

WAL Jr and the House of Ill Fame

I was talking to Dad after passing on to him the newspaper (the "L.A. Times" article of July 1989 about Chuck and Ginny Barrett's whorehouses in Battle Mountain, NV.) Dad was startled and (somewhat) amused, and then said, "Well, when I was in the whorehouse business I didn't get the newspaper coverage." Oh, yeah, I said, and then, "Really?" "Really really?" And this is how the story unfolded.



In the late 1950's Henry John Oliva owned the Rincon Cliff House between Ventura and Carpinteria, a pink-painted restaurant and hotel with (at one time) a sea-water swimming pool; and he got into serious financial problems. To help him, Dad, Perry Gates and Lee King loaned him some money, taking a third trust deed as security. Well, the problems were too serious, and in time the place went into bankruptcy. So the three men

had to buy the Cliff House to protect their investment. But they of course had no interest in operating the hotel/restaurant, and leased it to the widow of "Nick" Knickerbocker, the man who had originally built the Cliff House. And everything seemed to be okay.

Then one day Bill Hill, then Ventura County Sheriff, called Dad and said, "Bill, can I come and talk to you?" "Of course, glad to see you, please come," for of course Dad was not only a friend but a sheriff's deputy. Hill came in, sat in the chair across Dad's desk, and said, "Bill, what is going on at the Rincon Cliff House." "Why, what do you mean?" "No, really, what's going on up there?" "Please, I haven't any idea what you're talking about." So Hill revealed that Mrs. Knickerbocker, her twin sister, and a black woman were entertaining customers there. So while the sheriff was still there Dad called Lee King and asked if he knew what was happening, but of course King didn't either. The three partners quickly evicted the tenants, but Dad kept it very quiet for years, until the statute of limitations had passed, for he could only visualize the headlines in the "Star Free-Press" - "Prominent Lawyer Operates House of Ill Fame." Mom said, when I showed this to her, said that Dad said that it was not a respectable place.