

Illinois has been dominating the "Illegal Of The Day" posts for the last few weeks. Ed Hertel gives us a welcome break and takes us to Indiana. Most of you will be familiar with all the great research Paul Bender has done of the illegal hub of Jeffersonville, IN. Ed takes us to a small town Indiana operation. The small town illegal club operations were a big part and maybe the heart of the "Americana" that was illegal club operations. There were literally 1,000's of them. Gambling was a side line and they flew under the radar of the big investigations and major closings. You can bet Estes Kefauver would never have heard of the "Elite Restaurant and Tavern," if it had operated 10 years earlier

Take it away Ed.

Today's quick IOTD just goes to show that not every chip has an epic story attached filled with booze, gangsters and murder. Most of the chips ordered were used in the backroom of small bars and clubs which simply wanted nothing more than have a little gambling action on the side.

This is also a good example of the human element of this hobby and the connections we can make. That is one of the joys of this hobby and for me, it's one of the main reasons I continue to do it.

I bought a box of these gray and pink chips a couple months ago (we need the black ones):

NAME		SPECIAL MONOGRAM						
Wm. Michas		506						
Address 119 W. Bdwy.								
Town Princeton State Ind								
Per Gordon Miller								
Amount	Color	Initials Both Sides	Style Type	Initials One Side	Other Side	Style Type	Monogram Color	Date Shipped
600	Pink	SOL	Patck				Blue	
300	GRAY	SOL	"				"	
100	Black	SOL	"				"	2-14-61

SOL1att2

(The "Gordon Miller" on the Per line is most likely the Taylor salesman who sold the chips.)

My initial efforts at researching both the name William Michas and the address in Princeton, Indiana, came back empty. The seller of the chips was an antique shop in Illinois and they had no information about the chips or where they had acquired them. Adding to my frustration, the town of Princeton, Indiana, is pretty small and material from it is not publically available. It sits on the southwest border on Indiana and Illinois, just a little north of Evansville.

Indiana



SOL2att2

In the 1960s, Princeton held around 8,500 people (about the same as today) and for all I could find, they did not have much trouble with vice of any sort – especially gambling. With little to go on, I contacted the Princeton library's genealogy department and asked for some assistance which gave me my first real leads.

They found that in 1961 when the chips were ordered, William Michas and his wife Anna were residents of Princeton and owned the "Elite Restaurant and Tavern" at the address listed on the Taylor record (119 W Broadway). The next available source they had was a 1965 city directory that listed Anna Michas, now a widow, and the Elite Café being run by Nicholas and Peggy Michas.

Further research was able to bridge this gap a little, but still left some questions. The chips were ordered in early 1961 and William Michas would not live long after, passing away the next year (which might explain why the chips are in such good shape.) It was at this point that his son Nicholas and wife Peggy would take over the Elite Restaurant and Tavern and rebrand it the Elite Café.



SOL3att2

The building as it stands today (it's the the small brown building wedged between the larger antique store and the smaller white shop):



SOL4att2

So we have an ID and everything is neatly wrapped up, right? Well, there is still the monogram on the chips of "SOL". That doesn't seem to fit anything. I had hit the end of my sources and was ready

to quit when our "Friend of the Hobby" emailed me and said, "Hey Ed, William's son Nicholas, who your info says was running the Elite in 1965, is still alive and residing in Princeton. He might know something about the SOL on the chips. His contact info is..." Thanks Friend!

I reached out to Nicholas, now 78 years old, and waited. A couple weeks passed and I finally received a response from Nicholas' son, who at first was a little concerned about what exactly I was asking about (common response from family). Once I had convinced him that I was legit, he talked a little about the Elite, although his personal experience was very limited as William, his grandfather, died when he was very young.

As for gambling at the Elite Restaurant and Tavern – "I have heard stories of games he (William) ran in the back room of the tavern." Any gambling at the Elite died with William though as his successor, and son, Nicholas knew nothing of it.

My biggest concern was of course the "SOL" on the chips, and this he unfortunately did not have an answer. His personal theory – "I would only guess that he had a sense of humor like mine and it stands for 'Sh** Outta Luck'. Sometimes that's how I feel in my weekly poker games." (That is my personal favorite theory as well.)

My note: I think Nicholas hit the nail on the head with his guess 'Sh** Outta Luck.' *vbg* OK, maybe not but I still like it.

Another theory of mine is that the initials are for one of William Michas' partners who may have run the game at the Elite. It would answer the question as to why the family, including William's son who took over the Elite in 1962, had no knowledge of the chips ever existing. Perhaps the SOL partner left when William died and eventually one of his heirs sold them to the antique shop in Illinois. It's all speculation of course.

Further interviews with William Michas' family brought up a few more tidbits. Rumors are that he did indeed dabble in a little side gambling with some friends and it wasn't confined solely to the Elite. William was also involved in a game that took place in the basement of a dry cleaner as well as at the local Elk's Club.

I thought it fitting that the story should end here with the relatives of William Michas. One of the joys of this hobby is connecting with people and these rare cases are unfortunately getting harder as time passes. I sent the family some chips as personal mementos and was pleased that they were returning home to Princeton. Boy how these little pieces of clay travel.

My note: I used to spend many hours on the phone looking to put history to chips. Ed is right, as time passes so do the "Old Timers" that have this history. Fortunately we now have search engines, but it is not the same as talking to someone that actually lived it. *vbg*