



Crystal Bay

CLUB CASINO

Lake Tahoe • Since 1937

by Howard W. Herz

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The Ta-Neva-Ho Block

In the summer of 1937 the North Shore of Lake Tahoe was a busy place for construction and business activity. With the May 17th fire at the Cal Neva Lodge and its frantic rebuilding under way, another casino and business area was hardly making headlines. A small article in the Reno Evening Gazette noted a development being built that has lasted to this day.

The Ta-Neva-Ho began as a conglomeration of businesses that were intended to serve the rapidly developing community on the north shore of Lake Tahoe. Long before the up scale development of Incline Village, the finger of land that juts into the north shore of Lake Tahoe at the state line between California and Nevada developed first. In the 1920's developer Norman Biltz constructed a building that served as a land sales office. This building became the Cal-Neva lodge in 1929 and hosted gaming even before it became legal in Nevada (1931).

In the early 1930's with the Cal-Neva Lodge and the Cal-Vada Lodge operating on the north shore, the growing community was in need of business services. Seven businesses other than gaming were located in the block along with the Ta-Neva-Ho gaming area. These included over the years, a bank, drug store, bakery, several bars, furniture store and other gaming operations.

Jim McKay and his Reno associates are reported to have been the first gaming operators at the Ta-Neva-Ho at the time of its opening. A 1937 article in the Nevada State Journal states that the building includes the Club Fortune, however Washoe County gaming records do not show any licensing under this name but does list the Ta-Neva-Ho as having been licensed for roulette,



Ta-Neva-Ho under construction

Photo courtesy Reno Color Lab

WORK IS RUSHED ON BUILDING AT LAKE

TAHOE CITY, Calif., May 16. — (Special).—A new business block, now nearing completion on the Nevada state line overlooking Lake Tahoe, will be ready for occupation on the first of June, according to the foreman of construction there.

The first of eight new business establishments to open its doors to the public in the new building will be the Tahoe branch of the First National Bank in Reno which is to occupy large quarters at the extreme southern end of the block. The bank is scheduled to open on May 17. The seven other stores in the building have been leased to business firms and are expected to be open and operating by the middle of June.

The Casino, at the extreme north, has been leased by James McKay of Reno and will be opened for the summer soon. Finishing touches are now being added to the elaborate hall by Bert Pierson, Hollywood interior decorator. Huge murals adorning its walls depict the early pioneering days in Nevada, showing wide stretches of the Carson basin, glimpses along the Emigrant Trail and a view of the early day Kit Carson pass. The entire decorating scheme is carried out in Washoe Indian design.

The Sierra Construction Company headed by Norman Biltz and Oscar Alexander of Reno, is at work this week on the installation of a new all-year water system for the business block. An eight inch main is being laid to the lake through which the water will be pumped to a 300,000 gallon reservoir tank on the mountain above the vicinity. This huge tank is constructed entirely of concrete, sealed and ventilated. An eight inch supply main leading from the tank will be equipped with laterals to connect with the various buildings.

A sprinkling system will be added later for special fire protection.



Ta-Neva-Ho

Photo courtesy Reno Color Lab

craps, 21 and 9 slot machines. Given the fact that Bill Graham and Jim McKay's Cal-Neva Lodge had just burned to the ground on May 17th, It is very possible that McKay licensed the Ta-Neva-Ho for gaming while construction was under way at the Cal-Neva Lodge.

Tracing the gaming operations that were in the Ta-Neva-Ho block does require some speculation and investigation from several sources. Opening only in the summers from June through August, the Ta-Neva-Ho licensed the same gaming in 1938 as it had in 1937. In 1939, however, the only licenses that were issued to the Ta-Neva-Ho Bar were for three (3) slot machines and a roulette table.

The 49er was licensed on July 1, 1940 for craps, roulette and blackjack. At the same

time, the Ta-Neva-Ho was licensed for 10 slot machines and no table games. This would indicate that the "lodge" was operating a smaller area or that the name of the gaming operation had been changed. Photographs of the Ta-Neva-Ho block show a "The 49er" sign on the building.

The summer seasons of 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944 give an uncertain picture of what gaming was operating in the Ta-Neva-Ho block.

Opening
TODAY

Lake Tahoe's New Playground
In Nevada... Adjoining Cal-Neva

TA-NEVA-HO

Hawaiian entertainment and music direct from Honolulu. Excellent food served at all hours at popular prices. Come... a barrel of fun for less money!

COME AS YOU ARE

Dining Dancing Gaming
Entertainment

The entire decorating scheme is carried out in Washoe Indian design by Bert Pierson. Huge murals adorning the walls depict the early pioneering days in Nevada, showing wide stretches of the Carson basin, glimpses along the Emigrant Trail and a view of the early day Kit Carson pass. A branch of the First National Bank in Reno and stage nearby for your convenience. Come along and enjoy yourself.

1941 again has 7 slot only licenses for the Forty-Niner (The 49er) along with 5 slot machines in the “Ta-Neva-Ho Grocery”. 1942 gaming records show the Ta-Neva-Ho with 1 slot machine in the “bakery”, 1 slot machine in the “grocery”, 5 slots in the “bar” and 3 slots in the “alley”. Our best guess is that the “alley” was a reference to the bowling alley that was in the building. 1943 records indicate that NO licenses were issued to the club. One of the better histories of the club indicates that Frank Fat and August Nyberg had purchased the club in the 1942-1943 period. This sale may have been the reason for the limited slot gaming during this period of time. In 1945, Fat and Nyberg et.al. sold their interest in the club to John Rayburn.

The summer seasons of 1945 indicate that only slot machines were licensed to the Ta-Neva-Ho, although an entry does exist under the name “John Rayburn” for craps, roulette, blackjack and 11 slot machines. Although this entry does not specifically refer to the Ta-Neva-Ho, John



The 49er

Photo courtesy Reno Color Lab

Rayburn had leased the gaming from Frank Fat and August Nyberg. With the United States still at war with Japan, the summer season was still somewhat limited.

The 1946 season of the Ta-Neva-Ho with John Rayburn and his associates began a period of expansion and development for the club. In 1946, the grand opening

was announced with major advertising in the Reno papers. Featuring roulette, craps, blackjack and 37 slot



machines, Rayburn was certainly challenging the competition that was itself swelling in the ranks. By the summer of 1947, the Crystal Bay area was alive with gaming. The 1947 season opened with not just the traditional Cal-Neva Lodge and Cal-Vada Lodge, but with a whole new batch of casinos. The Sierra Lodge, the Log Cabin, Cappy Rix and the Crystal Bay Bar were now all in contention for players money.

The summer of 1948 brought out one of the first attributable gaming checks from the Ta-Neva-Ho. The large crown issues of the club were made for the Washoe Investment Co. by T.R. King of Los Angeles. These hot stamped checks with values of \$5, \$25, \$50 and \$100 are the earliest checks that we have been able to



Ta-Neva-Ho Bowling Alley

Photo courtesy Reno Color Lab

definitely attribute to a time of operation of the Ta-Neva-Ho. From 1949 through the summer of 1955, the Ta-Neva-Ho continued to operate. Although we can not make an attribution from original records, we can presume with some safety that the later Ta-Neva-Ho issues that appear on the zig-zag mold of Noll & Co. are later than the large crown issues.

John Rayburn and his associates undertook a major renovation of the Ta-Neva-Ho block in the winter of 1955-56 and on May 1, 1956 re-opened the club under the name of The Crystal Bay Club. Not only



would the new club now challenge the competition, it would extend its seasonal operation. Starting with the 1958 season, the Crystal Bay Club opened in April and closed in October.



Crystal Bay Club

Photo courtesy Howard Herz



Crystal Bay Club

Photo courtesy Reno Color Lab

In 1960, John Rayburn sold his interest in the Crystal Bay club to his partners Mac McCoskey and Hjalmer "Slim" La Borde.

Eventually La Borde sold his interest to Mac McCoskey and retired. McCoskey's ownership lasted until 1968 when he sold the club to the Ohio Investment Company of Cincinnati.



Operations of the of the club by the Cincinnati group lasted until 1979 when the club was sold to a group of Nevada investors headed by Conrad Priess. This group of investors operated the casino until May 24, 2002 when the club entered a chapter 13 and closed.



A Newly Renovated Crystal Bay Club

It had rained all day on July 31, 2003 and the owners of the newly renovated Crystal Bay Club had been hoping to have a quiet “soft” opening. Word of mouth had been the only advertising the casino had for the opening, mostly spread from workers on the renovation. At midnight a small crowd of 40 or so people had assembled outside the casino and were waiting. Across the street, people were watching out of the windows of the Tahoe Biltmore. At 12:01am (midnight) the doors were opened as the small crowd surged in. To a chorus of whoops and hollering

the crowd descended on the slots and gazed at the casino renovation. It was not as quiet as the owners had expected it to be.

Such a simple opening belies the effort that Elise and Roger Norman have put into an almost entirely re-made Crystal Bay Club. Tons, yes literally tons of junk, asbestos, old mechanical equipment and a whole attic of accumulated items had to be removed and a gutted building had to be renovated.

After purchasing the casino out of bankruptcy, the Normans passed the rigorous Nevada State Gaming Control Board licensing in record time. Then they plunged into a renovation that has been spectacular. Elise Norman's exquisite taste and decorating skills are reflected in everything from the antique chandeliers to the Grohe bathroom fixtures to even the gaming check design.

An environment of very comfortable elegance is what customers find in the remodeled Crystal Bay Club. Tan to brown colors and accents of rock blend with Tahoe's majestic north shore pines. The state of the art electronics that drives this casino are as unobtrusive as I have ever seen in the gaming industry. A small fortune in flat screen TV monitors (30 HD TV's) are found throughout the casino, but they seem natural to the comfortable environment. At all times if there is a special event to be viewed, including all sporting events, volume control and audio video sources can be changed by a touch of a button on the micro cash registers.

The total renovation went from the basement to the attic. A glittering new count room hides behind a deceptively modern casino cage. What is behind the scenes is as impressive as the public areas. The totally renovated kitchens are staffed with employees trained in hygiene as well as their normal duties, just another extra protection for customers.



Crystal Bay Club 2003

Photo courtesy Allan Anderson



New Crystal Bay Club Interior

Photo courtesy Howard Herz



Interior showing the custom made trees

Photo courtesy Allan Anderson

The players club cards are totally integrated with the machines as well as the bar and restaurants, a feature that gives the management an advantage in customer care. Player tracking includes your preferences at the bar for extra service.

Perhaps the most spectacular renovation is the restaurant that was once a bowling alley in the original Ta-Neva-Ho. By blending the original ambience of the Tahoe classic Ta-Neva-Ho mountain lodge beam ceiling with natural rock pillars and wrought iron fixtures, the Crystal Bay Cafe has a spectacular open feeling. It is one thing to blend into Tahoe's scenery, but the Crystal Bay's interior enhances the comfort you feel at the lake.

The slot gaming area has the usual state of the art machines, but the clink of gaming tokens is definitely absent. Paper pay outs are on all of the machines. Sorry - token collectors - but you will have to be content with the original 1965 Michigan Tool and 1980-Franklin Mint issues of this club. Table games are located in a single pit that has a forest of trees covering the supporting pillars in the



pit area. State of the art table games feature MP21 technology security play protection. All of the casino

action is dutifully covered by video that unobtrusively records every turn of a card. A Cal-Neva sports book and a very comfortable lounge round out the present amenities.

What is in the works to come? The club's traditional steak & lobster room will be refurbished next. A convention area and a concert venue are in the plans.

And just how totally can they tweak the casino environment for customers? The music videos on the flat screen TV's can start out with mellow music in the morning and graduate to more stimulating afternoon sounds - they can even cater to a special players choice of sounds on the flat screen near his gaming table.

In this comfortable casino, the only necessity for any player to bring on his own, is his luck and his some cash. We are looking forward to watching this high tech operation bring new life to one of Tahoe's classic gaming houses.



Coffee shop with the wood beams from the Ta-Neva-Ho bowling alley

Photo courtesy Allan Anderson