



**Hazel Anna Sorensen Smith**

**August 31, 1911 ~ September 2, 1991**

In August of 1992, the City of West Wendover adopted Resolution 92-7, establishing August 31<sup>st</sup> as **Anna Smith Day**. This was to honor an exceptional lady, businesswoman and friend who had such a significant impact on the community of West Wendover. The City believes in the importance of continuing to honor her and to educate the public about who Anna Smith was and what she meant to our community.

### **Who is Anna Smith?**

Anna Smith was born Hazel Anna Sorensen on August 31, 1911 in Mt. Pleasant, Utah. She relocated to Wendover in 1933 along with other family members and while in Wendover met William F. “Bill” Smith. Bill Smith was a hearty entrepreneur and individualist who came to Wendover in 1924 riding the Western Pacific Railroad with nothing but the clothes on his back. In 1926 after working a couple of years at the local potash plant as a mechanic

and saving \$500 he purchased, along with his partner Herman Eckstein, a small service station which sat along the newly built Victory Highway (now Wendover Boulevard) on the Utah/Nevada border. The new business became State Line Service. This service station catered to the booming automobile and travel industry which roared to life at this same time with the completion of the transcontinental highway across the United States connecting east coast to west coast.



*State Line Service (cobble stone station) c.1930*



*State Line Hotel/ Casino & Service 1939*

In 1931, gaming was legalized in Nevada and that cobble stone service station took another leap forward and truly turned into a traveler’s oasis on now Highway 40/50; hosting a restaurant, hotel rooms and now, gaming. The State Line Casino was one of the first businesses to apply for and be issued a gaming license by the State of Nevada.

However, not long after gaming was introduced and the business was starting to grow Bill’s partner Mr. Eckstein passed away and his son took his place as Bill’s partner.

The new arrangement however was not working and Bill and his new partner had several disagreements about business policy which led both to agree that one should “buy-out” the other... but which one would it be? They settled it in the only way such things could be settled, the “Nevada way”. Bill and his partner with legal witnesses present at the Elko County Courthouse flipped a silver dollar to determine which of them would sell out

their stake in the business to the other and walk away. Bill was given the option as the senior partner to make the call, the coin was tossed and he called for heads. The coin bounced and spun and then finally settled...it came up heads...Bill Smith was the winner and now the sole owner of the business.

Not long thereafter in the spring of 1935 Bill married Anna and the two not only became partners in life but partners in business and continued building a better future for them and their family.

In 1958 just six years after Bill had erected the world's largest neon mechanical cowboy "Wendover Will" over the



*State Line Hotel/ Casino & Service 1950*

Wendover skyline to promote their fast growing business he passed away one night while reading in bed. Anna was heartbroken and unsure of the future of the business without her husband. She was soon convinced by her and Bill's longtime Assistant General Manager Mr. Gene L. Jones that together they could continue to grow the business, prosper and be successful, together. Anna chose a path for the future, one of many decisions she made which would eventually bring about more prosperity to the community; she made Mr. Jones General Manager and her new business partner and together they moved forward investing millions and building the company through the decades into what became West Wendover's premier hotel/casino/resort, the State Line Hotel & Casino. This business was the community's largest employer and the basis of support for hundreds of families. As such, and as usual, Anna felt a special obligation not just to her employees but, to the community as the business grew.



*Bill Smith & son Jimmy with Wendover Will 1952*

She was an instrumental force in bringing about economic development in the community by not only investing in the gaming business but also general lodging and service businesses for



*Anna with partner and General Manager Gene L. Jones 1979*

travelers such as acquiring the old A-1 casino in 1972 which eventually was renovated into Jim's Casino; to operating gas stations and building the State Line Inn, a motel facility in Wendover, Utah. These along with many other projects were important business investments which helped the community but, Anna also believed that good business meant securing a strong community of families. One area of projects which Anna and her partner Mr. Jones focused on was solving

housing shortages in the community in order to assist their current and future employees. They solved this dilemma through the renovation of former WWII housing facilities as well as the construction through the years of new homes, apartment complexes and mobile home parks in order to provide adequate housing opportunities for families.

Through the years she was not shy about stepping up when called upon. She loved Wendover and she never shied away from letting others know what the community and its people meant to her. After more than 50 years of being at the forefront of progress in Wendover, Anna was witness to something that perhaps she never imagined all those years ago. The creation of a new city and a new citizenry; one which she had in fact nurtured for so many decades and literally helped build from the ground up. West Wendover was incorporated as the 18<sup>th</sup> city in Nevada on July 1, 1991. Just two months later on September 2, 1991, Anna passed away peacefully at home at the age of 80.



Eleven years after her death in the fall of 2002, the State Line Hotel & Casino was acquired by the Ensign Family of southern Nevada (Generation 2000, LLC) ending the Smith Family's casino/hotel legacy of more than 75 years and as holder to the longest singly held gaming license in Nevada. Today the facilities Anna helped build from the ground up continue to operate and provide employment in the community as the Wendover Nugget.

### **The Importance of Her Life & Legacy**

Throughout her life in Wendover, Anna showed unselfish dedication and service to the community. She always looked for ways to help the community have a brighter future. At times, she would lend a personal hand, such as driving a pregnant friend in labor across the



*USO Club – Wendover Field – c.1940's*

desolate Salt Flats to ensure the baby was delivered at a proper medical facility or by volunteering to help with local entertainment at the USO Club for those young soldiers training at Wendover Field during WWII. Or she would help in other ways through various programs which she either participated in and/or helped to financially support.

From local church activities to the American Legion Auxiliary, Anna was a generous benefactor to all. She had a strong spiritual faith and was instrumental in promoting and assisting in the funding to build both the Wendover LDS chapel as well as the construction of the San Felipe Catholic church. If she wasn't helping with fieldtrips to Salt Lake City museums, opera's and plays for the local school children to make certain they had exposure to the arts, she was contributing financially to other local programs to provide youth in the community with the same opportunities found in much larger cities from the sciences to sports.

One such prominent program which Anna created was the W.F. and Anna Smith Scholarship Foundation. Through this Foundation, Anna ensured through the years that hundreds upon hundreds of deserving Wendover and West Wendover High School graduates were provided the financial support through scholarships to continue their education beyond high school and be on their way to reaching their true potential in life. As a result of her Foundation, these students from the Wendover area, who otherwise may not have had an opportunity for higher education, now hold degrees from various universities and colleges. Many are entrepreneurs or are in the employ of companies nationally and internationally as well as working for public institutions. And, many of these students over the years have returned to the Wendover area to live and raise their own families and continue what could be considered Anna's truest legacy...

*a legacy of tireless work, dedication and commitment to one's family, friends, neighbors and community to form a foundation for a more enlightened, prosperous and giving citizenry, leading to a better and brighter future for everyone.*

Anna Smith truly had an exceptional heart and spirit to have seen what she did arriving in Wendover nearly a century ago; a small dusty stop on the edge of the salt flats somewhere in the middle of nowhere, and having the fortitude to not just see the community as it was then, but to see it as it could be and to make a commitment to nurture and shape it for the future.

Anna has received several honors from the community over the years. One which she would have certainly cherished and smiled on, given her support of the education of our youth, would have been the new elementary school built in 1996 in Wendover, Utah, bearing her name: Anna Smith Elementary.



*Anna Smith Elementary – Wendover, Utah – built 1996*

We continue to do our best to honor your memory Anna and this month, we take yet another opportunity to do so and to wish you a Happy Birthday!