

Then and Now

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Bright lights, non-stop entertainment 24-hours a day, the town that never sleeps! ...Las Vegas...sure, you've heard of it, you may even live here, but have you ever thought about how Las Vegas became the city that it is today? Yes, we all know about the organized crime, and stories about how casinos came about, but what about further back in history? How did the history over 200 years ago bear any effects on the city here today?



The land we know as Las Vegas was originally home to several different Native American tribes for many centuries. In 1776 the Paiute Indians had their first contact with Europeans who were establishing the Old Spanish Trail. The first person to step ground in Las Vegas that was not of Indian descent was Rafael Rivera (No, not Bugsy Siegel!). He was with a group that had veered off of the main route of The Spanish Trail because they were in need of water. Rivera was venturing the unexplored desert and found water springs in a land called Vegas. He also realized that going through Vegas shortened the path to Los Angeles. Word spread of the short cut and soon many traders were enjoying the shorter trip, and this new route also hastened the California Gold Rush.

Before now, Las Vegas was known only as Vegas. Between 1830 and 1848 the name was changed to Las Vegas, which means "the meadows" in Spanish.



In 1844, John C. Fremont, leading exponent in the U.S. Topographical Corps, led an expedition west and camped in Las Vegas. Because of Fremont, Las Vegas was literally "put on" the

maps. Today, his name is remembered in neon lights and museums. The Fremont Hotel and Casino bear his name, as well as the main street of downtown Las Vegas.



In 1890, railroad developers decided that since the springs of Las Vegas were rich with water, the Vegas Valley would be a prime location for a stop facility and town. In 1904, Las Vegas sprouted saloons, stores and boarding houses. The Union Pacific auctioned off 1,200 lots in a single day in an area, which today is casino-lined with The Fremont Experience. The Plaza Hotel stands on the site of the original Union Pacific Railroad depot.

At midnight Oct. 1, 1910, a strict anti-gambling law came into effect for the state of Nevada...it was even illegal to flip a coin to see who was buying! The Nevada State Journal newspaper reported, "Stilled forever is the click of the roulette wheel, the rattle of dice and the swish of cards." "Forever" lasted 3-weeks in Las Vegas. Gamblers quickly set up underground casinos, that with the correct password, could get you to joint with Lady Luck all day and night.

When the Hoover Dam was built in 1928 it had a major impact on Las Vegas. Thousands of people migrated here looking for work. The next year, the first luxury home was built in the valley: the Whitehead Mansion. This home was really quite plush for the time. It had all the modern conveniences of air conditioning, electricity and indoor plumbing.



Then, in 1931, gambling

became legal in Nevada. The bill that was authored by Phil Tobin said the legalized gambling was designed to raise needed taxes for public schools. Today, more than 43 percent of the state general fund is fed by gambling tax revenue and more than 34 percent of the state's general fund is pumped into public education.

(Much like today.) The new town of Las Vegas was virtually insulated from the



economic hard times of the 1930's. Jobs and money were prevalent because of the Union Pacific Railroad development, legal gambling, and construction of the Hoover Dam 34 miles away in Black Canyon on the Colorado River. Fremont Street was paved (being the first paved street in town) and had the first traffic light. The first telephone installed in Las Vegas was also established on Fremont Street.

In the 1950's, the Riviera made history by being the first high-rise in Las Vegas at 9-



stories tall. The following year, the Fremont Hotel was built and surpassed the Riviera by its 15-story structure. During that time, the Hacienda made its impact by expanding the boundaries of the strip and opening 2-miles south of the nearest resort.

In the 1950's, the city was populated with around 50,000 people. This was the start of glamour in Las Vegas. People dressed to the tee in floor-length gowns and suits, ready to hit the town! The Desert Inn opened at this time and brought a new style of elegance to the strip. Then in the late 50's, the Tropicana opened and then came the Stardust. The Stardust cost around \$10 million dollars to build and had the capacity to accommodate thousands of people by its 1,065-room structure. All of the top stars of the time performed in Las Vegas and the reputation grew as the place to go for

high-class entertainment.

During the 1960's, Caesars Palace and The Aladdin were built. The Aladdin became famous by hosting Elvis Presley's wedding to Priscilla. During these years, the Department of Justice began to watch over Las Vegas Gaming Operations with a more scrutinizing eye.

At this time, a billionaire named Howard Hughes moved to Las Vegas and ended some of the organized crime messes by purchasing millions of dollars worth of hotel property. Then, in the late 1960's, Circus Circus was built and was the frontier of marking Las Vegas to becoming one of the largest family destinations in the world.

In the 1970's, Las Vegas got even more popularized when Merv Griffin taped his shows at Caesars Palace. Now everyone in America could see the town with all of the action. The town was



thriving, new businesses were successful, the casinos were full, and life in Las Vegas was wonderful! Then, unexpectedly, a flash flood struck Las Vegas Boulevard and caused over a million dollars in damage on the strip. If that didn't sober Vegas, the legalization of gambling in Atlantic City certainly did.

In 1980, tragedy hit Las Vegas once again when a fire erupted at the MGM Grand and left 84 dead and 700 injured. By the end of the decade, the town took a turn when the Mirage was built. With its unique volcano and beautiful waterfalls, lagoons and tropical setting, it quickly became the place to see!

The 1990's were busy years that had a huge impact on the Las Vegas Valley. The Hard Rock Hotel, the Monte-Carlo, the Stratosphere and the New York-New York were all built between 1995 and 1997. Yes, these casinos had a huge impact on the positive growth in Vegas, but it was the next couple of years that followed that really transformed the city.

Several new hotels were built that were like no other in the valley. The Bellagio, the Mandalay Bay, the Venetian and the Paris all had price tags around the billion-dollar range and were built to attract a more high-end lifestyle. Las Vegas changed its reputation from family destination to luxury resort.

Las Vegas is now one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. "In the past several years, Las Vegas has grown and is expected to continue to grow. As Vegas continues to grow, all sectors of the market grow." David DeZotto, president of Remington Homes stated.

There are thousands of people moving to the Las Vegas Valley every month. These people need places to live, so real estate prices are rising as an effect. DeZotto continues, "The market currently is right to buy or build a home. A number of homes have been built recently because of the large number of people migrating here."

Due to the tragedies in America the past year, we have witnessed, and even felt the hit of the economical market in this country. Mitch McClellan, director of marketing for Southern Highlands Golf Club remarks, "The price for property is increasing here and we will probably continue to see that. Investing money in property is a more stable way to invest your money compared to the stock market."

What attracts so many people to this desert town we call Las Vegas? There isn't one answer; many things contribute in making this town like no other. "A dollar goes a lot further here than other places in the country." DeZotto answers. "People like the fact that the cost of living is low. They also move here for tax reasons, and the lifestyle that Vegas has to offer." DeZotto concluded.

There are many attributes to living in Las Vegas, or even buying a second home here! The valley has fabulous weather, wonderful casinos, beautiful desert scenery, the hiking on many of the great trails

the valley has to offer, skiing in the close mountains, boating in Lake Mead, the 5-star entertainment, and much more that makes this town uniquely different.



There is always something to do, even if you are not a big gambler. A short drive away is Mount Charleston and Red Rock Canyons. If you like the outdoors, these are great places to go for a hike; snow skiing in the winter, horseback riding, camping, or just to go to get away from the city life. Also, beyond the nightlife, it has great restaurants, fantastic shops (did we mention The Forum Shops...the #1 rated mall in the world?), outdoor recreational activities, and beautiful mountain scenery. The average of 310 days of sunshine a year is also enticing to the new "locals."

Jenny Leiber, Director of Marketing for Red Rock Country Club and Siena said, "Las Vegas is the entertainment capital of the world. There is something to do for everyone. We have fine dining, shopping and great Broadway shows."

With everything that Las Vegas has to offer those who call this valley home, the next question you might want to ask yourself might be, "Why don't I live there?"

