

Historic Hotels!

XI: Las Vegas's *El Rancho Vegas*

Another great hotel...and one most people have at least heard of...Thomas E. Hull, a hotelier who had built eight hotels including El Rancho Sacramento and El Rancho Fresno in California, built the El Rancho outside the city limits of Las Vegas, introducing a major element to the development of the Las Vegas style - the theme resort. On April 3, 1941, the \$425,000, western themed El Rancho Vegas opened on 66 acres, as the first hotel casino resort on what would become the Las Vegas Strip. Ten gardeners worked the year round keeping up the grounds. El Rancho took as much as 10 million gallons of water a month in the dry summer periods. A neon-lit windmill sat atop the casino for all to see. The El Rancho provided badminton courts, dinner dancing, and an outdoor barbecue serving the terrace. In the 1940s, El Rancho's Chuck Wagon Buffet had seating for 250 people and was the largest in town. The Entertainment that appeared at the El Rancho in the 1940s included Pearl Bailey, Earnie Baron, and world famous clown Grok. Major names continued to appear at the hotel through the 1950s.

On June 17, 1960, a fire burned the El Rancho to the ground. All that was left of the central building after more than two hours of burning was a charred shell. Damage was estimated at \$5,000,000. The building was constructed of wood in the frontier theme that was Hull's dream. In July of 1960, the owner, Katleman, had promised that he would replace the existing resort with an ultra-modern concrete building, but Katleman's dream was never built.

