

'THE GAMBLING CLUBS AND CHIPS OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY'

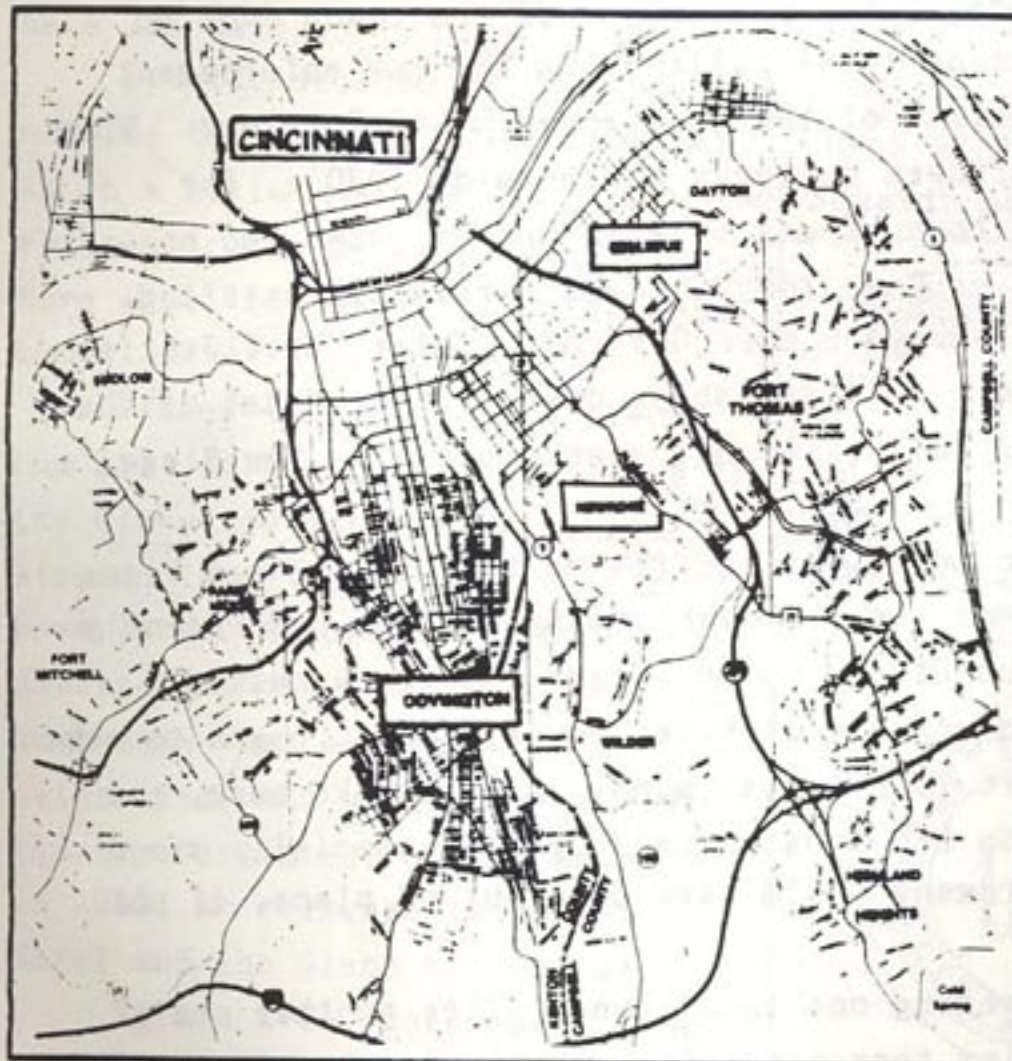
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From the 1930's through the early 1960's, Newport and Covington, Kentucky, sister cities just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Ohio, were nationally known as the illegal gambling center of the country. (See below.) The number and variety of gaming clubs in the rather small area of northern

Kentucky was unparalleled anywhere in the United States.

From the local equivalent of the Nevada "sawdust joint" to casinos in nightclubs more plush than anything in the sole state where gambling was legal, to small "bust-out joints," from which few customers ever escaped with anything left in their wallets, northern Kentucky had them all. Thanks to an investigative reporter for the Louisville Courier-Journal named Hank Messick, and to a few specialized collectors of the chips, dice and other



memorabilia of the Newport and Covington casinos, there is probably more known about the illegal gambling activities in that area than in most areas of the country where illegal gaming was prevalent.

This is the story of those clubs, and the chips they used for so long. As in many areas of the country, illegal gambling began in northern

Kentucky in earnest in the period immediately after Prohibition ended. The early gambling operators were, as was largely true elsewhere, ex-bootleggers who now faced legal competition and could no longer make a living with the same quality of liquor at the same prices.

Most of the early gaming operators in Newport/Covington worked at one time for George Remus, known as "King of the Bootleggers," and who controlled illicit prohibition-era liquor throughout southern Ohio, southern Indiana, and northern Kentucky. Jimmy Brink, Peter Schmidt, Buck Brady and Red Masterson (later to become known as "The Enforcer"), all were part of the Remus liquor business in the 1920's.

Initially, gambling in Kentucky was split largely along racial lines, with blacks patronizing and operating (although rarely owning) certain clubs, and whites patronizing and operating others. In the late 1930's, when the Cleveland Syndicate moved into the area, clubs were split again, this time along locally versus Syndicate-controlled lines.

Although all of the northern Kentucky clubs were started by locals, their success, and the tolerant attitude of the population of the towns (not to mention the direct interests of many local politicians and law enforcement officials), did not escape the notice of the "big money boys" for long. When gambling was rolling along in northern Kentucky in the mid- 1930's, for example, Reno was still the only town of any size in Nevada; Ben (no one called him Bugsy) Siegel and his partner Tony Cornero were still battling California Attorney General Earl Warren (later Governor, later Chief Justice of the United States) to keep their gambling ships open off the coast of that state. The Las Vegas Strip as we know it wasn't even a gleam in Ben Siegel's eye at the time.

The Cleveland Syndicate, run by Moe Dalitz (later the dean of Las Vegas pioneers, owning the Desert Inn and the Stardust) among others, had recently managed to force Dutch Schultz out of the Coney Island racetrack outside Cincinnati. They remodeled it and renamed it River Downs, and it began to make money. The group needed somewhere to put that money, and to make more, and the clubs of Newport and Covington had substantial appeal, especially since reporting the income to the government would have been out of place, if not downright dangerous.

The Syndicate moved in, squeezing one local owner after another out of their own clubs, or at least taking them over, leaving the locals as minority owners. The main local holdout, who became a rallying point for other locals trying to keep their clubs to themselves, was Peter Schmidt, one of George Remus' bootlegging lieutenants from the '20's. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Perhaps it would be best to take a look at the rest of the history of the Newport and Covington areas through the clubs themselves.

The Glenn Rendezvous. Peter Schmidt (1886-1958; below left) built the Glenn Hotel, a small place, at 928 Monmouth Street in Newport, naming the hotel after his son, Glenn. In the 1920's it served the illicit liquor that Schmidt was helping to distribute throughout the tri-state area. In the early 1930's, back-room gaming began on a regular basis at the Glenn Hotel, and the gaming room (hardly a "casino" by most standards) became known as the Glenn Rendezvous. Below are chips from the Glenn Rendezvous.



When the Cleveland mob moved into the area in the mid- 1930's, Schmidt held out. He refused to be intimidated, and refused to take on "partners" he had got along very well without. But the handwriting was on the wall: if the Glenn Hotel and the Glenn Rendezvous were to remain open, the Syndicate would have its part.

Schmidt decided on an "end run." He purchased an old, rundown nightclub outside town in Southgate, Kentucky, known as the Old Kaintuck Castle. It sat up on a hill above the road, and when Schmidt was finished remodeling it he renamed it the Beverly Hills Club. More about the Beverly, as it was known, later.

Rather than give up a piece (or all) of his Glenn Rendezvous to the Cleveland outsiders, Schmidt simply closed it in 1935 when the Beverly was completed. Rather than distracting the Syndicate boys, the move made them even more determined, and when Schmidt was finally forced out of the Beverly in 1943, he reopened the Glenn Hotel and the Glenn Rendezvous.

Within a few more years, the Syndicate prevailed, and Schmidt was forced out of the Glenn Rendezvous for good in 1950 or 1951. The club was renamed The Tropicana, and the Glenn Rendezvous was no more. Schmidt opened a new place, called the Glenn Schmidt Playtorium (see below), and The Tropicana later played a prominent role in the death of the gambling industry in Northern Kentucky.



There are no remaining known chips from The Tropicana, but the photograph below shows the club on Monmouth Street. A fire destroyed the hotel and club in 1962. Today the building is gone, an empty lot between some buildings.

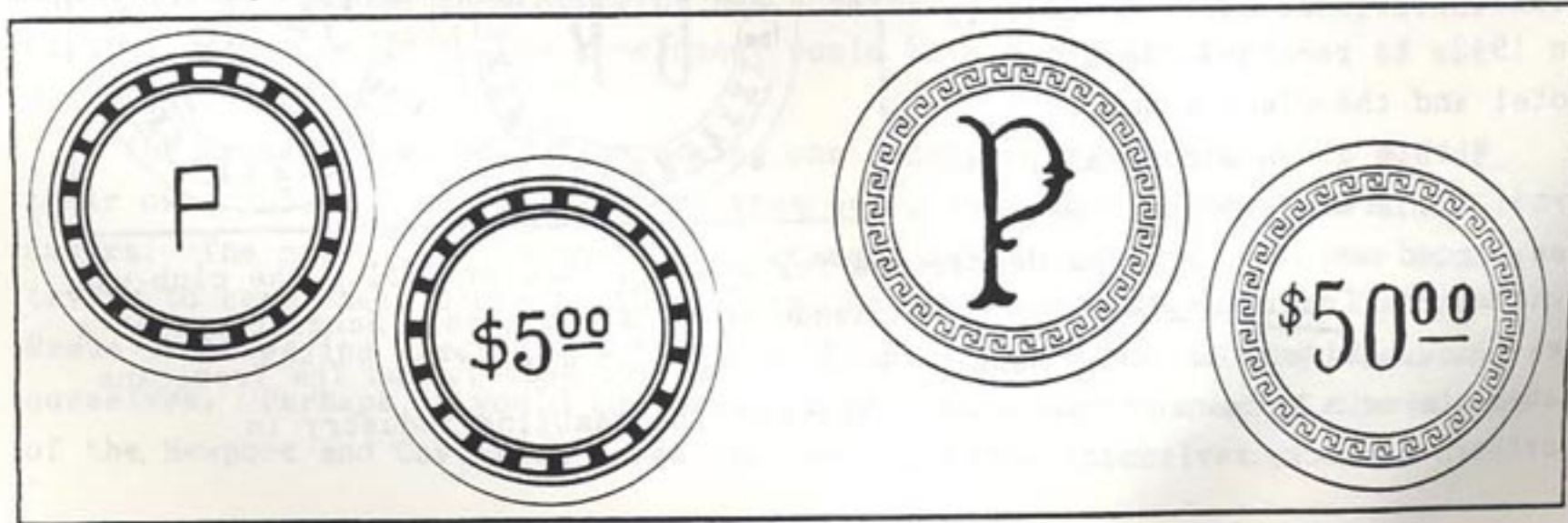
Primrose Club and Latin Quarter. Unlike the Glenn Rendezvous and many of

the other northern Kentucky clubs, the Primrose Club was not in the downtown area. Then Newport (and now within the city limits of Wilder), the building on Kentucky Route 9 sits out in the country even today. The Primrose (see below) was originally the Bluegrass Inn from which, if it had gaming, no chips are known to exist today. The Primrose was operated by ex-bootlegger Buck Brady, who was another local who resented and resisted the attempt of the Cleveland mob to take over the northern Kentucky clubs.

In 1946, Brady shot Red Masterson, who ran the



Merchant's Club (see below) for the Syndicate. Brady was forced out of the Primrose, and the price for his life was the turnover of the club to the Syndicate. Brady had done to himself what he had fought for so long. The Cleveland boys renamed the club, and it became the Latin Quarter, which it





remained until the end of gaming in the area. Above are examples of Latin Quarter gaming checks, as well as the dice used there.

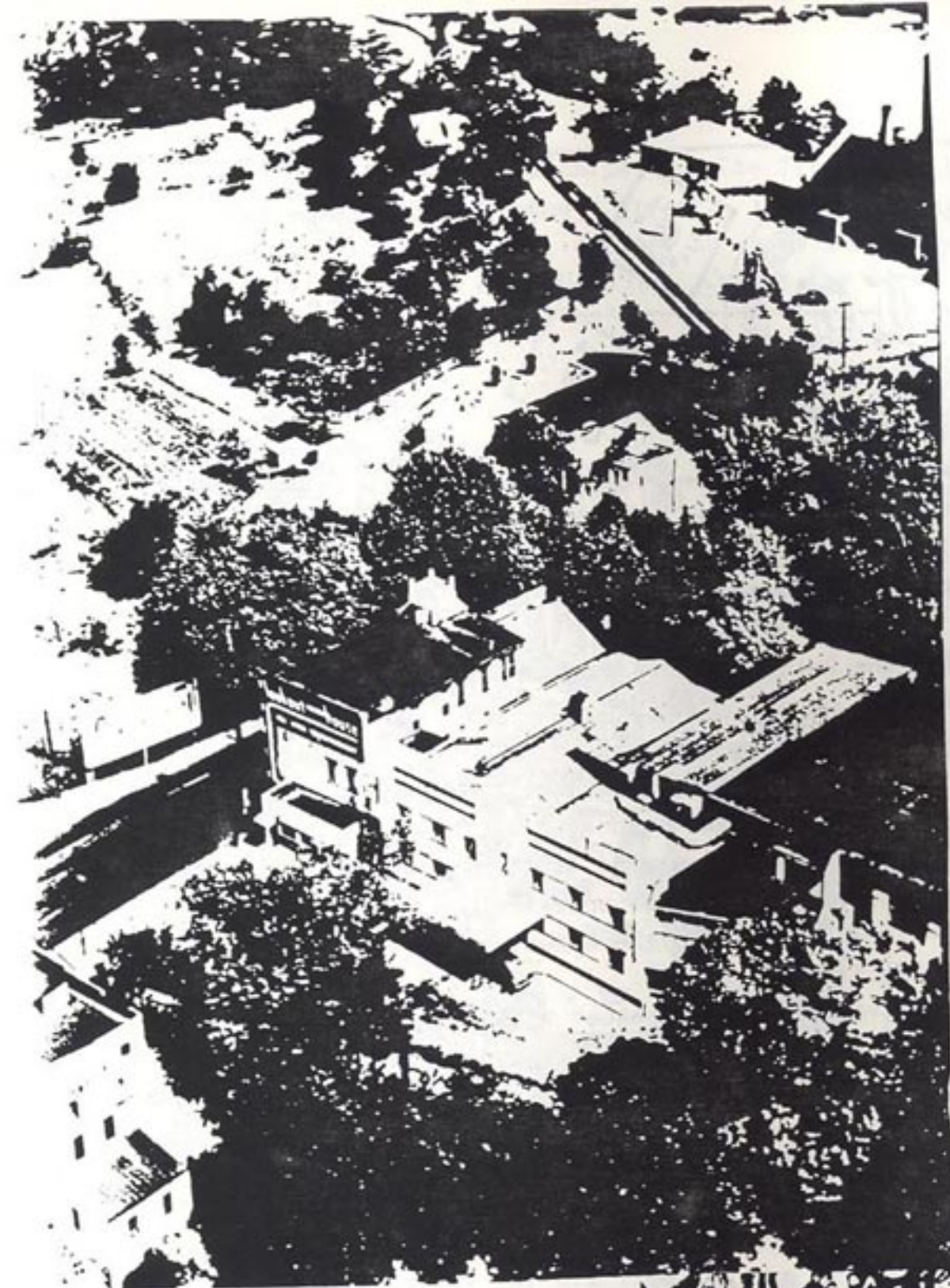
The building still exists, now known as Bobby Mackie's, a rustic local bar and restaurant.

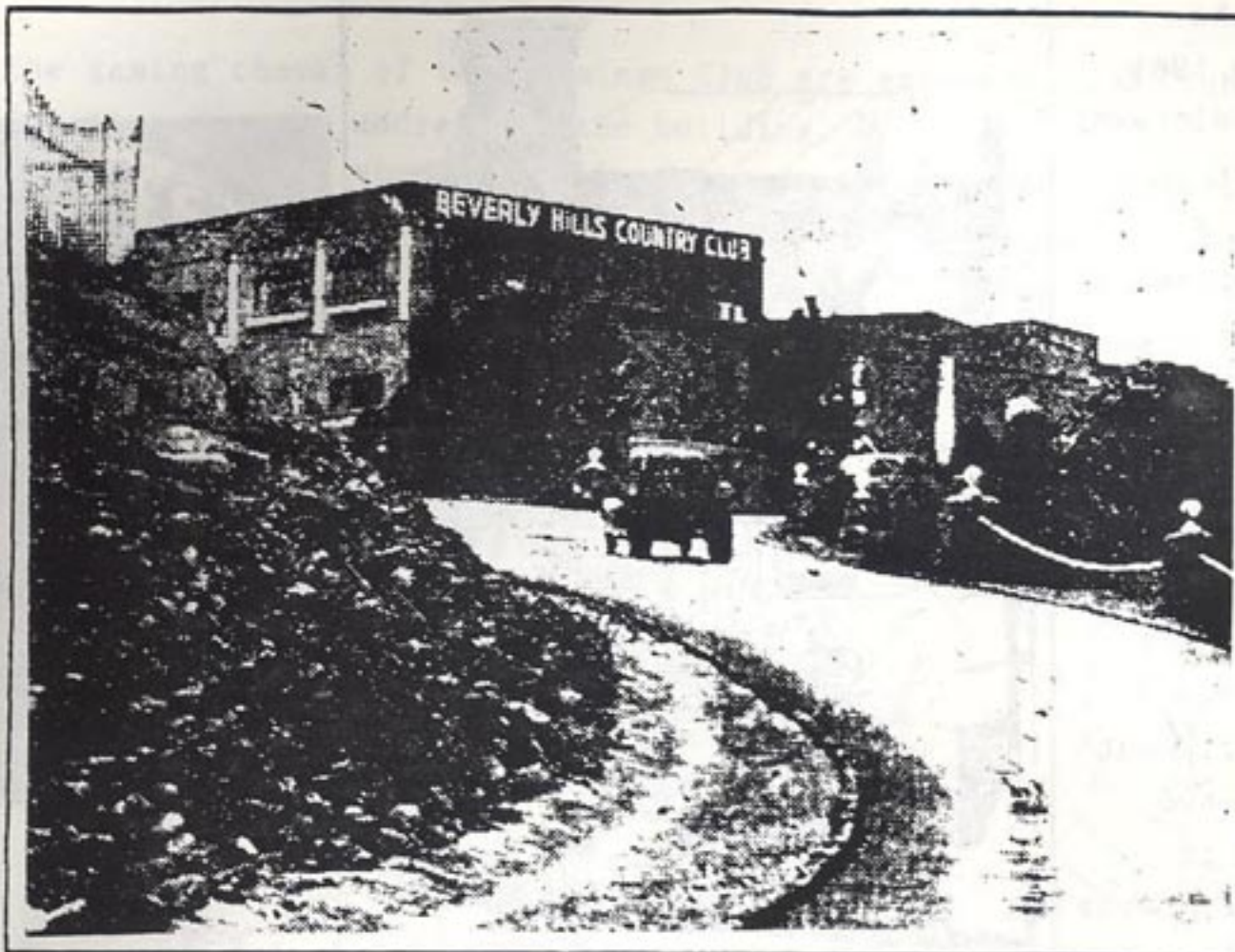
Lookout House. As with the Primrose/Latin Quarter, the Lookout House is located in Covington, some miles away from the downtown area which held most of the smaller clubs. The Lookout House, along with the Beverly Hills Club, was known as the "class" of the northern Kentucky clubs. Not quite so plush as the Beverly, the Lookout House was by the standards of the era a full and comfortable casino. Big-name entertainment played in the lounge and restaurant, and the club was host to some of the underworld's most influential figures, as well as to many Cincinnati and northern Kentucky political and social bigwigs. (See next page.)

The Cleveland Syndicate moved in on the Lookout House in 1941 and appointed local Jimmy Brink as their operator. The club prospered throughout the rest of the decade, but ran into serious trouble in 1952 following the Senate Kefauver Hearings on organized crime. In that year, the state police, pressured by the FBI to do something about the open and notorious gambling industry in northern Kentucky, made an example of the Lookout House by raiding it (see next page) and shutting it down. Although it reopened as a restaurant and nightclub, the casino had closed permanently.

The Lookout House (shown next page), one of the two queens of northern Kentucky gambling clubs in its heyday, burned down in 1973, and the site is now the Lookout Corporate Center, a 7-story, modern brick office building in a built-up area of Covington. The woods shown in the picture are gone, and Route 25, Dixie Highway, is now a six-lane thoroughfare.

The Beverly Hills Club. When Peter Schmidt remodeled the Old Kaintuck Castle and reopened it as the Beverly Hills Club in 1935, he started what was to become the plushest and most famous casino/night club in the country until the palaces of the Las Vegas Strip were built. Out in the country in Southgate, Kentucky, the Beverly sat at the top of a large hill, with a stately, curving driveway going up the hill, lined with rock cairns between which





wrought iron chain was strung. The photo at left is the club in the late 1940's, and below left is the roulette action at the club in the late 1950's.

The Beverly became successful soon enough that by 1936 the Syndicate was

banging on Schmidt's door again. He was no more eager to have partners from Cleveland than he had been when he was running the Glenn Rendezvous, however, and the boys from Cleveland decided that it was time to teach Mr. Schmidt a lesson. In 1936, reportedly by order of Moe Dalitz, the Beverly was burned.

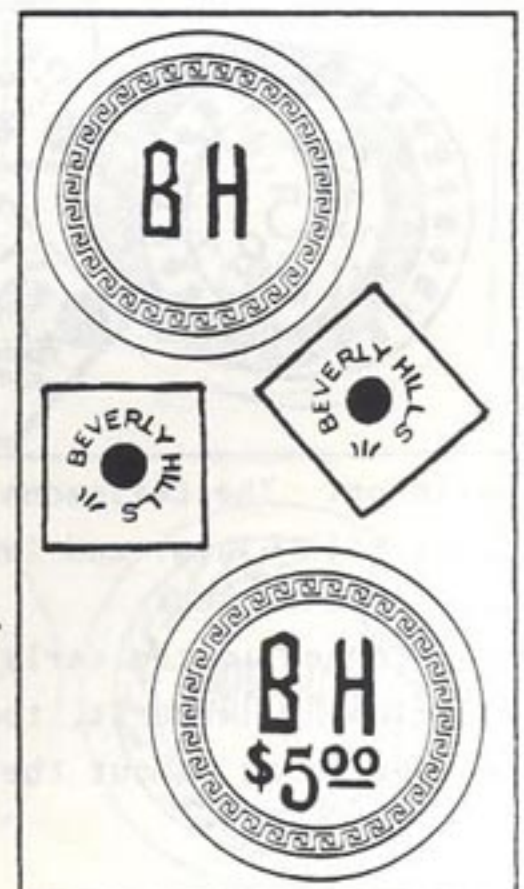
Schmidt didn't scare easily, though, and in 1937 the Beverly reopened,



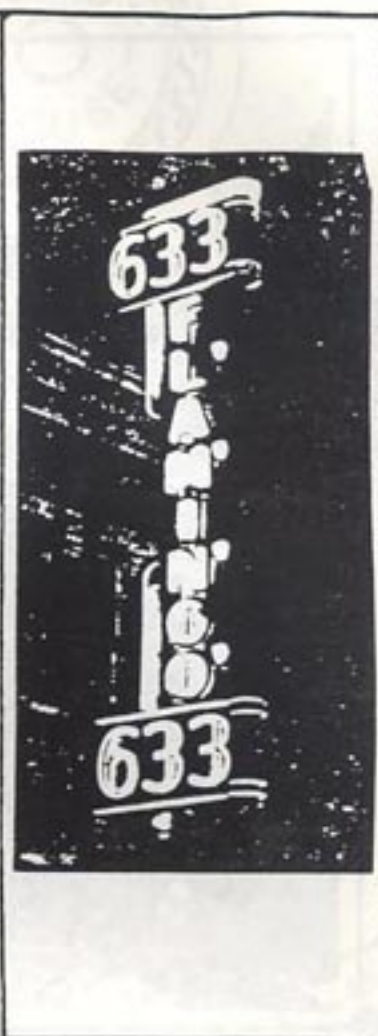
larger and more plush than ever. It thrived, and so did its casino. By 1940, however, Syndicate pressure became too heavy even for

Peter Schmidt, and he turned the club over to the Cleveland faction. With their connections in the entertainment field, the Syndicate improved on the substantial reputation which the Beverly Hills Club already enjoyed.

It became the nation's showplace for entertainment, fine food and high-roller casino action when Las Vegas was still a spot in the desert with a few downtown sawdust joints.



Gaming at the Beverly ended in 1961, and with the development of legal gambling in Nevada, especially in Las Vegas, the operators had begun to lose interest in northern Kentucky anyway. The club went downhill until it was finally shut down completely in 1963. It remained vacant until 1969 when a new owner tried to reopen it, but he failed within two months. In 1972 it reopened, and for a time became successful again,



booking name entertainment on a regular basis. In 1977, however, a fire destroyed the Beverly Hills Club, killing 165 people. One of the co-authors of this article, Earl Reppetto, was the first on-duty fireman at the scene of the disaster.

Flamingo Club. The Flamingo Club was one of the major downtown Newport gambling clubs, located at 633 York Street. (See photos above right .) A Syndicate-run club, it was operated by brothers Ed, Louis and Mike



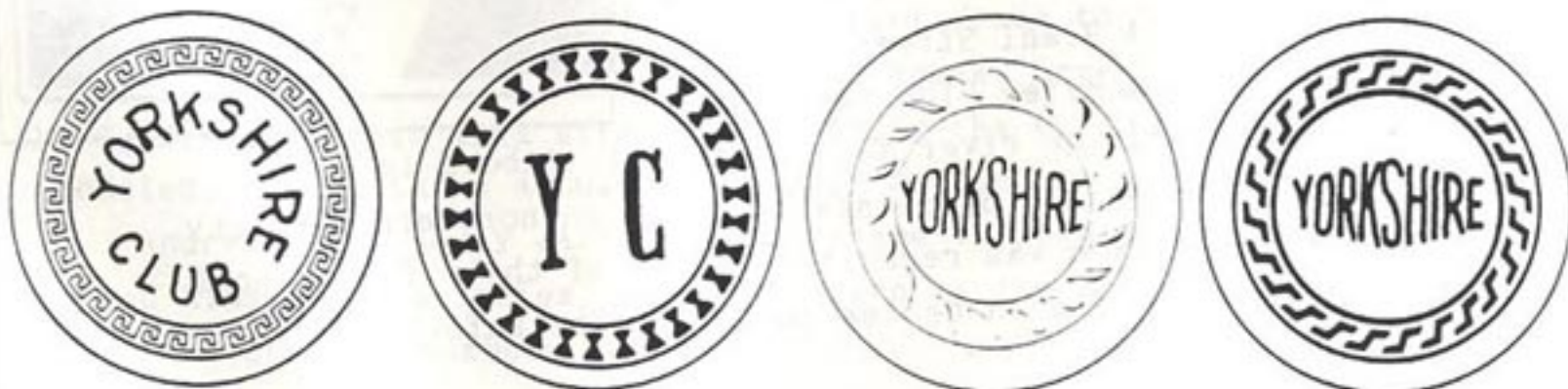
Levinson. The Levinsons had come from Detroit, having operated the Chalet and Charlevoix Clubs, and leaving when the heat in Detroit was turned up and those two clubs closed.

Opened in the early 1940's, the Flamingo Club lasted until the late-1950's, when it, too, was finally shut down by local police pressured to "do something" about the open gambling in the northern Kentucky area. All of

the gaming checks of the Flamingo Club are embossed "633 Club," 633 York Street being the address of the building.

Ed Levinson, who had received his gambling higher education in Detroit and in Newport, was sent to Las Vegas by the Syndicate in 1956 to run the just-opened Fremont Hotel, then the tallest building in Nevada. The Flamingo was left in the hands of his brothers, but it wasn't long before the reform movement in Newport forced its closing.

Today the site of the Flamingo Club, across the street from the Wiedemann Brewery, is part of a complex of new buildings owned by a cab company.



Yorkshire Club. Across the street and down a block from the Flamingo Club, at 518 York Street, was the Yorkshire, the Syndicate's largest sports book operation in the northern Kentucky area. Also housing table games, the Yorkshire was in a somewhat larger building than many of the small downtown clubs. See previous page, where one photo shows a Yorkshire Club dealer caught in the act of paying a customer at a 21 table.



Although the Yorkshire Club, like the Flamingo and several others, used personalized dice,

chips were somewhat more portable, and direct advertising on the gaming checks was thought reckless. Various styles of Yorkshire Club checks are known.

Mecca Club. Next door to the Glenn Hotel

on Monmouth, the Mecca Club was located at 926 or 930 Monmouth. Its checks bore its name. (See above left.)

Kid Able Club.

Monmouth Street rises as it heads south away from the Ohio River.

On a clear day, standing outside the clubs of Monmouth Street, patrons could see the tall buildings of downtown Cincinnati, and at night, their lights. Kid Able Club was located at 941 Monmouth Street, a couple of blocks south of the Glenn Rendezvous, Tropicana, Mecca Club, etc. Today it is "Barbz Bar," but the building still stands. (See right.) Gaming checks from the Kid Able Club are embossed "KID."

Grandview Club. Located in the Grandview Gardens restaurant at 34 Biehl Street at the end of Monmouth, the Grandview Club sat on a hill looking down toward the river and Cincinnati. (Above left.)

Merchants Club. When the Syndicate moved in on northern Kentucky, ex-bootlegger Red Masterson was recruited as one of their first local representatives. He would soon become known as "The Enforcer" for his efforts





in trying to squeeze local owners out of their clubs, or at least to give the boys from Cleveland a piece of the action.

Masterson himself ran the Merchants Club, at 15 East Fourth Street in downtown Newport. Across the street from the Merchants Club is a fire station, and a block to the west, clearly visible from the club's front entrance, is the county courthouse. At least three different styles of Merchants Club



checks are known. (Above left is a photo of the Merchants Club as it exists today, and at right are its dice and checks.)

Sportsmans Club.

One of the largest clubs which catered to black clientele, the Sportsmans Club was taken over early on by the Cleveland Syndicate. Located at the northeast corner of Second and York Streets, down close to the Ohio River, the club was run by Frank "Screw" Andrews (left), one of



the Syndicate's main area strongarms. Today the building stands, somewhat remodeled, and contains a building supply company.

Andrews supposedly earned his nickname through his sexual exploits, and fancied himself as a ladies' man. He began as the man in charge of the Syndicate-operated numbers racket in the black communities of Cincinnati,

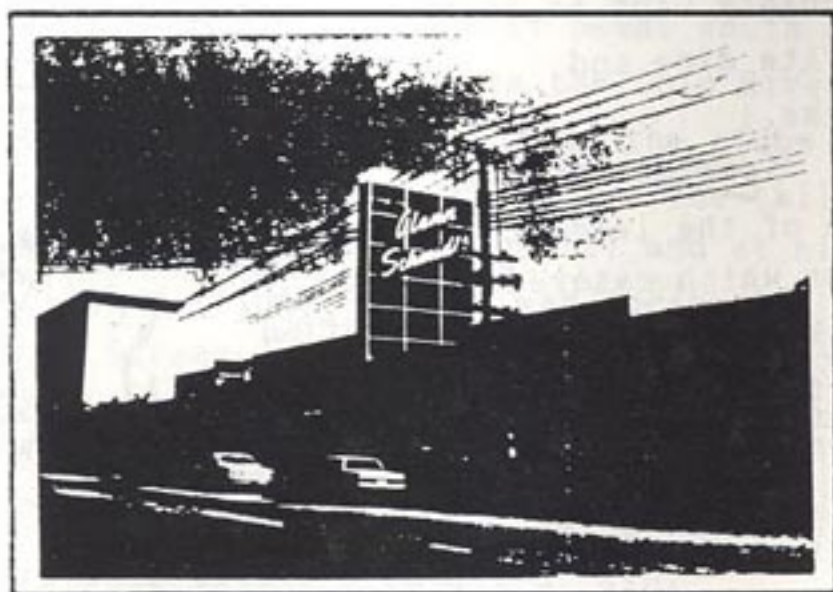


Newport and Covington, and eventually took over most of the black-owned clubs as well. Sportsmans Club checks have only an "S" on them.

Rocket Club. Another black club, also owned by the Cleveland Syndicate, located across from the Sportsmans Club on the northwest corner of Second and York Streets.

Kentucky Club. Across the Licking River in Covington is the site of the Kentucky Club. In addition to table games, the Kentucky Club featured a horse race book, and one style of the gaming chips used there features a brass-inlaid horse's head. The building still stands, although now faced with brick. Three styles of chips from the Kentucky Club are known. (Right.)

Glenn Schmidt Club. When Peter Schmidt, fighting the Syndicate to remain independent, was forced out of the Beverly Hills Club, and then out of the Glenn Rendezvous, he moved to the block between York and Monmouth Streets on Fifth and opened a large bowling alley known as the Glenn Schmidt Playtorium.





In a large back room, now used as a restaurant, Schmidt opened a new casino. The Glenn Schmidt Club still stands, as does the bowling alley (see left and previous page) one of the few buildings from the boom days

of northern Kentucky gambling clubs which still serves most of its original purpose. When, in the late '50's the reform movement heated up and pressure on the casinos increased, Schmidt moved the Glenn

Schmidt Club next door behind his Snax Bar restaurant, now attached to the bowling alley, but then separated by a wall.

The gaming checks from the Glenn Schmidt Club bear his initials on two bowling pins.



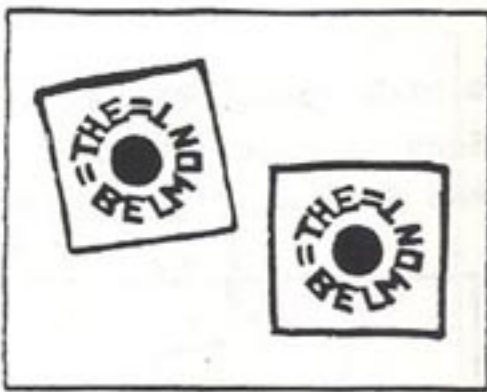
Alibi Club. Another black club taken over in 1949 by "Screw" Andrews, in Newport. The address is not known. (See above right.)

Stork Club. Although the dates are unclear, the Stork Club, at 613 Monmouth Street, was a club owned by local Jim Harris. The Syndicate moved in, and in the late 1940's it was taken over and renamed the Stardust. In the 1950's the name was changed again to the

Silver Slipper. Only the Stardust check is known today. (See left.)

Beacon Club. Located out in the country on Licking Pike in what is now Wilder, the Beacon Club also operated during the boom days of northern Kentucky gambling. (See right.) When gaming ceased, the place became the Beacon Inn, and may now have been





torn down - your authors were unable to locate it, at least!

Other clubs. There are a number of other clubs which operated at one time in the Newport/Covington area, of which relatively little is known. The Belmont Club (see left), the Club Alexandria, the Club Kenton and the Golden Horseshoe, for example. There are others which existed, but for which no chips of any kind are known to exist today: The Avenue in Bellevue, which some recall had a single dice table; The Guys & Dolls, a club in Wilder which closed the same night it opened after a player had a hot run at a craps table; the 222 Club, a black club near the river; the Coconut Grove, another black club opened by Melvin Clark, head of the black numbers racket, who was shot and killed by "Screw" Andrews, who then shut the club down rather than operating it; the Copa Club, another black club; the Varga Bar, a Newport bust-out joint with such a bad reputation that even in wide-open Newport, it was shut down in the mid-1940's; the Dogpatch, near the river; the Teddy Bear Lounge in Covington, and the 316 Club.



There are also chips known to exist which some people have attributed to the northern Kentucky area, but which cannot be tied to a known gaming club: see right, for example.

The end of gaming in Newport and Covington. When the northern Kentucky clubs operated, at least in the early days, they usually shut down for the winter months. Cincinnati convention business, on which some of the clubs relied more than others, slowed considerably in the winter, and the high rollers from the midwest usually spent substantial periods of time in Florida in the winter. The clubs could not afford to keep their doors open solely for local patronage.

Throughout the period that the clubs operated, they also shut down for two weeks every year when the grand jury was in session. When the grand jury received complaints of open and notorious gambling in the area, the members could investigate all they wanted: they would find nothing at the buildings to which they had been sent. As soon as the grand jury's session was over, the doors were unlocked and it was business as usual. The clubs also closed periodically, for varying lengths of time, during the "locals versus outsiders" (i.e., Syndicate) wars.

Of course, illegal gambling in northern Kentucky, or in any other venue for that matter, could not exist without the involvement of politicians and

law enforcement officials. Newport and Covington had their share of payoffs to make, and in fact some prominent politicians and peace officers had significant ownership interests in the clubs themselves. In addition, however, the northern Kentucky area had something else going for it: a very tolerant and assenting attitude on the part of the general public, and even state officials. One candidate for governor of Kentucky, when asked about the existence of gambling in the Newport/Covington area, was reported to have remarked that it was the citizens' privilege to have it dirty if that's the way they wanted it!.

In the late 1950's, however, a reform movement, led by a group of local clergymen and headed by a postman, began to exert substantial pressure on the politicians and law enforcement officials to clean up the cities' image. With gambling had come a profusion of strip joints, bordellos and the associated unsavory characters which the reform group felt ought not to be tolerated.

The victory of John F. Kennedy in 1960, and his appointment of his brother Bobby as Attorney General, lent substantial impetus to the Newport reformers. Bobby Kennedy had been counsel to the McClellan Committee and the Kefauver Committee, both of which conducted lengthy investigations into organized crime, its influence in labor unions, illegal gambling, and legal gaming in Nevada, and both of which received significant publicity.

The reformers managed to nominate George Ratterman an ex-football player, as their candidate for sheriff of Campbell County, in which Newport is located. The Syndicate, fearing that the time might have come when the political winds had shifted enough that they might be driven out of northern Kentucky, moved to protect their interests.

During the campaign, Ratterman was lured to a bar, where he was plied with liquor and drugged. He was then transported to the Tropicana, in the old Glenn Hotel, where he was put to bed with an exotic dancer from the club named April Flowers (Juanita Jean Hodges; top right), and photographed with her. The attempted frame was a transparent flop. Ratterman beat all charges, and the beginning of the end had started. (Bottom right shows Ratterman after his acquittal, outside the Tropicana.) The coup de grace for gambling in Newport



came in August of 1961. The reformers had put sufficient pressure on the county prosecutor to indict several local politicians and law enforcement officials on numerous graft charges.

Such charges had never been made to stick before, although they had occasionally been attempted. Witnesses disappeared, lost their memories, or evidence had simply been ignored by juries who were tolerant of the situation. This time, however, the prosecution had subpoenaed a former madam who, embittered by the lack of protection she had received after having made the demanded payoffs, took the stand and began to recite in great detail how much she had paid, to whom, and when. The trial resulted in a number of convictions, and when George Ratterman won the election that year, the few remaining clubs shut their doors forever.

Following this article is a complete trial listing of the known gaming checks and varieties from the clubs of northern Kentucky.

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The authors also wish to thank Dick Waymeyer (CH-082), and Larry Trapp, a private collector and casino historian from Northern Kentucky, without whose help this article would have been far less inclusive.

A TRIAL LISTING OF THE GAMING CHIPS OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY

All known colors and styles of gaming checks used in northern Kentucky gambling clubs are listed as follows: denomination, main color, rim (mould) design, center type, and number and color of edge inserts. A sample illustration of each of the chips listed here appears in the accompanying article.

Alibi Club

1.00	red	smkey	embossed
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Beacon Club

.50	yellow	smkey	embossed
1.00	ivory	smkey	embossed
25.00	black	smkey	embossed

Beverly Hills Club

----	ivory	smkey	embossed (BH)
5.00	brown	smkey	embossed (BH 5.00)

Flamingo Club (633 Club)

.50	dk. yellow	smkey	embossed (lg. denom.)
.50	lt. orange	smkey	embossed
.50	green	smkey	embossed
.50	mustard	diasqr	embossed
1.00	dk. red	smkey	embossed
1.00	bright red	smkey	embossed
1.00	red	diasqr	embossed
5.00	black	smkey	embossed
5.00	blue	diasqr	embossed
5.00	gray	diasqr	embossed
50.00	pink	smkey	embossed (sm. denom.)
50.00	dk. green	smkey	embossed
----	lt. gray	hrglas	embossed
----	dk. salmon	hrglas	embossed 3 1/4 black
----	mauve	hrglas	embossed
----	mauve	hrglas	embossed 3 1/4 green
----	red	hrglas	embossed
----	purple	hrglas	embossed 3 1/4 yellow
----	blue	hrglas	embossed 3 1/4 yellow

Glenn Rendezvous

1.00	brown	smkey	embossed
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5.00	red	smkey	embossed	
25.00	yellow	smkey	embossed	4 1/4 black
5.00	red	hrglas	embossed	

Glenn Schmidt Club

.50	brown	smkey	embossed	3 1/4 orange
1.00	rose	smkey	embossed	3 1/4 black
5.00	dk. yellow	smkey	embossed	3 1/4 green
50.00	green	smkey	embossed	3 1/4 red
----	black	hrglas	embossed	3 1/4 salmon
----	white	hrglas	embossed	3 1/4 red

Grandview Club

----	blue	smkey	embossed	
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Kentucky Club

----	dk. yellow	dots	embossed	
----	yellow	smkey	embossed	
----	red	smkey	brass inlay	
----	white	smkey	brass inlay	
----	yellow	smkey	brass inlay	
----	blue	smkey	brass inlay	

Kid Able Club

----	tan	hrglas	embossed	
----	grayish blue	hrglas	embossed	
5.00	brick red	hrglas	embossed	

Latin Quarter

----	blue	hrglas	embossed	
----	yellow	hrglas	embossed	
----	blue	smkey	embossed	
----	yellow	smkey	embossed	
.50	pink	smkey	embossed	2 1/4 black
1.00	ivory	smkey	embossed	2 1/4 black
5.00	blue	smkey	embossed	2 1/4 orange
25.00	red	smkey	embossed	4 1/4 yellow

Lookout House

.50	yellow	smkey	embossed	
1.00	ivory	smkey	embossed	
5.00	blue	diasqr	embossed	
5.00	gray	diasqr	embossed	
5.00	rose	S's	embossed	
5.00	rose	smkey	embossed	

5.00	bicolor: obv.		
	brown/rev.		
	yellow	snakey	embossed (silver)
25.00	black	S's	embossed
25.00	dk. yellow	snakey	embossed 4 1/4 black
Mecca Club			
5.00	black	snakey	embossed
Merchants Club			
.25	yellow	S's	embossed
.50	dk. yellow	flower	embossed
.50	dk. yellow	snakey	embossed
1.00	dk. red	S's	embossed
1.00	red	snakey	embossed (\$1)
1.00	red	snakey	embossed (\$1.00)
1.00	red	flower	embossed
5.00	lavender	snakey	embossed
Primrose Club			
1.00	yellow	rectls	embossed
5.00	red	rectls	embossed
50.00	red	snakey	embossed
Rocket Club			
----	black	snakey	embossed
Sportsmans Club			
----	gray	hrglas	embossed
Stardust			
1.00	yellow	hrglas	embossed
5.00	red	hrglas	embossed
50.00	black	hrglas	embossed 3 1/2 white
Yorkshire Club			
----	ivory	cord	embossed (Yorkshire both sides)
----	yellow	cord	embossed (obv. = Yorkshire/rev. = Y)
----	dk. pink	3dots	embossed
----	ivory	S's	embossed
----	dk. rose	S's	embossed
----	yellow	S's	embossed
----	red	S's	embossed
----	lt. gray	flower	embossed
----	lt. gray	hrglas	embossed
----	dk. red	hrglas	embossed
----	red	snakey	embossed
----	blue	snakey	embossed
----	yellow	snakey	embossed
----	green	rectl	embossed
roul.	dk. yellow	plain	inlaid