

# City of West Wendover



by Allan Anderson

The community of Wendover came into existence in 1906 as a railroad town, serving the steam engines of the Western Pacific Rail, which is now part of the Union Pacific Rail Road. The community boasted a population of around 150 people. Wendover included a train depot, water towers, a round house and other ancillary buildings needed for the operation of an emerging and growing railroad. Wendover became a main stop on this route, which provided service across the Great Basin deserts of Utah and Nevada connecting Salt Lake City to San Francisco. During the early 1900's Wendover was a cross road for many significant undertaking including arsenic mining 25 miles south of Wendover mainly for the efforts of World War I and the connection of the first transcontinental telephone line connecting the U.S. from east coast to west coast.

Wendover was established in the 1920s when Bill Smith built a small cobblestone service station that provided weary travelers with a place to rest.

This facility became the State Line Hotel and Casino. A light bulb Bill Smith erected on a tall pole was only a tiny speck of light that served west-bound motorists as a welcome beacon as they crossed the Bonneville Salt Flats. Thus Wendover developed as an outpost of civilization in the midst of isolation.

The Wendover area saw its first boom in the 1930's and 40's with the introduction of legalized gambling in the State of Nevada. The State Line Hotel Casino was the oldest continually operating licensed casino in Nevada. As equally important to this new business spirit in the area was the role the United State Military played in building and operating Wendover Field. Construction on

Wendover Field began in November of 1940. By 1943, Wendover had become the largest military reserve in the world with over 23,000 military personnel, a total of 668 buildings and encompassing 3.5 million acres of property. The facility became the mainstay of the United States Military's training mission for bomber crews. Wendover field was home to 21 heavy bomber groups including the most notable; the 509th Composite Group commanded by Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, along with its counterpart the 1st Ordinance Detachment, which was responsible



Wendover Field today Photos Courtesy Howard W. Herz

for the assembly and modification of the atomic aerial devices. The 1st Ordinance Detachment later became part of the Manhattan Engineers. These two groups' mission which were recorded in history as the atomic missions over Japan (Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945) was to be the first and to date, the only atomic bombardment exercised by one nation against another.

Along with these and other significant events, Wendover has also been home to one of the most time-tested man vs. the elements matches, the Bonneville Speedway, which lies on about 30,000 acres of public land. The salt flats were named for Captain L. E. Bonneville, an officer and explorer. The Salt Flats are what is left of a huge prehistoric lake which was once 145 miles wide and 346 miles long and as deep as 1,050 feet. Some of the ancient shore line is still visible above the salt in the mountain areas. The famous Bonneville Speedway is about 4 miles east of Wendover on the border between Utah and Nevada. The salt floor of the speedway has been witness to hundreds of individuals and their cars, rather they be stock or modified, internal combustion or rocket, attempting to reach for speeds on land which no other human has. Most notable is Gary Gabelich and the "Blue Flame", in 1972, of over 626 M.P.H. Though the 1970's and 80's Wendover began to emerge as a destination resort.

Now a neon cowboy greets the travelers along Interstate 80 and Wendover is booming again. Additional businesses arrived constructing more casinos, hotels and many different types of service establishments as well as recreational venues such as the Toana Vista Golf Course.

Today, Wendover has five large casinos. With over 600 lavish rooms and suites, the Peppermill and Rainbow Hotel Casinos are renowned

as legendary entertainment and gaming establishments. With the largest Poker room and the only Race and Sports book in town.



Peppermill Hotel, Casino

Photo Courtesy Peppermill Casino



Peppermill Casino Chips



Rainbow Hotel, Casino

Photo Courtesy Peppermill Casino



Rainbow Casino House Chips



Red Garter Casino House Chips



Red Garter Hotel, Casino

Photo Courtesy Howard W. Herz



State Line Nugget

Photo Courtesy State Line Nugget

Other casinos include The Red Garter, Bill Smith's old place, the State Line, has become the State Line Nugget,

and the Smith family's Silver Smith has been purchased by the Peppermill and re-named Montego Bay.



Montego Bay Casino House Chips



Montego Bay

Photo Courtesy Howard W. Herz



State Line Nugget Casino House Chips

Wendover's closed casinos include Jim's Casino and Saloon which operated from 1979 to 1983. Jim's was torn down to make room for The Silver Smith Casino. The A-1 Casino operated from 1956 to 1967, the Gold Rush Casino operated from 1981 to 1984 and was razed to make room for the Peppermill, the Hideaway Casino operated from 1976 to 1980.



Jim's Casino

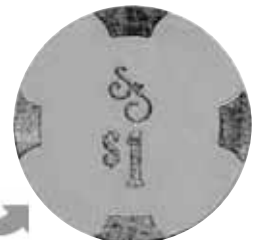


Silver Smith Hotel, Casino

Photo Courtesy Tim O'Neil Collection



Silver Smith Casino House Chips





NCV Chip comes in 3 colors,  
Green, Orange and Blue

Silver Smith Limited Edition Chips



Hide-Away Club



Gold Rush Casino

A-1 Casino



State Line Hotel, Casino

Photo Courtesy Tim O'Neil Collection



State Line Casino House Chips



NCV Chip comes in 3 colors,  
Green, Orange and Blue

State Line Limited Edition Chips



The Nevada Crossing hotel's casino is now closed but there is a walkway to The Rainbow Casino next door.

Bill Smith's little light bulb would be lost in the glare of Wendover's neon lighting now. As growth continues to spiral up, the citizens of Wendover, Nevada, which was operated by a town board under Elko County Commission, elected to incorporate in 1991. West Wendover has been one of the fastest growing border towns in Nevada with an average growth rate of between 8 and 10 percent.

I'd like to thank Chris Melville, City Manager for supplying me with the cover photo, Kerrie Supanich, West Wendover Tourism and Convention Bureau for the background information, Howard W. Herz and Larry Hollibaugh, [www.RenoCasinoChips.com](http://www.RenoCasinoChips.com), for the chip scans.



Nevada Crossing Hotel

*Photo Courtesy Howard W. Herz*



Nevada Crossing Casino Chips