

LAS VEGAS

law and order turning a deliberate blind eye. This lasted until 1931 when the State reversed its earlier edict and restored legalized gambling at the behest of Phil Tobin, an assemblyman from Humboldt County—a man who never gambled himself, but was quite happy to see the taxes raised on others doing so in order to pay for public works, particularly schooling.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The small but growing city of Las Vegas largely escaped the effects of the Great Depression that caused such havoc in many other parts of the United States during the 1930s. The Union Pacific Railroad continued to expand, providing a steady source of employment, while the construction of the nearby Boulder (later the Hoover) Dam brought some 5,000 men into the area between 1930 and 1936. They had plenty of money to spend, and Las Vegas, with its recently legalized gambling, was just the place to spend it.

WORLD WAR TWO

Overall development of Las Vegas, not unnaturally, slowed down during the war years, although the arrival of the United States Army Air Corps at the airfield north of the city, which they used as a training establishment for air gunners, brought a new, if largely transient, population. However, in one last peacetime hurrah—and an indication of what was to come later—1941 saw the opening of the El Rancho Vegas Hotel-Casino.

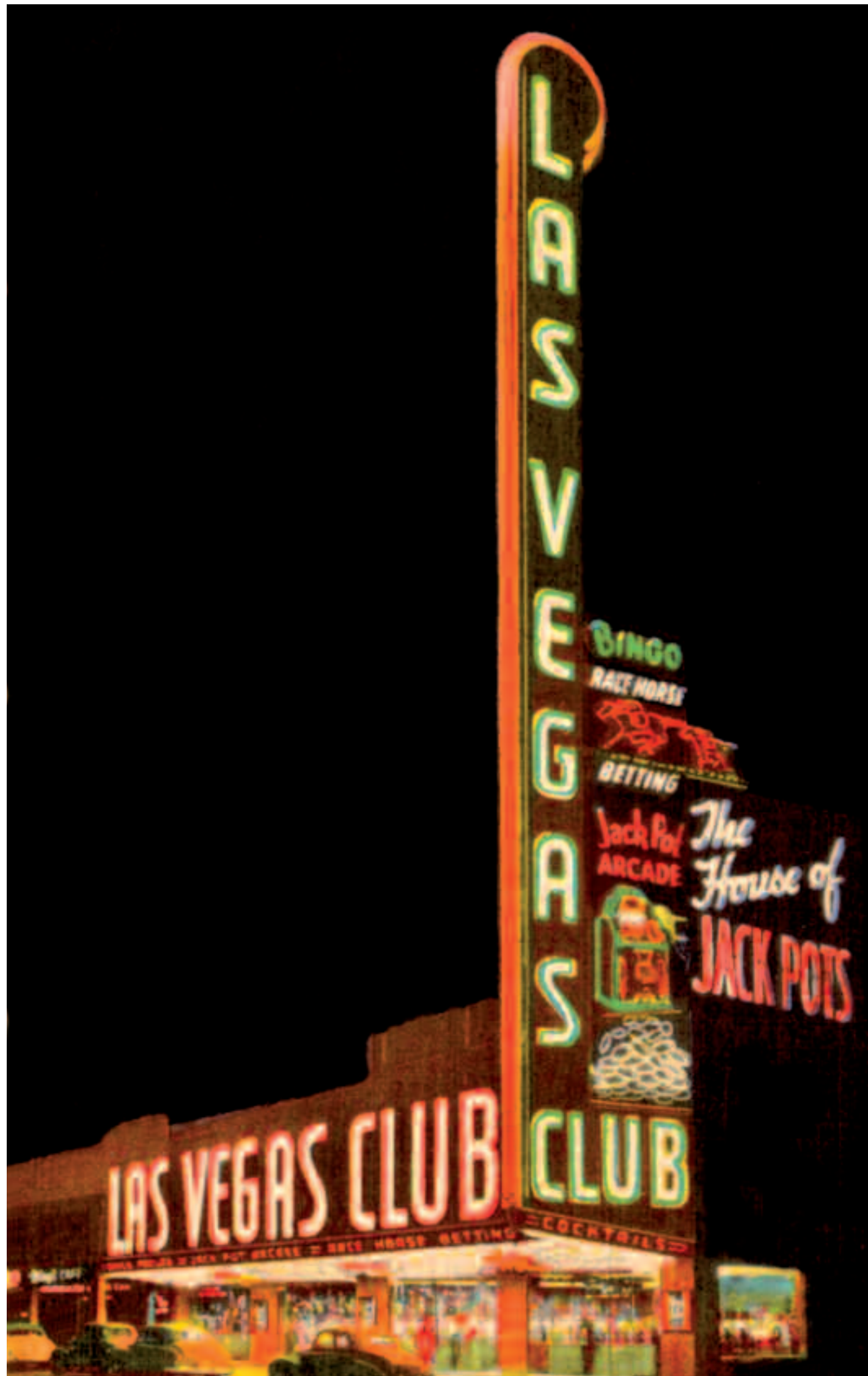
RAPID POSTWAR EXPANSION

In the years immediately following World War Two the success of the El Rancho Vegas led to further establishments of the same nature, such as the Last Frontier and the Flamingo Hotel, part-owned by the notorious mobster, “Bugsy” Siegel. These were built along the two-lane highway from Los Angeles, an area that eventually became the world-famous “Las Vegas Strip.” The Flamingo opened on January 1, 1946, even though it was not completely finished, and despite Siegel’s best efforts in attracting big name stars such as Clark Gable, Lana Turner, and Caesar Romero to a glitzy opening show, it was a flop. The Flamingo was closed and completed, being reopened in March, when it began to make money. But Siegel was strongly suspected of lining his own pockets at the expense of his partners in “The Mob”—a truly unforgivable sin!—and on June 20, 1947, he was murdered in his Los Angeles home, by a still-unidentified gunman.

The Flamingo is one of the few resorts of that era that still exist, but it has been totally rebuilt by its present owners, the Hilton Hotel Group, who have done their best to eliminate the memories of such a discreditable and unpleasant founder. Almost all the other original resorts built in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s have now disappeared, either burnt down or deliberately demolished to make way for newer, larger, more exciting, and ever more expensive complexes.

One of Bugsy Siegel’s concepts that did take root, however, was that of a combined casino, hotel, and entertainment complex. Once the

Right: The Las Vegas Club in the 1950s, substantially as it was when it opened in 1941. Located at 18 East Frémont Street, it has always been renowned for combining gambling with excellent food, not least its nine-pound hamburgers.



Above: The 1950s view of Frémont Street shows a totally different town, compared with today’s Frémont Street Experience. Even though the 1950s city was run by mobsters, it was an unsophisticated and much simpler place.

Right: Dean Martin (left) and his partner, Jerry Lewis (right) ham it up with Bud Abbott (second from left) and Lou Costello (second from right). The ability of the men running Las Vegas to draw in the biggest names in show business has played a great role in establishing the city’s reputation both nationally and internationally.



Flamingo had established itself, more on the same pattern followed. The Desert Inn came on line in 1950, followed by the Sahara Hotel and the Sands Hotel in 1952; the names of all three have survived, but, like today’s Flamingo, they have been rebuilt to such an extent that the original is no longer recognizable, while ownership has changed hands frequently. The original Desert Inn was three stories high, but in 1955 the Riviera Hotel was completed with nine floors—a record on The Strip in those days but extremely modest by today’s standards. Another significant development was the opening of the Moulin Rouge Hotel-Casino in 1955, the first multi-racial casino, having been built at a time when black entertainers working in hotels on the Strip were still made to sleep elsewhere. The late, great Joe Louis, one-time world heavyweight boxing champion, was part of the scene at the Moulin Rouge, although he later moved to Caesar’s Palace on The Strip.



Above: The legendary Frank Sinatra and his fellow members of the "Rat Pack," whose name was later changed to "The Clan." Their abilities as individual entertainers, coupled with the obvious enjoyment they gained from working and playing together, were enough to generate an outstanding reputation. But, Peter Lawford (second from left) had links to the Kennedy family, while it was suspected that Sinatra (center) had links to the Mafia, adding a strong whiff of controversy.

Another significant and far-seeing development in the 1950s was the introduction of a convention facility. The first center and adjoining exhibition complex were opened in 1959 and, having been rebuilt several times, the site remains used for the same purpose.

FRANK SINATRA AND THE RAT PACK

There have been many individuals who have influenced the development of Las Vegas, but perhaps the greatest of them all was Frank Sinatra, whose first Vegas gig took place at the Desert Inn in 1951. Over the next forty-odd years he and his friends—particularly the legendary Rat Pack—did more than almost anyone else to give the town an image that combined sophistication with the high-life and sheer fun. Sinatra performed originally as a solo artist but by the late 1950s he was joined by the Rat Pack, which eventually comprised singer/comedian Dean Martin; singer/actor/dancer Sammy Davis Junior; singer Joey Bishop; and actor (and John F. Kennedy's brother-in-law) Peter Lawford; and Sinatra himself. Each of them was a major showman in his own right but in combination they were electric, putting on performances that those who saw them talk of to this day.



Perhaps their finest hour came with the "Summit at the Sands" that they put on from January 26 to February 16, 1960, which involved two evening shows in the Copa Room, followed by a third in the early hours in the Sands Lounge, all accompanied by their trademark loud behavior and heavy drinking. Even presidential candidate John F. Kennedy turned up on the evening of February 8.

The great days of this particular era were coming to an end in the early 1960s, with Sinatra's loss of his gaming license (September 1963), Kennedy's assassination (November 1963), the increasingly malign influence of the Vietnam War, and the ever-growing focus on "youth," which made it appear that the 51-year-old Sinatra was past his best. This was not true, of course, and a slightly mellower and more mature Sinatra transferred to Caesars Palace where he performed from 1968 to 1970 and then from 1974 onwards, although his appearances grew rarer as he aged. He played Caesars Palace until 1984 when he switched to the Golden Nugget for three years, and then Bally's until 1990, with a final performance at the MGM Grand on December 31, 1993. Sinatra died in 1998.

Above: The El Cortez on East Frémont Street in the 1950s. The two-story casino and three-story hotel block behind are incredibly unsophisticated by today's standards, and the entertainers named on the billboard are long forgotten. But the El Cortez (rebuilt several times) still occupies the same spot, and is considered a major historical landmark by Las Vegas inhabitants.

Right: Of all his leading ladies, both moviegoers and Elvis rated Ann-Margret the best—beautiful, very talented, and an excellent actress. All who have seen *Viva Las Vegas!* know that the stars each considered the other to be someone very special. They met for the first time right here beside the swimming pool at the Flamingo, a facility that was luxurious by 1960s standards, but would rate as little more than a paddling pool today.





ELVIS PRESLEY
Another of the legendary Las Vegas entertainers was Elvis Presley, who was invited to star in a show at the newly opened International Hotel in July 1969. He gave a total of 837 performances at the International, the last being on December 12, 1976. Wearing his white jump-suit covered with sequins, he became an iconic figure. He was paid huge sums, but, on the other hand, he packed in the audiences, and for the first time a Vegas hotel made a straight profit from its entertainment, an activity that had earlier been seen only as a way of luring gamblers into the casinos and keeping them there.

GAMBLING
At the root of almost everything that happens in Las Vegas is gambling.

Every gambler, from the serious professional to the meekest amateur, dreams of going home richer than when he or she arrived. A few, of course, do go home with winnings of over \$10,000, and a tiny handful of them win a million dollars or more, but the vast majority lose on the table and the slots machines. Almost all the casinos run beginners' classes to explain specific games to newcomers, so that they have some idea of what they are letting themselves in for.

LAS VEGAS AS A TOURIST CENTER
Quite apart from its fame as a gambling city, Las Vegas is also a major tourist center, being very close to a large number of major attractions. Many visitors use the city as their base, while even a jaded gambler can



Left: There are very few people for whom their Christian name provides instant recognition around the world, but Elvis Presley is one of them. The then new International Hotel featured Barbra Streisand on its opening night in August 1969, but Elvis then took over and, in one of the finest come-backs ever achieved, performed to sell-out audiences for fifty-eight consecutive shows. From then on, whenever he performed in Vegas, he lived in the penthouse suite atop the International, until his last performance in the city in December 1976.

refresh his or her spirits among the wonders of Nature in the National and State Parks, or take some much-needed exercise in the designated recreation areas. Some of the nearest and most spectacular are listed below

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
The Grand Canyon, known since time immemorial to local Native Americans, was first seen by a European in 1540 when the Spaniard, Captain Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, found it by chance while conducting one of several Spanish expeditions searching for the legendary Seven Golden Cities of Cibola. As far as is known, no further Europeans visited the Grand Canyon until 1869, when the redoubtable one-armed explorer Major John Powell passed through it during his descent of the Colorado

River. The Grand Canyon attracts over five million visitors every year, its sheer grandeur striking awe and wonder into every last one of them. The gorge is some 277 miles in length and varies in width between five and eighteen miles, the average being about ten. The depth varies, being approximately 5,700 feet from the north rim and 4,500 feet from the lower south rim, and along the bottom flows the mighty Colorado River. The gorge includes towering mesas and buttes, plateaus, and valleys, which with the desert plants and the rare but dramatic wildlife combine to make this an essential item on the schedule of all tourists except for the most dedicated gamblers.

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK
The great majority of visitors to the 5,220-square-mile Death Valley National Park come from Las Vegas. This ominously named valley was given its title during the 1849 Gold Rush, when a party of thirty prospectors tried to find an overland shortcut to California. Just twelve survived the dreadful experience. The valley includes the second lowest point in the Western Hemisphere, at the aptly named Badwater, which is 282 feet below sea level. Overall, the valley is the driest known place in the Continental



United States, with an average rainfall of under two inches per year. The valley is also one of the hottest places on Earth, with average summer temperatures of well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the record being 134 degrees, recorded in 1913.

HOOVER DAM NATIONAL PARK
The Hoover Dam is only thirty minutes' drive from Las Vegas and is one of the greatest man-made structures in the world. Although built during the Great Depression, it was, in fact, conceived at least ten years earlier, with the aim of controlling the flow of the Colorado River to prevent the floods that periodically inundated the farms nearer the coast, and to generate large amounts of electricity. Construction lasted from April 20, 1931, to March 1,

Above Left: The scene in the 1970s as the Sahara advertises appearances by Frank Goshin and Don Pickles, two of the most popular entertainers of their day. In fact, the appearance of these two names together was somewhat ironic, as in 1957 Goshin drove from Pittsburgh to Hollywood to audition for a major role in the film *Run Silent, Run Deep*, and after thirty-nine hours non-stop fell asleep at the wheel and crashed. A Los Angeles newspaper reported, quite incorrectly, that Goshin had died, whereupon the studio gave the role to none other than Don Pickles. Goshin went on to play the role of the Riddler in the first Batman movie.

Above: Many companies have used neon lighting to advertise both events and goods, but nowhere did it achieve such prominence as in Las Vegas, where it became something of an art form in its own right. Here the 1970s Stardust forces its attention on passers-by at 3000 Las Vegas Boulevard South, a site it still occupies today, albeit in a thoroughly modernized form.