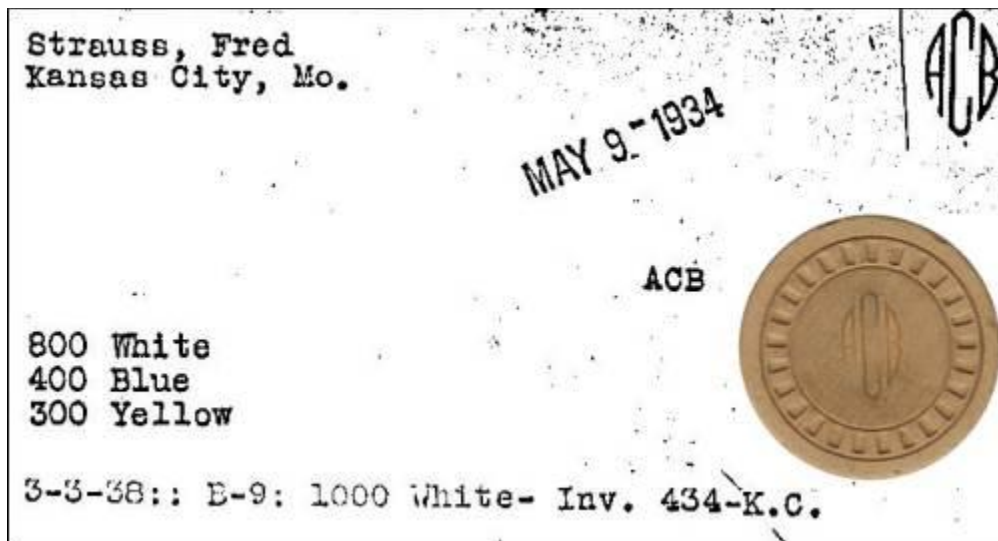


This will be the last "Illegal Of The Day" until after the convention. It is #256. A lot of time and research has gone into them. Thank you to all that have contributed and to all that have read them. If you don't collect the history of your chips, IMO you are missing out on a big part of our hobby.

Enter Ed Hertel:

Today's IOTD started when I pulled out an old unidentified chip from my records and decided to give it a fresh look. I received both the chip and the ID back in 2004 and using the limited skills I had back then, I came up with nothing and forgot about it.



My note: I need the white and yellow chips. Cough them up if you have traders. *vbg*

Now, years later, I'm circling back to some of these forgotten chips and seeing if I am now able to find anything. I keep surprising myself!

The first chip order comes from 1934, but like many of these stories, we need to turn the clock back some before heading into its connection. Fred Strauss had been around for a while, and was a pro at delivering entertainment of all kinds. Before Prohibition, Fred owned a cabaret in Kansas City that operated from the Antler Hotel at 13th and Wyandotte Sts. Once the curtain fell on open drinking, he closed the night shows and opened a string of "soda shops" throughout downtown. It was here that his patrons could order a Coke, and if you knew the right code word, chase it down with a shot a whiskey. Business was good, and Fred was making some money, but he wasn't without harassment issues from the police.

It was around this time in mid-1924 that the police cracked a gang and Fred was arrested for participating in a robbery ring. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but because of overcrowding,

the judge gave him probation with one stipulation – Fred Strauss must leave the county for the duration of this sentence. The decision between prison or exile wasn't as easy at one might think. He had a good thing going in Kansas City and doing a nickel in jail wouldn't be too hard (knowing he would undoubtedly be out early). Besides, where would he go?

The answer to that question would lead to a bizarre story involving oil wells, rivers of booze, prostitutes, gambling, and a gun fight with a legendary cowboy lawman. For the next chapter of Fred's adventure, we will visit the new town of Cromwell, Oklahoma.



The town of Cromwell was literally built up overnight. In the summer of 1924, Joseph I. Cromwell, a friend of Fred Strauss, drilled a test well in the middle of Oklahoma's dusty open fields and found a little bit of oil. It was no Spindletop, but it was better than average. Cromwell extended an invitation to Fred and his brother George "Ed" Strauss and the three of them set up a partnership to exploit this new find.

Of course they would need more than just the three of them. They would need pumping crews, oil field workers, truckers, technicians and all sorts of laborers. And then there is the need to feed and house this crew which brought the builders and merchants. And what about entertainment? Certainly they couldn't have all these workers (young, male with disposable income) sitting around idle all night. They would need dance halls and bars and perhaps a couple places where one could find a little feminine company. In no time at all the town, now called Cromwell after its founder, grew from nothing to 3700 people in less than three months. It quickly gained a reputation as the Wild West where anything goes and everything is for sale.

While Joseph Cromwell took care of the business of finding oil, Fred Strauss took care of the business of separating the workers from their hard earned pay (not that anyone were complaining). And just to make sure everything ran like it as supposed to George Strauss elected himself mayor.

But, of course, when things are looking too good to be true, they usually are. Cromwell's reputation as a wide open and wild town grew large and soon it was impossible for county and state officials not to

notice (or pretend to not notice). The beginning of the end of the hey-days of Cromwell started in October of 1924.

Fred Strauss had opened various gambling halls and made sure the cabarets and houses of ill-repute were stocked full of women – many from his various establishments back in Kansas City. For a couple months work, a strong woman could make enough money to retire. However, life in these towns was not easy and a continual supply of workers was in constant demand. In need of fresh entertainment, a call was made to the clubs in Kansas City asking for some young pretty girls to help entertain the hard working boys of Cromwell. A large group of girls, with promises of big bonuses, piled in a caravan and headed south, only to be stopped as they crossed the state line. Finally, the state had something they could use and claimed the caravan violated the Mann Act which prohibited the interstate transportation of girls for the purposes of prostitution. A judge out of the county capital of Wewoka, armed with a long chain, entered Cromwell and famously led a chain-gang on a 16 mile walk back to county jail. It was a bold statement, but in the end was really quite ineffective. In no time, Cromwell was back to running its old ways, but with the eyes of the state staring down on it.

At this point, Cromwell was less than five months old, but already it was well on its way to legendary status. State officials decided the only way to fight fire was with fire and they sent in a legend of their own. In October 1924, Cromwell finally met its match with the introduction of Bill Tilghman.



Tilghman was every stereotype of a cowboy, right down to his boots and large western hat. The revolvers around his waist were much more than for show and had served as his instruments of justice for years as a United States deputy marshal. It was Tilghman who, in the 1890s, had broken up the murderous Doolan and Dalton gangs. His reputation for no nonsense justice was known to all and was

treated with respect by those on both sides of the law. Although he was now 71 year old, and perhaps not as spry as he used to be, everything about him conveyed the fact he could still take care of business.

I'm sure the state officials believed that sending in someone as respected and incorruptible as Tilghman would be enough to quiet the romping times in Cromwell. I doubt very seriously anyone believed he would need to wield his gun and serve any Wild West justice, but unfortunately, that is exactly what happened on Halloween night, October 31, 1924.

Tilghman had barely time to unpack his suitcase when he was called in to keep the peace outside of a bar. When he arrived a fight broke out and guns started firing. This time however, legendary western hero Bill Tilghman found himself on the wrong end of a gun and caught a shot in the chest. Wiley Lynn, the town's corrupt Prohibition officer, fled the scene with his smoking gun.

Bill Tilghman, national hero, died the next morning in the first town he was unable to tame. It was not an act that Cromwell would soon forget, nor would it be forgiven. One month later, as if the town itself of responsible for the ex-US marshall's death, the buildings started to burn. First one fire destroyed a couple buildings, then more. Within days, most of the town's "business" district was in ashes. Rumors of citizen's retribution were rampant, but the state had no desire to investigate the arsons. In their minds, Tilghman was simply finishing the job from beyond the grave.

Cromwell's live-fast-and-die-young life was now essentially over. The bars, clubs and cathouses never returned to their glory. Fred Strauss and his brother packed up their belongs and left what remained of Oklahoma's Sodom and Gomorra.

(As a side note, Wiley Lynn, the murderer of Bill Tilghman, was arrested soon after he fled and put on trial. He was acquitted after several of the witnesses declined to show up, and the ones that did had suddenly come down with amnesia. He managed to stay healthy for eight years before he was killed in a shoot -out with a police officer in 1932.)

Fred Strauss knew his influences and business opportunities were in Kansas City. He drove into the city limits and was promptly arrested for violating his parole and finished out his sentence. Upon release, he returned to his old ways of running whiskey and being a general vagrant in the eyes of the law.

By the time the early 1930s rolled around, Fred was starting to slow down. The life of a hustler puts a strain on a man, and Fred had been at it for a long time. The energy involved in running a western town like Cromwell was something for the young. What Fred needed was to get back to his roots and that is exactly what he did.

In the 1934 (the same year the ACB chips were ordered), Fred Strauss partnered up with fellow gambler Walt Rainey and Billy Van Dyke and opened the 85 Club at the corner of Kansas City's 85th and Wornall. Although it wasn't unusual to name a club after the address, these guys might have put a little more thought into it as within months the numbers "85" would be meaningless. For reasons unknown,

Strauss' 85 Club had a history not unlike a gypsy throughout Kansas City. It seems that twice a year, regardless of need, the club moved. Despite this fact, it did seem to be very popular and always made the society pages with its upcoming acts.

The following article from October 1935 maps the club's migration (it would move again twice in 1936):

A BIG WEEK FOR SHOWS

DINE-AND-DANCE PLACES PREPARE FOR ROYAL VISITORS.

Entertaining Programs Are Offered by Virtually All Operators and Menus Are Featured as Attractions.

Kansas City's night clubs have put on their best bib and tucker for American Royal week and good programs are being presented virtually everywhere.

The 85 Club, which moves its location twice a year but consistently holds its trade, now is at the old Paramount Club location. From Eighty-fifth and Wornall to Thirty-fourth and Main, to Eighty-second and Troost, to Seventeenth and Baltimore is a winding route for a night club to lead its patrons over, but Walt Rainey, Freddie Strauss and Billy VanDyke, the 85 leaders, are accomplished travelers. Jack Starr is the new 85 master of ceremonies. The orchestra still is Paul Schaeffer's.



My note: I got my ACB blue chip in a trade back in 2002 and immediately sent \$5 for the Mason ID. With no other info I listed it under home games but noted the info with "possible Troost Street Illegal." I was Hoping some day I would run into the name Fred Strauss again. We have done several Troost Street "Illegal's Of The Day" without seeing the name. Then, along comes "Ed" and proves my first thought from 2002. Maybe I'm psychic. *vbg*

It is at the 85 Club that I think the ACB chips were probably used. I can't unfortunately make sense of the initials as they don't match the "published" owners of the club, but the timing is right. It seems unlikely, to me at least, that someone with Fred Strauss and Walt Rainey's reputation with gambling not to have some action in the club. Prohibition was gone and the days of making a killing selling liquor were in the past. Why would two hustlers give up on what they know best?

I couldn't find any mention of gambling raids at the 85 Club, but it was well known that the partners in the club were still in the business. In 1936, Walt Rainey left the 85 Club and went into business for himself buying the Sni-A-Bar, notorious gambling den with plenty of chips. (I'm going to stop short of

the story of Walt Rainey because he really reserves his own write-up. He's a very interesting person and was in the thick of some very messy stuff which included Capone and several mob assassinations.)

Strauss and Rainey would again find themselves together in 1939, but this time in court. National attention was focused on Kansas City as Tom Pendergast's racketeering machine was being investigated. Fred Strauss and Walt Rainey would reunite as witnesses, along with just about every other gambler in town, to testify in the case against Charles V. Carollo "Charlie the Wop". The boys were sent in to help explain the workings of what was called "the lug," or a fee, like protection, paid by all the city gamblers to Carollo. The original intention was to have this money funneled into the defense for those who were busted for voter fraud orchestrated by Pendergast. This cut, at the time up to 45%, didn't all make it to the defense fund. It was suspected the Carollo was taking a share off the top. The government charged him with tax fraud and sentenced him to 15 years in Alcatraz followed by immediate deportation. (Probably saved his life.)

It is here that our story with Fred Strauss ends. No doubt he continued gambling and hustling until his dying day, but he would fade from the limelight and let people like his buddy Rainey grab all the attention. As I mentioned above, the story of Kansas City gambling was far, far from over. It was really just revving up. But that will have to wait for another time.

I have one parting clip for anyone who might question the nerve of the old gamblers. In December 1940, the police were called to a disturbance and who should they find but our old friend Fred Strauss...



Boys will be boys...

Fun Facts about Bill Tilghman:

Bill Tilghman was every bit the western legend described above. Fed up with the Hollywood portrayal of the western lawman, Tilghman wrote, directed and starred in his own silent movie entitled "The Passing

of the Oklahoma Outlaws" (1915). You can see an excerpt here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REOpl00-P0A>

Bill Tilghman's character has turned up a few times in the movies. Rod Steiger played him in the 1981 movie "Cattle Annie and Little Britches" and Sam Elliott in 1999's "You Know My Name".

Bat Masterson, while mourning the death of his friend, proclaimed Tilghman "the greatest of them all."

My notes: How is that for history gang?

Once again thank you Ed. I am always amazed at the amount of info the IOTD team can find.

Here is a deal for anyone out there that wants to start an illegal chip collection. Five (5) free illegal chips that have been featured in IOTD posts to anyone that will research at least 1 old UFC. (while supplies last) We are mainly looking for Club names.

I can send links for research to anyone that emails me at poker4@cox.net. I can also send the manufactures records on many of the old molds I have listed in my "Home Game" file. This should be easy for you computer nerds. And, the best part, you get to see your name in "Lights" in an IOTD. *vbg*