

## Gambling in Big Bear and the Sportsman's Tavern

Yes there was gambling in the Big Bear Valley and at the Sportsman's Tavern. But first it is necessary to look at the general history of Big Bear to get a better understanding of the social and economical issues of the times and gambling in the mountain communities.

Various towns in the Big Bear Valley were first settled in the 1860s with gold mining. When combining gold mining, the old west and young men and the lack of structured law enforcement, there will always be gambling, and drinking (and women, working as prostitutes). Although it can never be really proven, Big Bear Valley in the 1860s was most likely no different. Initially, gambling in boom towns consisted of card games, dice, and faro wheels.

Slot machines were invented in the 1890s but gained their popularity in the 1920s. Their use continued on, in most of the US until the 1950s. Each state had their own laws regulating the use of slot machines. Originally the slot machines were of the three wheel type. The payouts at that time were not cash but tokens for certain goods. Three cherries would get you one particular item at that store and then three lemons would get you something of a higher value. This payout system was employed into the 1940s, thus making the use and gains from these machines more socially acceptable than that of the other card, wheel and dice games.

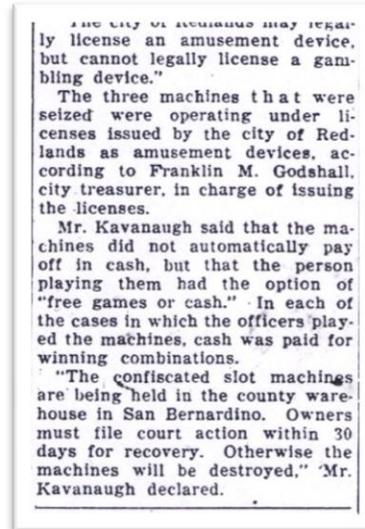


In California depending on how the laws were legislated in or out, the state/cities looked to charge a tax on any establishment that was using slot machines. *(This same concept is still with us today where the state charges the Indian casinos for every slot machine and then a tax again on the profit from those machines. In the early days it was hard to enforce the laws on these machines.)* In 1945 California passed a law that made the ownership of slot machines that paid out cash illegal. But slot machines were legal in those instances where there was no cash payout. As described in this November 8, 1946 article in the San Bernardino Sun, for those cases where the “pay out” slot machines were found, the machines were confiscated and held by the law enforcement agency for 30 days. The establishment owners or managers were rarely arrested or fined. If the owner of the slot machines wanted to retrieve the machines he had 30 days to file a civil law suit. (The law was later revised in the 1980s that an individual could own a slot machine that was more than 25 years old. This allowed for private

antique collectors to legally have the devices as long as they were not being used for the purposes of gambling.)



For those establishments that did have slot machines that paid out something other than cash, various levels of the government collected a tax. This system was best explained in a Redland Facts article from Dec 16, 1946.



Practically, there was not a clear cut line between the slot machines that were being used for “amusement” and those that were being used for gambling. To complicate the issue California law clearly spelled out that the gambling variety was illegal, but collected a tax on the amusement type. The federal government through the IRS collected a tax on both types. If a business wanted to be completely compliant with the tax laws they would file taxes that reflected that they had the “cash pay out” variety even though the possession was illegal.

From interviews of several relatives of those people that were involved with the Sportsman’s Tavern, there was gambling at the restaurant. In the case of Paul Parish’s son, Wesley, he was able to produce a photograph of his mother, Wanda who acted as “Change and Chip” girl. Most likely this photograph was taken in 1948. It was believed that there were eight to ten slot machines in the restaurant. It is unclear which owners of the Sportsman’s Tavern were in favor having gambling or not having gambling. In any case there is strong evidence that the slot machines were there from the beginning (May 30, 1947). The local economy was still not great and each of the local stores were in need of that extra income.



Wanda Parish as “Chip and Change” girl

Further evidence of gambling was illustrated in this LimeLight advertisement in early 1949. Most likely the “Visit our no-Peek Room” was the upstairs back area that was used initially as an office and then housed all the gambling operations. Although no photographs have been located at this time, it is believed that in addition to the eight to ten slot machines there was a craps table and a roulette wheel. It is unknown as to who was running those tables.

VISIT OUR NO-PEEK ROOM

**WHOOOO**

DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?  
GET YOUR CARCUS OUT TO THE

**SPORTSMAN'S TAVERN**

For A **BIG BEAR NATIVE'S SPECIAL DINNER**  
FOR JUST A BUCK AND A HALF

DANCING EVERY NITE TO LYNN PETERS' FREE OLD-TIME DANCE INSTRUCTION EVERY WED. NITE BY MR. AND MRS. HUGH MOORE

At The **HAMMOND ORGAN**  
Cocktails by **TONY, the Fiddling Bartender** Phone 4571

The Sportsman's Tavern was not doing financially well from the beginning with Hank Halstead at the helm. In 1948 Paul Parish took control of the restaurant and tried to make it profitable.

The LA Daily News had already been reporting on gambling and slot machines in California for some time. On August 8, 1948 they published an article regarding the number of slot machines in San Bernardino County. It is interesting to note that of the 2500 slot machines in the county there were 100 slot machines in the greater Big Bear Valley (76 in Big Bear Lake, 5 in Big Bear City and 19 in Fawnskin). Only two other areas had more slot machines: San Bernardino with 281 and Fontana with 91. The main reason that Fontana had so many is that it was very lucrative for the local store owners since the steel mill provided many workers with a steady income.

## L. A. Paper Says 2,500 'Bandits' In S. B. County

There are 2,500 slot machines in San Bernardino county doing an annual business in excess of \$6,000,000, it was alleged last week by the Los Angeles Daily News in two articles dealing with the gambling situation.

The News also intimated that there must be some sort of a tieup between racketeers and politicians in order to provide for gambling activity uninterrupted by law enforcement officers.

According to the articles, part of a series dealing with slot machine activities in Southern California counties, there are 861 locations where slot machines are in operation. Redlands is the only community of any size in the county where the one-armed bandits are not listed.

All slot machines must pay a federal license and a breakdown of the tax records in the office of the collector of internal revenue in Los Angeles shows the following number of places where they are operated:

**TAX RECORDS TOLD**  
Arrowbear, 3; Argos, 4; Alta Loma, 1; Adelanto, 2; Amboy, 4; Barstow, 49; Baker, 8; Blue Jay, 9; Big Bear City, 5; Bloomington, 21; Big Bear Lake, 76; Crestline, 60; Cucamonga, 13; Cajon, 2; Cedar Glen, 8; Colton, 63; Chino, 17; Cima, 1; Camp Baldy, 4; Del Rosa, 5; Daggett, 4.  
Devore Junction, 1; Etiwanda, 4; East Highlands, 4; Fawnskin, 19; Fontana, 91 (concentrated here

News indicates that gamblers and racketeers have a genuine bonanza in San Bernardino county and that their relations with law enforcement officials are such that the "big business" approach to gambling is not fearful of molestation.

**SAYS LAW IGNORED**  
Excerpts from the disclosure follow:  
"In the desert county of San Bernardino, where slot machines flourish like cactus, section 337-A of the state penal code, which outlaws them, is and always has been in a virtual state of suspension."  
"Federal tax records disclose that there are 861 locations in 37 cities, towns, hamlets and whistle stops in the county, with approximately 2,500 machines operating

Then on March 30, 1949 the LA Daily News printed two articles concerning this issue that were very damaging. The first one was titled “Slot machines flourish in San Bernardino County”. The article informed the reader that there were “Cash pay out” slots machines being operated in California. The LA Daily news had obtained a list from the federal IRS tax records that were public records. The article gave the following statistics:

- There were 11,000 “Amusement” type slot machines in use in California
- There were 3322 “Cash pay out” slot machines in California
- There were 1096 “Cash pay out” slot machines being operated in San Bernardino County.
- From those in San Bernardino County 137 machines were located in the Big Bear area.

*It is interesting to note that Lake Arrowhead only had 10 “Cash pay out” slots and there were 43 listed for Crestline.*

To make matters even worse for the Big Bear businesses there was a second article titled “Here’s list of ‘one-arm bandits” which gave a list of all the establishments in each city that had slot machines and how many are at each of the establishments. The Sportsman’s Tavern was listed as having eight slot machines. See attached news articles.



Note that the ownership of the Sportsman’s Tavern is listed as the “Sportsman’s Village”. Thankfully it did not list the five owners. If the LA Daily News had realized that Andy Devine was involved, they would have broken that news item.

The number of “Cash pay out” machines was most likely even higher than that reported. In those days it was common to have several additional “unregistered” machines on the premises. From the list published by the LA Daily News it shows that the Zebra Room had one machine.

From an interview with one of the musicians that played at the Zebra Room there were several machines along with other gaming tables. It is also interesting to note that the Big Bear Airport was listed as having one slot machine as well. This would implicate Devine, Probert and Halstead directly as well as from the Sportsman's Tavern.

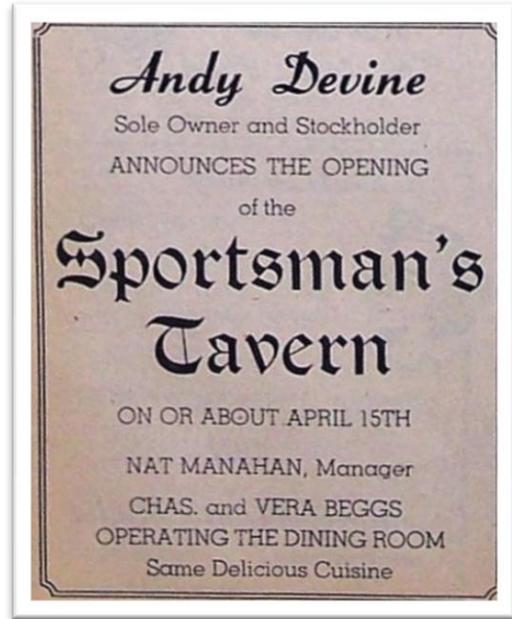
To add to the problem the San Bernardino Grand Jury released a report that was very incriminating of Jim Stocker the San Bernardino County Sheriff. The foreman for the Grand Jury was J Dale Gentry. This report was the start of a feud between the two men that would last for years and come to a final confrontation in a public display at the Estes Kefauver crime investigation in 1951. In this Grand Jury report there were four points worth mentioning:

1. During 1948 approximately 800 locations throughout the county maintain one or more gambling devices in violation of the State Penal Code.
2. The Grand Jury asserted Stocker has usurped the functions of the court by taking the stand that confiscation of the gambling devices is sufficient punishment for the operator of the gambling devices and ordering deputies not to arrest such operators.
3. Gambling, bookmaking and houses of prostitution have been conducted in open violation of the law and these conditions are being tolerated by the sheriff and his deputies.
4. Mountain resort areas during the summer months are infested with all types of gambling devices and open gambling games wherein juveniles participated or had direct knowledge of the operation.

It is obvious from a listing of all the films (shown to the right), that Andy Devine was involved with during this time period that he did not have time to be involved with the running of the Sportsman's Tavern. Besides his interest was more toward the aviation aspect of Big Bear.

Year	Number of Films
1945	4
1946	1
1947	7
1948	8
1949	1
1950	2

For sure the owners of the Sportsman’s Tavern realized that their position was not very good. In particular Andy Devine’s reputation was somewhat at risk. With the LA Daily News articles hitting the presses on March 30, March 31, April 1 and April 8, Andy Devine must have decided to “take a hold of the reins” with an advertisement in the April 8, 1949 edition of the Grizzly by advertising that he was the “Sole Owner and Stockholder” of the Sportsman’s Tavern.



From a segment of the “Time Table” of activities at the Sportsman’s Tavern, we can see some quick changes in management direction.

Date	Owner/Leasee	Host/Manager	Dining Rm	Piano/Organ
1948/10/1	Owner Paul Parrish			Lynn Peters & Tony Fink
1948/10/29	<i>Ad has comment of “No Peek Room”</i>			Lynn Peters & Tony Fink
1949/1/21	Paul Parrish		Charles Beggs	”Operating this winter”
1949/4/1	<i>LA Daily News runs article on Corruption in San Bernardino County</i>			
1949/4/8	Andy “Sole Owner and Stockholder”	Nat? Manahan	Charles & Vera Beggs	
1949/4/29	Andy Devine	Matt Manahan		Burton Morse

With management changes and the press doing a lot of investigations, it was most likely at this point that gambling came to an end at the Sportsman’s Tavern. It is not known what happened to the slot machines from the Tavern, but considering that they cost \$200 to \$1000 in 1949, they most likely were sold off to someone else in the town (or out of town such as back to Las Vegas as used equipment). *(From an internet calculator with 4% inflation today’s value would have been from \$1934 to \$9670)*

With so many slot machines in town, there must have been someone that was servicing or fixing them when they broke down. From two different sources there is a story that there was a man in

town that had a lot of influence on local businesses and actually had ownership of the slot machines. This individual may have “leased out” the slot machines to the various stores/businesses in town. There was also a second individual that also have had experience working with slot machines and was called upon from time to time to repair them. In any case both sources indicate that the gambling (slot machines) activity ended very suddenly with all the machines being removed from sight. *(This statement gives support to the theory that one person did have control on the gambling activity)*

With the law in California changing in July of 1950, many of the slot machine operators sold their machines to various operators in Nevada as can be seen in the July 18, 1950 San Bernardino Sun article shown to the right.

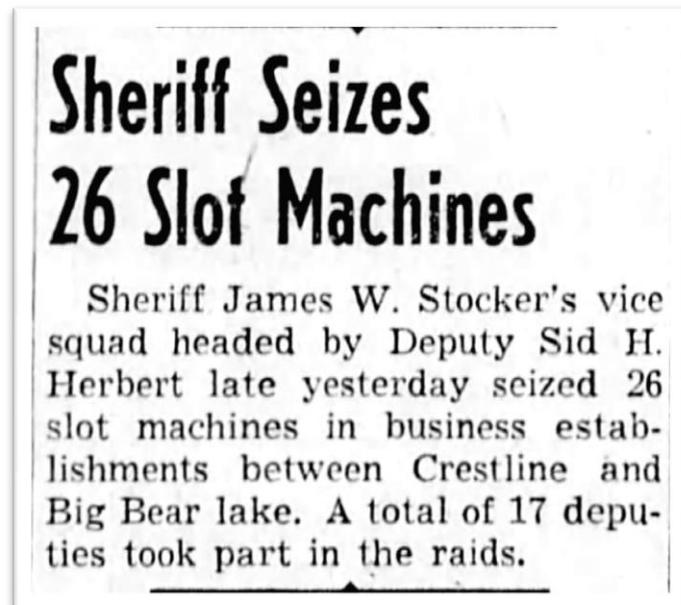


It may have been that person that took repossession of the slots. With the cost/value on the machines it is doubtful that the machines were “dumped” into the lake. Besides the penalty for possession of a slot machine up to July of 1950 was only that of a misdemeanor. The average weight on an electronic slot machine is 225 pounds, so a mechanical one would weigh at least that or more. It would have been a real feat getting them on a boat and then dumping them in the lake. After reviewing past issues of the Big Bear Grizzly from 1956 and 1959 when the lake was at it’s lowest recorded level, no one found any slot machines laying on the lake bottom.

As for gambling raid in the town, there does not appear to have been any raids during this time period. There are some suspicions that someone in the Sheriff’s Department would notify some of the businesses of any impending raids. This would allow the businesses time to hide the slot

machines or gaming tables. It does seem odd that with LA Daily News giving information for two years (1948 and 1949) that showed Big Bear having a large number of slot machines. Sheriff Stocker was constantly under attack for not taking any action. (See April 2, 1949 article titled "Hot War on as Slot Expose Rocks Berdoo" in the LA Daily News section of this document.) The San Bernardino Sun had several articles over the years concerning raids that took place in the desert, Fontana and San Bernardino.

As for the mountain areas, there were a couple of raids in the Crestline area. It is odd that there is one article which describes a raid on various establishments between Crestline and Big Bear. If they got 26 machines just in that area, one can only imagine how many they would have gotten in Big Bear itself.



Then to cap off the whole issue at Senator Estes Kefauver's crime investigation in Los Angeles with the San Bernardino Grand Jury Foreman, J. Dale Gentry testified that Sheriff Stocker was not doing his job and he openly tolerated vice in the county. This was followed Sheriff Stocker testifying, it was Gentry had it in for him because Stocker had conducted a raid on Gentry's cabin in Big Bear. At the raid they confiscated two roulette wheels, one crap table and nine slot machines. Shown at the right is a photo from the article that ran in the March 1, 1951 San Bernardino Sun newspaper.

# Simmering Stocker-Gentry Feud Flares Up Before Crime Probers

## Former Sheriff, Hotel Man Trade Counter-Charges

The bitter Stocker-Gentry feud, which has been boiling quietly for years, flared right out in the open yesterday and was carried by television into the homes of thousands of San Bernardino valley residents.

Both ex-Sheriff James W. Stocker and J. Dale Gentry, San Bernardino hotel owner and former county grand jury foreman, testified before the Kefauver senate crime-probing committee in Los Angeles.

Gentry charged that under Stocker's term as sheriff slot machines "were running in the county and law enforcers let them go."

Stocker, who followed Gentry to the stand, said the hotel owner "has it in for me" because he (Stocker) once raided a gambling layout in Gentry's Big Bear Valley cabin.

The feud developed about 12 years ago—at the time of the raid—Stocker told the Kefauver committee. He said he confiscated two roulette wheels, "probably one crap table" and nine slot machines. The former sheriff said the raid was conducted when he was under-sheriff and Gentry came to him and asked return of the equipment.

### CHARGES 'FALSEHOODS'

"I turned him down," Stocker said.

Describing Stocker's allegations as "falsehoods," Gentry denied owning the mountain cabin but said he held a mortgage on a Big Bear house about that time. Gentry said he later foreclosed the mortgage but added that "at no time" was there any gambling equipment in the place.

Tempers of the two men flared as they testified at the Los Angeles hearing being conducted by Senator Estes Kefauver.

Gentry was foreman of the 1949 grand jury which delivered a blistering accusation against Stocker, who was then sheriff. The jury charged Stocker with "openly tolerating vice and gambling in the county."

## Prosecution to Begin Case in Murder Trial

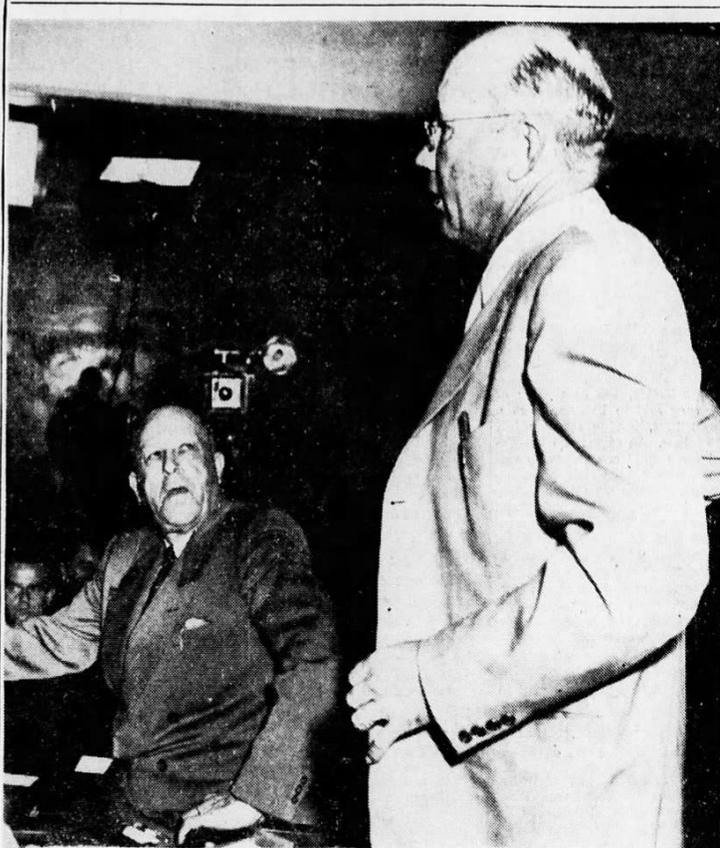
The people's case will get under way today in the prosecution of Albert Edward Clark, 59, wealthy Twentynine Palms lumber company executive charged with murdering his wife.

Twelve jurors and two alternates were sworn in shortly before noon yesterday in Superior Judge Archie D. Mitchell's court.

With opening arguments out of the way, District Attorney Lowell E. Lathrop and Chief Deputy District Attorney Robert J. Simpson are free to call their first witnesses. Defense counsel are Donald S. Gillespie and Alden Reid.

Clark, pleading not guilty, has declared that he was out of his mind at the time of the alleged slaying. His estranged wife, Esther, 49, was found slumped on the grass in the backyard of her desert home on an early October morning last year. Her body was riddled by six .25 caliber pistol slugs.

## Airman Fatally Hurt in Crash



STOCKER TELLS OF 'RAID'—Former Sheriff James W. Stocker (right) of San Bernardino county tells the Kefauver crime investigating committee in Los Angeles yesterday he once seized gambling equipment in a Big Bear cottage owned by J. Dale Gentry (seated), 1949 county grand jury foreman, and says he believes Gentry's opposition to him resulted from the raid. Gentry told the committee he never before had heard of the raid and said he didn't own the cottage—he merely had a mortgage on it. (AP Wirephoto)

## 'Malicious Rumors' Denied by Mayor

Mayor C. T. Johnson, a candidate for reelection on the city's ballot, said last night that it had been "maliciously" rumored that

## ALARM CAUSES BURGLARS TO ABANDON \$3,300 IN WHISKY

A truck already loaded with 60 cases of whisky valued at \$3,300 was abandoned yesterday morning when an alarm failed.

### Other Gambling in Big Bear

From SoCalMountains.com a question was asked about gambling in the community. The following are some of those replies many of which are first hand accounts of the times:

*If there were as many hookers, gambling, and booze halls as it is rumored Big Bear would have been more prosperous then it was. There were a lot of slot*

*machines around and I don't think booze was ever hard to find. And there always were and will be hookers. When there were raids, they seldom got more than one place because of the phone tree that was in place. and it wouldn't be hard to hide a few slot machines. XXX was working as a waitress at Stillwell's when he was raided and he was running around yelling "their taking my slot machines, their taking my slot machines".*

*.....I heard recently that XXX had some at his arcade that he would wheel out for the people waiting in line at the show. Maybe thats why the town was packed, in all the old postcards. During the war the place was a boom town since people couldn't travel long distance with everything rationed.*

Second entry:

*More information on slots from a friend who was talking from first hand experience I have red x'd names that are not needed for story. The arcade mentioned was below Brown Bear Gift Shop and is shown in one of the historic pictures*

*"The original **Peter Pan Woodland club** had a gaming room, The Andy Devine **sportsman tavern**, (captains Anchorage) was built with the intention of having live gaming up stairs. **xxxxxx**& **xxxxxx** had slots that they would place on the sidewalk when the line would form for the **movie theater**. **Community Mkt.** had slots in store. **Airport** had small slots that they would place on counter upon request, **the store that had the arcade** that **xxx** ran for **xxxx** had slots stored in simulated out house in back yard I don't remember where any whore houses were located. As a joke we would send guys looking for a whore house to the upstairs door of the Fawn lodge no body lived there."*

Third entry:

*Yes, there was gambling there, as in many of the entertainment spots in Big Bear before Paul Price of the LA Daily News got a speeding ticket in San Bernardino County. He decided to go on a crusade to rid Big Bear of gambling. Virtually all stores and motels had at least a slot machine. The revenue paid the rent and utilities and nobody got hurt.*

*Andy Devine's Sportsman's Tavern (now, Captain's Anchorage --The Hook) was*

*the most elaborate of the gambling places. Tables and wheels in addition to the slot machines.*

*The Zebra Room did have slots as well as a craps table. No wheel.*

*As for loose women.....Yes, the ZR had regulars who made a little extra money at night.*

*The upstairs rooms at the Navaho Hotel & Bar were very popular.....as was the Fawn Lodge in Fawnskin.*

*Big Bear, in the late '30's, '40's and early '50's was a very popular place for the Hollywood folks. Remember that Harry James, Benny Goodman, Glen Miller and many other name bands used to make Big Bear a regular stop during summer months.*

*There was little, if any, crime in Big Bear during those times. "Potential troublemakers" were discouraged from entering the Valley. Read into that anything you wish.*