

## 50 years later, S&T historian finds out what happened in Vegas

December 29 2011

---

(PhysOrg.com) -- "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" may be the city's motto, but as Dr. Larry Gragg can testify, discovering what happened years ago in Las Vegas just takes some digging.

While researching an upcoming book about perceptions of the city, Gragg stumbled upon references to an early 1960s NBC television series called "[Las Vegas Beat](#)." Unfamiliar with the show, he found that although a pilot episode of the detective series had been made, the project had been scrapped.

"The show was killed by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce," says Gragg, chair and Curators' Teaching Professor of history and political science at Missouri University of Science and Technology. "The pilot included several murders, and the city feared week after week of this televised violence would impact tourism and, more importantly, bring increased scrutiny from the federal government into organized crime."

Intrigued by his discovery, Gragg wrote an article, "[Protecting a City's Image: The Death of Las Vegas Beat, 1961](#)," which was published in the Popular Culture Association in the South's fall 2011 issue of *Studies in Popular Culture*.

"This is the most fun project I've worked on," says Gragg. His sources for the article included chamber of commerce meeting minutes, newspaper clippings and telephone interviews with the show's lead actor, Peter Graves, best known for the television series "Mission Impossible,"

and actor Jamie Farr, best known for the [television series](#) "Mash." Gragg also interviewed "Las Vegas Beat" creator Andrew J. Fenady. Graves died in 2010, shortly after the interview.

"I even bought a copy of the series pilot on eBay," says Gragg. Fenady told him it was a bootlegged version.

According to several sources, "Las Vegas Beat" was a promising show. Graves told Gragg it was "the hottest thing" NBC had on its schedule that year. But Gragg found that several hotels' publicists went on record saying the series reflected poorly on the city. As the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce was about to file suit to stop production of the series, two sponsors pulled out because of 11 telegrams they had received, causing NBC to scrap it.

"Andrew Fenady said the telegrams threatened a Las Vegas boycott of the sponsors' products," says Gragg.

Gragg says another series, "Las Vegas File," was also in production at the same time. The Warner Bros. series was also scrapped.

"This is more than a saga of one of many failed television pilots," says Gragg. "It reveals how the nation's gambling Mecca felt threatened by a simple television program. Civic leaders and hotel owners understood that the federal government could eliminate their vital gambling industry if Americans perceived that it was an industry tainted by violence and controlled by organized crime."

After a federal crackdown of organized crime in Las Vegas in the 1970s and 80s, Gragg says the city is now run by corporations, not the mob. But hotel and casino owners still have a say in how their establishments are portrayed.

"Just watch 'CSI,'" he says. "The dead bodies aren't often found in a real casino -- they're usually fictitious."

Provided by Missouri University of Science and Technology

Citation: 50 years later, S&T historian finds out what happened in Vegas (2011, December 29)  
retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-12-years-st-historian-vegas.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.