

LAS VEGAS – “TEDDY ROOSEVELT...” INTRO (TRS)

Jim Terr © 2017

(trolley sound) (train sound...)

TEDDY: Las Vegas, 1897. The grandest town in the southwest. This is long before the name “Las Vegas” came to be associated with gaming tables. There was plenty of gambling, though, and plenty of desperate men willing to shoot each other when things didn’t go their way – and they often did. In fact several historians have written about the extraordinary level of violence – and hangings – in Vegas in the 1880s. Far beyond those of Deadwood, Tombstone, Dodge City, Kansas, and the towns more famous for violence in the popular western literature.

But let’s look at the lighter side. Its local college was considered the Harvard of the Southwest, it was a haven for Opera, with a mighty opera house, theater, churches, a considerable synagogue, an electric trolley car system, telephone service, a tremendous roundhouse for servicing the many locomotives that came through. Fraternal organizations and sanitariums of all sorts, and the first million dollar hotel in the west, built at the beautiful hot springs near town. Presidents and dignitaries visited there, and slept there.

This was before it became a capital for filming western movies, because of course movies had barely been invented then.

Fly-fishing in the mountain streams, riding and hunting in the mountains, and a grand system of cutting and conveying huge blocks of ice from those cold mountains to the railroad system that came through, to cool the passengers and the hotels along the rail line, including a couple of grand hotels in the town itself.

I’m speaking of course of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Yes, New Mexico... no, no, that other one was no more than a tiny watering hole in the Nevada desert at the time, unknown to most of America.

Las Vegas New Mexico was one of the grandest – and rowdiest towns – in the southwest. The cattle ranching trade was in decline at the time, due to a change in which railroads took beef to market, and that made Las Vegas a perfect place for me to recruit the exceptionally tough, rough-riding cowboys I needed for a little expedition to Cuba.

Yes, Cuba. The Spanish had it under their thumb in 1897 and I wasn’t going to stand for it, as Naval Secretary of the United States – at the time. If it was going to take a little war to kick them out, so be it. Plus a little war is a grand adventure, in my book. My whole life was, and would continue to be, a grand adventure. This was one of the most interesting chapters. I hope you enjoy it.