

# **Ten Dollars on the Nose**

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In the 1970s gambling in Massachusetts was taken out of the hands of hard working citizens called 'bookies' and put into the greedy, sticky mitts of the politicians in the form of a State Lottery. I always felt that somehow an honest crook like my local numbers guy was more on the 'up and up' than the people running the 'legal' numbers racket.

Now as we get close to two decades into the 21st. century, I am more certain than ever, that I am right.

Here then, with a full measure of cynicism is my tale of old school gambling, entitled: "Ten Dollars On The Nose".

Many years ago before the Massachusetts State Lottery transformed gambling from a shady activity conducted in the backrooms of stores on Main Street to a shady activity conducted in the front rooms of stores on Main Street; the only way to gamble in Hyannis was to contact a man called the Colonel.

The Colonel had no office of his own in the capital city of Cape Cod, but occupied every building on Main Street at one time or another during the course of the business day. A full service purveyor of wagering, he would take a bet on a horse, a dog, or the last four numbers of the treasury balance - which were printed daily in the Cape Cod Times.

Writing down the wagers on little white slips of paper, the Colonel had only one rule - the minimum bet had to be one dollar. If a person bet a buck on the treasury balance and had the winning numbers, he or she would win an even \$500.00 - with no taxes taken out.

Few people knew his real name. He did not acquire the rank of Colonel in military service, nor was the title picked up as some sort of a non-monetary honorarium. The man was so named because of his inordinate fondness for fried chicken. Every day, seven days a week for lunch and dinner, he strolled to the KFC restaurant and summoned a flock of chicken; original recipe, with biscuits and gravy.

On sunny Summer days the Colonel often asked for take-out and ate his chicken while sitting on a bench by the Main Street Merry Go Round and Penny Arcade. (Near the present day site of the President John F. Kennedy Museum)

Passers by would stop and chat for a few minutes. Before they left, the Colonel could be seen writing something on a small white slip of paper. Money changed hands.

On occasion a uniformed person would encounter the Colonel on the street or in a store. As often as not, money would change hands and something would be written on a tiny square of paper.

The Colonel was a very popular, if untidy, figure in Cape Cod's largest community. A best selling song of the era was not written for him; but the tune, "Mr. Five by Five", did describe him. He wasn't much over five feet tall and he wasn't much less than five feet wide.

Further, the long distances that he walked on his daily beat, tended to make him perspire; and if awards were given for diaphoresis (sweating), the Colonel would have taken first, second and third places.

At this point, it must be stressed again, if this narrative is to make proper sense, that the Colonel was a man liked and trusted by the entire city; in fact by virtually every adult man and woman on the whole of Cape Cod. People came from as far East as Provincetown and as far West as Sandwich, to do business with him.

His opinions on horse races, politics, wine, and whiskey were highly prized. He never flinched when he had to pay off on bets and he shelled out the first thing in the morning, right after breakfast.

He was on a first name basis with every occupant of every cell in the Barnstable House of Correction, along with their jailers, their lawyers and even the judges who put them away. Selectmen, State Representatives and police chiefs called him friend. Some people say that even a certain President of the United States was a pal and customer of the Colonel's.

It has been stated that the Colonel was called the Colonel because of his zeal for fried chicken which he ate at noon and night. But in the early hours, at breakfast, the Colonel was a 'ham andegger'.

Daily, by eight in the morning, he smothered one of the stools at the counter of The Sunrise Cafe, where he polished off a platter of eggs, ham, fried potatoes and toast, with a bowl of baked beans on the side, a pot of coffee and two or three jelly donuts.

The Sunrise was host to a group of regulars that included working people, folks who were not allowed to cook in their rented rooms, and single people like the Colonel who didn't want to prepare his own food. One of the more recent regulars was a police officer named Charley Larson. He was relatively new to the Hyannis Force and had a reputation as a mean cop.

Larson watched the Colonel ravage his plate and leave it emptier than a fire station after a five alarm call. For reasons Officer Larson himself probably did not know, he took a dislike to the Colonel.

After finishing his meal, the Colonel quickly filled out a few betting slips for some of his fellow diners, collected the money and set out on his rounds. Larson, who was on duty, followed close behind.

All morning long the policeman dogged the rotund Colonel. In the afternoon when the Colonel stopped in at the Five Cent to a Dollar Department store to service a large group of customers, he noticed that he was still being shadowed by Larson.

From the store, the Colonel crossed Main Street and headed for the docks, his shirt pocket now stuffed with a small pile of white betting slips and a larger stack of green paper money.

Winded from the walk, and sweating from the Summer sun, the Colonel sat on a bench overlooking busy Hyannis Harbor. He watched as one of the hulking ferries departed for Nantucket Island, with hundreds of passengers and dozens of cars aboard.

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