

THE HISTORY OF MODERN DAY GAMING



Gambling, in one form or another, has been around for many centuries however most historians agree that the oldest versions were in the form of dice games. Some opinions state that one of the earliest forms of gambling took place in

China back around 2300 B.C where dice were thought to have decided territories. An even earlier version had Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon splitting the Universe by sharing heaven, hell and the sea with the throw of the dice. Whichever variation of history you choose to believe, here is a little history on modern day gambling.

♦ 1931- Nevada was the first state to legalize modern era gaming, when the “wide open gambling” bill was signed on March 19, 1931. That was the same day that Governor Balzar signed a 6-week divorce law, and both events went on to making Nevada very popular!

♠ 1941- Tommy Hull, a California hotel owner, in April opened the El Rancho, the first major property on what would later be known as the Las Vegas Strip. The casino had a western theme, 63 cabins, and The Chuck Wagon Buffet which sat 250 people. Hull is referred to as “the father of the Strip.”

♣ 1942- The Last Frontier, another western themed resort, opened in October. One of the owners, William Moore, was one of the first people who hired planes to fly entertainers, as well as gamblers, to his resort. Moore decided to book flights with a small airline owned by Kirk Kerkorian, the future owner of the International and MGM Grand hotel casinos.

♥ 1946- The Flamingo, operated by mobster Bugsy Siegel, opened on December 26. This was the first major plush resort hotel casino with top name entertainment and was the first carpeted casino (as opposed to western



themes). This is where the term “carpet joint” was penned.

♦ 1950- The Desert Inn was the idea of Wilbur Clark, who took \$1.5 million of his proceeds from the sale of the El Rancho. Unfortunately he ran out of money and turned to Moe Dalitz and other unsavory associates. Four years in the making and costing \$6.5 million, the 300 room Desert Inn opened on April 24. Opening night entertainment was performed by Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, among others, and the next year ground was broken for a golf course which would make this the only Strip resort with an 18-hole golf course.

♠ 1952- October 7, the 240 room Sahara Hotel & Casino opened. Labeled the “The Jewel of the Desert,” opening night entertainment was provided by the famous scarecrow from the “Wizard of Oz”, Ray Bolger, and singer Lisa Kirk. The Sahara had originally

opened as Club Bingo on July 24, 1947 and the Sahara officially closed May 16, 2011 housing 1,720 rooms.

♣ 1958- July 2, Tony Cornero's dream (he had passed away in July 1955 when he suffered a heart attack while gambling at the Desert Inn) became a \$10 million, 1065 room reality while charging just \$6.00 a day for a room. The Stardust was the first Strip hotel to not include the prestigious circle drive (up to the hotel check in), and also conveniently held Las Vegas' only first run drive-in theatre at the rear of the resort.

♥ 1976- New Jersey becomes the second state to legalize casino gaming, and on May 26, 1978 Resorts International opened up to standing room only crowds. Initially casinos were only allowed to operate for 18 hours during the week and 20 hours during the weekends. The property had gone through various owners including Merv Griffin and Sun International,

and in December 2010 was sold to DGMB Casinos, whose owner was Dennis Gomes, longtime gaming executive and former Tropicana Casino and Resort President, who passed away February 23, 2012 from complications of kidney dialysis.

♦ 1989- November 1 saw Deadwood, South Dakota open up casinos. All of the buildings were required to conform with the city's authentic 1880's architecture, and this is the town where Wild Bill Hickok was shot to death while playing poker. He held two-pair in his hands, Aces and Eights, which is now commonly referred to as "dead man's hand." The regulations limit each casino licensee to a maximum of 30 slot machines, and no one person can own more than three licenses, however some operators form a cooperative and put their machines under one roof so that it looks like one large casino.

♠ 1989- Steve Wynn purchased the Castaways in 1987 from (Howard) Hughes Tool Company, and had a dream of a resort "that will usher in a new Las Vegas." The resort, which was to be called "Golden Nugget on the Strip," went into the planning stages. The \$750 million, three-winged, Y-shaped, 30 story tower The Mirage, the first hotel casino resort built on the Strip in 15 years, opened on November 22 with 3,044 rooms. On March 6, 2000 it was announced that Mirage Resorts had been sold to Kirk Kerkorian/MGM Grand for \$4.4 billion in cash.

♣ 1991- On April 1 three riverboat casinos opened in Iowa- the first in the country outside of Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Today Iowa has 18 Riverboat casinos and three Native American owned casinos.

♥ 1991- In September, with the introduction of Argosy's Alton Belle casino, Illinois became the second state to allow riverboat casinos. Currently there are 10 casinos in Illinois, which are taxed at the highest rate in the nation.

♦ 1991- In October, 11 casinos opened in the mountain towns of Black Hawk, Central City and Cripple Creek, Colorado. They were limited to electronic games (slots, video poker, etc) and to table games, however there was a \$5 maximum wager. That law changed in July 2009 and was raised to a \$100 maximum wager.

♠ 1992- Mississippi was the third state to legalize Riverboat casinos. The first casino to open was the Isle of Capri in Biloxi, followed one month later by The President. Due to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina in August, 2005, the law was changed to allow



the gulf coast casinos to be rebuilt on land within 800 feet of the shoreline. Today there are 31 "Riverboat" casinos and two Native American properties in the Magnolia state.

♣ 1993- The \$1 billion, 5,005 room MGM Grand opened December 18, making this the largest hotel in the world. The MGM sat on approximately 112 acres, with 171,500 square feet of casino (larger than Yankee Stadium's field), eight restaurants, five lounges and bars, 23 retail shops, and 158,000 square feet of meeting space. Kirk Kerkorian was the majority owner, and Larry Woolf Chairman and CEO.

A lot has transpired since the gods rolled the dice to divvy up the world, and a lot is happening all around us (half a billion dollar lottery pools, legalizing internet gaming) at this moment. I hope this article shared a few interesting tidbits, and as always please contact me with any comments or questions.

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