

I had this ready to post months ago. I decided to hold it up because the Mason records were in the process of being entered into TGT database. There was still 30% to go at the time I was ready to post. From experience I knew there was some chips that records could not be found for and some mislabeled. Non entered entries are down to 10% and I have been assured there is not another card for the Owl on a branch chips.

So, here we go! <g>

I guess it's time I ruffled a few feathers. The "Owl On A Branch" chips have been laying on my desk for the last 3 to 4 years. David Spragg and I have gone back and forth several times about them. After all that time and talk I have finally made the decision to put them to a good home in my database as California illegal chips.

David and I used to pay \$5 each for searches of the Mason records for ID's on unknown hubs, and share the results. David sent for the "Owl On A Branch" ID 5 years ago. This was a year or so before I got my set. He also noticed the Owls were in TCR as Battle Mountain, NV, 1956.

The attribution in TCR database is listed as:

1st edition, per Harvey Fuller in 1993. They have one of the earliest Chip Rack numbers. TCR has them listed as 1956 issued chips.

I have a very hard time disputing Harvey. He was my friend, a fellow CCGTCC Hall Of Fame member, and a Nevada chip historian with no equal. Harvey traveled Nevada for years documenting NV chip history. He kept his notes on the back of Keno tickets.

Harvey and his wife visited the Fiesta Rancho for 5 days most months from 1996 to 2001 where I was Bingo/Keno manager. His wife played slots and Harvey played Keno for many hours each day. I sat talking chip history with him for as many hours as I could each day. He is the one that got me interested in Bill Borland's story. For you younger guys that never heard of Harvey, click here and meet a legend in our hobby.

http://www.ccgfcc.com/hof_harvey_fuller.html

To be clear on the Owl's. I can prove the following ID. I am open to anyone that can furnish "proof" of a Battle Mountain. NV, ID. Maybe this post will bring out that proof. Trust me, David and I have gone over the many reasons but IMO no proof for a Battle Mountain ID exists. We have argued it for years. I made a decision for the set of Owl's I have in my collection. It is a CA illegal.

Here is the ID David got back 5 years ago.



Owl on branch1att2

No monogram on card
"Owl on a branch"
Cook & Wickstrom
530 Market St.
San Francisco, CA
Date – Unknown

I had the Mason records searched again recently. There is no Mason record for the "Owl On A Branch" chips. The first search was done when there was 2 different files available. One was called "Die Tags" or "Special Dies." Back then I received several ID's that were not in the regular Mason records but were found in the Die Tag records at the time. The Die Tag file is no longer available to us.

Enter our "Friend Of The Hobby."

Been looking into the Owl hub chip. I haven't been able to find any info that would make me think that there is a connection between the guys in San Francisco and the guys in Nevada.

The chips were delivered to Cook & Wickstrom, 530 Market St., San Francisco, CA. Thomas William Cook & Alfred Duke Wickstrom, both natives of the Bay Area, operated a cigar store at 530 Market St. from around 1936 to 1937 (maybe as early as 1935 and as late as 1938). By 1938 they were no longer partners. In 1938 Cook moved to nearby San Mateo where he died 11 years later at age 65 (all the years he resided in San Mateo he listed his occupation as a cigar merchant; at the time of his death he operated a cigar counter in a large office building in downtown San Francisco).

My note: Cook & Wickstrom company was in business at the outside 1935-38. That dates the production and delivery of the Owl chips to a 4 year period. Cook & Wickstrom 1935-38. TCR Owl Club use 1956. Big stretch, IMO.

Wickstrom continued operating a cigar store at 530 Market St. until around 1942. In the late 1940's he moved to nearby Millbrae and started a coin operated device company called Wickstrom Music Co. Shortly afterwards he ran a coin operated device company called Acme Music Co. Acme placed juke boxes and "multiple-odd bingo pin ball machines" in Bay Area businesses. In the 1950's Wickstrom moved north to Sonoma County. At some point he moved to the Phoenix suburb of Mesa where he died in 1984 aged 84.

In 1937, when Cook & Wickstrom were still in business, pin ball machines were confiscated from the rear of their downtown cigar store on Market St.:

Pinball Games Seized

Fourteen pinball games were confiscated yesterday by San Francisco police. They were removed from the backroom of a cigar stand at 530 Market Street.

Owl on branch2att2

My note: Cook & Wickstrom raided for illegal machines. They had backroom gambling. Did they have other illegal gambling using chips? Chances are good. <g>

A lot of guys from the Bay Area were involved with gaming operations in Nevada, but I didn't see any info that suggests either Cook or Wickstrom were. If the chips--which probably were ordered sometime around 1935-1938ish--were made for use in the cigar shop on Market St. is an open question. My guess is that they were probably made for Cook & Wickstrom's place, but it's possible they could have ordered them for a customer.

At the time of the chip order the Owl Club in Battle Mountain, NV was run by Samuel Jonathan Ballin (1890-1956) and Frank J. Eaton (1874-1955). Both were natives of Michigan who had made their way to the Battle Mountain area by the 1920's. They were operating the Owl Club by the early 1930's (some say as early as 1923) and continued to do so until the mid 1950's. Battle Mountain is the county seat of Lander County. Lander County had a population of less than 2,000 people during the years Ballin and Eaton ran the Owl.

My note: This is good information on a NV casino. Not sure if it is new information. But: (some say as early as 1923) that makes the operation illegal from 1923 to 1931. <g>

Frank Eaton visited San Francisco several times during the years that Cook & Wickstrom operated their cigar store. He also had friends and relatives who lived in the Bay Area. However, I haven't come across any info linking Eaton to Cook & Wickstrom. Also, during the years Cook & Wickstrom operated their cigar store, Mason & Co. maintained an office in downtown San Francisco at 120 8th St. (managed by a guy named Fred Nelson). *If you were going to get chips on a visit to San Francisco, why not order them directly from the Mason & Co. office and save the markup a distributor would add?*

My note: I agree. NV casino operators would not pay a distributor commission when the original source had a business a few blocks away.

The chances that the Owl hub chips which were delivered to Cook & Wickstrom in the late 1930's were originally ordered for use at the Owl Club in Battle Mountain, Nevada seems a bit of a long shot, but you never know... Maybe they migrated there later on?

My notes: Why did Harvey list them as 1956 issued chips?

There are a lot of reasons the Owl chips may have migrated to Battle Mountain, including the chips were "found" in Battle Mountain. I can counter with just as many reasons they did not.

I am a "Show Me The Proof" kind of guy. I see no proof for Battle Mountain. <g> I present proof for CA. You be the judge and jury. <g>

One more point. There were at least two different HUB molds made over the years, maybe more. The V-H hub is a later made mold.



Owl on branch3&1att2

Might be a little tough to see in a scan. The bottom of the rectangles are narrower than the tops. It was suggested to me the Owl's are the newer mold. I DO NOT SEE THAT! I do see it on the V-H. BTW the V-H has the Elk's Head logo on reverse and there is no Mason record card on it.

Years ago when I was researching my Arrow Die article, Jim Blanchard of Atlantic Standard the former Burt Company that made both Hub molds in the scans, sent me a complete list of Burt molds and dates made from the beginning to the end of the Burt CO. He told me there were no copies, take care of it. IMO it was invaluable. All of the old molds went NG after use and new ones were made. Some had small differences like the hubs. We could help date chips from the list.

After I got that list there was a chip show across the street from the Hard Rock Las Vegas, I showed the list around. A club member asked me if he could make a copy. I never saw it again as he told me he had misplaced it. I blame myself as the 1st thing I should have done was make copies. A lot of history disappeared with that list.

I wish I had talked to Harvey about the Owl chips. Sadly it is too late. Rest easy "My Friend."

Maybe you CA and illegal boys can make some good deals with the NV boys. <g>