

# The Trinidad Hoard

*By: Johnny Duckworth*

*Happy Hunting!*

I have always wondered when the old floor machines were taken out of service just where they went. As we all know so well many of them found their fate at the local dump while others were gutted out and transformed into strange looking liquor cabinets. You can imagine my excitement when I was able to track down the story of an actual hoard that surfaced in Trinidad, Colorado.

I have made three separate deals on upright floor machines that originally came from that hoard in Colorado and this set me on the trail to learn more. Here I will share what I know and if any readers have additional details, send them along.

The prices make nostalgic reading, too!

The story starts out in Trinidad, Colorado where long time operator Johnny Pricco had ran gambling machines in the area all his life. In Trinidad he set up machines in the Grand Hotel and the Century Brewing building, among other places. In the early 1960's he was getting into his late eighties and he had at least 20 complete upright floor machines and almost as many "parts machines." They had all been stored away on the 3rd floor of the old ice house building in Trinidad.

Cleo Finklin of Raton, New Mexico, who had worked as a mechanic for Johnny years earlier had seen them covered with a thick layer of dust and grime. They hadn't seen the light of day for decades! Cleo pried the entire load out of Johnny for \$300, and with his friend Joel Sanderson, they hauled them all back to Raton. Joel's "payment" for his help was one of the machines which turned out to be a Caille Bullfrog! You

probably know that tradition has it the Caille Brothers learned of the Mills Cricket, so they came out with the Bullfrog as a competitor. In real life, bullfrogs eat crickets, you know! In any event, as the hobby grew and more information was learned, it developed that Mills Crickets, while scarce and desirable, were available with some regularity, but a Caille Bullfrog was the rarest of the rare.

A large truck with an open bed and high sides was borrowed, and the several dozen machines packed in. After sorting them out, Cleo sold most of the intact machines for a few hundred dollars each. Some of the machines that had music sold for even more. As to the parts machines from the Trinidad hoard, they were unceremoniously hauled off to the local dump. Read this and weep, for today they would form the basis of reconstructing many fine machines.

There was little information available on the rarity or value of such machines. For example a Musical Dewey, desirable then and now, could be priced higher in comparison to a non-musical Caille Venus. Their legality was uncertain in some areas, and in any event there was no community of collectors. Those interested in old slots enjoyed them in private.

My first buy from the Trinidad group was a Mills Musical Judge, which I picked up from Gary Sturtridge, of Tonganoxie, Kansas, over 10 years ago. This had been sold by Cleo out of the hoard to the owner of the De Anza motel in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He had also bought a Mills Cricket from the hoard as well. Roger "Waldo" Kislingbury of Pasadena, California, who is also part blood hound, tracked down these two machines

in 1968. Waldo was able to buy both machines for \$500. He kept the Cricket and then sold the Musical Judge the next day to Dave Bowers. Gary would acquire the machine from the Bowers collection in the early 1980s. I won't mention Dave selling a Caille Triple, Mills Cricket, and another machine as a package deal to Walt Bellm for \$7,500 in the 1970s! This was still in the early years of collector interest.

The second Trinidad machine I found was the Caille Bullfrog which was still owned by Joel Sanderson. Joel was instrumental in passing the bill to legalize slot machines in New Mexico. His wife was also a long time judge in Raton and they always had public officials stopping by the home to visit. The officials would always mention that the machine was supposedly illegal as it stood tall against the living room wall.

The third and last Trinidad prize I was able to dig up was a 2-Bit Musical Victor which Cleo had sold for \$500 to a friend in Raton. This was an especially high price at the time, as Cleo thought it was one of the best-preserved in the group. I purchased this machine in the spring of 2009 in Red River, New Mexico. The owner had passed away and left the machine to his son.

It is always great to know a little history when you find a machine but it doesn't always happen that way. The photos accompanying this article show some of the other machines that were sold off. I am sure they are in great collections today. You might also enjoy the photos of the Grand Hotel in Trinidad with Johnny's machines lined up and waiting for their next victim.

The list of floor machines from the hoard in which are known are the Caille Bullfrog, 2-Bit Musical Victor, Mills Cricket, Mills Musical Judge, Mills Jackpot Dewey, Watling Dewey, Watling Jackpot, Watling Big Six, and Watling Cupid. Now, I'll have to track down the remaining machines.

Or, perhaps you will find one.



Grand Hotel, Trinidad, Colo.



