

SLOT MACHINES IN CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND
1910-1968

by
Susan Hickey Shaffer

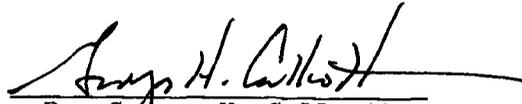
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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Slot Machines in Charles County,
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Psychologists and sociologists have studied gambling for many years, but historians have paid little attention to the subject.

This is a study of the impact of gambling, and specifically slot machines, on rural Charles County, Maryland from 1910 to 1968.

Slot machines moved up the Potomac River by riverboat, and gradually they spread throughout the county. In July, 1949, when most American communities had eliminated gambling as a source of immorality and crime, the people of Charles County, moving against the tide, voted to license and legalize them. Initially they brought tremendous growth to the area. During the 1950s, U.S. Highway 301 cut through the center of the county and brought with it a strip of tourist courts, restaurants and slot machine emporiums. Charles County also tapped the gambling market in Virginia, where gambling was illegal,

by constructing piers out from the Virginia shore into Charles County waters.

Despite their loss in the 1949 referendum, however, the anti-slot machine forces remained vocal. Ministers, newspapers, judges and concerned citizens argued the machines were immoral and crime producers. As a promise to his political supporters Governor Millard Tawes and the anti-slot forces outlawed the machines from the state, effective 1968.

Economically, the machines poured new money into the county government, kept taxes low and increased police. Service related industries benefited by supplying casinos and motels. Slot machines created new wealth for many, poverty for others. Socially the industry brought family disruption and petty crime. Politically, it provided the issue for the opposition party, the Democrats, to come to power. Finally, after 58 years, Charles County faced the future without a gambling crutch.

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The strange thing about gambling is that
the laws usually have very little effect
on what actually happens.

Earnest Havemann
"Gambling in the U.S."
Life
19 June 1950

CHAPTER I

THE SLOT MACHINES

Slot machines have been alternately cursed, enjoyed, destroyed, legalized and banned. Called many names, including one-armed bandits, vending machines, coin operated amusement devices, nickel separators, amusement devices, bell-fruit machines, gambling machines, gaming machines, and consoles to name only a few.

No one knows the exact origin of the machines, although the first commercial success may have been the 7-foot tall "King Bee" of 1875, probably built by the Camille Brothers Company of Detroit, Michigan. From 1875 to 1900 the coin vending business expanded. The Mills Novelty Company, Jennings Company, and the Watling Manufacturing Company all began in these years to provide competition to the Camille Brothers. The manufacturers openly copied each others designs and used aggressive advertising techniques.¹

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Along with the new machines, there emerged during the 1890s a group of professional coin machine operators who purchased their machines and placed them in local taverns or stores. The operators kept the machines in good repair and retained a percentage of the

profits, usually fifty percent.² The system of operators or distributors for the slot machines spread nationally. The earliest evidence of the distributor system in Charles County was found in the 1930s. It appeared to be a popular arrangement, frequently beneficial to both the owners of machines and to the establishments where they were located. The distributor structure continued in the county through the mid-1960s.³

Penny arcades developed into a popular form of entertainment beginning in the "Gay Nineties" decade and spread through the country. The arcades contained many coin operated amusement and vending machines. Some machines played music, others distributed candy or cigarettes, while others were considered solely gambling devices. Mechanical roulette games existed in the form of race tracks, these had colorful metal horses moving in a circle which gave the appearance of a child's game. In such a form, authorities classified it as an amusement game rather than a gambling one, but if one did not put his coin in the winning slot, then one lost his coin. It was designed to operate on pennies or nickels. Horse racing and similar games became very popular in resort areas with arcades.⁴ In Charles County, the Marshall Hall amusement park had an entire

building for these games, with their colorful names - "Camille's Centaur," "The Venus," and "On-the-Square" by Mills.⁵

Through the years, the Camille and Watling factories concentrated specifically on slot machines, while Mills tried all areas of the coin business. The company experimented with coin operated scales, music boxes, and food vending machines. Competition became fierce as more people realized how lucrative the slot machine had become, both to produce and to own. Double and triple machines for five-twenty-five and fifty cents play, weighing six hundred and ten pounds, playing music to attract customers were designed to surpass the competitors.⁶ Even trade catalogues emphasized the need to attract customers with special devices. In the Mills' catalogue of 1913, the company called itself a "Prosperity Promoter."⁷

From 1895 to 1951 were the open years of the slot machine industry.⁸ No federal laws regulated them, local laws seldom addressed the slot machine, and when any did then the laws were generally ignored by local officials.⁹ The big models of the 1890s were conspicuous, and when smaller counter models were developed, many often bored customers. The manufacturers were becoming desperate until Charles Fey of San Francisco created a machine called the

"Liberty Bell" for a waterfront bar in 1895. This machine contained three moving reels with pictures of playing card symbols and became an instant success. Fey built more machines for his own distribution and extended his business to most of central California. Fey never patented his invention. In 1905, one of his machines vanished from a saloon and resurfaced at the Mills Plant in Chicago. When dismantled by Herbert Mills, it was found to have a fantastic mechanism with odds of nine hundred and ninety-nine to one of winning the grand prize. There were ten symbols per wheel, and possible combinations numbered ten times ten, or one thousand combinations, so that the odds were nine hundred and ninety-nine to one.¹⁰

Fey's Liberty Bell actually took much more of the public's money than Mills' most popular model the Dewey slot machine, but it was more appealing because of the speed and suspense it engendered with the sounds of spinning wheels and the small viewing windows. Soon Mills produced the Mills' Liberty Bell model with an identical mechanism to Fey's machine, the mechanical prototype for even the slot machine of today.¹¹ The smaller, lighter weight Fey machine was the spark that awoke the industry and eased the old, huge and conspicuous machines out of the way.

Mills in Chicago became the undisputed leader in the industry. It operated with a network of distributors over the country.¹² Advertisements spoke of "play" and "vending," never of gambling.¹³ The decade of the 1930s was the biggest boom time for manufacturers. Slot machines were shipped all over the world and represented a thriving business in a time of depression. New taverns opened in 1932 with repeal of prohibition, and often installed slot machines and juke boxes which were also supplied by slot machine distributors. The machines operated legally from coast to coast. The general public accepted them for pleasure or amusement, although increasingly some people formulated an opposition to them. At first opposition did not affect their popularity; if anything it seemed to increase the playing.

Still, criticism prompted manufacturers to develop smaller machines which could be concealed under counters, and machines with silent mechanisms.¹⁴ Now, the big four manufacturers were Mills, Jennings, Watling, and Pace, followed closely by Bally. Slot machine producers boasted they had helped pull America out of the depression.¹⁵

The 1939 World's Fair had a midway with slot machines, but the threat of war and increased bad publicity began to show some effect. Despite some losses from slot machine notoriety, their manufacturers

diversified into other aspects of vending which aided in keeping total sales up. When the United States entered World War II in 1941, coin machine factories turned to war production. All machines increased in value as a war time society demanded amusements. So, distributors kept the old pre-war machines operating as slot machines became even more popular.¹⁶

As the war ended manufacturers geared up to resupply the market. In 1946, Chicago's Sherman Hotel hosted a convention for slot machine people that drew thousands.¹⁷ Returning soldiers with money looking for opportunities and other investors had many plans. Few realized that they had only five more years before the federal government would regulate slot machines out of open business with the Johnson Act. It prohibited the transportation of gambling devices in interstate and foreign commerce.¹⁸ Only the state of Nevada was legally exempt, as it had legalized gambling for many years. Consequently, a legitimate need existed for additional gambling devices within the state which had to be transported from other areas.

Manufacturers closed their doors. Mills moved some operations into foreign countries where gambling was legal. The casinos of Las Vegas and Reno, where the machines could be legally shipped,

wanted more excitement in the form of lights, color and especially tamper-proof machines. So, Jennings developed an electric machine, destined to become solid state. The largest company was to become the Bally Manufacturing Company, which in 1964 produced a model called "Money Honey." This machine was electronic, visually exciting, and popular, thus Bally has not stopped growing since.¹⁹

The industry boomed in the 1960s and 1970s because of the popularity and glamour of Las Vegas casinos. Bally entered the New York Stock Exchange Board as BLY and investors benefited with large dividends. Big payoff machines attracted thousands hoping to win a fortune and in all casinos the slot machines earned half the profits.²⁰ The 1970s also witnessed the opening of the first casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

For a hundred years, from the 1870s to the 1970s, slot machines made a circle in their development, from popularity, to repression and back to popularity. Modern machines were lighter, electronic and faster than the old cast iron ones and as popular in gambling casinos as all other forms of gambling put together. In downtown Las Vegas, slot machines in the 1970s held first place as money earners. The nickel machines alone earned thirty percent of

gambling income.²¹ Manufacturers of the machines were no longer anathema to the public.

The first warning against slot machines came in 1908 in a one hundred page pamphlet printed by Joseph E. Meyer, an anti-gambling crusader from Wisconsin. Meyer described in detail some effective methods to beat the slot machines because he felt the machines cheated the public.²² Four years later, John Philip Quinn, a minister, attacked "coin operated gambling devices." He incorporated manufacturer's catalogues in his discourse to display how the public had been swindled.²³ This fierce attack had probably been generated by the astounding popularity of Charles Fey's new machines, which took one's money quickly.

Arguments against slot machines in the early 1900s were lead by Methodists who traditionally opposed gambling due to church teachings. Another opposition group included reformed gamblers who spent their energies opposing gambling in all forms. In the 1920s journalists like Kenneth Roberts, and Edward H. Smith provided sarcastic, anti-gambling articles for the Saturday Evening Post. Also, Scott Turner wrote articles for American Magazine.²⁴

The literature of the 1920s included gambling with the problem of

prohibition. In 1931, the Wickersham Commission appointed by President Herbert Hoover, reported that prohibition was an unenforceable law that should be abolished.²⁵ Prohibition created an aura of lawlessness. Along the shores of the Potomac River, notably in Charles County, residents supplemented their incomes with production and delivery of illegal alcohol to metropolitan areas like Washington, D. C.²⁶ As the local people considered prohibition impractical, they simply scorned the law, therefore creating inherent feelings that useless laws should simply be ignored.

The literature relating to gambling and slot machines was highly diverse. In early 1930, business magazines described the plight of owners of vending or slot machines whose equipment had been deluged with slugs instead of legal currency due to the economy. Articles listed the states which legislated in favor of the owners by labeling the slugs illegal. In addition, the union of the manufacturers into special interests groups, such as the Automatic Merchandisers Association indicated that businessmen were rebelling against the cheating criminals. In Business Week of 1931 no stigma was attached to owning slot machines, which were oftentimes illegal themselves. Instead, there was an implied sympathy for the businessmen plagued by

the economic depression.²⁷

In 1935, popular literature described slot machines as a business generating 150 million dollars in revenues. One manufacturer, Mills Novelty Company, stated that as far as it knew its "notorious Product was simply used as a trade stimulator or for amusement." By 1937 the literature contained more emotional opposition. Time magazine called it a "fun business" but also argued that "Slot machines originated in penny arcades and ended up in gangland."²⁸

Popular magazines like the Literary Digest went after the slots with emotional titles like: "You Can't Win in the Slot-Machine Racket," and "Gambling Slot-Machines That Swallow Millions."²⁹ Perhaps the recent repeal of the Prohibition Amendment generated a need to locate other evils that could be eradicated.

By 1939, writers noted that the slot machine industry had millions of dollars in machinery, five trade journals, a cast of inventors and thousands of salesmen, plus representation in sixty foreign countries. Samuel Lubell, writing for the Saturday Evening Post, commented that the machines operated illegally everywhere but Nevada. Lubell continued to say that bribing of public officials was common in the slot machine industry.

Also, the periodicals began to comment upon the universal appeal of machines for men, women and children who played. Players stood in line for the opportunity to try their luck. Journalists particularly noted the addicting effects of penny machines on children, therefore establishing some bad habits.³⁰

Although moral indignation reverberated in literature from 1933 to the decade's end, there seemed to be a lessening of it in the early forties. War shifted attention to matters of an international scope, and conversion of slot machine manufacturers' factories into wartime production removed new slot machines from the market and silenced the anti-slot machine articles for awhile. Avid gamblers had only the older pre-war machines for their pursuits.

Faced with costly war expenses, in 1942, the federal government required a yearly revenue stamp for slot machines. Costing one hundred dollars each, the stamp raised 7.8 million dollars for Uncle Sam in 1943. Outlawed by most states, the machines' stamps created increasing revenues for the federal government and became the only method for proving the enormous popularity of an illegal device. For instance, Washington, D.C., according to one article in Business Week, contained twenty-one establishments with one or more slot machines in

the year 1944. This could be contrasted with Nevada, the only state where they were legal, which had 1,016 slot machines and Maryland where they were not legal with a total of 2,039.³¹

In 1944 Business Week noted the personal profits obtainable from the machines by owners who generally operated along routes with twenty-five to a hundred machines. The magazine noted a large amount of money flowing into a "fast moving, low cost amusement field." It also expressed sympathy for the factories which had huge back orders for parts and machines but were stymied by shortages caused by the war. Business Week observed that law enforcement people have "shut their eyes to games in private clubs, taverns, and public amusement places," and noted that many country clubs and private organizations paid for new buildings by placing machines around for members to play.³²

Although criticism of the machines renewed with the end of the war, a greater literary fury came with an expose article in 1949 by Collier's Magazine which was reprinted in Reader's Digest. The article spoke of fights in many communities to eliminate machines which were tied to the underworld of organized crime. The authors, Norman and Madelyn Carlisle, wrote about the Coin Machine Institute in Chicago

giving "legal conferences" at their headquarters which detailed how to corrupt public officials. Some suggestions included an annual flat sum, a percentage of the profits or a heavy campaign contribution. The article quoted a California Special Crime Study which reported that "slot machine operators throughout the country pay ten to twenty percent of gross profit for protection and graft." The authors concluded by observing that local officials had access to federal tax payments on machines to discover who owned them, if they wished to enforce the law.³³ The entire article was a powerful voice against slot machine gambling.

The specter of organized crime running the slot machines was a powerful incentive to end them. In 1948 and again in 1949, California examined its own local gambling and found it connected to organized crime all over the country. Much of the data found in California's study, repeated in the Carlisles' article, resurfaced in the 1948 to 1949 struggle against legalized slot machines in Charles County. In this climate of the late 1940s, Southern Maryland elected to make its slot machines legal.

FOOTNOTES

¹William Gersh, "Pictorial History: 100 Years of Slot Machines," Market Place, February 1976-February 1980 (Serialized), p. 3; and p. 6.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Interview with Walt Hendrix, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 30 March 1982.

⁴Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 15; and p. 54.

⁵Interview with Paul J. Bailey, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 5 June 1982.

⁶Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 30; and p. 37.

⁷Mills Novelty Company, Mills Prosperity Promoters, (Chicago: Mills Novelty Company, 1913), title.

⁸Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 43.

⁹Samuel Lubell, "Ten Billion Nickels," Saturday Evening Post, 13 May 1939, p. 13.

¹⁰Marshall A. Fey, "Charles Fey and San Francisco's Liberty Bell Slot Machines," California Historical Quarterly 54 (Spring 1975): 57; 58; and 59.

¹¹Ibid., p. 60.

¹²Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 99.

¹³Mills Novelty Company, Prosperity, p. 1.

¹⁴Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 166; and 157.

¹⁵Lubell, "Ten Billion Nickels," p. 12.

¹⁶Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 195; p. 214; and p. 220.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁸U.S. Congress, Senate, Third Interim Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce. S. Res. 202, 1951, 82d Cong., 1st sess., Kefauver Crime Report.

¹⁹Gersh, "Pictorial History," p. 255; and p. 260.

²⁰Ibid., p. 266; and p. 312.

²¹Robert D. Herman, Gamblers and Gambling: Motives, Institutions, and Controls (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1976), p. 28.

²²Joseph E. Meyer, Protection: The Sealed Book: A Treatise For the Guidance and Protection of Players of Games of Chance Such as Dice, Cards, Roulette, Slot Machines, Etc, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: By the Author, 1908), p. 17-24.

²³John Philip Quinn, Gambling and Gambling Devices: Being a Complete Systematic Educational Exposition Designed to Instruct the Youth of the World to Avoid All Forms of Gambling, (Canton, Ohio: J. P. Quinn Co., 1912), p. 204.

²⁴Kenneth L. Roberts, "Gambling Made Easy," Saturday Evening Post, 12 March 1921, pp. 16-17; Edward H. Smith, "The Class," Saturday Evening Post, 4 June 1921, p. 10; and Scott Turner, "Why Men Gamble," American Magazine, December 1920, pp. 32-33.

²⁵Charles Van Doren, ed., Webster's Guide to American History (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971), p. 437.

²⁶Frederick C. Tilp, This Was Potomac River (Alexandria, Virginia: By the Author, 124 Quay Street, 1978), p. 290.

²⁷"Clink of Slugs on Slot Machines Sour Music to Manufacturers," Business Week, 15 April 1931, p. 28.

²⁸"Novelty Suit," Time, 13 May 1935, p. 64; and "Nickel Games," Time, 25 January 1937, p. 58.

²⁹Wayne W. Parrish, "You Can't Win in the Slot Machine Racket," Literary Digest, 26 August 1933, p. 30; and Wayne W. Parrish, "Gambling Slot-Machines That Swallow Millions," Literary Digest, 19 August 1933, p. 9.

³⁰Lubell, "Ten Billion," p. 12; and p. 13.

³¹"'Bandits' Taxed: U.S. Hits the Jackpot with \$100 Stamp Fee on Slot Machine Parlors Declared Illegal By Most States," Business Week, 11 November 1944, p. 48; and p. 50.

³²"Pinball Payoff," Business Week, 27 April 1946, p. 38;
and p. 36.

³³Norman and Madelyn Carlisle, "The Big Slot-Machine Swindle,"
Reader's Digest, June 1949, p. 47; and p. 48.

CHAPTER II

LEGALIZATION OF SLOT MACHINES

Located in the southern part of the state, Charles County was geographically isolated, rural, agricultural and Republican dominated in the early 1900s. The presence of large numbers of Catholic and Anglican church members probably contributed to a "live and let live" philosophy toward gambling, as those churches did not rigorously oppose gambling, and sometimes they used it as a money making scheme at church socials. Residents could play slot machines at Chapel Point, a small amusement park along the Potomac owned by the Jesuits in the mid 1930s, as well as picnic and dance.¹

Slot machines probably existed in Charles County as early as 1910, and State Senator Paul J. Bailey, who worked as a musician in his youth on Potomac River boats, recalled seeing the machines in 1921 on the Charles Macalester. This boat traveled from the Seventh Street wharf in Washington to Mount Vernon and then across the river to the Marshall Hall Amusement Park in Charles County. Bailey stated that there were no machines at Mount Vernon, but "They had them on the boat and . . . on the shore at Marshall Hall in a little building

built for amusement machines."²

According to excursion boat advertisements, Marshall Hall existed as early as 1876 as a park. An annual summer jousting tournament followed by a grand ball was traditional by 1884, attracting enormous crowds. In 1895, the Mount Vernon-Marshall Hall S.S. Company purchased the 400 acre park, later superseded by the Wilson Line in the 1940s.³ The machines were closely tied to the river boats and soon became available in wharves and piers serviced by those boats.

With a beautiful location, rides, picnic area and restaurant, Marshall Hall was a favorite gathering place especially for the young people of Charles County. The park also attracted day crowds from nearby Washington, and tourists visiting Mount Vernon. Marshall Hall advertised in all the area newspapers, and in May 1947, made special note of a "Beautiful Penny Arcade." The following year the advertisement read: "Enlarged and Beautiful Penny Arcade."⁴ A penny arcade contained many amusement machines, included were penny slot machines, designed to especially appeal to children. These ads provided publicity for the machines two years before they became legal in Charles County. Sites of the machines before legalization could be

determined from newspaper advertisements with key words like "games" or "amusements" in connection with the restaurants, taverns or summer amusement parks in Southern Maryland.

As early as 1922, Morgantown's Old Cedar Point Beach on the Potomac had a wharf with swimming, boating, a dance floor, and "amusements" in the county. In 1947, publicity appeared extolling a new business on the same location with "beach pavilions, large restaurant and casino, landing field for planes, picnic areas and dance floors."⁵ Announcements incorporating the word "casino" only lasted a few more weeks before one found "amusements" substituted. Interestingly enough, this was one of the few uses of the word "casino" even after the machines became legal. The Maryland Independent, which ran the ad was the newspaper of the local Republican party. Perhaps, it did not seem so bad to the editor at the time the ad was first submitted, but caution seemed to dictate changing the wording in later editions. The Charles County Fair of 1924 advertised a "midway of amusements," and residents sometimes recalled seeing their first slot machine at the county fair.⁶

After prohibition ended, small taverns opened all over the county and became ideal sites for playing slot machines. William Edward Berry,

a resident of Waldorf and former county commissioner recalled seeing slot machines in Waldorf at the Three Owl Inn as early as the 1930s.⁷ Richard Long remembered playing the penny slot machines as a child in the same time period in Curley's, another Waldorf tavern.⁸ People often expressed an innocence about the machines, they regarded slot machines as an amusement or game not gambling. One doctor in La Plata was reputed to have had a slot machine in his home to amuse his patients.⁹ Not until the 1940s, did the grand jury or newspapers actually realize or care that slot machines were illegal. Perhaps prompted by the deluge of articles in national magazines, residents began to note their presence.

In 1943 Anne Arundel County increased the authority of its county commissioners, with the authority of Chapter 321 of the Acts of 1941, to license amusement devices. Thus, Anne Arundel was the first Maryland county to legalize slot machines.¹⁰ Anne Arundel only licensed nickel machines and bingo parlors. It never had the variation of machines found in Charles County.

In 1947, the St. Mary's County delegation proposed legislation to become the second county with legal slot machines. The legislation was originally written to include Charles County, but in May, 1947,

Governor William Preston Lane vetoed it, because it included both counties and did not provide for local support. Unfortunately, the problem of illegal slot machines did not disappear. Lane's papers revealed letters from private citizens in May, right after his veto questioning, "Why the law in regard to slot machines is openly and flagrantly violated in Southern Maryland."¹¹ The newspapers carried stories of violations of gambling laws and queried why the sheriff continued to ignore the problem.¹²

In May, 1947, the grand jury in St. Mary's returned 24 indictments for operation of slot machines and a crap table. A letter from an attorney in the county accused the State's Attorney, C. Henry Camalier of favoring "this type of gambling," and requested Maryland's state police to enforce the laws in St. Mary's. "For various reasons the sheriff has failed to completely carry out his duties."¹³ Obviously St. Mary's County had a dilemma. Illegal slot machines existed in the county; action was necessary to eliminate or legislate.

Later that year the State of Maryland conducted an Extraordinary Session to pass a sales tax legislation. Additionally, from that session came a bill which Lane signed for legal slot machines in St. Mary's County. When former Senator Bailey was asked why Lane

signed it in the second session, but vetoed it in the first, he replied that he and Lane met earlier in 1947, to discuss a sales tax bill needed to pay for state improvements. Lane required help from the Republicans for its passage. Bailey told him how gambling had existed in his county for years and he wanted to give the people there an opportunity to decide whether it would be legalized.¹⁴ As a result, Bailey and several other Republicans voted for the sales tax. In the Extraordinary Session, Bailey submitted a bill for a referendum in St. Mary's to legalize slot machines. Lane signed the Coin-Operated Device Act of St. Mary's County. His press release stated that the county commissioners in St. Mary's would regulate and license the machines, he concluded with "I do not believe it would be a proper exercise of my veto power, if I withheld from the voters of St. Mary's County the right . . . to determine this question."¹⁵ Obviously, the referendum requirement of the measure provided the Governor with an "out" with the press and public, for he had then left the question to local option.

Included in the Governor's papers was a letter from Senator Bailey thanking him for signing the bill. He stated "Senator Dorsey and States Attorney Camalier and . . . all people of the county . . .

grateful for opportunity to settle the issue which has recently been the cause of many indictments, business failures, tax problems, and personal bickerings, and we promise you that you may be well assured of our constant help in your manifold problems."¹⁶ Thus, the Governor gained a political ally for his state tax, and St. Mary's acquired legal slot machines.

The original bill included Charles County in the wording. Senator Bailey explained the difference between the two bills: "The reason that Jimmy Monroe withdrew from it is that newspapers had stirred up such a furor that Senator Monroe and Senator Goldstein of Calvert agreed that it would be better to go ahead with the one county where we knew the sentiment was so strong that it undoubtedly would pass and be completely successful. They then would watch the situation and if everything went well, as it did, they would follow suit."¹⁷ As a result, Charles County and Calvert representatives waited to see if the political climate warranted proceeding with their bills.

The public and political furor created by the St. Mary's legislation caused a reaction in Charles County. The grand jury of November 1947 was directed by the judge to study illegal machines in the county. It reported: "All evidence collected indicates that no

slot machines or gambling devices are in operation in Charles County at the present time nor have been for the past two or three months."¹⁸

The machines vanished prior to the grand jury's meeting and stayed that way until it concluded. Edward Berry of Waldorf recalled the machines in the Three Owl Inn being located behind a trap door. When the sheriff came to make his rounds the door was dropped.¹⁹ The increased pressure of newspapers and probably grand jury investigation prompted Walt Hendrix, a distributor, to send a truck into the county and collect his machines until the "heat" was off.²⁰ The first grand jury, which noticed the machines, had not been impressed by their threat, instead felt the constables were much more derelict in their duties regarding "roadhouses, bars and taverns selling spirituous or fermented liquors," as perpetrators of crimes were found to be frequenting such establishments, and better law and order should be maintained there.²¹

Between the November to May 1948 sessions, publicity generated by newspapers like the Times Crescent made the illegal and still present slot machines a much hotter issue. This time the grand jury investigated more rigorously and reported: "There are adequate laws governing the County in regards to professional gambling such as slot

machines . . . any unlawful situation that exists, is due to lack of enforcement."²² After this meeting the grand jury left the provision that they would meet again in 90 days to hear complaints from members of the community and representatives of organizations regarding the slot machines.

At the July meeting no one showed up to testify because of a lack of advertising. The states attorney had to explain the situation to the jury; he noted that it was not his responsibility to advertise any special sessions.²³

Forced to meet in August, this time provided with proper publicity, the meeting proved far different. Harold A. Milstead, Methodist minister of Waldorf, spoke of the evils of the slot machines and the needs of a community for proper law enforcement.²⁴ Others spoke as well. The final report of the grand jury suggested that the local police force could not control the growth of the machines. They believed that since the slot machines already existed in the county they might as well be legalized so that Charles County could benefit by gaining liscensing fees.²⁵

This approach incensed the Times Crescent, and its editor, Judge James C. Mitchell, who believed that legalization was not the answer.

The Judge was one of the earliest opponents of legal slot machines in the county. As a leading Democrat, he realized that his struggle represented a "voice in the wilderness" initially, but it did not deter his opposition. Beginning in 1948, the Times Crescent utilized impressive editorial cartoons hinting at nefarious activities by a mysterious "Mr. X," who ran the slot machines in the county. Mr. X was depicted as driving a black limousine, wearing fancy clothes and sporting a diamond stick pin. The emotional impact of such an individual representing a slot machine distributor disturbed readers, for they referred to Mr. X in editorial letters. Recently Mitchell reminisced about his anti-slot struggle and the identity of his Mr. X. The Judge noted "Mr. X was a figment of imagination. We were trying to warn the people that in places where gambling is prevalent that there are Mr. X's around and that if slot machines got to be lucrative enough in Charles County that Mr. X would make his appearance."²⁶

In November 1948, another grand jury met, but its report did not mention slot machines. Perhaps everyone awaited legislation in the next assembly. This seemed to be the opinion of the Times Crescent in an editorial, "Now or Never." It reported that since the August grand jury there had been constant violations

of the slot machine law which had been ignored by Sheriff Quade and the deputies, who appeared to assume the machines would be legalized. The editorial urged the county to consider that slot machines would not serve any good purpose and definitely would not make the county a better place to live.²⁷

While the Crescent continued to harangue against the machines; the other county paper, the Maryland Independent had no articles about the slot machines, either pro or con. The closest it came to the controversy was to print the grand jury reports, and then without the headlines in the Crescent. The difference between the two was politics. The Republicans, represented by the Independent controlled county politics and wanted legal slot machines. Whereas the Democratic leadership, whose official voice was the Crescent, was opposed to any policy of the Republicans, especially legal gambling.

Charles County's Senator, James B. Monroe introduced slot machine legislation for Charles County in the 1949 legislature. He wrote the bill providing for a referendum vote in the county. This action forced the opponents of the machines to become more vocal. Next to Judge Mitchell the most outspoken and articulate local crusader was the minister Harold A. Milstead. Milstead had grown up in the

county, gone away to study and returned to the area several years earlier to a Waldorf congregation. He remembered the machines from his youth in Marshall Hall. In late 1948, faced with the possibility of legalized gambling in his home county he united the Protestant ministers, both black and white, into a Ministerial Association whose primary goal was to fight the impending threat of legal slot machines.²⁸

The ministers spoke from their pulpits, wrote letters to the Governor and arranged for articles in the newspapers.²⁹ Due to their efforts the Granges, Children's Aid, Parent-Teachers' Associations and private citizens deluged Lane with their objections. Elwood Schafer of Newburg stated, "Because the Sheriff of Charles County keeps his eyes closed as to the Numbers Racket, and the Slot Machines in Charles County is no reason to make them legal. . . ." Apparently slot machines were not the sole vice in the county. Others repeated Schafer's sentiments in letter after letter, one even came from a Baltimore attorney which expressed fears for the youth of the area.³⁰

Despite the ministers' campaign, it appeared likely by the end of April that the Governor would sign the bill. Milstead wrote to

Lane again, this time requesting a meeting for a "delegation of responsible citizens from the county . . . that our case may be stated." He asked Lane to refrain from action on the bill until after their meeting. The Governor called Milstead on May 2 to set up a meeting for May 5.³¹ The minister and representatives from the Parent-Teachers' Association, churches, Granges and the President of the Farm Bureau traveled to Annapolis to plead their case, but they "pleaded in vain" for the next day, the governor signed legislation for a slot machine referendum in Charles and Prince George's Counties.³²

The Prince George's referendum passed on June 2, but Prince George's County Circuit Judge Charles C. Marbury ruled the bill legalizing cash pay off machines was invalid because the title of the bill, as cited in the legislation, did not adequately describe the measure.³³

The Charles County bill was not challenged in court, although it was threatened, and plans proceeded for the referendum vote on June 21. The arguments appeared as soon as Lane signed the bill. The May meeting of the grand jury charged by Judge J. Dudley Digges, a Democrat, to pay specific attention to "disregard of gambling laws."

Two days later the jury called slot machines "a vice that demoralizes youth" and noted that several weeks prior to the court's meeting all the machines had disappeared.³⁴ It was impossible to determine the political affiliation of all the jury members, but P. Henry Bealle, the foreman was a Democrat. Samuel C. Linton of Nanjemoy, who served as clerk, was a registered Democrat as well. Linton's son was elected to the State Assembly in the late 1950s where he fought to regulate the machines.³⁵

The ministers organized meetings throughout the county to urge residents to vote no against the proposed legislation. At a meeting in Indian Head, J.R. Wiggins, managing editor of the Washington Post, discussed the effects of slot machines on other communities. The Times Crescent published cartoons urging everyone to get out and vote against the Slot Machine Bill.³⁶

Charles County's new slot machine legislation required an annual license fee of \$150 per machine. Anyone who wished to be a distributor had to pay a fee of \$2,000. In order to register machines, a distributor had to be a property owner or registered voter in the county prior to July 1, 1949. The bill provided that the county commissioners apply forty percent of slot machine revenue to reduce

real estate tax, thirty percent to reduce school bonds and \$8,000 distributed to the fire departments. The library fund would gain \$7,000 with another \$8,000 for Physicians' Memorial Hospital Fund. Finally plans existed for \$3,600 for the expense of a slot machine inspector.³⁷

The planned distribution of revenues into schools, libraries, hospital and fire departments aided the legislation's chances for passage. The Governor received fifty-three telegrams urging him to sign and "assist hospitals and volunteer fire departments."³⁸

On 21 June the polls opened for voters with slot machines as the only issue. Forty-three percent of the registered voters went to the polls: 1,973 for the machines and 1,040 against them. The Crescent tried to explain the low turn out of the voters, especially the farmers who opposed the machines, observed, "the warm, humid weather was ideal for planting and stripping of tobacco." The newspaper also noted that the local taverns had to close for the election, but some had posted signs: "Closed today until 8 PM to vote for legalization of slot machines. Suggest you do the same."³⁹

The victory meant that on July 1 the Clerk of the Court began accepting fees for licenses. Patrick C. Mudd, the Clerk had no idea

how many people would show up that day. The office had no forms and typed out the information while the forms were being printed.⁴⁰ Applicants deluged the office and by July 15, the Clerk's office had issued licenses for distributors and 285 for operators. The money collected came to a total of \$43,173.32. This pace continued for the remainder of the month, by the end of August the license money totaled \$68,196.49.⁴¹

Economically the machines flooded the court house with revenues far beyond what the Republican leaders envisioned when they supported the legislation.⁴² Charles County's government welcomed the new income, but had not needed the money as desperately as St. Mary's had in 1947. St. Mary's County used script prior to legalization to pay its employees and debts.⁴³ The machines quickly reversed that problem. Consequently, local governments in southern Maryland began to depend upon slot machines to supplement tax revenues.

Thus, in July 1949, Charles County began its era of legalized gambling at a time when the nation was questioning gambling's morality and possible connections to organized crime. Neither the Judge nor the Ministerial Association, however, gave up their distrust of the machines. In a few years the struggle would intensify.

FOOTNOTES

¹Letter to Frederick A. Tilp from Frank Wade, 8 November 1973. Tilp Private Papers. Alexandria, Virginia.

²Washington Post, 4 June 1949; and Interview with Paul J. Bailey, 5 June 1982.

³Poster, 1884, Mary K. Edelen Collection, 850019, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland; and Times Herald, 10 May 1953.

⁴Times Crescent, 23 May 1947; and 18 June 1948.

⁵Times Crescent, 26 May 1922; and Maryland Independent, 20 June 1947.

⁶Times Crescent, 19 September 1924; and Interview with Aubrey J. Burch, Sr., Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 7 June 1982.

⁷Interview with William E. Berry, 15 March 1982.

⁸Interview with Richard Long, Waldorf, Maryland, 10 May 1982.

⁹Interview with Patrick C. Mudd, La Plata, Maryland, 14 October 1982. Interviewer's personal notes.

¹⁰Slot Machine Study Committee, "Report to J. Millard Tawes." 12 January 1963, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹¹Letter to William Preston Lane from Harry A. Wise, 19 May 1947. Governor's Correspondence, 10630(3). Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹²Beacon, May-June, 1947.

¹³Letter to William Preston Lane from Robert E. Wigginton for St. Mary's County Civic Association, 10 June 1947. Governor's Correspondence, 9929(60). Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹⁴Interview with Bailey, 5 June 1982. Mr. Bailey, a former Senator from St. Mary's County, recounted the events of 1947, and his story was reinforced in the papers of Governor Lane. Bailey was the

only Southern Maryland representative who voted for the St. Mary's legislation in 1947 and Charles' in 1949, still capable of an exacting oral history interview. He favored the gambling interests as a Republican and his interview provided many important clues to the events unavailable in newspapers.

¹⁵Governor Lane, "Statement" Correspondence, Legislation File, no date, 9929(34). Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹⁶Letter to William Preston Lane from Paul J. Bailey, 11 November 1947, Governor's Correspondence, 9929(35). Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹⁷Interview with Bailey, 5 June 1982.

¹⁸Charles County Grand Jury Report, November 1947, Clerk of the Court, La Plata, Maryland.

¹⁹Interview with Berry, 15 March 1982.

²⁰Interview with Walter Hendrix, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 30 March 1982.

²¹Charles County Grand Jury, November 1947.

²²Charles County Grand Jury Report, May 1948, Clerk of the Court, La Plata, Maryland.

²³Charles County Grand Jury Report, July 1948, Clerk of the Court, La Plata, Maryland.

²⁴Interview with Reverend Harold A. Milstead, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 23 March 1982.

²⁵Charles County Grand Jury Reports, August 1948, Clerk of the Court, La Plata, Maryland.

²⁶Interview with Judge James C. Mitchell, "Thainston," La Plata, Maryland, 2 June 1982.

²⁷Times Crescent, 21 January 1949.

²⁸Interview with Milstead, 23 March 1982.

²⁹Letters to William Preston Lane from the Reverends Milstead, Metz, Rice and Sampelle, March-May 1949. Gambling Opposition File, 10630(2), Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³⁰Letter to William Preston Lane from Elwood Schafer, 21 April 1949, Charles County Proposed Legislation File, 10630(2); and letter to William Preston Lane from Summerfield Baldwin, Jr., 6 May 1949, Gambling Opposition File, 10630(2), Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³¹Letter to William Preston Lane from Harold A. Milstead, 18 April 1949, Charles County Proposed Legislation File, 10630(2); and Notes of William Preston Lane, 3 May 1949, Charles County Proposed Legislation File, 10630(2), Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³²Southern Maryland Times, 15 May 1949.

³³Washington Post, 24 June 1949.

³⁴Charles County Grand Jury Report, May 1949, Clerk of the Court, La Plata, Maryland.

³⁵Interview with Samuel C. Linton, Jr. Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland 16 March 1982.

³⁶Times Crescent, 17 June 1949; and 27 May 1949.

³⁷Maryland, Laws, Statutes, etc: Laws Made and Passed, 1949, (Annapolis, n.p., 1949), p. 1618-1619.

³⁸Telegrams to William Preston Lane, from 53 people in Charles County, Maryland, May 1-5, 1949, Charles County Proposed Legislation File, 10630(2), Hall of Records, Maryland.

³⁹Times Crescent, 24 June 1949.

⁴⁰Interview with Mudd, 14 October 1982.

⁴¹Times Crescent, 15 July 1949; and 26 August 1949.

⁴²Interview with Mudd, 14 October 1982.

⁴³Interview with Bailey, 5 June 1982.

CHAPTER III

GAMBLING FLOURISHES

After all the furor over legalization, the actual beginning received little notice. A scattering of articles appeared in local and Washington newspapers. One of them concerned Richard Stubbs, a Republican, who was awarded the newest political plum, the job of Slot Machine Inspector.¹ His duties involved examining all the machines in the County to ensure they had a proper local license. He was paid three thousand dollars, plus six hundred for transportation. Later articles merely announced current license revenues for the first month of legal machines. For the Washington newspapers, the issue of slot machines in Charles County disappeared.

The local furor against legal gambling faded also. The Ministerial Association continued to meet but topics reverted to pastoral subjects. Even Judge Mitchell's acidic anti-gambling editorials in the Times Crescent gave way to more mundane concerns such as tobacco conditions and schools.

The other event along with slot machines that influenced the county was the opening of the Potomac River Bridge in December, 1940,

and the development of U.S. Highway 301 through the heart of the county. The number of vehicles using the span grew from 594,038 in 1947 to 1,863,019 in 1954.² Later methods of computation listed only the dollars collected, not the number of vehicles, but the numbers continued to increase through the 1950s.³ Improvements in the form of dualized highway construction kept up with and encouraged county growth. By 1959 a Chamber of Commerce publication boasted of an estimated ten million travelers a year utilizing U.S. Route 301, "a four lane super highway . . . cutting through the heart of Charles County." Twenty-one motels with a 600-room capacity sprang up along a fourteen mile stretch of the route and large numbers of restaurants appeared to cater to travelers and gamblers.⁴ There is no doubt that the presence of slot machines contributed to such impressive building projects for a rural area. Slightly to the north in Prince George's County, where there was no gambling, the highway looked bare by comparison even though that county was closer to the capital city.

The county's population increased significantly. From 1940 to 1950 the county's populace grew 32.7 percent, to 23,363.⁵ Finally, for the first time in 150 years, Charles County surpassed its population of 1790. Between 1950 and 1960 growth exploded with a

39.1 percent increase. Mostly the growth occurred in the towns.

Indian Head grew from 491 to 780, a 59.3 percent growth; La Plata grew by 55.9 percent increase; Waldorf, which had no reported figures for 1950, had a population of 1,048 in 1960.⁶ Waldorf was the center with the greatest concentration of motels, restaurants and slot machines.

Population came as gasoline once again became plentiful, after the war, and the migration from urban areas accelerated. In July, 1949, large advertisements for land and homes in Charles County were printed in Washington newspapers, emphasizing words like "change from overcrowding. . . ."⁷ With incentives like fresh air, open spaces, low land taxes and improving roads, many former city dwellers moved to the country.⁸

The Korean War resulted in a rise in employment at the Naval Powder Factory (now the Naval Ordnance Station) located in Indian Head, the area's largest employer. By the nature of its product, the facility tended to attract an educated middle class type of employee. These individuals--engineers, chemists, and physicists--had been recruited from all over the country.⁹ Although the Korean War ended in June, 1953,¹⁰ and the Powder Factory slowed production, a

new industry had emerged which was to effect every person in the county, gambling. Gambling had rapidly grown into a legitimate and extremely profitable business.

Business organizations appeared to assist the new entrepreneurs. The Indian Head - Bryans Road Businessmen's Organization existed prior to legal slots, but another one called the Hotel, Restaurant and Tavern Owners Association of Charles County became prominent as well, beginning in 1950. It sponsored Christmas baskets to the poor every year and donated to the county its first ambulance.¹¹ Its political and lobbying influence grew. Politicians seeking endorsements knew that one must always appear before the group while campaigning. In one instance, a young Democratic politician who favored the curtailment of slot machines was not permitted to enter a meeting, although his Republican opposition did that same evening.¹² The Association boasted a large Republican membership, and they strongly favored slot machines.

In 1954, another organization called the Route 301 Association began to unite all the businessmen from Maine to Florida along the road. The promotion of travel along this major highway was its major purpose, plus it lobbied for reduced tolls on the bridges, especially

the Potomac River Bridge.¹³

Finally, in November of 1955, a group of merchants organized the Charles County Chamber of Commerce. The primary function of the Chamber was to counter adverse publicity generated by slot machines.¹⁴ No longer did the county have to strive for publicity, for sensational articles in the national press gave Charles County more notoriety than it needed.

In addition to buildings, roads, restaurants, and a rising population, a large planned community called Linda City (subsequently St. Charles Community) sprang up in the Waldorf area. A significant barometer of growth occurred in April 1950, when a bank opened in Waldorf. Only three new banks had opened in Maryland since the 1932 depression. The Waldorf venture had an authorized capital stock of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. All the incorporators were Southern Maryland men of long standing in the community. Maryland Governor William Preston Lane cut the ribbon before an audience of one thousand people, and first day deposits totaled approximately \$100,000. By 1954, announced assets were \$2,846,988; and by 1957, assets had risen to \$3,312,245.01. Obviously money was flowing into the bank, and the same trend could be seen throughout the county. Gambling was

profitable.¹⁵

In early 1950, the County Commissioners approved a budget of \$425,577.95 for the fiscal year beginning in July. This sum represented a \$70,499 increase, attributable directly to slot machine license revenues over the previous ten months, which were \$76,577.82. Steady growth of slot machine revenues through the 1950s meant many improvements to Charles County, which previously the local government could not have afforded. Fire companies multiplied from one in La Plata in 1949, to seven in 1954, spread throughout the county. The county library, which had been closed for two years due to finances, re-opened in October of 1950. Income produced income, for \$7,000 in county revenues to the library entitled it to \$1,400 in state aid. Civic groups purchased a bookmobile, and donated it.¹⁶ Once again the county had an operational library, this time due to the infusion of license revenues. Physicians Memorial Hospital in La Plata gained monies every year.

Slot machine revenues paid the expenses of the slot machine inspector and clerk. The remainder of the money collected was utilized reducing taxes, school bonds and interest. Five years after the slot machines were legalized, the income from amusement licenses

totalled \$149,493.42. Of that amount, \$36,807.62 went to fire companies, library, hospital, and inspector's expenses and the remainder, an impressive \$112,685.80, went into tax reduction and school bonds. By 1963, the revenue from slot machine licenses totalled \$485,961.91, some 20 percent of the county's total revenues.¹⁷

The Distributors

In 1949, there were three types of licenses available for slot machines. For \$2,000, a distributor could purchase a license which authorized him to sell or lease machines to others in the county. An individual machine's license cost \$150. And the third license, called "seasonal" provided those who had summer resorts or amusement parks, like Chapel Point or Marshall Hall, a reduced rate of \$150 for one to ten machines and \$75 for each machine over ten.¹⁸

In July 1949, five people or companies paid the required sum to become distributors. They were Hyman Levin of Ia Plata, and Aubrey P. Cronk of the Charles County Amusement Company in Indian Head. In Waldorf there were two, Roy A. Farrar, George and his wife Wilhemina Howard of the Southern Maryland Novelty Company. In addition, L. C. Addison applied for a seasonal license for fifteen machines at the

Marshall Hall Amusement Park.¹⁹

Of the five distributors, Roy Farrar, who was black, operated a "colored tavern"²⁰ in the county. These were the times of segregation and Farrar was one of a number of black businessmen and women who prospered in the slot machine period. Eventually Farrar constructed a motel, the Blue Jay, which had the distinction of being one of the few places where blacks could spend the night along the Charles County stretch of U.S. Route 301.

Often black entrepreneurs obtained their machines from the Southern Maryland Novelty Company. Mrs. Emma Wallace of the Blue Haven Restaurant, bragged about the enormous crowds her establishment would attract, many from the northern states. Mrs. Wallace advertised in black newspapers for her customers. She stated that families would plan to spend several days in Charles County on their travels, sleeping at Farrar's Blue Jay Motel, eating her soul cooking and, of course, playing the slot machines.²¹

Pat and Gee-Gee Penny, also black, owned several nightclubs in Waldorf and hired black entertainers like Ray Charles to perform in their clubs. The couple believed their major audiences came from the nearby cities, like Washington, Richmond and Baltimore. People drove

to Charles County to hear the name performers, and bands, and play the slot machines.²²

Most of the black restaurants and taverns dealt with the Southern Maryland Novelty Company, rather than Farrar. Black businessmen and women who depended upon the Novelty Company were outspoken in their belief that the organization treated them fairly, and their mechanics were always available when needed.²³

Rivalry existed among the distributors to lease their machines to the choice locations, especially along Route 301. A distributor's agreement with owners of an establishment provided machines, paid the license fees, kept the machines operational, and split the machine's income, fifty-fifty. In small locations without volume business, the split changed to sixty-forty. The smaller split would be found at tiny grocery stores, or taverns on less traveled roads.²⁴

Frequently distributors would lend money to businessmen to start a business or undertake property improvements. This money was usually loaned at no interest or at a low, two or three percent rate.²⁵ This benefited both distributor and business for the distributor acquired another location for its machines and the businessman a readily available source of money to start a business or expand an existing one.

Thirty years later, many a successful businessman in the county pointed to the distributors as the agents, who "gave them a start."²⁶ Of course, one had to place that distributor's machines in his establishment in order to gain a loan.

By the late 1950s the number of distributors had increased to ten--Ruby S. Boswell, A. P. Cronk of the Charles County Amusement Company, Helen L. and Wilhemina G. Howard of the Southern Maryland Novelty Company, Charles N. Baden of Spring Hill Enterprises, E. Elwood Jones, Benjamin Weiner of Waldorf Novelty Company, James F. Cooksey of the Vending Machines Company, Bruce Shymansky, Louis S. Welch, Jr. and Edward W. Gardiner of the Waldorf Amusement Company.²⁷

Best known and largest of the Charles County distributors was the Southern Maryland Novelty Company which was owned by the Howard family which had handled slot machines in the days prior to legalization, especially in the Waldorf area.²⁸ At the height of the slots, in the mid-fifties, it employed twenty-three people, twenty-one of whom lived in Charles County. It operated eight automobiles, all purchased and maintained in the county. Its annual payroll was one hundred and sixty thousand dollars.²⁹

Most employees were the mechanics, or slot machine repairmen,³⁰

and women,³¹ who were frequently available at a moment's notice to repair disabled machines or bring extra change to establishments.³²

All the Novelty's company cars were equipped with two way radios for greater speed in aiding their customers. At the large establishments with many machines like Marshall Hall (193 machines),³³ or the Waldorf Restaurant (60 machines), or Club Waldorf, Inc. (140 machines)³⁴ or the Reno with its two hundred plus, the Novelty Company maintained permanent mechanics to ensure constant operation of the machines. Machines were never permitted to be broken for long, or else valuable income was lost.

By 1959, the Southern Maryland Novelty Company had machines in seventy-five locations.³⁵ The company kept three local banks busy. One of them was the Waldorf Bank, which helped explain its phenomenal growth. Furthermore, the company always kept two or three thousand dollars in change in its Waldorf office available for its customers when the banks were closed. Melvin Downes, who owned the company in the 1960s, stated that car springs frequently broke from carrying large sums of change around the county. Despite the enormous sums of money it handled, the company was never robbed at gunpoint.³⁶

In January, 1951, the federal Johnson-Preston Act became

effective, forbidding the interstate transportation of gambling devices and making enforcement the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.³⁷ Prior to 1951, slot machines were readily available from the manufacturers, many in Chicago. After the Johnson Act, the machine owners had to repair existing machines, sometimes manufacturing their own parts.³⁸ Occasionally a batch of machines became available for sale in the state.³⁹ Local distributors generally required an affidavit that the machines were from within the state in order to protect themselves.⁴⁰ Some of the distributors bought parts from the company in Anne Arundel County, which made the "Ace," and "Space" machines, and had ties to the Mills Company of Chicago.⁴¹

Ingenuity was the key word in machine repair. With over five hundred moving parts, distributors had to have extra machines just for spare parts. A good mechanic was a valuable commodity. He could wire two or more mechanical machines together and create a console machine capable of keeping many people busy with flashing lights and special pay outs.⁴² He could repair a machine on the floor quickly, frequently in low lights, so one did not lose revenue and he could change the odds of pay out, by adding lemons to the reel strips. When

slot machines left the factory, they were pre-set with sixty-forty odds. Odds in Charles County establishments varied, depending upon the particular location. However they were reasonably fair. If a business had a "tight" machine with low pay outs, customers simply left and played the machines elsewhere. The numbers of slot machines made them competitive and tended to keep them liberal in pay outs.

Slot machine operators emphasized the "fairness" of the machines, and usually players agreed. One gambler who had developed his slot machine skills so well that he became known as a rhythm player, and made a considerable amount of money doing it, insisted that the county's machines were fair in paying out. He listed a "bandit" in Bryans Road that was the most liberal machine he had ever seen in his career of playing.⁴³ Roscoe Odle, who worked on the machines for Southern Maryland Novelty, stated that Charles County machines paid off at a rate averaging between seventy and seventy-two percent. "The looser the machine, the more play it gets."⁴⁴

For the distributors, the biggest problems in the 1950s consisted of keeping old machines operational and establishing sites to place them. With about half the 2,268 licensed machines in the county belonging to Southern Maryland Novelty, it dominated the business.⁴⁵

Southern Maryland Novelty or any distributor in the 1950s in Charles County had few legal restrictions, one need only have been a property owner in the county on or before 1 January 1951, or be a registered voter in the county, then pay two thousand dollars for the license. A license had not risen in cost since 1949.⁴⁶

The distributors encountered some particularly unsavory publicity, but until 1959, no legislation limited them. In 1959 a House Bill sought to curb the distributors, by limiting the number of machines in an establishment to thirty-five, by tightening controls on those who could obtain licenses, and by permitting private individuals to purchase more than three machines. The county's two delegates and state senator were responsible for the bill, they were John F. Parran, Jr., Samuel C. Linton, Jr. and John H. Mitchell, who wrote the bill. Delegate Mitchell had worked previously for the Justice Department and felt there was the potential for trouble in Charles County, as the initial law was written.⁴⁷ The representatives felt that it was time to tighten up the old legislation created by James B. Monroe, which catered to the actual owners or distributors of the machines.⁴⁸ The bill obtained legislative approval on 5 May 1959, but it was subject to a public referendum in the November 1960

elections.⁴⁹

Legislators were deluged with local support for the bill. People from the county noted that four huge casinos with two hundred machines each had recently opened. The residents expressed fears over outside, or mob-linked influences and the bill was even supported by Carl Hampton, president of the Charles County Restaurant and Tavern Owners Association, who declared in a Post article: "We don't want to be another Las Vegas."⁵⁰

Opposition to the bill was also strong. Marshall Hall Amusement Park,⁵¹ the Wilson Boat Company, which brought two boat-loads of people daily to the Park,⁵² and others presented their views on the legislation. The distributors, led by the Southern Maryland Novelty Company fought the legislation. The Hotel, Restaurant and Tavern Association changed its stand and urged rejection of the measure. Enormous advertisements of the pro and con views filled the papers prior to the election, but the referendum was approved by the voters. The ballot was written such that one voted against the Amusement Device Act if one supported the distributors. People speculated that it was deliberately written by the Democrats to confuse the voters.

Beginning 1 May 1961, the casinos were limited to thirty-five

machines each, and the distributors had to spread their machines around to more places. The tide was beginning to turn against the gamblers.

River Gambling

Virginia had slot machines in the 1930s, especially along the piers and on the riverboats, but they were illegal in the state by 1949, when Charles County made them legal by referendum in Maryland.⁵³ Less than a month after legalization, piers located on the Potomac across from the county began to place slot machines in small rooms out over the water. Due to the land grant of 1632 to Lord Baltimore, the Potomac River belonged entirely to Maryland.⁵⁴ Thus, despite the fact that Charles County was located across the river, slot machines placed over the low tide mark were actually subject to Charles County laws.

The first establishment to acquire machines was Fairview Beach, which already had a structure over the water and quickly gained eleven machines. Other establishments appeared at Muse's Beach and in Colonial Beach near the New Atlanta Hotel. Ralph Millen, who put up the twelve by eighteen foot building at Colonial Beach, acquired ten

slot machines from Charles County. Residents of Colonial Beach were not much concerned about the slot machines, or another Charles County import, beer. Soon, however the Town Council requested a ruling by Virginia's Attorney General. Apparently, the town churches were questioning Maryland's authority in this situation, especially as additional piers were planned along with liquor by the drink.⁵⁵

Colonial Beach remained relatively quiet until the spring of 1950, when the Town Council considered leasing the community's municipal pier as a gambling house to earn money for the town. One resident, a Mr. Graham stated, "He didn't want Colonial Beach to be like some beach resorts where women display themselves in a disgraceful manner and where liquor is sold." The sale of liquor by the drink appeared to have been a greater problem than slot machines. The Council decided not to lease the pier in a vote of four to two.⁵⁶

A gambling boat called the Pleasure Island anchored off of Colonial Beach's shore that spring, too.⁵⁷ Owned by Frank Tims of Newport News it was thirty-six by one hundred feet, had two decks, one for dancing and the other for slot machines, with a twenty-seven foot bar.⁵⁸ Unable to lease the town's pier, the Pleasure Island had to motor boat people to its machines from the Little Reno owned by Delbert

Conner. The boat did not prove successful, for apparently the Potomac was too rough and many gamblers became sick.⁵⁹

In May, the Little Reno opened, with over thirty slot machines and the Little Steel Pier, which had been built entirely of wood, with eight slot machines.⁶⁰ Dennis Conner, who worked at the Little Reno the summer it opened said, "It got so busy you couldn't walk into the place . . . the first summer we were so busy we worked constantly . . . people came all that winter, too."⁶¹

Despite minimal uproar in Colonial Beach, some people in Charles County were not so pleased about piers in the Potomac. The Times Crescent printed an editorial referring to casinos as being in "very bad taste" and a potential embarrassment to Maryland Governor William P. Lane, and Virginia Governor John S. Battle.⁶² Truer words were never written for the piers remained a constant irritant to the chief executives of both states for many years.

In 1951, with the enactment of the Johnson Act forbidding interstate shipment of slot machines, the machines had to be brought to the piers by speedboats, as those machines could not cross into Virginia. In the early years, all liquor going to the piers had to be transported that way, as well.⁶³

In 1950, Theodore McKeldin, a Republican, was elected governor of Maryland. He did not appear to favor slot machines, just to tolerate them. In a campaign speech for Presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower, McKeldin referred to Washington, D.C. as a "slot machine, keeping its percentage" and slot machines as "one armed bandits."⁶⁴ Re-elected in 1954, McKeldin encountered many Potomac River problems, among them gambling.

In June, 1956, Governor Thomas B. Stanley of Virginia wrote to McKeldin complaining of the proposed Gunston Hall Yacht Club. Governor Stanley had received a strongly worded complaint from Mrs. Lamot du Pont Copeland who was First Regent at Gunston Hall. The planned yacht club was to be located adjacent to Gunston Hall and she was strongly opposed to it.⁶⁵

Governor McKeldin's staff discovered that Fulton King was the owner of three barges and planned to anchor them off the shore. Coral Heil, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney of Arlington owned fifty-one percent of the proposed gambling business with the remainder of the investors unknown.⁶⁶ The notes in the Governor's papers were typed, but the names of Coral Heil, and that of Carl Hill, who later established the gambling boat Freestone were too similar to be ignored. In an

interview in September, 1982, Hill admitted that he had purchased the land at that location, but that living nearby was Charles Tolson, the first assistant of F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover. Tolson suggested to Hill that he would stop his plans. Hill explained that he began to look for another location. Meanwhile, in July, the Governor's assistant formerly alerted Senator James Monroe of Charles County of the proposed yacht club. Thomas Carr listed the people involved and asked him to "look into the situation immediately . . . as you know the feelings of the Governor."⁶⁷ Whether Tolson's feelings were instrumental or Senator Monroe's county contacts, the Gunston Hall Yacht Club never materialized.

McKeldin's files contain a selection of letters from individuals complaining about Colonial Beach and a gambling presence so close to Virginia. McKeldin courteously responded to all. In November, 1956, he stated: "While I do not basically approve of such operations, and in at least two instances have directly intervened, I have no authority to prevent its continuance."⁶⁸ The gambling situation was considered local option, not touched by the state government.

Colonial Beach had grown to become a major gambling area. There were three large casinos, the Jackpot, the Reno, which was no longer

styled "little", and the Monte Carlo. The first two were owned by the flamboyant and crafty Delbert Conner who began with cash assets of ten thousand dollars and built it into a fortune worth over a million.⁶⁹ The Jackpot contained fifty-nine machines, but the Reno, nearly the size of a football field had three hundred and eighty-four amusement devices.⁷⁰ The dance floor could hold twelve hundred people seated and three hundred dancing.⁷¹ Conner hired Guy Lombardo for three hours in the fifties and packed in huge crowds.⁷² He and his brother operated an amusement park outside the casino to entertain children while their parents gambled. In addition, the Conners flew customers from nearby metropolitan areas in their Boeing 247, nicknamed the "Pink Champagne," due to its dominant color scheme to their airport outside the town. For evening accommodations, the Conners also owned the large Colonial Beach Hotel.⁷³

This style of operation seemed more reminiscent of Las Vegas than Charles County or Virginia. In fact, at the same time there were no operations of this magnitude in Charles County. In 1957, the largest establishment with slot machines was Marshall Hall Amusement Park. In Colonial Beach, Conner's only rival was Walt Hendrix who owned the Monte Carlo located next to the Reno. Hendrix also came to

the Beach not long after legalization and recalled he had no problem getting slot machine licenses from the Charles County Court House.⁷⁴

As the Clerk of the Court, Patrick C. Mudd, pointed out the legal questions had been settled long before 1949, the river belonged to Maryland, and Colonial Beach waters were in Charles County.⁷⁵

Legally, the machines were located in Charles County but the issue rapidly became a moral and political problem when J. Carl Hill decided to buy the ship Tolchester, rename it the Freestone and anchor it at Freestone Point in Prince William County, a little south of Mount Vernon. Envisioned as an entire convention center and recreation complex, Hill planned for the Freestone to be the nucleus of the operation.⁷⁶ Once again, liquor and slot machine licenses were required from Charles County. Apparently when the news broke in May of 1957, the liquor license had already been granted. McKeldin's files indicated the Liquor Board had been appointed by the Democratic County Commissioners and the Governor could do little to stop it. He wrote, however, to Mary Gardiner, the slot machine clerk of the county, "I hope you will see fit to deny this slot machine license if it has not been issued, or to rescind it as promptly as possible if it has been issued . . . such an embarrassment to the State of Maryland could

develop into a situation in which the General Assembly would take away the peculiar privilege accorded to Charles County and a few neighboring counties to license slot machines."⁷⁷ The following day, his letter was printed in area newspapers, plus a letter of apology to Governor Stanley of Virginia over the Charles County activities.⁷⁸

The Charles County Commissioners, chaired by John L. Sullivan, voted to retain the liquor license and approve a slot machine one for the Freestone Holding Company. They stated that they saw "no just or legal reason for not issuing a license."⁷⁹

The Governor was probably furious. Then he received information from the Board of Supervisors in King George, Virginia, about a second ship to be located near Dahlgren Naval Proving Grounds, also Charles County's jurisdiction. McKeldin replied that the Charles County Commissioners "have jurisdiction in such matters, I can advise you that the matter has already been referred to the attention of the Legislative Council with a view towards drafting and introducing legislation at the next session of the Maryland General Assembly to prevent the repetition of such licensing."⁸⁰

One day later McKeldin wrote a blistering four page letter to John L. Sullivan pointing out his earlier attempts to stop such

gambling establishments in both Charles and St. Mary's Counties' waters. Apparently, Sullivan accused the Governor of playing political games with the issue. The draft contained many of McKeldin's own underlining and comments. He concluded, "Your entire attempt to avoid the blows of public opinion invited by the inexcusable performance of your Board and that of the Board of License Commissioners is groping in the extreme. I fear, Mr. Sullivan, that you are sadly lacking in the dexterity and clever footwork which were possessed by the distinguished athlete whose name bear. With kindest regards and with the reminder that the issue here continues to be the damage which your County Government is inflicting upon Maryland's relations with the Commonwealth of Virginia."⁸¹ Sarcasm can be an effective weapon and McKeldin utilized it efficiently.

Later at a Governor's Conference in Virginia, Stanley and McKeldin discussed the problem. Governor McKeldin promised legislation as soon as possible to gain "more control over commercial enterprises on the Potomac."⁸²

Members of the Legislative Council and local politicians used the Governor's yacht, Potomac to tour the Freestone on 16 July, and discussed their gambling problems on the opening day ceremonies.⁸³

Soon the public came to the ship in droves, sometimes twenty thousand on the weekends.⁸⁴ It contained over two hundred slot machines and some pinball machines which also paid off. All the political disagreements and resultant publicity probably stirred the curiosity of many residents so they came to view the Freestone, just to see what had caused all the publicity. National television stations interviewed Mr. Hill, and this, too, informed many others of the presence of gambling off of the Virginia shores.

The ship itself measured fifty feet wide by two hundred and seventy feet long and contained four decks. The first deck held two bars and the slot machines, the second a dining room and ballroom. The third one was an open balcony viewing the second and the fourth, completely covered by a canopy, was decorated in a Hawaiian motif. The owners gave away cars and trips as prizes and the ship operated twenty-four hours a day. For non-gamblers, there were three swimming pools and a small amusement area.⁸⁵

The base of operations for liquor and slot machines was Sweden's Point Marina in Charles County. Elwood Jones, who provided the machines for the operation, said they were taken by barge from the marina and then handed onto the Freestone. The work boat Maryanne

hailed supplies across the Potomac.⁸⁶

According to Hill, he hired two police forces. One had been created by Prince William County, Virginia, and operated on the five hundred and six acre complex. The second one had men deputized by the Charles County sheriff and they worked on the boat.⁸⁷ This method had been developed years before at Colonial Beach and proved successful. Off duty constables frequently worked also at the piers and boats.

The Freestone survived as a gambling boat for eighteen months. Governor McKeldin finally eliminated river gambling, but not without a struggle. In September, the Legislative Council issued its opinion of the river gambling, stating that the problem's solution rested with the Virginia General Assembly, "whenever that body chooses to act."⁸⁸ Meanwhile a long and sensationally written article about Colonial Beach appeared in the September 7 issue of the Saturday Evening Post entitled, "Las Vegas on the Potomac," which also mentioned the Freestone. The Governor's correspondence concerning river gambling jumped enormously, as probably did McKeldin's temper.

In March, 1958, the Maryland Senate passes an act ending gambling along the Virginia shore.⁸⁹ In a vote of nineteen to three, only Senator Peter DiDomenico of Baltimore City voted with St. Mary's

and Charles' Counties representatives.⁹⁰ John Parran, Jr., one of the delegates from Charles County, supported the bill.⁹¹ As a Democrat, Mr. Parran felt the machines should be more controlled and he was determined to achieve that aim.⁹²

Deadline for the gambling to cease was the first of June, 1958, but in May the law was challenged,⁹³ and a circuit court in St. Mary's agreed it was unconstitutional. The machines operated through the summer but in October, 1958, the Maryland Court of Appeals upheld the 1958 law and Judge Gray ordered all gambling to cease at the end of the month.⁹⁴

The total number of machines affected at the various beaches and aboard the Freestone numbered about eight hundred. While owners were making provisions to move their machines back across the river. Their attorneys appealed for a ruling by the Supreme Court on the Maryland law. On 18 December, the lawyers claimed that the law favored Maryland casinos over Virginia ones and it did not compensate the Virginia owners.⁹⁵ River gambling lost when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Maryland law. It had been quite a struggle to accomplish this one restraint against slot machines. Now, where did the machines go when the river areas closed?

Casinos

The machines returned to Charles County and for the first time casinos were built to house them. Happyland's Pot o' Gold Casino at Marshall Hall opened in the summer of 1958 in a beautiful new building with over one hundred machines, expanding to 193.⁹⁶ The Conner brothers bought the Southern Trail in Newburg in November and in June of 1959 opened Aqua-Land adjacent to the Potomac River Bridge.⁹⁷ The Conners floated the Jackpot Casino over from its pilings in Colonial Beach, and planned a theme park with storybook characters, camping, a marina, an airport, and of course a casino. The Jackpot was to have been the nucleus of the operation. Unfortunately it burned not long after moving it, and they had to build another casino.⁹⁸

In October, 1958, Club Waldorf had a grand opening with the Ray Eberle Orchestra. It had twenty-five hundred square feet of dance floor, and advertisements bragged about the longest bar in Charles County, 130 feet long. The parking lot held 3,000 cars.⁹⁹

Carl Hill, formerly of the Freestone, built a restaurant and crab house at Sweden's Point for his slot machines and ferried his

customers from Virginia.¹⁰⁰ Between 1957 and 1960 the number of restaurants increased from forty-one to fifty-seven.¹⁰¹ All restaurants had slot machines, but some were so big they also styled themselves casinos.

Names like Happyland, Southern Trail, Crystal Door, Aqua-Land, Wigwam, the Waldorf Restaurant, and Smittys on Route 301, drew ever increasing crowds. It took the closing of the river gambling to spurt additional growth into Charles County. These places stayed open twenty-four hours a day, and people would frequently arrive in bus loads to play the machines.

Women found the machines fascinating, and played far more frequently than men. There were many stories of people refusing to leave machines which were "hot." Many gamblers believed the machines at the door of a casino always paid off better than the ones further inside. People had their special machines and would only play their favorite ones. A folklore of superstitions developed. Winners usually left their earnings in the tray, for good luck. Good luck came to those who inserted the coins with the head facing up, and a true gambler never left a win on the machine. He always pulled the handle one more time. The "little old lady" stories became part of

the folklore. One man recalled seeing an elderly lady actually strike a man with her umbrella when he inadvertently took over her machine while she went to acquire change. She struck the man over the head when he won a jackpot, and she demanded "her" money back!¹⁰²

For their old customers driving from Virginia, the Connors and Hendrix paid the bridge tolls. They served sumptuous food buffets, and kept prices low.¹⁰³ In a buffet, one could eat quickly, and then return to the machines. Gambling had become very big business and it shocked quite a few residents to see it becoming so pervasive.

Pro-Slot Rhetoric

The Southern Maryland Novelty Company lead the fight against the limitation of the machines because it had the most to lose. Of its seventy-five locations, two had more than one hundred machines. The company utilized well organized economic data to support itself. It stated that eighty-four percent of its seventy five locations did not have more than ten machines, but the remaining sixteen percent could support the rest based on the volume of business they produced. The Novelty Company itemized all it contributed to the county in the form of payroll, automobiles, and how much its monthly gas bill amounted to.

It pointed out the fact that it was a family run business with generations of tradition in Southern Maryland, with no "outside" interests.¹⁰⁴

Huge newspaper advertisements urged voters to vote against the Amusement Device Act. Joining the Novelty Company with full page ads was the Charles County Hotel, Restaurant, and Tavern Association which shifted its views of a year before, when Carl Hampton spoke against casinos and for the legislation to limit the number of machines. The Association surveyed its one hundred and eighty members. Of these, one hundred and thirty-three responded. The results were printed in the newspaper prior to the referendum. The Association demonstrated the economic impact of the Tavern Owners' income on other businesses, such as insurance premiums, lawyers, utilities, automobiles, advertising, churches, accountants and others. It listed the current Charles County revenue as \$1,447,967.41 of which slot machines' fees were \$394,788.22. In addition, the real estate taxes, liquor licenses, and beverage taxes for these businessmen amounted to an additional \$124,504.02 totaling 35.0 percent of the county's total revenue. The threat of increased taxes and business failures was repeatedly made in all these advertisements.

"Do-gooders and Publicity Seeking Politicians" did not fare too well, either.¹⁰⁵

The pro-slot's strongest argument was economic. This was especially true for the Charles County government, which had the tightest method of earning money from the machines through its licenses.¹⁰⁶ In retrospect many pro-slot people felt that if they had been more responsive to the community through charity or built another hospital and advertised it well, their cause might have gained more merit.

In actuality, the forces against the machines had never given up their battle. The passage of years and circumstances increased their strength. By the late 1950s, the anti-slot forces had coalesced into a position of definite power.

Law Enforcement

The major problem the slot machines caused law enforcement officers was burglary.¹⁰⁷ The large establishments stayed open twenty-four hours a day and frequently hired their own guards for they did not like the publicity of calling in the sheriff's department. The prime targets were gas stations, liquor stores and small grocery

stores. Former Sheriff Francis Garner noted that the big glass windows on stations framed the machines so that everyone could see them for robbery.¹⁰⁸

Newspapers contained many stories of petty thefts. Beginning in May 1950, a slot machine at Moses Queens' filling station was dragged across the floor and broken into, and "five dollars in nickels had been violently taken from a slot machine located in Three Owls Inn." Thefts in such establishments continued through the 1950s. Jimmy's Esso Station in La Plata, by 1954 was bulgarized fourteen times, and it was only three years old. Three Florida men were apprehended with special drills developed to break into the front of machines where the jackpot was displayed.¹⁰⁹

By 1952, the grand jury complained of "mounting law enforcement problems created by slot machines, liquor and an influx of transients on mushrooming Route 301 . . . the vast number of slot machines tempt some travelers to see if they can't come by some of that easy money by breaking and entering."¹¹⁰

The problem continued to grow through the 1950s. In 1957 Judge Dudley S. Digges reported that during the past six months, twenty-five of fifty-four indictments from the grand jury dealt with

"breaking and entering business establishments in the county . . . ninety-nine were done by non-residents . . . and common demoninator was slot machines."¹¹¹ This continued increase in petty crimes provided fuel for the opponents of slot machines.

The huge establishments at Colonial Beach posed peculiar problems for law enforcement officials. The crimes committed at the casinos were in Maryland jurisdiction, so Maryland police were necessary. The solution created by Sheriff Avery Monroe consisted of a special police force whose salaries were paid by the casino owners but who acted under the sheriff's authority. Owners of the casinos even posted bonds for them.¹¹² It proved a very satisfactory solution, although the criminals had to be transported back across the Potomac to Charles County.

According to the original 1949 legislation, the slot machine inspector's duties were to ensure all Charles County slot machines had purchased a proper county license. The County Commissioners chose the inspector, and the person selected tended to be a loyal party member. Just before the 1954 elections the Washington Post targeted Charles County as an area of crime and slot machine abuses. For the first time in years the Democrats won two of the three commissioners

positions and selected Earl Milstead, a fellow Democrat, to replace Richard Stubbs, who had held the position since 1949. Milstead won considerable acclaim for his diligence.

Beginning in August, 1954, Ed Koterba of the Washington Post wrote a series of sensational and politically damaging articles about the slot machines. He claimed to find unlicensed slot machines in one-fourth of the establishments he visited. He pointed out license applications improperly filled out, and local, Republican government ignoring the situation. He noted children playing penny slot machines in many places. "It is where a man loses \$15,000 of his father's estate by pulling a handle, and the community gives it only a passing thought."¹¹³

Unfortunately for the Republicans, there was truth in everything Koterba wrote. Republicans bungled their rebuttal to the articles. The election in November gave the Democrats a position of strength in the commissioners' office and Milstead was selected to clean up the licensing mess which he did effectively. Milstead who personally disapproved of slot machines was related to Reverend Harold Milstead who opposed legalization in 1949. Earl Milstead took the job as a crusade and thereafter no one read about unlicensed machines.

The sheriff and owners of establishments increased surveillance of young people to prevent those under sixteen from playing the machines, although this was a problem never resolved. The machines could be played everywhere and law enforcement officers could not patrol laundromats, grocery stores, church socials, gas stations, and all the countless other places where slot machines were placed. Perhaps if the machines had only been placed in casinos, the gambling could have been more tightly regulated.

FOOTNOTES

¹Times Crescent, 15 July 1949.

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³Russell H. McCain Letter to McKeldin, 14 August 1957, "Bridge Tolls." McKeldin Papers: Susquehanna and Potomac Rivers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

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⁵Maryland State Planning Commission, Economic County Data Book, Publication Number 66, 1954-64 (Baltimore, Maryland: n.p., 1964) p. 25.

⁶Charles County Chamber of Commerce, Your Guide to Charles County (La Plata, Maryland: Charles County Chamber of Commerce, 1960), p. 83.

⁷Washington Star, 2 July 1949.

⁸Charles County Delegation, "A Report to the Legislative Council on Problems Created in Charles County by the Enactment of Statewide Slot Machine Legislation," n.p., 5 November 1963, p. 4.

⁹University of Maryland, College of Agriculture, Resources Study Committee for Southern Maryland, "Southern Maryland Resources," College Park, November 1964, p. 25.

¹⁰Charles Van Doren and Robert McHenry, eds. Webster's Guide to American History: A Chronological, Geographical, and Biographical Survey and Compendium (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971), p. 534.

¹¹Times Crescent, 15 December 1950.

¹²Interview with John T. Parran, Jr. Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 29 March 1982.

¹³Times Crescent, 15 January 1954; and 11 April 1957.

- ¹⁴Times Crescent, 17 November 1955.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 7 December 1957; 7 April 1950; 21 April 1950; 16 July 1954; 13 January 1955; and 4 April 1957.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 5 May 1950; 15 January 1954; and 20 October 1950, Reprint from the Evening Star.
- ¹⁷Times Crescent, 15 January 1954; and Charles County Delegation, "A Report," p. 10.
- ¹⁸Maryland, Laws, Statutes, etc: Laws Made and Passed, 1949 (Annapolis, n.p., 1949), p. 1619.
- ¹⁹Washington Star-News, 8 July 1949.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹Interview with Emma Hill Wallace, Blue Haven Restaurant, La Plata, Maryland, 25 March 1982.
- ²²Interview with Glysterine Penny, Waldorf, Maryland, 18 May 1982.
- ²³Interview with Mary Toye and William Diggs. Toye's Tavern, near Benedict, Maryland 15 April 1982.
- ²⁴Interview with Melvin Downes, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 13 May 1982.
- ²⁵Interview with Downes, 13 May 1982.
- ²⁶Interview with Mudd, 14 October 1982.
- ²⁷John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "List of Operators, Owners and Number of Machines." 1959, Parran Papers, 0850042, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland.
- ²⁸Times Crescent, Advertisement written by the Southern Maryland Novelty Company, 3 November 1960.
- ²⁹John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "Comments of the Southern Maryland Novelty Company Re Proposed Changes in the Present Slot Machine Act." 1959, Parran Papers, 0850042, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, p. 4.
- ³⁰Interview with Roscoe Odle, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 7 May 1982.
- ³¹Interview with Emma Wallace, 25 March 1982.

- ³²Interview with Melvin Downes, 13 May 1982.
- ³³John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "Comments of the Southern Maryland Novelty Company," p. 3.
- ³⁴John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "List of Operators."
- ³⁵John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "Comments of the Southern Maryland Novelty Company," p. 2.
- ³⁶Interview with Melvin Downes, 13 May 1982.
- ³⁷John E. Hoover, "Report of John Edgar Hoover, Director of Federal Bureau of Investigation: Fiscal Year, 1952," McKeldin Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland, p. 7-8.
- ³⁸Interview with Melvin Downes, 13 May 1982.
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- ⁴⁰Interview with Melvin Downes, 13 May 1982.
- ⁴¹Interview with E. Elwood Jones, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 7 April 1982.
- ⁴²Interview with Roscoe Odle, 7 May 1982.
- ⁴³Interview with James R. Couchenour, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 3 March 1982.
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- ⁴⁶Maryland, Laws, Statutes, etc: Laws Made and Passed, 1951, (Annapolis, n.p., 1951), p. 465.
- ⁴⁷Interview with Samuel C. Linton, Jr., Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 16 March 1982.
- ⁴⁸Interview with John T. Parran, Jr., 29 March 1982.
- ⁴⁹Maryland, Laws, Statutes, etc: Laws Made and Passed, 1959, (Annapolis, n.p., 1959), p. 1412.
- ⁵⁰Washington Post, 4 February 1959.

⁵¹John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, Marshall Hall Amusement Park Letter to John T. Parran, Jr., 17 March 1959.

⁵²John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, Wilson Boat Line Letter to John T. Parran, Jr., 18 March 1959.

⁵³Interview with George Mason, Colonial Beach, Virginia, 10 August 1982.

⁵⁴John Kobler, "Las Vegas on the Potomac," Saturday Evening Post, 7 September 1957, p. 39.

⁵⁵Evening Star, 22 July 1949; 23 July 1949; and 22 August 1949.

⁵⁶Ibid., 15 April 1950.

⁵⁷Tilp, This Was Potomac River, p. 303.

⁵⁸Evening Star, 15 April 1950; and 16 April 1950.

⁵⁹Interview with Dennis Conner, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 10 June 1982.

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⁶²Times Crescent, 12 May 1950.

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⁶⁴McKeldin Correspondence, Sin-Sma, 1951-1952, n.d. McKeldin Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

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⁶⁶Raymond V. Long Letter to McKeldin, 11 July 1956, Charles County General, 1955-1956, McKeldin Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

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- ⁶⁹Kobler, "Las Vegas," Saturday Evening Post, p. 88.
- ⁷⁰Interview with Dennis Conner, 10 June 1982.
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- ⁷²Interview with Dennis Conner, 10 June 1982.
- ⁷³Kobler, "Las Vegas," Saturday Evening Post, p. 39; and 88.
- ⁷⁴Interview with Walt Hendrix, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 30 March 1982.
- ⁷⁵Interview with Patrick C. Mudd, 14 October 1982.
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- ⁸⁴Tilp, This Was Potomac River, p. 304.
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- ¹⁰⁰Interview with J. Carl Hill, 7 September 1982.
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- ¹⁰²Interview with Richard Long, Waldorf, Maryland, 10 May 1982.
- ¹⁰³Interview with Walt Hendrix, 30 March 1982.
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- ¹⁰⁵Charles County Leaf, 27 October 1960,
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- ¹⁰⁷Interview with Judge James C. Mitchell, 2 June 1982.

¹⁰⁸Interview with Francis Garner, Waldorf, Maryland, July 1982.

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7 September 1951.

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¹¹³Washington Post, 24 August 1954.

CHAPTER IV

OPPOSITION TO THE SLOT MACHINES

The 1950s marked the re-emergence of the Democratic party as a local political power. Beginning quietly in Indian Head, Democrats like Mrs. R. E. Slavin began to build a small core of dedicated workers. They started with the Parent-Teachers' Association in the local schools and gradually spread to town government as well as other parts of the county.¹ Indian Head represented an anomaly in the area. The Naval Powder Factory, the county's largest employer, hired professional, white collar people from out of the area, and more than anywhere else, it had a more liberal, Democratic base which only required organizing. Julian Parsons formally organized the Democratic Party of Charles County in October of 1949 at a meeting in Waldorf with Mrs. Slavin as secretary.²

Traditionally, the Republican's political power rested with a strong black vote. Since the Civil War, blacks in Charles voted solidly Republican. In the 1920s the black-white ratio was almost equal, but by 1950 there had been a 60.0 percent increase in white population while the black's increase was only 0.2 percent. The trend

continued, by 1960 the total increase since 1920 was; white, 128.1 percent and black, 32.9 percent.³ Such population expansion represented a potential threat to the Republicans, which Democrats recognized.

The Democrats urged people to register to vote, and in September, of 1950, the spectacular result was 633 newly registered Democrats and 329 Republicans. In October, Republicans regained the lead in total eligible voters (8300) when 471 Republicans registered, but only 200 Democrats. The largest gain in eligible voters was in the Indian Head precinct.⁴

Despite the Democratic margin, the 1950 elections reinforced the Republicans' hold on the area, especially when Theodore McKeldin was swept into office over William Preston Lane for governor, but the party organizing continued. Indian Head held town elections in May, 1951. It was described as a "spirited town election in which more than two hundred voters went to the polls . . . less than twenty ballots at the last election."⁵ One of the three elected to town council was Richard E. Slavin.

A strong local newspaper aided the Democrats. The Times Crescent run by the Democratic Mitchell family, had already proven itself

neither friend of slot machines nor Republicans. It became a very strong ally to the Democratic reorganization. The paper covered every Democratic meeting and missed no opportunity to write negatively about Republicans and slot machines. It particularly noted every crime associated with the machines or with people associated with them.

In April, 1954, seventeen Democrats registered for local offices for the fall elections. Among them were John T. Parran, Jr. of Indian Head, registered for the House of Delegates, and William Berry who joined J. L. Sullivan to run for county commissioners. The Times Crescent's editorials in that spring and summer were filled with worries about juvenile crime. Letters to the editor suggested that all of Charles County's saloons and slot machines were negatively affecting the youth.⁶

In June another voter registration drive benefited the Democrats, 506 to 414. From 1952 to 1954, the Republican majority declined from 266 to 105. The Democrats were achieving steady progress. By the November elections the Democrats were in an excellent position. Koterba's Washington Post articles shocked many people, and the Times Crescent aptly condensed the articles for local readers. "We do take this opportunity," said a Times Crescent

editorial, "to point out that wherever elsewhere there has been legalized gambling, there has always been trouble in the enforcement of laws concerning it . . . by our laxness we would be inviting illegal operations or a bad element of people to come and take up residence here."⁷ The Independent refuted the articles, and defended the local politicians but the damage had been done.⁸ A week later, the Times Crescent wrote about the impact of the bad publicity on the rest of the state, and suggested that Charles County looked very bad in their eyes.⁹ Controversy and grand jury investigations continued until the election.

In October, Governor McKeldin visited the county three times. All his appearances drew good crowds, but not enough for the Republicans to sweep another election. Democrats reported that the Republican sheriff's office was removing Democratic campaign leaflets from mail boxes throughout the county. The night before the election the Democrats printed an extra edition of the original leaflet, but on this one was added the story of the Republican exploits. This time Democrats John T. Parran, Jr., John L. Sullivan and William Berry won the best Democratic victory in thirty years.¹⁰ The Democrats benefited from voter reaction to the slot machine issue plus

a strong grass roots structure.

In December and January, following the election, the ministers began to write letters urging the abolition of slot machines from the county. In February 1955, the La Plata Methodist Church took a stand against the machines and in March the Waldorf Baptist Church followed suit.¹¹ The ministers chose a new president of their Ministerial Association, Reverend Andrew L. Gunn, an articulate Methodist minister, stationed at Indian Head. He made official contacts, visiting with the Attorney General Robert Kennedy to express his concerns about slot machines in Charles County.¹² Gunn was the spark plug to ignite the local churches again. Through his Bishop, John Wesley Lord, a statewide network of churches expressed opposition to the slot machines in southern Maryland as a source of immorality and potential for criminal activity. Thus, whenever the slot machines generated publicity, as in the Potomac River gambling issue, the Governor was deluged with mail from all over the state objecting to those machines. The mailing campaign was organized by the Protestant churches.

In addition to the rise of the Democratic Party, and the re-emergence of the Ministerial Association, there were lurid and

sensational articles printed about Charles County in national "pulp" magazines such as Man's Conquest (December 1955) and Real Adventure (March 1956). The county was called "dirty, drunken and debauched," where people made money from "slots, sex and sin."¹³ Residents were horrified. The area was described in Real Adventure as a "modern Sodom with 30 ginmills to the mile and a populace of gun carrying gangsters and sleazy dames."¹⁴ Residents who might have been neutral about slot machines found it hard to remain that way. Their county was slandered and depicted as a national disgrace.

After the 1958 election, the Democrats gained all the state representation. John T. Parran, Jr., as State Senator, Samuel C. Linton, Jr. and John H. Mitchell, as delegates introduced legislation to closely regulate the machines by limiting thirty-five to a location and tightening residency requirements for businesses with machines. Through some contacts with the Justice Department, these men suspected mob attempts to use legitimate Charles County businesses, especially the new casinos, to launder monies. This legislation experienced mysterious difficulties. Linton recalled a warning from an anonymous source right after the legislation passed in the House. He and Mitchell were advised that their local bill

would be lost between the House and the Senate. As a result, it would not make it to the Senate docket and it would have been too late to re-introduce it. The source proved correct. The bill had disappeared. He and Mitchell spoke strongly to the Clerk of the House about the missing legislation, and threatened to call the State Police. The next morning the bill was placed on the Senate docket. Linton stated that there were many people throughout the state with investments who did not want to see any legislation limiting slot machines, even a local bill for Charles County.¹⁵ Later, in spite of a vigorous resistance by the local distributors, the electorated voted in November 1960, 3999 to 3739, to curtail the machines.¹⁶

Earlier in 1959, the last legal barriers eliminating the Potomac River gambling were overcome. The opposition to slot machines gained some legal victories, but it still did not have a leader nor a united platform with rhetoric strong enough to overcome the machines' advocates.

In December 1959, a new citizens' group publically launched drives against slot machines in Anne Arundel and Charles Counties. Reverend Charles F. Kirkley of Anne Arundel and Reverend Richard C.

Johnson of Waldorf were cited as leaders. This organization stated that it had ties neither to the Maryland Justice Commission nor to the Maryland Investigating Committee. These crime-fighting groups had recently received publicity for taking monies from private or slot machine sources.¹⁷ The citizens' group would officially become the Maryland Committee for the Abolition of Slot Machines and Commerical Bingo.¹⁸ Kirkley and Johnson contributed much to the anti-slot machine drive. Richard C. Johnson, a lawyer and minister, wrote a legal analysis of the constitutionality of gambling in Maryland which proved that the existance of slot machines in southern Maryland stood on very shaky legal grounds.¹⁹ As for Reverend Kirkley, his name appeared frequently in the fight to eliminate the machines.

In January 1960, the Council of Churches representing twenty-three Protestant demoninations sent a delegation to call upon Governor Millard Tawes. The Council wanted his views on slot machines. The Governor referred to the machines as "evil," but felt the legislators would hesitate to support state-wide abolition of slot machines due to senatorial courtesy. The next month, David Hume made his first public speech against slot machines, on a television show called "Four Corners." Hume urged the federal government to

investigate the slot machines in Maryland, as so much revenue was gained from them through the internal revenue stamps. Hume, a former Texan, moved to Charles County in 1957 and practiced law in Washington, D.C.²⁰ In 1958, Governor Tawes appointed him the Democratic Party's treasurer.²¹ David Hume was a persuasive speaker, socially prominent, and ambitious. Several days later on another television show, he referred to the machines as a "narcotic to Southern Maryland's economy."²² In a very short time, the media referred to David Hume as a leader in the anti-slot machine drive. David Hume became the rallying figure whom the ministers, editors, law enforcement figures and concerned citizens were seeking. After Hume's request for federal investigation of the machines, the ministers urged a state study as well. The federal government and the state of Maryland rejected both requests.²³

In May 1960, Reverend Gunn spoke before women's groups urging their assistance in abolishing the machines. The Maryland Committee for the Abolition of Slot Machines concurrently printed a detailed report about slot machines in Anne Arundel County. The Committee report concentrated on Glen Burnie's Ace Manufacturing Company with its "Chicago connections." The Committee also studied Colonial Beach,

Virginia, where bank deposits at the Westmoreland Bank had increased since the slot machines were removed. In addition, the number of car re-possessiones decreased, and new home mortgages rose.²⁴ The Anne Arundel based committee wanted a county referendum to eliminate the slot machines and their report painstakingly pointed to the impact of slot machines on their county.

Throughout the summer, Reverend Gunn spoke against the machines in Charles County. On several occasions he and his family received threatening telephone calls. One night, while leaving a local convenience store Gunn had a "pointed object" thrust into his ribs and a voice stated, "get the blankety blank out of Charles County and stop making trouble or you'd end up going out of Charles County in a box."²⁵

Not long after this incident, David Hume called Gunn and said, "I'm fully behind you. I'd like to see the slot machines out of southern Maryland and I don't think you are going to get anywhere with Governor Tawes. I think he is too tied in with the political establishment . . . but I am not, and I have influence and am willing to come and help in any way I can as a politician, and as a citizen of Charles County, to do what I can to get rid of the machines." As a

result the various ministers and Hume conferred frequently by telephone to plan additional strategy.²⁶

In December, Hume resigned as treasurer of the party, citing his dissatisfaction with its acceptance of campaign monies from slot machine interests. Governor Tawes, according to the Times Crescent, "let it be known that Mr. Hume was regarded as a thorn in the side of administration policy makers." A bonus came to the anti-slot forces in January of 1961 when the Catholic clergy condemned area slot machines for "disrupting businesses, injuring families, causing false economy and effecting the civic, cultural and social life."²⁷

Reverend Gunn stated the bishop was persuaded by the urging of Charles Countian, Elbert R. Sisson. Mr. Sisson published an article in The Nation condemning the slot machines. He also gathered other Catholics to speak to the bishop about the socially unhealthy conditions in southern Maryland.²⁸ The bishop was convinced, and the Catholic clergy and their parishioners joined the movement.

Agitation continued. In March 1961, the House Judiciary Committee in Annapolis conducted hearings on two bills which would outlaw the machines. Protestant and Catholic clergymen drafted both bills and came to hearings. Sisson, Reverend Flint from the Council

of Churches, Methodist Bishop John Wesley Lord, Reverend Kirkley and David Hume spoke in favor of the bills. Several days later, on a Baltimore television program, Hume predicted the slot machine bills would be killed by "pre-arrangement." His prediction proved accurate. The anti-slot bills for 1961 were called a "local issue" by the Judiciary Committee and dropped.²⁹

By the summer of 1961, Hume campaigned actively. He spoke against both slot machines and Governor Tawes. He referred to the Governor as "a man who had turned from church and friends over the issue." In July, David Hume announced his intention to seek the Democratic nomination for Governor.³⁰ The Times Crescent printed a Hume endorsement. The paper had previously supported Tawes. Judge Mitchell explained the shift in endorsements by stating that Hume represented the best hope for ridding the area of slot machines.³¹ Hume campaigned vigorously through the fall, sometimes questioning some of the sources for Tawes' own campaign funds. Newspapers like the Baltimore Sun and Washington Post aided him with unfavorable stories about the slot machines. The Sun estimated the profit from southern Maryland averaged about thirteen million dollars a year. It stated the area contained 5,200 machines, or one for every 57

residents. The Sun titled Charles County's casinos as the most "gaudy." The Sun noted that the Club Waldorf in Charles County was owned by Philadelphia people and not locally owned. This ownership violated county amusement device laws.³² All this adverse publicity further strengthened the anti-slot resolve. Letters continued to urge Tawes to eliminate the machines from the state.

Beginning in January 1962, Governor Tawes' files contain a series of letters from Reverend Kirkley requesting assistance in eliminating slot machines. From the letters' tone, the two men had earlier been friends, but at that time the relationship had been strained. Kirkley asked for recommendations and suggestions from Tawes, specifically "for a bill which would ban slots." Kirkley offered to draft the bill, provide sponsors, and create support. Copies of his letter were sent to Bishop Lord, Reverends Gunn, Johnson and Firth.³³

A terse response came from Tawes . . . "I feel your approach to this matter has been wrong and much could have been accomplished had you not sought the counsel and advice of certain individuals whose names I will not mention at this time." He announced that nothing would be done about slot machines in the thirty day session,

but the group could meet to discuss the machines after the session. Nowhere in the correspondence did either man mention whose "counsel" had irritated the Governor. However, as a former Justice Department lawyer, David Hume probably advised the ministers legally and he was definitely co-ordinating activities with them. Kirkley sent a letter with three possible meetings listed. With one reminder from Kirkley, Governor Tawes took a month and half to respond. In mid-March, Tawes wrote that all three possible meeting dates were impossible. Many more letters were exchanged. Meetings were arranged and then cancelled. Finally in late April, Kirkley wrote, "I will await further word from you at your convenience."³⁴

In May, convinced that the Governor would not assist them, clergy throughout the state endorsed David Hume for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. They cited the scandals surrounding Tawes administration, and his inactivity on the slot machine issue. To the clergy, Hume represented "decent government" in Maryland.³⁵ Hume carried the populated and liberal Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties in the primary election. Tawes won the Democratic nomination, but voter dissatisfaction with him was evidenced by the large vote for Hume.

Within Charles County, the Democratic party had split over David Hume and the actual issue of slot machine elimination. Separated into three groups; the Old Guard, the New Mavericks, and the Mystery Slate, the party structure faced disaster with such dissention. Governor Tawes won the primary in Charles, but only about four hundred votes separated him from Hume.³⁶ The party reformed behind Tawes officially, but many still wanted those slot machines removed.

David Hume's persuasive speaking and effective use of television and radio reached many throughout the state. After the elections, these news sources continued to question Tawes' plans regarding slot machines. A Washington radio station editorial stated, "Incredible as it may seem, Maryland has three times as many establishments equipped with gambling devices as the state of Nevada."³⁷ Mail poured into Governor Tawes' office from all over the state. Much of the mail came from southern Maryland, particularly Charles and St. Mary's Counties. Postcards, letters, telegrams, petitions, all repeated the same message: "Get rid of slot machines." Most of the time, the local churches organized these messages, so the letters frequently contained an appeal to Tawes as a "Christian gentleman."

In August, David Hume declared his political support for Governor Tawes in the November election. He stated that the two of them "had reached accord on issues that caused their differences."³⁸ Had Tawes agreed to eliminate slot machines for Hume's support? John Parran, Jr. remembered campaigning with Tawes that summer in Charles County. The Governor took him aside and said, "I'm sorry I have to do this, but you know there is some pressure being applied and I'm going to have to take a stand on this issue . . . I would back any legislation that would abolish the machines."³⁹

Finally on September 20, 1962, Governor Millard J. Tawes formally announced that slot machines were no longer a local issue, and they should be abolished. He concluded by stating he would appoint a special committee to "establish procedures designed to remove the machines with the least possible damage."⁴⁰

Letters of congratulations poured into Tawes' files from the entire state. Television and radio stations lauded his stand. Reverend Kirkley wrote, "It has been a matter of great concern to me that the friendship we have shared had been adversely influenced by our divergent views about slot machines . . . my sincere thanks for the position you have taken." Mrs. Farlee Hume, wife of David Hume,

sent Tawes a letter, too. She expressed her gratitude for his decision.⁴¹

Prior to the election, Tawes announced the commission members to study the slot machines. He selected the former Assistant Attorney General from Baltimore, Richard W. Emory to be chairman. Tawes experienced difficulty in choosing the Charles County representative. He consulted John Parran, Jr., Edward Digges and David Hume. Finally Tawes selected a local historian and civic leader, Paul D. Brown. In the Governor's notes, Brown had "no business connections, was foreman of the grand jury which indicted slot machine operators for being non-residents, and was recommended by Ed Digges."⁴²

The Governor had named his commission; he only required a mandate from the voters to act. The November election gave him the necessary power. Tawes defeated his Republican opposition, Frank Small, Jr. Three of the four slot machine counties supported Tawes in the election, Charles County did not.

By the time the legislature met early in 1963, the Emory Committee, also called the Slot Machine Study Committee, had held several meetings and prepared a report to "establish procedures designed to remove the machines with the least possible damage to the

economy of these counties."⁴³ It totaled the number of machines in all four counties; Anne Arundel County, 1,278 machines, Calvert had 704 machines, Charles had 1,926 and St. Mary's County had 1,029 for a total of 4,927 slot machines in southern Maryland. The Committee also uncovered in its investigations the fact that there were seventeen other counties plus Baltimore City with so-called "free play" slot machines. These machines operated identically to southern Maryland's machines except they were not supposed to dispense cash or tokens. The Committee suggested that the labeled "free play" machines were probably used for "gambling on a far larger scale than legalized slot machines." Economically, the Committee noted that county revenues amounting to \$1,600,000 would be lost with the slot machines to the four counties. An additional \$22,000,000 loss would impact the owners and distributors of slot machines plus business establishments which had them. The Governor received the Committee's final report on 12 January.⁴⁴

All members of the Committee agreed that elimination of slot machines would cause "serious economic impact upon the four southern Maryland Counties." and recommended strong state support for alternative county development. Individually the committee members

disagreed upon the actual abolition date. Charles County's member P.D. Brown joined with William Loker from St. Mary's and Paul Nystrom of the University of Maryland to suggest state wide abolition by April 30, 1966.⁴⁵ To further reinforce their suggestions, Brown and Nystrom toured Colonial Beach, Virginia and found a healthy economy after several years without slot machines. The two men suggested that southern Maryland should build up its tourist trade by emphasizing its history and colonial tradition.⁴⁶

Less than a week after the Emory Committee made its report, the Maryland Crime Investigating Committee, Inc. printed a report on Maryland gambling, as well. Alvin J.T. Zumbrun, the Executive Director of this organization, relied heavily on the Emory Committee's findings. One new data table revealed that although Charles County had effectively reduced the number of machines per establishment with legislation, the number of businesses with machines had increased from 190 in 1960, to 217 in 1962. The restricting law for thirty-five machines had only scattered the machines over a wider area. The report gave Charles County praise for its strict licensing procedures, but questioned the effectiveness of Section 55 of the Code, keeping youngsters from the machines. The Crime Committee concluded its

report by stating it favored elimination of all slot machines from the state for three reasons. First, the machines represented an area which could attract organized crime. Second, the Crime Committee feared the possibility of political corruption and bribery due to such large sums of money involved. Finally, it referred to the adverse publicity to the state generated by slot machines.⁴⁷

With the Emory Committee favoring elimination as soon as possible and the Crime Investigating Report concurring, the Governor had plenty of data to provide the legislators. In a speech to the Assembly Tawes stated, "Several months ago I pledged to the people of this state that one of the aims of my administration would be to eliminate from our State . . . slot machines. It is my sincere intent to fullfill this pledge . . . Local self-determination must yield if it is not compatible with overall well being of the State . . . a bill has been prepared for introduction to the General Assembly. I therefore call upon members to support and pass this legislation."⁴⁸

The Speaker, A. Gorden Boone introduced to the House a bill to eliminate slot machines from the state. The House Judiciary Committee had hearings on February 28, which the Emory Committee attended.⁴⁹ The legislation returned to the House of Delegates, where Linton of

Charles County managed to change the final dates from 1966 to 1968.

In addition, Samuel Linton, Jr. introduced a bill to make the slot machine issue subject to a public referendum. He lost.⁵⁰ The bill to eliminate slot machines passed the House with a vote of 95 to 44.

Charles County's representatives, Linton and Frank Perrin voted against it. The Senate spent most of its time trying to extend the phase-out time on the legislation, to no avail. It passed the Senate by 25 to 3, the Senators from Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert voted against the elimination of slot machines.

Governor Tawes approved the anti-slot machine bill on April 30, 1963. Phase-out of the machines began on July 1, 1965, and after July 1, 1968, all slot machines became illegal in Maryland. The opposition had finally won.

Charles County's Democratic party gained enough strength through the 1950s to regulate its slot machines more effectively. However, to eliminate slot machines entirely required a massive campaign by the churches, citizens committees and media combined with a brutal political contest for the office of Governor of Maryland. This ban on slot machines could never have been accomplished without all of these forces coalescing in an anti-gambling social atmosphere.

Intrenched slot machine interests had gained too much strength for one group or county to eliminate them, it required the efforts of the entire state and Governor Tawes.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Interview with Francis H. Slavin, Indian Head, Maryland, 1980.
- ²Times Crescent, 8 October 1949; and 13 January 1950.
- ³Maryland State Planning Commission, Economic Data, 1954-1964, p. 25; and p. 23.
- ⁴Times Crescent, 1 September 1950; and 6 October 1950.
- ⁵Ibid., 10 November 1950; and 11 May 1951.
- ⁶Ibid., 23 April 1954; and 4 June 1954.
- ⁷Ibid., 25 June 1954; and 27 August 1954.
- ⁸Maryland Independent, 3 September 1954.
- ⁹Times Crescent, 10 September 1954.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 5 November 1954.
- ¹¹Ibid., 24 December 1954; 1 January 1955; 17 February 1955; and 3 March 1955.
- ¹²Interview with Reverend Andrew L. Gunn, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 23 April 1982.
- ¹³B. W. Von Block, "U. S. Highway Hot-Spots; U.S. 301, Charles County, Maryland." Man's Conquest. December 1955, p. 31.
- ¹⁴Times Crescent, 29 March 1956.
- ¹⁵Interview with Linton, 16 March 1982.
- ¹⁶Times Crescent, 10 November 1960.
- ¹⁷Washington Star, 16 December 1959.
- ¹⁸John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "Report," by the Maryland Committee for the Abolition of Slot Machines and Commercial Bingo." Parran Papers, 0850042, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Md.

¹⁹John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "A Study of the Constitutionality of Gambling by Means of Slot Machines in the State of Maryland," by Richard Johnson, n.d., Parran Papers, 0850042, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland.

²⁰Times Crescent, 10 January 1957.

²¹Charles County Correspondence, 1958, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

²²Washington Star, 14 February 1960.

²³Times Crescent, 25 February 1960; and 3 March 1960.

²⁴John T. Parran, Jr. Collection, "Report" by the Maryland Committee for the Abolition of Slot Machines, etc., p. 8. Parran Papers, 0850042, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland.

²⁵Interview with Gunn, 23 April 1982.

²⁶Interview with Gunn, 23 April 1982.

²⁷Times Crescent, 19 January 1961; and 5 January 1961.

²⁸Interview with Gunn, 23 April 1982.

²⁹Times Crescent, 23 March 1961.

³⁰Ibid., 29 July 1961.

³¹Interview with Mitchell, 2 June 1982.

³²Times Crescent, 23 November 1961, Reprinted from Baltimore Sun.

³³Letter to Tawes from Charles F. Kirkley, dated 20 January 1962, Slot Machine File, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³⁴Letter from Tawes to Kirkley, dated 6 February 1962, Slot Machine File; Letter from Tawes, dated 9 February 1962, 16 March 1962, and 25 April 1962, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³⁵Times Crescent, 10 May 1962.

³⁶Maryland Independent, 17 May 1962.

³⁷Press Release from WMAL, dated 7 July 1962, Slot Machine File, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³⁸Maryland Independent, 30 August 1962.

- ³⁹Interview with Parran, 29 March 1982.
- ⁴⁰Press Release, dated 20 September 1962, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴¹Letters to Tawes, dated 26 September 1962; from Kirkley and Hume. Slot Machine Correspondence. Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴²Slot Machine Committee File, notes, no date, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴³Press Release, dated 20 September 1962, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁴"Slot Machine Study Report," 12 January 1963, pp. 4, 10, 11. Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁵"Slot Machine Study Report," 12 January 1963, pp. 13, 14, 15. Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁶Letter to Emory from Paul E. Nystrom, dated 11 January 1963. Slot Machine Committee File, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁷Maryland Crime Investigating Committee, Inc., "Gambling Devices Within the United States: A National Report with Emphasis on the Maryland Scene." 1 February 1963. pp. 32, 39. Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁸Press Release, dated 20 September 1962, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁴⁹Memo to Members of the Slot Machine Study Committee, dated 25 February 1963, from Emory. Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⁵⁰Interview with Linton, 19 March 1982.

CHAPTER V

PHASE-OUT OF SLOT MACHINES

Slot machine interests were stunned. They never organized an effective challenge to Governor Tawes. "We never thought it would really happen," said one operator, "the machines had always been there."¹ Slot machine interests made a number of attempts to delay, or abrogate the legislation after 1963, all to no avail. Governor Tawes remained firm. He had promised to eliminate the slot machines, and as of July 1, 1968, they were legislated to disappear from the state.

The anti-slot machine bill provided only for abolishing slot machines, and it provided no economic assistance to southern Maryland. A Senate Resolution, written by J. Frank Raley, Jr. of St. Mary's County in 1963 requested the Legislative Council of Maryland to study and then report to the Governor "on problems created by the enactment of state-wide slot machine legislation."² In July, 1963, the Legislative Council toured the southern Maryland counties effected by slot machine removal and met with county leaders.³

In November all the counties presented economic impact reports

indicating the extent of damage they would feel from slot machine phase-out. The Charles County Chamber of Commerce organized a most comprehensive study. It pointed out that the area's economy depended upon "foreign dollars, whose sources are sale of tobacco, the tourist industry, and Federal government payroll." All three sources were in danger and the Chamber effectively demonstrated this to the Council.⁴

The Chamber's Executive Secretary, Captain Francis Busey, joined with the County's legislative delegation to meet with the Legislative Council.⁵ The group explained the economic loss of slot machine removal and noted also the recent United States surgeon general's attack on tobacco, which was another major source of county income. The delegation observed that the Naval facility at Indian Head had recently undergone a reduction in force, which effected Charles County's economy. The Chamber of Commerce calculated that 1,024 jobs would be lost when the slot machines were removed, thus effecting the family incomes of 3,548 persons. It suggested a 74 cent increase in the tax rate would be required to replace the revenues of the county government.⁶

Through the efforts of the southern Maryland representatives, the state arranged for many forms of aid to the area. Taxes ordered

all the state agencies to cooperate with the Department of Economic Development, which he selected to organize the efforts. In December, 1964, members of the Maryland assembly and leaders from southern Maryland organized the Tri-County Committee for Community Action, later known as the Tri-County Council.⁷ Governor Tawes officially recognized it as an initiating agency for the three southern Maryland counties in 1965, "to co-ordinate plans and projects for the development of human and economic resources in the Southern Maryland region."⁸ The Council received grants from the state, assisted in recruiting industry to move into the area and made recommendations for economic assistance.

The state of Maryland studied additional markets for Maryland tobacco, especially in Europe. The state roads commission initiated road construction projects in southern Maryland counties. Education benefited from the state's largess, for St. Mary's Seminary became St. Mary's College, a four year liberal arts college with an expanded building program, and Charles County received money for a college campus.

Responding to Democratic pleas for additional assistance, Tawes created the St. Mary's City Commission to begin reconstruction of the

old town to generate tourist interest. Port Tobacco's old court house gained money for reconstruction and St. Clements Island for preserving its shoreline. State parks expanded at Point Lookout, General Smallwood, and Cederville. Economically, the state strove to assist the southern Maryland area. Then in 1967, a psychological boost assisted the area as well. In December of that year, responding to gambling requests, the state examined its gambling industry. In one of the hearings, the Chairman noted that the FBI "has advised this Commission that they find no evidence of any operation by racketeers or gangsters in connection with the slot machines in Southern Maryland."⁹

Organized crime could never have survived in the early days of legal slot machines in Charles County. The population was too small, everyone knew their neighbor or frequently was related to him. The Court House in La Plata was dominated by the same names for years. Strangers were not common. The very insular attitudes and qualities of southern Maryland kept the slot machines free of organized crime. By the middle of the 1950s, when gambling emerged into a big industry, Charles County regulated its slot machines and the large casinos. The toughest licensing laws of southern Maryland were the ones for Charles

County.

The threat of organized crime never materialized, but southern Maryland saw family disruptions, petty crime, gaudy neon-lit casinos and itself sensationalized in the press. The anti-gambling forces emphasized these elements, and Tawes, a shrewd politician, joined their ranks. Tawes had no complaints against slot machines, however Tawes did hope to gain a large reform vote by leading the way to abolish the machines. His election in 1962 combined with Democratic victories in southern Maryland. Unfortunately, the Governor's party witnessed a voter backlash in 1966 with the next state election. Nearly every elected office in southern Maryland went to Republicans, who hoped to save the machines at the last moment.

By the late 1970s, all that remained of slot machines in Charles County were abandoned and tawdry-looking casinos and motels, a few isolated, broken and rusting neon lights and many recreation rooms in private homes with restored "antique" one-armed bandits. The bandits caused only reminiscences, no longer controversy. After 58 years of slot machines, on the night of June 30, 1968, all slot machines came out of casinos, drug stores and restaurants. The slot machine era had ended.

FOOTNOTES

¹Aubrey J. Burch, Sr. Interview, 7 June 1982.

²Senate Resolution Number 60, Slot Machine file, Tawes papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

³Legislative Council of Maryland Minutes, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

⁴A Report to the Legislative Council, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

⁵Interview with Francis Busey, Charles County Community College, La Plata, Maryland, 8 March 1982.

⁶Charles County Chamber of Commerce, A Report to the Legislative Council On Problems Created in Charles County by the Enactment of Statewide Slot Machine Legislation. November 5, 1963.

⁷Notes in Southern Maryland Economy File, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

⁸News Release, 15 May 1965, TriCounty Council File, Tawes Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

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