

1932 - Oasis Palms a Getaway from the Depression

In the face of shifting fortunes in America, the third generation of Smiths found themselves grappling with new challenges. Curtis Smith, a World War I veteran who returned in 1918 with a broad worldview, witnessed the tumultuous era of the [Great Depression](#) and the end of Prohibition. During this time, Oasis Palms felt the mounting pressure from [Palm Springs](#) to the south and its burgeoning tourist-driven neighbor to the north, the city of Las Vegas. Curtis observed the construction of the monumental [Hoover Dam](#), a project that employed thousands of laborers with money to spend. However, the labor force commuting to the dam site chose to spend most of their weekends and money, in Las Vegas. The town struggled to lure travelers to visit Oasis Palms.

In response, Curtis Smith resolved to embrace vice as a means of survival after the Prohibition era, establishing multiple clandestine gambling establishments in Oasis

Palms. One was discreetly tucked within the restaurant, while the other found its home in the pool hall. Both venues were stocked with the ever-enticing one-armed bandits, and the restaurant also featured some of the same table games that could be found 150 miles north in the burgeoning Las Vegas. Smith discreetly marketed these destinations to construction project managers, foremen, railroad executives, and affluent travelers traversing Route 66 positioning Oasis Palms as an upscale alternative to Las Vegas. However, his promotional efforts were constrained to word-of-mouth, given the illicit nature of the entire operation.



Though Curtis Smith enjoyed initial success with his plan, maintaining the quality of

traffic necessary for the town's survival proved challenging. Much of the vehicular traffic on Route 66 consisted of low-income people fleeing the [Dust Bowl of Oklahoma](#) or job-seeking drifters in California. As traffic and revenue dwindled, the town's buildings and infrastructure began to deteriorate. The weight of the Depression bore down on Oasis Palms, mirroring the struggles faced by the rest of the nation. The town's image was tarnished as the seedier elements took hold. When authorities finally cracked down on the illegal gaming operations, and with little else to entice train travelers, Santa Fe once again threatened to discontinue its daily service to Oasis Palms. The town again found itself at a critical juncture.