

# Fort Erie "Corridor To Hell" in Gay Nineties

Soon after the pool room closed the Fort Erie race track was built. It has been in operation for over fifty years. It was originally created for Buffalo patronage and special trains from that city to the track, combined with an improved ferry and jitney service, brought daily crowds to the track. For many years the track operated all summer with no restrictions from the government as to the number of days for racing and with no government tax on the betting.

The betting privileges at the track were assigned to a dozen bookies, each of whom had his own betting booth and posted his own odds. That system was most exciting because the bets were laid on the odds posted when

the ticket was purchased and not on the closing odds as in the present day pari-mutuel system.

The purses set up in the early days of the race track were not large and did not attract the best horses, and the races were not always honest, which gave splendid opportunities for the touts with their inside information. All of this added to the hazards and excitement of horse playing.

At the turning of the century Fort Erie also had a boxing arena, which brought many fistie encounters and a number of championship battles to that town. The arena was just one block from the ferry and with two boats running on fight nights, great crowds were brought over, but after the program it sometimes took two hours to get the patrons back to Buffalo. This was a legal sporting enterprise and ringside seats were always reserved for the crown attorney or his representative.

The public gradually lost interest in this sport, probably because of the difficulty of having to depend on ferry transportation and the arena was finally burned out.

Fort Erie itself has survived all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and is growing into quite a town. It's beautifully-appointed race track and the high standard of operation represent amazing transformations from the early days. This year, the spring meeting opens on Monday, April 7, and there are many patrons who can hardly wait.