

This is 1 of course, not Freestone.

Aug 4, 1957

which pool

P. B-1

Colonial Beach

By Phil Casey
Staff Reporter

At Freestone Point, Va., they waste no time writing love letters in the sand. They're up on the main deck of the S. S. Freestone playing more than 200 slot machines and glad to break even.

The beach is dry and with out games, in true Virginia style. But the boat is in Charles County, Md., and things are different there. The old excursion boat, now in gaudy retirement, is moored at a wharf beyond the low water mark and therefore beyond Virginia's anti-drinking and gaming laws.

There's gambling on the first deck and drinks on all four decks, and food, too. When the weekend rush down the bumpy, unfinished three-mile road from U.S. 1 heading there are sometimes lines of visitors clutching fistfuls of silver waiting for a crack at the slots.

A surprising part of the crowd, the ship's employees say, is from Charles County and other areas where the slot machine is nearly as common as the cold, but doesn't come with a view of the Potomac River in the background.

Bufs Undaunted

Even physical infirmity, the ravages of time and the bumpy, dusty road fail to discourage the slot machine buffs. Friday night, just before the rush began, a man in an aluminum wheelchair rode relentlessly up and down the long rows of machines, pausing frequently to try his luck. A boy on crutches maneuvered along the deck watching the bright lights flash on the pin-ball machines. Gray-haired women, undaunted by age, yanked with vigor at slot machine levers. A small boy stood on tiptoe, peering into a machine's payoff slot and was outraged every time his mother didn't win, which was most of the time.

"Ought to see this boat when the sightseeing boat comes down from Washington," a waiter said. "Place is packed. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, kids all over the boat."

"Most people leave their money here," another waiter said. "They win so what do they do? They spend it at the bars. I noticed even the help spends here."

"It's much better in here," said a man at a slot machine. "That water's brackish. I tasted it."

"I think some chemicals floated down river from somewhere," a guard said.

A soft breeze blows over Colonial Beach, Va., but it ruffles no hairs among the gray-haired ladies who make up a substan-

tial part of the crowd that spends days, nights and money at about 400 slot machines on the enclosed piers.

"Daytimes, it's mostly women," said a boy making change in the Reno pier, biggest of the three slot machine centers on the beach. "Nights, we get everybody."

An elderly lady watching the fruit spin in a slot machine said, "Oh, yes, I've had my jackpots. I'm nearly 80."

The Reno and the Monte Carlo, which, along the Jackpot pier, are beyond the low water mark and out of Virginia jurisdiction, are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"Do people play slot machines at 2 a. m. and 3 a. m.," a bartender asked rhetorically. "I guess they do. They do here, anyway. Play all hours. There's some machines being played almost all the time."

The noise of the levers and spinning cherries, lemons and oranges reaches its crescendo on those nights when bonuses are given for the first jackpot.

When the announcement of the jackpot contest is made, the machines go into swift, strident and simultaneous frenzy. Hundreds of arms tug decisively at levers, and the noise is numbing. Ordinary, non-financial types of music are provided by juke boxes and orchestras elsewhere on the piers.

Small family groups cluster about some of the machines. Children—who can't pull the levers until they're 16—stand by wishing their parents well in their bouts with the slots. They assist in scooping up the winnings.

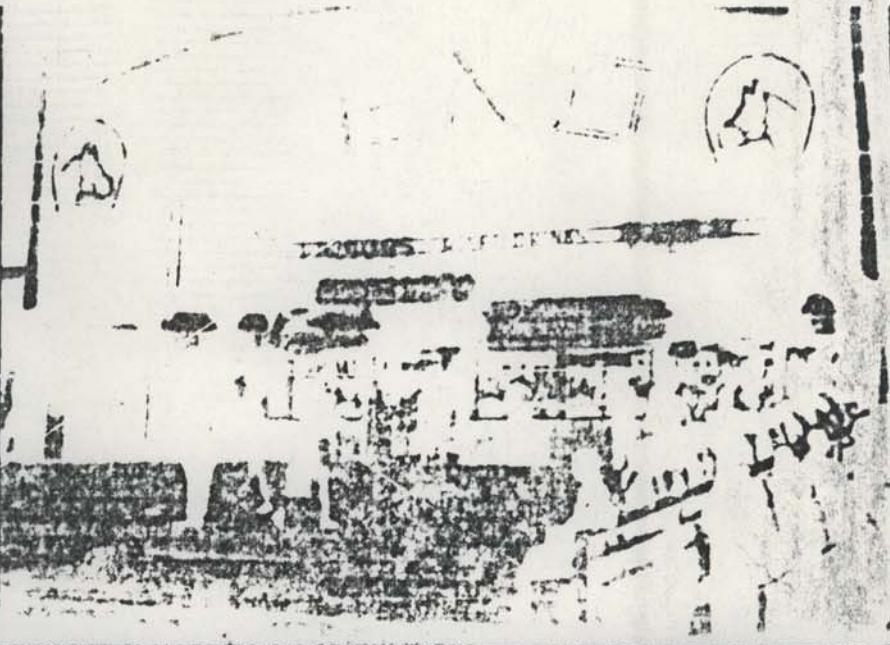
Conversation is at a minimum. The players are silent and busy, watching the spinning fruit and yanking the levers. If you want to talk, the bar is handy.

Hard Feelings

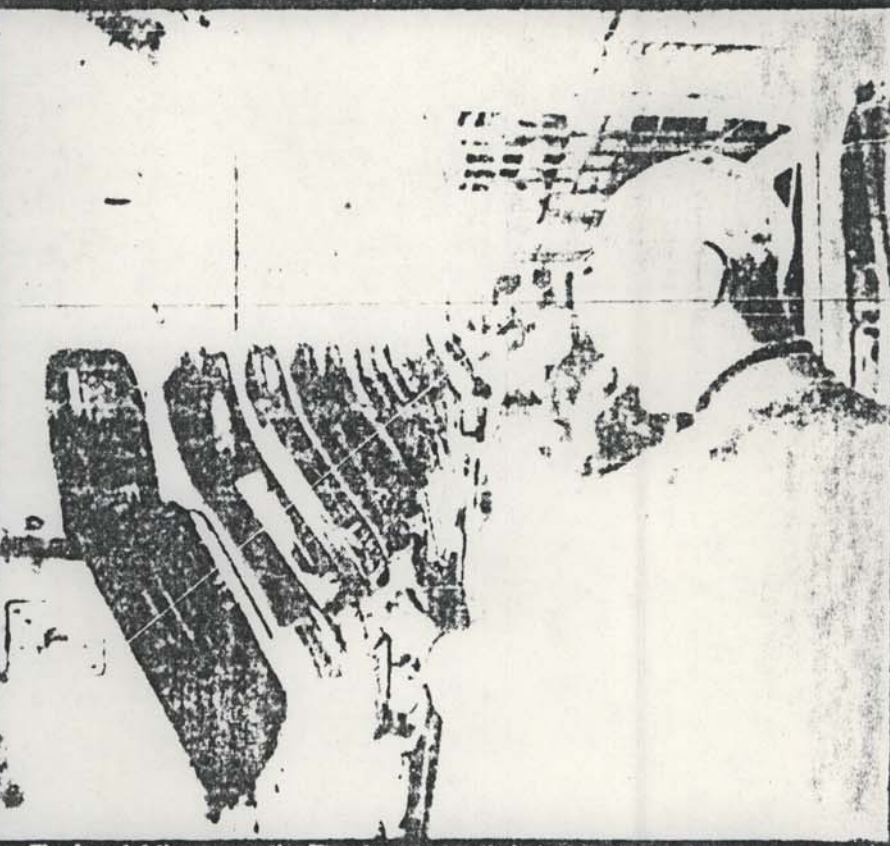
The smallest of the piers, the Jackpot, is closed from midnight—"unless a lot of people want to keep playing"—until 8 a. m. Sometimes, at 8 a. m., there'll be someone waiting for the place to open.

"You'd be surprised, sometimes, at how many people want to play the machines at 8 a. m.," said the man behind the bar.

The fact that people are



The Reno, just out of Virginia jurisdiction because it is built on a pier beyond the low-water mark, is the biggest gambling establishment at Colonial Beach.



The hopeful line up on the Freestone to try their luck with the one-arm bandits.

Banneckburn Difficulties

able to play slot machines on the Virginia shore at Colonial Beach and Freestone is a source of contention and hard feeling between Maryland and Virginia officials. Since 1950, when Charles County legalized the machines, the Colonial Beach piers have provoked controversy. The S.S. Freestone, which began operating this year, has re-

question and the Council is approval. "Why, if I ever hit that machine that pays \$1250 on a quarter, I'll die," said a bartender. "They'll have to bury me right here."

Forecasts on Airfile

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