

In my opinion this is the most "explosive "Illegal of The Day" post to date. *vbg* I doubt we can see more destruction than this unless we find an illegal chip from Texas City 1947. Google "Texas City" if you want to read about it. Ed Hertel got the JCN chip and did the research.

Take it away, Ed.

Today's IOTD is unusual in that most of this club's notoriety isn't from gambling, or anything illegal at all. Its claim to fame is the fact that it was ground zero for one of North Carolina most unusual tragedies. But first, let's set the scene.



JCN1att2

Initials on the chip read "JCN". Mason records show this chip went to:

L. Gurkin / Catch Me Eye Inn

Selma, NC

1934

I need this chip. Cough it up if you have a trader. *vbg*

Thirty miles southeast of North Carolina's capital of Raleigh, the "Catch-Me-Eye" complex was located just south of Selma on Highway 301. It was little more than a blip on the map that offered traveling motorists a tavern, cabins and service station. At the center of it all was Gurkin's Tavern, run by local Lloyd Gurkin:

GURKIN'S TAVERN

Steam Heated Brick Cabins

Located on U. S. Highway 301 between Selma and Smithfield, at intersection of Highway 70. Telephone—County 9111, Smithfield, N. C.

Their steam-heated brick cabins are equipped with toilets and shower baths, and are well conditioned. So when the weather is hot, come spend the night in one of their cool cabins. But during the winter months all their cabins are heated, so spend any night and you will be more than pleased.

Many new improvements have been made lately, such as the Oyster Bar, New Frigidaire Counter and beautiful back bar. If you have not tried the oysters at Gurkin's Bar you are missing something. This writer has—and personally recommends them to the public.

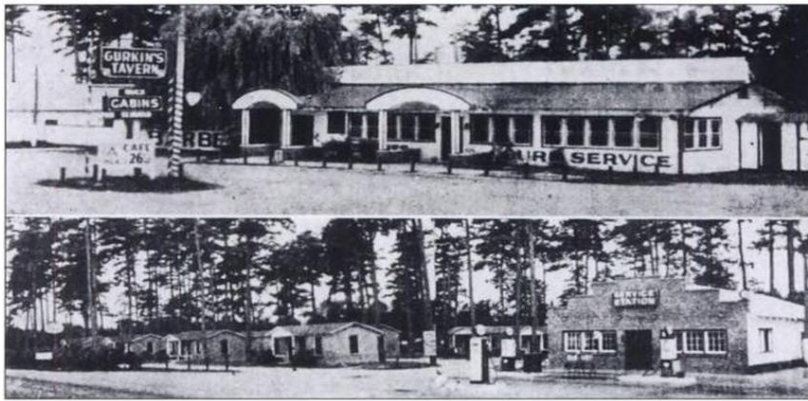
It's a common expression, "Meet me at Gurkin's Tavern", which of course means that is a popular establishment. This is an indication of the great popularity of the place. Since being established it has gained in popularity until today it occupies the position of being one of the leading social centers in this section.

The management of Gurkin's Tavern invites the people of this territory to pay them a visit. Gurkin's Tavern is known for good food. A reputation sustained by the community as well as motorists and the traveling public.

The courtesy and attention of the attendants is a feature that receives more than passing notice from the patrons.

In ancient times walls were placed around the city to keep the stranger out, while today the destiny of traffic, the numerous traffic officers who are continually on the lookout for citizens making left-hand turns and the scarcity of parking space, all are the contributing factors to make motor life in the city more difficult. Mr. Gurkin, seeing the opportunity of the day, has established a tourist camp that is a real home for the family and car with all modern facilities at popular rates.

Mr. Gurkin welcomes all motorists to Gurkin's Tavern who wish to stay for one night or longer at his modern camp and can assure them that every convenience will be placed at their disposal.



JCN2att2

Although I found no evidence of gambling raids at Gurkin's Tavern, there is some history of illegal activity. In 1932, during the embarrassing period known as Prohibition, federal agents responded to a complaint that Gurkin was serving whiskey in his tavern. His response is great:

Man Drives Away When Agents Find Whiskey on Place

Smithfield, Jan. 8.—Federal prohibition agents, having received information that whiskey was to be found at "Catch-Me-Eye," a road house and dance hall near Selma, went to the place Thursday morning between 9 and 10 o'clock armed with a search warrant issued by United States Commissioner I. W. Massey.

The officers said they asked to search the garage at the road house first, and a Mr. Gurkin, the proprietor, opened the garage doors and got in his car, telling officers that he would back the machine out, so that they could proceed with the search. When the officers went in the garage, Gurkin backed out, turned the car around and kept going, they reported. That happened Thursday afternoon and late in the day the officers were still wondering where Gurkin went.

The prohibition agents found about three gallons of whiskey and 40 empty fruit jars in the garage. A small quantity of wine and cider was also found.

JCN3att2

Although I couldn't find a record of gambling at the Gurkin complex, it is not unusual for this type of tourist court to have it. I have seen many examples of this in other states, and with a liquor violation two years before the chips were ordered, it is not a stretch to put a card game in a back room somewhere on the premises.

The quiet surrounding of the Catch Me Eye complex would be literally blown to pieces in an early morning in 1942. As the war raged on overseas, nearby Fort Bragg was busily preparing our troops for combat. Around 1am on March 7th, an army truck carrying 30,000 pounds of explosives rolled past the Gurkin Tavern and right into a civilian automobile. Emergency personnel responded to the ensuing fire but kept their distance due to the explosive risk of the truck's contents. Nearby residents were warned, and most people evacuated to a safe distance. Despite the danger, some patrons of the Gurkin Tavern stayed and continued their night of revelry. It would be a mistake they would soon regret.

Two hours after the accident, around 3 am, the heat from the fire finally proved too much for the truck's cargo. The ensuing explosion was heard over fifty miles away and broke virtually every window in downtown Selma. Locals assumed a German air raid had begun and headed for cover. It wouldn't be until the next morning that the true nature, and the extent of the damage, would be fully realized.

Where the army truck once sat was now a giant crater 50 foot across and 20 feet deep. All that remained of the large Talton Hotel, once situated across the street for the Catch Me Eye complex, was a single chimney.



JCN4att2

The dedicated patrons of Gurkin's Tavern were rewarded with flying glass and wooden splinters which caused many injuries, some severe. The building façade held together, barely, but the damage to the complex as a whole was devastating and complete. Buildings and cabins collapsed, making it a total loss.

Amazingly, only a few people were reported killed from the chaos - two of them in a passing car that ignored all warnings and was caught in the blast.

The wounds eventually healed and the town moved on. The tavern would rebuild and operate again under Lloyd Gurkin's management until his passing years later. The Catch Me Eye would settle back into its quiet existence, although now immortalized by its notorious and depressing fame.

The below link is a YouTube video shot the next day after the explosion. There are shots of Gurkin's Tavern at 1.20, 1.50 and a good one showing the extent of the tavern's damage around the 3.00 minute mark.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f_J-eVdo50

I've not been able to decode the initials on the chip – JCN. My guess is it stands for a partner or employee who ran the games.

My note: I agree with Ed on the JCN initials.

Every time I think we have seen it all in past "Illegal Of The Day" posts something else new shows up.

vbg

OK, where are the chips from Texas City? *vbg*