By Steve Strahler

Eighty-two brotheals along the riverfront. And payoffs.

"In the old days, everybody knew where the red light district was. Now, hell, they're all over town, in the best hotels," recalls Jerry G. Weiss of 227 N. Rebecca PI.

Punchboards in the back of taverns. And payoffs.

"Think it over, I can remember the good old Woodruff days. Licensing, examinations and a safe city with safe streets for the good Peoria women," lamego C. G. Bridgeman, living in Wallen, Minn.

Slot machines at the Main St. Steak n Shake. And payoffs.

"Whenever you tell you about the good old days — You wanna know about the good old days? — A wife didn't let her husband come to Peoria for a convention. She didn't trust him," contends Max J. Lipkin, former city corporation counsel.

The baseball pool at the Empire. And payoffs.

"Peoria was a wide-open town because of a fellow by the name of Ed Woodruff," says Lipkin.

Rosette tables at the Lyceum. And payoffs.

Thirty years after his death, the legacy of Woodruff's way of conducting business as Peoria's perennial mayor, his creed, "You can make prostitution illegal, but you can't make it unpopular," and his association with a privilege-ridden aldermanic system, lingers around City Hall like a hobo in a freight yard.

For example, one of the leaders of the petition drive to revert to partisan City Council elections in 1940, says the effort has been hampered by the mistaken impression that "we want to go back to what might be called the good old days,"

"It's been a bit distressing to me," says James E. Christopher, former chairman of Peoria County Republicans. He says he has no intention of abolishing council-manager government instituted here in 1953 as a reform measure.

Others — die-hard loyalists of strong mayor-aldermanic government — wouldn't mind going back to the so-called "Good Old Days."

Says South Sider, former alderman and unsuccessful 1955 mayoral candidate Harley Besselt: "The old system of government had a better calibre of people. They did more things for the people. We haven't got anything down on this end of town since this outfit took over."

Contending the city manager system is a "farce," Roosevelt, the taxpayers don't get enough for their tax dollars. He alleges the city payroll is loaded, to use his term, with "deadwood."

But Lipkin, who served under the old and the new, says "variances, everything had a price" in those days, and at least half of the 22 aldermen were on the take.

"We used to have state's attorneys that got immensely wealthy. I know one state's attorney who at the beginning of his term demanded $200,000 in cold cash (from the rackets). In those days, that was a lot of money."

Woodruff, short, wiry, and by accounts unpretentious and honest, was an early advocate of mixed gambling and prostitution, believing the city could profit from its licensing.

Hidden costs and inborn abuses, however, doomed the concept and, ultimately, ushered in reform.

During Woodruff's 11th and final term (1941-43), slot machine operators paid $20 a month to the city treasury — $20 a month for each machine.

Periodically, the Journal Star receives letters and quotes seasoned politicians bemoaning the passing of what they term "the good old Woodruff days." Were those days,

Payments were acknowledged by official receipts and published in local newspapers.

The largest such payment, $63,750, reportedly followed a conference at the Pere Marquette (now Hilton) Hotel attended by city officials, slot machine owners and an agent for the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The agent supposedly advised the gamblers that the "tax" payments were deductible.

On another occasion, Peoria букет operatives raised $2,100 — $6 per machine — to fight a bill proposing an increase in the city tax on букетes. The money found its way to the Board of Aldermen; the tax increase was unanimously defeated.

"I heard ol Mayor Woodruff on several different occasions say he got his money from the slot machines downtown, but he also said he left more in the treasury than any other," recalls the 66-year-old Weiss, an advocate of the ward system.

"Everybody knew that the politicians were running our city on profits from gambling and prostitution, that the streets were filthy and the swimming pools polluted and the schools getting years older, every year,"

"... Most decent people wouldn't go within 100 yards of City Hall and its smelly附件s. Bums cluttered its stages and threw their empty whisky bottles into the courthouse yard..."

There was a box in the Palace Tavern defined loosely as the first half of the 20th century when E. N. Woodruff was running for mayor of Peoria with frequent success, really that good? What are we missing?

where traffic offenders could leave their tickets to be "fixed" by their aldermen...

"There were 12 brothels — and a gambling dive operated un molested a block from City Hall. In high school we used to drive on a dare through the redlight district. I can still remember those women standing in the doorways."

According to former Mayor Robert D. Morgan, over 200 prostitutes were licensed. " picturesque $1,000 were brought to City Hall each Monday morning by vice operators, and the money was used to clean streets," recalls C. Walter Anderson, 76, former mayor of Averyville.

"And the people thought that was just fine," says Lipkin. "But I can tell you, they paid on the side, a hell of a lot more than they paid in court."

Morgan, now a federal judge, says "there were not convictions of people doing wrongful things... but it was generally assumed because gambling and prostitution were unchecked that public officials were profiting from it."

Judging from some of the statements made following a reform effort in 1945, they must have been.

Sheriff Charles Swords: "I am a liberal (then a Peoria term signifying an advocate of open gambling). If we have gambling, let the overflow go to

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