

Once again Ed Hertel fixes a bad Texas ID and puts a Club name to hub chips we have had since 1998 without a Club name.

Take it away Ed.

IOTD – Texas – Bert Miller

It seems like I've been doing a lot of these corrections lately. The below "HC" chip came from the era before some of the chip manufacturer records were readily available and thus was the perfect picking for some less-than-honest assumptions.



WHM1

These chips were found in Texas - that much is true. What I believe happened next is just an assumption (or an accusation), but one that is based on years of uncovering faulty attributions. Chips like these, without a proper pedigree, were ripe for being attached to clubs on the sparsest of evidence. It is my guess that the attributor knew that Galveston chips were hot (expensive) and simply matched the chip with a club that had no chips already assigned to it. All of the sudden, these "HC" chips were said to belong to the Hurricane Club and sold accordingly.

I bought one, so did many others. I don't even know if there was an official story on where they were found. I had no reason or evidence to refute it.

Fast forward to recent times when the records were available and the first red flag starts waving with the Taylor record.

NAME Bert Miller		SPECIAL MONOGRAM						
address P. O. Box 651		HC						
town Victoria State Texas								
count	Color	Initials Both Sides	Style Type	Initials One Side	Other Side	Style Type	Monogram Color	Date Shipped
505	Orange	H.C.	Block				Blue	3/23/54
01	Yellow	H.C.	Block				Blue	3/23/54
02	Dk. Blue	H.C.	Block				Gold	3/23/54
01	White	H.C.	Block				Blue	3/23/54
01	Green	H.C.	Block				Gold	3/23/54

WHM2

The first problem is of course the city of Victoria, Texas. From what I knew of Victoria, it's a city about 120 miles south of Houston. Although it's a good distance from Galveston, it wasn't so far as to be completely ruled out. The second piece of information was the name of the guy ordering the chips. In all my research into Galveston I have never come across the name Bert Miller. If this guy had any part of the Hurricane Club, it certainly wasn't on any records I could find.

I started my search into Bert Miller, but wasn't getting very far. I was able to verify that he did live in Victoria around the time the chips were ordered, but not much else. Source materials from Victoria are not readily available online, and inquiries into the public libraries were being addressed slowly. It looked as though I would need to do some physical digging on my own.

Growing up in Houston's suburbs, the freeway signs outside my neighborhood always read "US-59 North – Downtown / US-59 South – Victoria". In the forty years I lived in this city, not once have I travelled south. Victoria was always a name on a sign, nothing more. I decided that to unravel this mystery chip, I would turn my car south and travel to this mysterious town of Victoria and see if I could dig up any information on this Bert Miller and the mysterious "HC" chip.

It was a beautiful Saturday morning and with my top rolled down I scooted out of the city of Houston and started south. It didn't take long for the sixteen lanes of freeway to contract to eight, then six, and finally down to four. Buildings and congested neighborhoods gave way to farms and pastures as billboard signs started changing from fancy restaurants to truck stops and feed stores. I had been driving for a couple of hours when I started to see my first signs for Victoria (this one happened to be an anti-evolution sign – "Do you want to be a monkey's uncle?")

As I pulled into the city I was a little surprised with the size. I had expected a small rural town, but instead found a fairly large expanse complete with one of the biggest Wal-Mart stores I had even seen

(is that an indicator for civilization?). I was optimistic that perhaps Victoria might not be the dead-end I had once feared.

I made my way to the Victoria public library and once again was surprised, and relieved, that it too was large and very professional looking. With very few notes in hand, I walked into the building and straight to one of the librarians. After a short discussion of what kind of information I was looking for, she ushered me into one of the back rooms labeled "Local Interests" and showed me their goods.

Unfortunately, one of the best resources available would have been the local newspaper, but for this time period it was unindexed. Although they had a hundred years microfiche, it would be impossible to find information about Miller's gambling activity (if it existed at all).

Another good source for reconstructing a man's life is through city directories and criss-cross indexes. These are important sources for knowing where someone lived, who they married and usually what they did for a living. I was very lucky that the Victoria library's sparse collection of indexes included most for the time period I was looking into.

I started just before the chips were ordered. In 1952, Bert Miller was a resident of Victoria and worked for the Gulf Coast Adjustment Co. I was unable to find out what this company did, but it didn't sound very promising for gambling.

However, my fears of a busted trip were soon tempered when the 1955 directory (one year after the HC chips were ordered) listed Bert Miller as the current manager of the "Hawaiian Club" at 1113 E. Oak St. BOOM! We have a hit. Although I don't have any proof of gambling yet, I finally found something for Miller that matches the initials on the chip.

I continued the timeline.

It's a year later, 1956, and Bert Miller is now listed as the manager of the Cactus Club on the Goliad Highway which coincides with another chip order (I have not seen these chips before.)

NAME <u>CACTUS CLUB</u>		SPECIAL MONOGRAM						
Address <u>Box 651</u>		CD \$100.00						
Town <u>Victoria</u> State <u>Texas</u>								
Per		3 SPACES BETWEEN LETTERS						
Amount	Color	Initials Both Sides	Style Type	Initials One Side	Other Side	Style Type	Monogram Color	Date Shipped
101	BLACK - REVERSE WHITE			CC	\$100.00		BLUE	1/23/56

WHM3

My note: We need this chip. Cough them up if you have traders. *vbg*

Although there is no name of the card it is obvious these chips were ordered for the new management. Bert had given up his “HC” chips for some “CC”. The address of the old Hawaiian Club is now listed as “vacant”.

Operating the Cactus Club was definitely a step up for Miller as it had a reputation and a long history in Victoria. A nightclub had been on the spot since 1933 when two men purchased the building and did a total renovation with a Haitian cult theme and called it the “Voo Doo Club”. It quickly caught on and continued operating, selling liquor (both legal and illegal) to locals and later to servicemen stationed nearby. After the war, the owners sold the Voo Doo to W.H. “Slim” Modlin in 1946 who changed the name to the Cactus Club and ordered the below chips to be used there.



WHM4

My note: I need the red chip. I have black and yellow.

W. H. Modlin
K 7181 P. O. Box 511
10-11-46 Victoria, Texas
1500 B-9 HUB CHECKS
400 YELLOW
600 RED
500 BLACK

WHM

MONO W H M BOTH SIDES IN GOLD

Completed October 16, 1946

W. H. MODLIN
P. O. BOX 511
VICTORIA, TEX.

WHM

9/18/47

K 4218

1600 B-9 HUB CHECKS
300 R 300 Y
MONO WHM IN GOLD BOTH
SIDES ALL CHECKS

Completed 9-26-57

WHM5

In 1950, Modlin sold the Cactus Club to locals who ran it, including Bert Miller from 1956 until 1960. It was here in 1960 that Bert's life would change forever.

In early 1960, Bert opened up a new popular nightclub he called the Town Club located at 1411 Village Drive. He was finally his own man and his club was a success. All was going well until the summer of 1960 when his personal life would suffer tragedy. The first in July when his elderly mother passed away, followed closely in August with an event so tragic it's difficult to imagine how he coped. It was a stormy night and Bert was travelling back from San Antonio where he had picked up his two teenage daughters from a summer camp. The blinding rain hampered his sight and Bert never saw the oncoming car being driven by an army major. The ensuing collision broke Bert's ribs and punctured his lung. More tragically, his fifteen year old daughter would not survive the crash. Her death would be felt throughout the community and must have been an immense weight of sadness for Bert.

Back in Victoria, after a few surgeries, Bert Miller would come back to the new Town Club. It was now in the late 1960s that some of the newspaper articles were starting to get indexed and right away I was able to find Bert's direct involvement with gambling and the law. In late 1968, the Town Club and the local Turf Club (203 S. Liberty, operated by William Alkek, Johnnie Lewis and Richard Dick) were raided and the owners indicted. Their felony charges were reduced to misdemeanors and, as was the case with so many of these club operators, they paid their small fines and were free to go about their business.

Victorians Fined in Wager Case

The four Victoria men arrested Dec. 28 by Texas Rangers and city officers during raids on two Victoria clubs were each assessed \$100 fines and \$15 in court costs Tuesday afternoon when they pleaded guilty to misdemeanor indictments before Dist. Judge Joe E. Kelly.

Entering guilty pleas and paying their fines later at the sheriff's office were Bert Miller, 63, of 4 Jade Drive; Edward William Alkek, 52, of 2107 Walnut; Johnnie Lewis, 57, of 2306 Lone Tree Road, and Richard Dick, 35, of 3304 Glenlake St.

They were indicted Feb. 5 on reduced charges of "accepting wagers on football" after originally being named Dec. 30 in felony charges of "keeping a gambling house."

Criminal Dist. Atty. Bill Sparks said the \$100 fines are the maximum amounts provided by law on misdemeanor gaming indictments.

The four men were arrested in simultaneous raids across the state in what the Department of Public Safety described as a coordinated crackdown on bookmaking operations.

Miller was arrested at The Town Club, 1411 Village Drive, and Alkek, Lewis and Dick were arrested at The Turf Club, then located at 203 S. Liberty.

Texas Rangers and city officers said they confiscated betting sheets on sporting events and ledgers containing names of persons who had placed bets on sporting events from the two clubs.

WHM6

The Town Club would close in 1970 and Bert started his well-earned retirement. He moved to Brenham (home of the best ice cream on the planet) and passed away in 1975.

My note: Here is a good one! Richard Dick mentioned in the above article was a good friend of mine. he came to every poker tourney I ran at the Four Queens 1981-1996. We had lunch whenever possible on his visits. I always knew he had been involved with illegal gambling in Victoria, but he did not talk about it. He gave me a bunch of sample chips that were sent to him from distributors in Kansas city, CJ, TKS, and Jack Todd companies.

And with Bert's obituary I closed the files and ushered out the doors of the Victoria library. It was been a good trip and I was pleased that I was able to uncover the true meaning behind the "HC", the Hawaiian Club and Mr. Bert Miller.

As I was driving out of town I programmed my GPS for the address of the Hawaiian Club. It guided me off the main highway, down a small side street and turned me unto E. Oak Street. Today the street is all industrial storage units, old houses and one very scary biker bar. As I counted down the street addresses I came to where the Hawaiian Club had once stood and found only an open field.



WHM7

The Hawaiian Club, like the Era of the Illegals, has faded into history.

Good research Ed. Don't stop. *vbg*