

The Las Vegas Hacienda



by Gene Trimble

Mandalay Bay is a beautiful new property at the north end of the Las Vegas strip. On New Years Eve 1996 the property was cleared to begin construction for this mega resort with the implosion of the Hacienda. I guess it is not too hard to destroy a building, but the legacy of the Hacienda can not be imploded. Memories do not die so easily. I am not going to write about the end of the Hacienda, the beginning is where the memories were made.

In the early 50's an entrepreneur by the name of Warren "Doc" Bayley owned three hotels in California and his dream was to build a chain of hotels all across America. His idea was to compete with the big boys like Hilton and Sheraton. The three hotels were located in Bakersfield, Fresno, and Indio. They all had the same name, The Hacienda. A funny thing happened to Doc's dream on his first attempt to expand his empire out of the state of California. His march to the east coast, began and ended in Las Vegas. Somewhere in 1954, Doc bought an unfinished hotel casino on the furthest end of the Las Vegas Strip called the Lady Luck. His intention was to rename and complete the hotel, lease the casino out, and continue his quest to the east coast. Dreams have a way of changing and this one was no exception.

The fourth Hacienda was completed and ready to open early 1956. The casino operators were chosen and applied for their gaming license. The plan was ready to proceed until the casino operators were found unsuitable for a gaming license. Doc was a 51% owner and 5 other partners held the other 49%. Jim Beam, a 15% owner, convinced Doc, the only thing to do was to operate the casino themselves.

The Hacienda opened in October 1956 and Doc was now a casino owner, instead of a hotel keeper. In a few short years his holdings grew into a 39% interest in the Old and New Frontiers plus the El Ray Club in Searchlight. Doc became a casino owner out of the same mold as many other owners of his day. Life was good and money was plentiful. He let the good times roll and he let the employees run the casinos. The casinos were heavily mortgaged and the three California hotels were put in hock to support the casinos. Even appearances by the Rat Pack at the Fresno Hacienda could not save the California properties. Two of them were repossessed by the lien holders. It seems that Doc was not taking care of business.

In 1964 Jim Beam passed away and his interests were handed over to

his wife. On the day after Christmas in 1964, Doc had a massive heart attack while partying with a friend. All of his dreams ended at this point, but another dream was born. Doc's wife, Judy Bayley the 1st Lady of Gambling entered the picture. Does anybody have any idea, what happened to the B in gambling? There was still a B in it, in 1964.

Judy had never been a business person and she had spent the last five years, letting the good times roll, along with Joan Rashbrook, who had been Jim Beams wife. They had spent their time at parties, race tracks and generally enjoying life. Judy decided to operate the Hacienda and enlisted Joan to help her. Together they owned 66% of everything, or nothing, depending on which way you looked at it.

Judy's first day on the job revealed some startling facts. There was no money, and in Joan's words, "5 pounds of hamburger was COD at the back door." Most bills were 120 days or more overdue including federal withholding taxes. Judy was urged to sell by almost everyone involved. Her decision was to go for broke, maybe because it was not too far to go. Maybe she thought someone would tag her with that 1st lady title somewhere in the future, but my guess is, she was stubborn. Her first task was to get some money. Four casinos and



very little money were not an enviable position to be in.

The Hacienda had an 11 1/2 million dollar mortgage on it. That probably sounded a lot bigger in 1964 than it does today. Judy and Joan flew to Palm Beach, Fl to meet with the mortgage holder. Judy had it in her



head that he would give her the much needed money to protect his loan. The girls pleaded their case and the answer sounded good, at first.

He would give them 3 1/2 million for the Frontier properties, but not cash. He would take it off the back of the Hacienda loan. Then he threw down the gauntlet with a remark that may have made them even more determined to succeed. He said "Women can't run a business". Our heroines returned to Las Vegas with an 8 million dollar mortgage that amounted to \$70,000 per month and a \$300,000 per year balloon payment, but still no cash. Judy managed to float a small loan from a lawyer friend and Joan got an uncle in England to come through with some cash. Together they took control of the daily operations of the Hacienda. The word "daily" had a deeper meaning than you might expect.

They did whatever was needed to make the property stay afloat, including busing tables in the buffet.

Whatever department needed help, the girls pitched in and did the job. Customers in the buffet were over heard wondering why management allowed bus girls to wear so many rhinestones. These particular rhinestones were left over from the days when "The good times rolled" and were worn by the owners who happened to be busing tables.

Joan was exiting the



buffet one evening after "work" and when she reached the casino area, there was a loud noise and pieces of the ceiling came raining down on the customers. It seems the eye in the sky had fallen off the catwalk and all that she could see was two legs flailing away as if they were trying to pedal a bicycle.

Money was never plentiful but it did get better. Judy became a force in Las Vegas and was loved and admired by many. The Judy Bayley Theater at UNLV is part of her legacy to Las Vegas. Judy Bayley died on New Years eve 1971 after 7 years of making her mark on the gaming world. The doctors said it was cancer that killed her, but Joan feels in her heart, that it was the constant daily stress of the Hacienda that killed her friend of so many years. It was too much for a sane person. Judy willed her 51% to Joan and after two hectic years she sold the Hacienda to Alan Glick for 28 1/2 million. The original loan was paid down to 5 million at this time. The Hacienda of the Alan Glick era is a story in its own right. A story for another day. Paul Lowden bought the Hacienda from Alan Glick. Circus Circus bought it from Paul Lowden and brought down the final curtain on the Hacienda. Forty years is a respectable run for any show in Las Vegas.

Today, Joan Rashbrook is an everyday customer at local poker rooms and is a consistent entrant in daily poker tournaments. Joan always has a big bag of candy for the dealers and other customers. I am not sure if she has character or she is a character. My guess is, some of both.

She still wears the "rhinestones" and has many memories of the people who were the force to reckon with in Las Vegas when "The good times rolled." Special thanks to Joan Rashbrook and Bill Moore, the entertainment director of the Hacienda, for taking the time to share the past with me. They have many colorful stories about when "The good times rolled." I opted for a few simple facts instead of names and places. I thought some insider views concerning the beginning of that era would help fill the gap.



Hacienda chips are very popular with collectors as most of us witnessed the end of an era, with the implosion of the Hacienda.

I welcome your comments at poker4@cox.net

