

Historical Review Las Vegas (Part 4)

(rs) With Flamingo that has been completed in 1947, there were now 3 Top-Casinos at the new established Las Vegas Boulevard. Besides – as reported before – the Last Frontier and the El Rancho Hotel and Casino. Now the origin run for the money began!

The next large hotel at the Strip was the Thunderbird, which has opened in 1948. Either a casino of the Wild West theme, financed by money from organised crime, that later in the year 1955 should have led to the resign of the licence. It had been opened again later, but the reputation was ruined. The Thunderbird was later gone over for nearly 10 million Dollars to the Del Webb Corporation. In 1972 it was sold to Caesars Palace. The later owner of the Dunes Hotels, instead of where the giant Super Casino Bellagio stands today, bought the Thunderbird in 1977, he extended it and changed the name to Silverbird. 1981 the casino goes over to Ed Torres, who changed the name back again to El Rancho. The original El Rancho stood only 2 blocks further along in front of on the other side of the street and there was not any connection between these both casinos. Now a real decade of developments began. In the 50ies the origin construction work boom at the Las Vegas Boulevard began. There was a relation also with the development and the rising popularity of cars and of the strong growth of the population in California, what did foster the demand for more leisure time and recreational possibilities. More hotels and more casinos were necessary, in order to satisfy the tourists and the fortune's knights, who came from Los Angeles over for their weekend holiday to Las Vegas.

One of the Top addresses was the Desert Inn, which was built in the late 40ies. The Desert Inn should become Las Vegas'

most beautiful hotel. It was the dream of Wilbur Clark's life, a former Bell Man and bar owner from California. Clark possessed already shares at the original El Rancho and he later opened the Players Club, a little Casino at the Highway 91, und later also the Monte Carlo Club, a Casino in the downtown area. With this smaller casinos it came already soon to wealth and he later bought the lot on the other side of the street of the Last Frontier. 1946 the constructions work for the project Desert Inn began. The name, by the way has been copied from the Desert Inn Hotel in Palm Springs, that permanently was the Wilbur Clarks idol-hotel and that he later was admiring.

The same problem as the others hotels have, so the project „Desert Inn“ had. The financing was endangered. The cost over exceeded and Clark had not any more money, in order to get the casino finished. Therefore the constructions work was temporary interrupted between 1947 and 1948. One year later, 1949 the financing question was solved. There was money at disposal at the East Coast that's origin came like the investment money for the Flamingo Hotel under Benjamin Siegel. The Desert Inn was opened on 24.th April 1950. Under a grossly financing effort there were reporters from the whole country flown in on the costs of the casino, in order to report about the sensational openings party. This time the success came like a hit of a bomb. Already in the first week the Desert Inn was generating a net profit of 750.000 Dollar that included 100.000 Dollar from sales at the bar. Afterwards the profits winded slightly back, but monthly they did not stay under 200.000 Dollar – after 1 year the casino was already having a surplus of approximately 2 million Dollars.

Some more northbound there was the Sahara Hotel and Casino, which until today still always has the same name. Originally run under the name Club Bingo, under the control of Milton Pell with African interior. The Casino was one of the first typical theme casinos, with it's still today known Congo Room, Caravan Room Restaurant. The Sahara was opened 1952 and in

regular distances extended and enlarged. Until 1966 it should become the hotel with the highest hotel tower. Famous music bands were flown to Las Vegas, 1964 there were 2 gigs of the Beatles in the Sahara hotel.

About at the same time also the Sands hotel and Casino were opened, only 3 month, after the Sahara had taken up their work. The Sands Hotel belonged to Jake Friedman, a Millionaire from Texas, who came to Las Vegas, in order to open up a luxury hotel their. Friedman bought himself the LuRue Restaurant at the Highway 91 (later Las Vegas Boulevard) and began there his constructions work for the Sands Hotel. Originally the Sands should get the name Holiday Inn. After a legend Friedman should have had, as he entered the constructions site for his new hotel and was very upset about the sand, he got in his shoes. Spontaneously he decided to call the site simply "The Sand". The client told Friedman of and he said, one should have to apply the plural, when at all, hence „The Sands“. And this name Friedman liked so much, that the hotel had to be renamed to The Sands. Within a record construction period of only 9 month was The Sands ready for working. The slogan was: The Sands – A Place in the Sun. Das Hotel consisted of 25-floors towers with originally 200 rooms that were aligned around in a bow like a crescent moon-alike pool. As a additional attraction was the hotel's own show, "The Copa", which let the Copa Girls – allegedly the most beautiful women in world, perform in their show. It began the age of the Super Shows. All dancers wanted to get in this show, and for decades „The Copa“ was the best show of Las Vegas.

Incidentally also began the film industry to get keen of hearing. The sensational hotel sceneries were the arena to many films. Hollywood Superstars as Grace Kelly and Cary Grant were shooting in 1955 the Hitchcock Thriller, „To catch a thief“ with scenes in the Sahara Hotel. Doris Day, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin or Jerry Lewis, are all famous names, who

were brought for shootings in the casinos of Las Vegas.

One of the casino-projects who risked, apart from the Strip or Downtown, to get into business, was the Showboat. Marketing analysis want to assume, how Las Vegas would grow south-eastwards. Convinced by these forecasts William J. Moore, Manager of the Last Frontier Hotel, and his companion decided to take up the construction work of the a little risky project, approximately 3 Kilometers south-east-bound from Downtown, Las Vegas. The city outskirts was pulled at that time so, that hotels as the Sands, Sahara, Flamingo, Desert Inn etc., were not counted anymore as belonging to Las Vegas. However the Showboat has still been set up within the border, so it became the official first Casino resort of Las Vegas.

The Showboat has been opened on 3.rd September, 1954 and the in the 19. Century typical paddle-steamer on the Mississippi and other rivers, served as a the pattern to this casino. For the casino's interior there was a prototype for the decoration built after a roman of Marc Twain. For the Showboat a survival was only possible with a targeted and very aggressive Marketing project to attract the gambler. The Showboat was organising for tourists bus tours from California and as a additional attraction there was offered in 1959 a 24-line Bowling grounds. Until in the late 90ies this bowling park was built another storey onto a 2. room so that final-eventually 110 lines were available. In order to lure natives in the casino there are only a few slot-machines and a dice table needed. This concept the casinos who wanted to operate standing outside the tourists' mile „Las Vegas Strip“ – had to comprehend, or they had to go off the business. About the meaning of these „Local“ casinos and some other hotels as well as over the influence of the financing societies we will write in the following reports. Also we will bring also personalities like Steve Wynn or Bob Stupak closer to you. So stay with us.

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