

This "Illegal Of The Day" is a last minute replacement for a very controversial one I planned to post. After spending an hour on the phone with David Spragg I decided to hold off a little longer, I've had it in the works for 3 years. This was the umpteenth time we've talked about it. <g> He did point out one good reason to wait a few more months.

Weston Charles sent me the HEL chip a few weeks ago. At first glance I thought it was an abbreviation for that "hot" place! <g>

Enough of that:

Let's revisit the "Big Sky" state of Montana for the first time since 8/15/2010. Maybe Michael Knapp will jump in with a little info.

Montana has had a love hate relationship with illegal/legal gambling for years.

Montana Gambling

Pre-1937 it was all technically illegal (though rarely enforced).

1937-1950, gaming was okay as long as it was licensed locally.

1950-72, it was illegal.

1973, gaming was legalized state-wide (only poker, pan, and live keno).

Although this place operated under several names it survived all 4 eras listed above, illegal and legal..



HEL1&2att2

HEL \$10 -

Helsinki Bar, Butte MT.

Delivered in 1963.

It was open until 1998.

Gambling illegal in MT prior to 1973.

Enter our "Friend Of The Hobby."

The HEL hubs were delivered to the Helsinki Bar in Butte, Montana in 1963. At the time of the delivery the Helsinki Bar was operated by John Iver Niemi, a Minnesota native and son of Finnish immigrants who moved to Butte around 1952. Prior to opening the Helsinki Bar, Niemi operated a place at the same location called the Corner Bar and the New Corner Bar. The name was changed to the Helsinki Bar around 1962-63.

Interesting promotion from 1959:

**FREE CASE
BUTTE BEER**
For largest trout
caught weekly.

**NEW CORNER
BAR & GRILL**
402 E. Broadway
Fishing Tackle
Last Week's Winner
Andy Juntunen
2 lb. 12 oz. Rainbow

HEL3att2

The Helsinki was located at 402 East Broadway in a part of Butte settled in the early 1900's by many Finnish immigrants and known as "Finn Town." Constructed around the turn of the century, the structure which housed the Helsinki Bar was equipped in the rear with a traditional Finnish sauna or steam bath. These steam baths were still in use when the chips were ordered in 1963.

Here's a pic of the rear of the place from 1939; at the time the front housed the Broadway Bar, run by a son of Finnish immigrants named John Niemi (no relation to Iver):



HEL4att2

Here's a pic of the front from the 1970's; sign out front mentions the steam baths:



HEL5att2

same pic, wider angle:



HEL6att2

Although in the photo above the Helsinki Bar sits somewhat isolated on the edge of town, it wasn't always that way. In its heyday the area around the Helsinki was surrounded by blocks of buildings. When the photo above was taken most of Finn Town had been purchased by the nearby Anaconda Copper Mining Company which tore down the structures in order to expand its mine. The Niemi's refused to sell the Helsinki and the bar promoted itself as "the last of Finn Town." The Helsinki Bar closed in the late 1990's.

Below is an aerial view showing the location of the Helsinki Bar relative to the pit created by the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. The pit, known as the Berkley Pit, ceased to be mined in 1982 and subsequently filled with water.

The Helsinki Bar is circled in red in the lower left:



HEL7att2

Another view; Finn Town extended several blocks left of the Helsinki Bar into what today is the Berkley Pit (the water in the pit is said to have the acidity of lemon juice):

My note: One HEL of a pit close to the HEL bar. <g>

Weston's comment after he was shown this history.

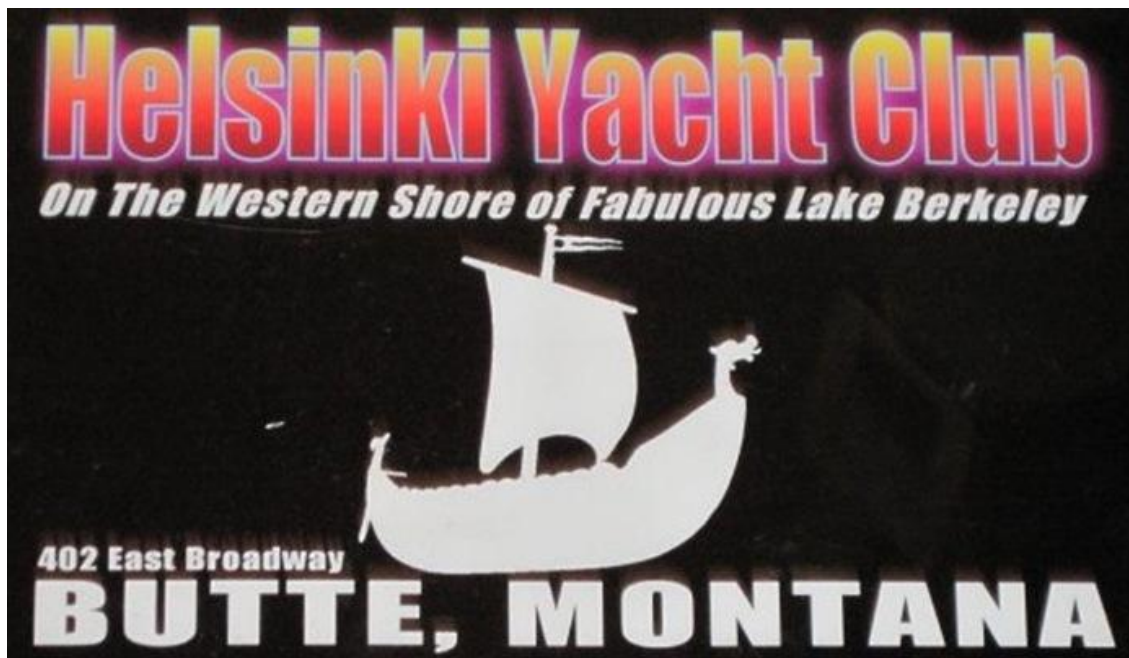
"I wonder how many bodies are at the bottom that pit."

My guess is, if the pit was in Illinois there would be more bodies than you wanted to know about. <g>



HEL8att2

In 2006 the Helsinki reopened as the "Helsinki Yacht Club," a humorous reference to its close proximity to the water-filled Berkley Pit--or as the sign below calls it: "Fabulous Lake Berkeley."



HEL9att2



HEL10att2

Warning Will Robinson: Since I brought up Illinois. New Illinois illegal has been identified from the Hunt & Company records and is coming soon to the "Illegal Of The Day" series. The son of the operator in 1932 is alive, talking, and has chips. <g>

Added info from Weston:

D.D.W



Hel11att2



HEL

12 att2

After piecing different parts together from the stamps...

The stamp reads:

HELSINKI BAR & GRILL
Saura B...?
402 E Broadway
Fintown Butte Montana

All of the Red diamond/square chips had the Hotstamps worn right off, but I noticed there was one one that had a faint Hot Stamp, It reads BOARD OF TRADE both sides.



HEL13att2

There were 12 or so of that mold worn clean, but the one was visible as shown. A couple of these reds had the same faded ink stamp as the wave chips.

Michale Knapp emailed me "In checking Steve Goodrich's Montana book, I found that he attributes DDW to Billings. Could be. Maybe DDW, whoever he was, later moved to Butte and ran a table at the Helsinki, and that's where the rubber stamps came in."

"Thing about MT chips is that poker tables are usually leased out to an operator, who pays a space lease to the bar owner, and the operator's name or initials are on the chips. They seem to have no connection with the bar they're used in, so you have to have independent information as to who the operator was and where he ran the table. Couple that with the fact that in many cases, the same operator ran tables at several different locations, and solid identification can be tough!"

Thanks for everybody's help on this one, as far as I know we are still looking for the ID the D.D.W, running theories are welcome. I have dupes on most of these, if anyone wants them please email me.