

BECK, JESSIE

Jessie Howard, a thirty-four year-old divorced mother, came to Reno to work as a roulette dealer in Harolds Club in the late 1930s. While on vacation in Texas, Pappy Smith had offered Beck a job after he spotted her quick mathematical skills while she was working as a cashier. After coming to work at Harolds Club, Beck soon rose through the casino ranks, building a reputation for friendliness and good business sense.

Her third husband, Fred Beck, owned and operated the keno, poker, pan, and horse race book concessions at Harolds Club. Jessie took over the operation when her husband died in January 1954. She lost the lease to the concessions in 1970 when Harolds Club was sold to the Hughes Corporation.

Jessie Beck bought the Riverside in 1971 for \$3 million and hired a staff of former Harolds Club employees who had quit or been terminated by the Hughes Corporation. She spent most of her working hours roaming the casino floor, sometimes staying as late as 3 A.M. Frequently, she took over a 21 game and dealt for hours.

Beck, who was known as the Gambling Grandmother of Reno, spent untold thousands of hours and thousands of dollars doing favors for servicemen in Viet Nam and all over the world. The Award of Merit, the highest honor the Defense Department can give a civilian, was presented to her in 1968. In 1969, then-governor Paul Laxalt named her a Distinguished Nevadan.

On March 10, 1978, spokesmen for the Riverside Hotel and the Overland Hotel announced that Harrah's was purchasing the Riverside so it could trade it to Overland, Inc., for that firm's old hotel-casino site at Center Street and Commercial Row. Pick Hobson was licensed to operate the Riverside the following month. This transaction was favorable to all parties, because it allowed Jessie Beck to retire from gaming and Pick Hobson to get back into the gaming business, and it gave Bill Harrah the key piece of real estate he needed for the parking garage in his multimillion-dollar expansion on North Center Street.

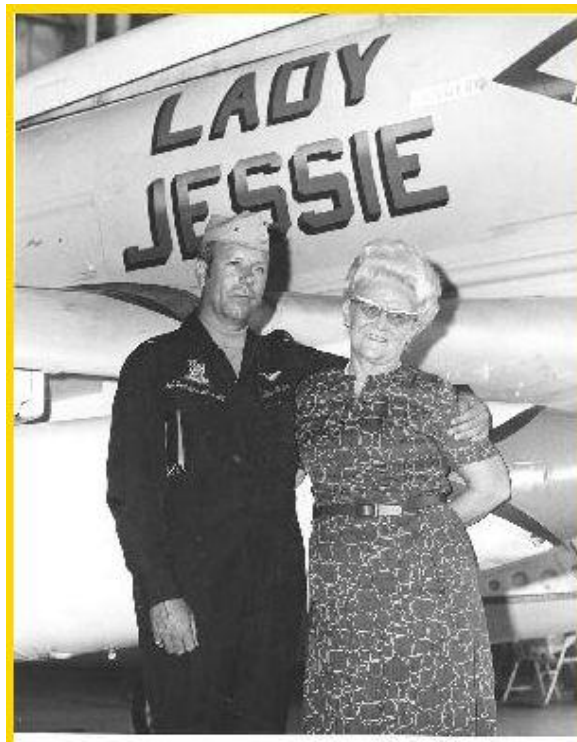
Jessie Beck died on July 17, 1987, at the age of eighty-three. She was a lifetime member of the St. Mary's Hospital Guild, the Washoe County Medical Center League, and the VFW Auxiliary, and she was active in the Republican Party.

Shortly after her death, Harold Smith Jr. said of Mrs. Beck, "She was a credit to the gaming industry, to Reno, to the state of Nevada and to all concerned. We all held her in highest regard. Jessie was a lady." And Helen Mapes, wife of former casino owner Charles Mapes, described Mrs. Beck as "a very gracious person; a loving, caring, generous person. And she was a very good businesswoman."

Source: *Reno Evening Gazette*, 31 Mar. 71; *Nev. St. Journal*, 10 Mar. 78, 18 July 87 (obit. And photo)



A parade float sponsored and staffed by Harolds Club, ca. 1947. Left to right: **Jessie Beck** (of Riverside fame), Monita McKinley, Fluff Webster, Chuck Webster (as Uncle Sam), and Bessie Hoyt. Courtesy of Darl and Marj Voss.



LCDR Don "Super" Snyder (I) and "Lady Jessie" Beck, circa 1971.



Officers from VA163 "Saints" and VA-164 "Ghost Riders" surround "Lady Jessie" Beck, circa 1967.