

Early 1930's. The beginning of the "Era Of The Illegals."

In the beginning there were "Chips." *vbg* Almost uncirculated 80 year old chips. They sat through 3 generations in someone's closet just waiting for a chip collector to "Come A Knocking." Kenny Craig was that collector. The Mason records have been a wealth of information giving us starting points to capture a picture of who, why, what, and where the buyers used our little pieces of clay.

Once again the ID did not give us a "Club" name. IMO, from the research it is safe to say it was called The Larch Club at the time the chips were ordered. Might also give us a clue on where the chips were for 80 years. This was a good size operation, BJ, craps, and a race wire. Is it possible The Hokey Pokey was first done at the Larch Club. *vbg* C'mon, own up! I know everyone has done the Hokey Pokey at least one time in their lives. *vbg*

I have a couple sets of EHD traders if anyone is interested.

Enough of that:



EHD1att2

Ed Degan

616 Larch St.

Dunmore, PA

6/2/33

Enter our "Friend Of The Hobby."

EHD—Edward Henry Degen

The EHD hubs were delivered to Degen at 616 Larch Street in Dunmore, a town which borders Scranton. 616 Larch, located in a two story wooden structure in a predominately residential area, had been the location of a gambling room for several years prior to Degen's 1933 chip order.

Degen was associated with 616 Larch as early as January 1932 when he was fined and given a suspended jail sentence for running a gambling operation at the address (prior to his association with 616 Larch, Degen ran a gambling operation at a billiard hall called the Twentieth Century Recreation Room.

Four months after paying his fine in January:

April 12, 1932

Sheriff Closes Gambling House On Larch Street

Chief Deputy Higgins Makes Surprise Visit to Edward Diegan's Es- tablishment

Chief Deputy Sheriff Patrick F. Higgins, in a surprise visit to an alleged gambling house located on Larch street, Dunmore, yesterday afternoon found the place in operation and ordered it closed at once.

According to Higgins, the establishment was being conducted by Edward Diegan, who some time ago was placed under arrest at the same place by state police, charged with conducting a gambling house. In court Diegan entered a plea of guilty and was fined \$250 by Judge Will Leach.

Diegan was warned by the county peace officer that his place would be placed under surveillance and should he again resume operation he will be placed under arrest.

EHD2att2

A year later Degen was running again at 616 Larch; his place was raided by the State Police and he was arrested.

This article about the raid refers to the place as the "Larch Club" which it says offered poker, blackjack, craps and horse betting:

April 10, 1933

35 Are Arrested As Police Raid Club in Dunmore

Troopers From Peckville and Wyoming Visit Alleged Gambling Establishment

Thirty-five men were arrested on Saturday afternoon at 5:30 o'clock when Corporal Jacob Hess and a squad of nine state troopers from Peckville and Wyoming barracks raided the "Larch club," alleged gambling establishment located at 616 Larch street, Dunmore.

Eddie Dieghan, this city, was arrested as the proprietor of the establishment. He posted \$1,000 bail before Alderman Thomas W. Davis, Eighth ward, for his appearance in court. Thirty-four others charged with being frequenters posted deposits before the same alderman. The latter group included "bookies" who occupied special quarters in one section of the club where returns were received from the Lexington, Ky., race track.

Five of the men were in charge of tables on which poker, black-jack and craps were being played, according to the police.

Only two of the troopers were in uniform, but they wore topcoats and were not readily recognized.

EHD3att2

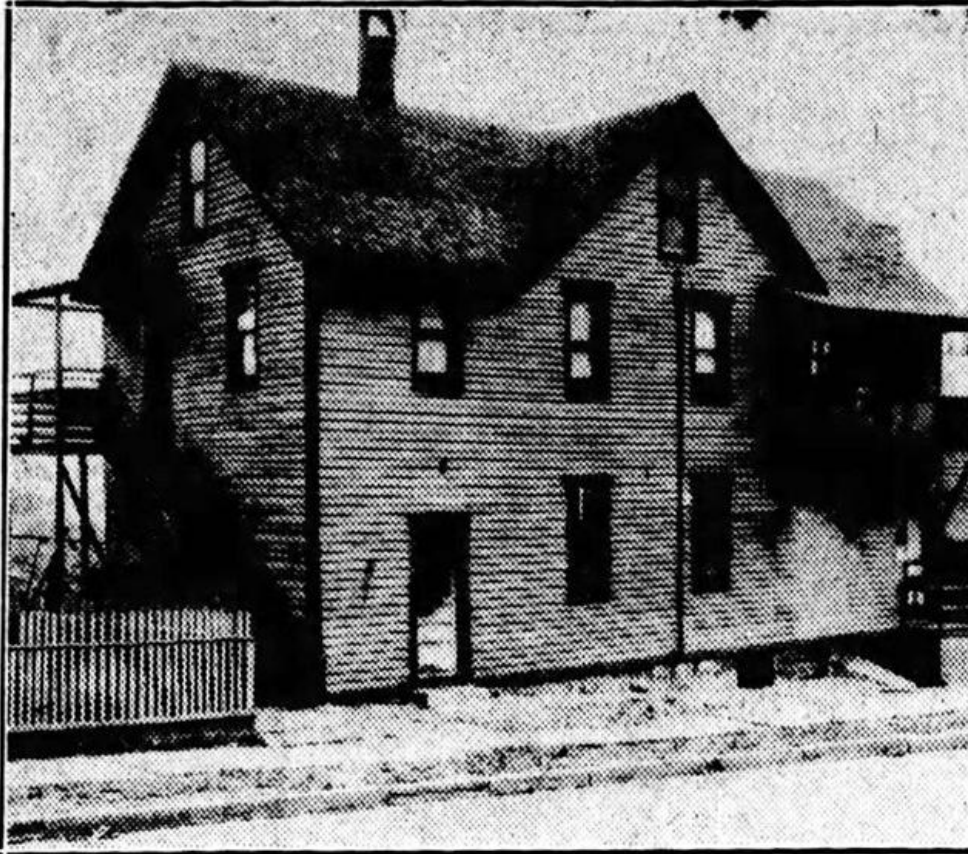
Three months later, and a month and a half after the EHD chip order, the place is raided again. 616 Larch is described as the headquarters for the dissemination of race wire information in the Scranton area.

July 21, 1933:

The establishment, reputed to be the headquarters for race track betting in this section, was stripped of equipment costing thousands of dollars. Principal among the fixtures removed by the deputies were two modern teletypewriters said to have been leased to the place by the American Telephone & Telegraph company. With these machines the place was kept in direct touch with all of the principal horse-race betting centers in the country. It is understood that the wire news received from the various tracks as well as bets placed here were carried over the teletypewriters for more than half-dozen local establishments. The wrecking of the Larch street place, as a result, affected several other houses.

EHD4att2

Raided as Gambling House



Shown above is the building at 616 Larch street, Dunmore, which was the scene yesterday of a raid by deputy sheriffs acting under orders from Sheriff George T. Williams. Equipment valued at several thousand dollars was removed from the establishment by the officers and is now subject to destruction. A warrant for the proprietor of the place will be issued before the end of the week, Sheriff Williams indicated.

EHD5att2

The sheriff never issued a warrant for the proprietor because he said he was not able to identify him, but presumably it was still Degen. Among the several thousand dollars worth of equipment removed from the place were chips, possibly the EHD hubs:

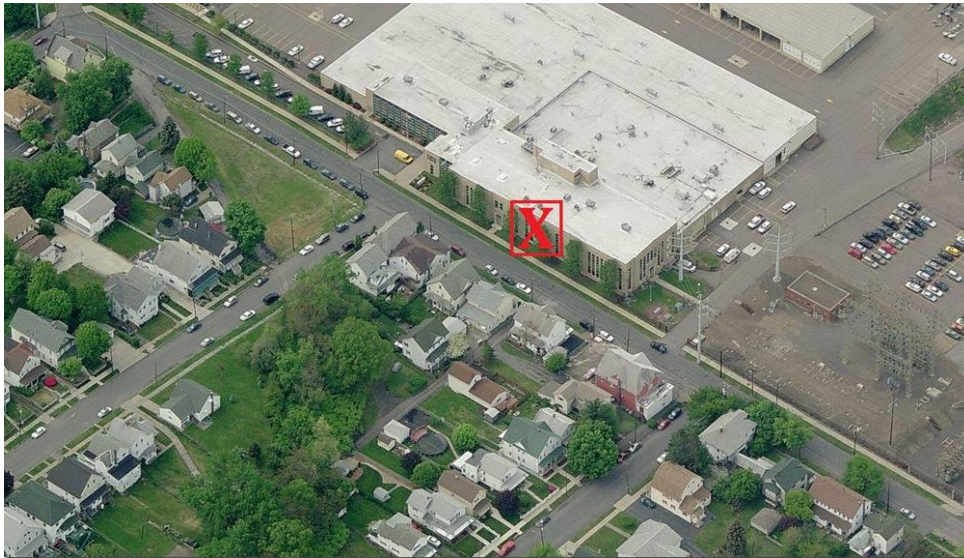
More than a truckload of equipment was carried away by the officers. Included in the fixtures were card tables, dice tables, cards, chips and betting signs indicating odds on parlays, etc.

EHD6att2

My note: If these were the EHD hubs, they could have sat in a police evidence locker for many years until they decided to sell them in one of their public sales. As we have seen in past IOTD stories, sometimes one of the raiding policemen often took some of the confiscated chips. Many times they sit in a raiders closet until the person dies and his heirs take them to ebay. In this case the ebay seller had no info on the chips. More than likely they came from an estate sale after several generations.

616 Larch continued to operate off and on as a gambling house until early 1935 when the property was purchased by the Scranton Electric Company which razed the building and several around it when it constructed a service center at the location.

Current aerial—Scranton Electric Company building still stands; red X marks the spot where the gambling house at 616 Larch once stood:



EHD7att2

Degen may or may not have been associated with 616 Larch after 1933. By 1934, and for several subsequent years, he was one of the leaders of a gambling syndicate which moved a big gambling room from one downtown Scranton location to another. One of the locations was in the 200 block of Wyoming and was described at the time as being “the largest and most completely equipped gambling house that this city has ever known.” By June 1934 this operation had moved to 326 Lackawanna and was known

as the Ritz Club. By late 1935 the operation had moved to the Mozart Pool Hall at 120 Penn Avenue where it ran until mid-1936 when it moved again.....and so on. All of these places were raided at one time or another. If Degen managed to keep his EHD hubs out of the hands of raiding law enforcement, then presumably they could have been used at any of these locations.

In late 1936 Degen was operating in the 200 block of Penn Avenue when his place was hijacked and he lost more than just his money:

September 31, 1936

Call a Cop? 'Taint No Use— Only Gambling Den Robbed

Although three armed men held up a gambling house in the 200 block of Penn Avenue Saturday night at 7 o'clock and got \$3,500 in cash, the Scranton Police Department has not yet been notified of the stickup.

The three men entered the establishment as attendants were counting up the day's winnings on the horse races and dice tables. Armed with automatics, the robbers ordered the 10 employees and patrons to turn over their cash.

They scooped up the money and ordered their victims to remove their pants. After ripping out the phone connections, the three holdup men left the establishment with the money and their victims' pants.

Police officials last night said that they have had no notice of the robbery.

The proprietors of the gambling house, it is understood, did not notify the police because they did not want to bring any further publicity on the establishment in the city's newspapers.

They said that the holdup men were "foreigners" and were probably imported from out of town to

(Continued on Page 3; Col. 7)

EHD8att2

Penn Avenue Gambling Den Scene of Holdup

(Continued From First Page)

do the job. They said that the robbers must have had some local connections because they were thoroughly familiar with the establishment and had timed the robbery so that there would be few patrons and a lot of money on hand.

Several weeks ago the police answered a riot call at the gambling house. When they arrived, the fight was over and they failed to close the establishment or to make an arrest.

Later in the day they arrested Bennie "Sixty" Schwartz, a paroled convict, on a charge of suspicion. Schwartz was charged with purposely provoking a fight with Al Deegan, brother of Edward Deegan, alleged proprietor of the place. Schwartz was held at Police Headquarters for four days before he was released.

EHD9att2

My note: Once again the robbers took their victims pants. We have seen this before. Kind of popular in the robbing of illegal casino's. *vbg*

(Al Degen was working as a stick man for his brother when Schwartz questioned Degen's operation of the dice table and took a swing at Al. Schwartz was jumped, gagged and dragged into a private office.....)

Degen left Scranton in the mid 1940's and moved to Kentucky where he died in 1975 at the age of 76.

My note: Degen spent 30 or so years in Kentucky. I'm betting he kept at what he knew best. *vbg* Any of you KY boys ever heard of him?

a final note, not chip related--

Degen had several brothers. At least one, Al, worked as a stick man at one of Degen's downtown gambling rooms. Another brother, Robert, was a musician who played in several popular bands in the Scranton area. Robert Degen's claim to fame is that he had a hand in the creation of the song "Hokey Pokey" --or of the version of the song that most of us are familiar with (he got royalties checks from it). Robert died in Lexington, Kentucky in 2009 at the age of 104 (he had moved to Kentucky in the 1970's, where his brother Eddie was living).

Degen's 2009 death notice and story about the Hokey Pokey from the New York Times:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/03/arts/music/03degen.html?_r=0

In 1933, when his brother Eddie was running an illegal gambling room at 616 Larch, the guy who helped author the Hokey Pokey was actually in the pokey:

Nab Local Musician For Sale of Narcotic

Robert M. Degen and Binghamton Woman Held In New York State City After Supply of Mari- huana Cigarettes Is Confiscated; Accuses Scranton Man of Furnishing "Weed"

Special to The Republican
BINGHAMTON, N. Y., Feb. 9.—Charged with the sale and possession of habit forming drugs, a man describing himself as a Scranton, Pa., musician and a local woman are being held by the authorities. Police believe that with the arrest of the couple they have stopped the source of the sale of many marihuana cigarettes, composed of locoweed or Indian hemp.

The prisoners are described as Robert M. Degen, 27, 1440 Capouse avenue, Scranton, and Mrs. Clara McKinney, 25, 105 Court street, this city. In default of \$2,000 bail each on a charge of selling the drugs, they were committed to the Broome county jail. They will be arraigned in city court tomorrow on a charge of possessing the drugs.

EHD10att2

Degen is facing two charges, sale and possession. Police indicate that he has refused to enter a guilty plea and intends to fight the case. Mrs. McKinney, police said, has signed an affidavit in which she accuses Degen as the ring leader in the marihuana traffic here, retracting a previous statement that a mysterious Mexican had given her the weed.

EHD11att2

When Degen plead guilty to misdemeanor possession, the felony selling charge was dropped and he was sentenced to 1 year in jail.



EHD12att2

"Police Heads" inspecting Degen's locoweed cache (the guy seated left almost looks like he has an "illegal smile"):



EHD13att2

My notes: I agree the cop on the left looks like he tried a "Toke" of the seized stash. *vbg*

Three more new illegal clubs, Larch Club, Ritz Club, and Mozart Pool Hall are identified for TGT in this "Illegal Of The Day." Seems like new ones are never ending. I've always said the "Era Of The Illegals" was a vast USA wide enterprise. IMO. that claim is proving true. The search continues.

This is "Illegal of The Day" #225.