

Welcome back to our "Friend Of The Hobby." Once again he shows us what detailed research is all about. *vbg* And a little contest at the end of this post.

I have played poker in Hamilton, Ohio many times. Before you ask, this game was a little before my time. *vbg*. There was two auctions on ebay for the HCW chips. One for the blue and one for the yellow chips. Two different collectors got them. They got together after the auctions and here we are with another great "Illegal Of The Day" post.

Lyman Williams story of gambling and booze starts in 1910, runs through prohibition, and ends after 53 years.

Take it away, "Friend."

HCW



HCW1att2

These die-cut chips were ordered from the United States Playing Card Company on March 29, 1922 by the American China & Glass Co. for customer Lyman Williams of Hamilton, Ohio (a Cincinnati suburb).



HCW2att1

USPC records are available here: http://chipguide.themogh.org/cg_uspc_list.php

Below is a newspaper ad for the American China & Glass Co. from 1922, the year of the chip order--if prohibition were not in effect, the ad's header would probably read "Bar and Saloon Supplies" (note the adjacent USPC ad; both companies located in Cincinnati):

SODA FOUNTAIN SUPPLIES

Restaurant Equipment, Pocket Billiard Tables and Supplies,
China, Glassware, Silverware and Utensils for
Hotels, Restaurants, Clubs and Institutions.

American China and Glass Co. Court and Walnut Sts.,
Cincinnati.

PLAYING CARDS AND SUPPLIES,
BICYCLE PLAYING CARDS,
CONGRESS PLAYING CARDS.

and other popular cards.
Manufactured Only By

THE U. S. PLAYING CARD CO.

CINCINNATI, OHIO, U. S. A.

Send for Catalog and Price List.

HCW3

At the time of the chip order Lyman Williams was the proprietor of a "soft drink" cafe and pool room located on the northwest corner of South 5th and Henry Streets in Hamilton, directly across the street from a railroad passenger depot.

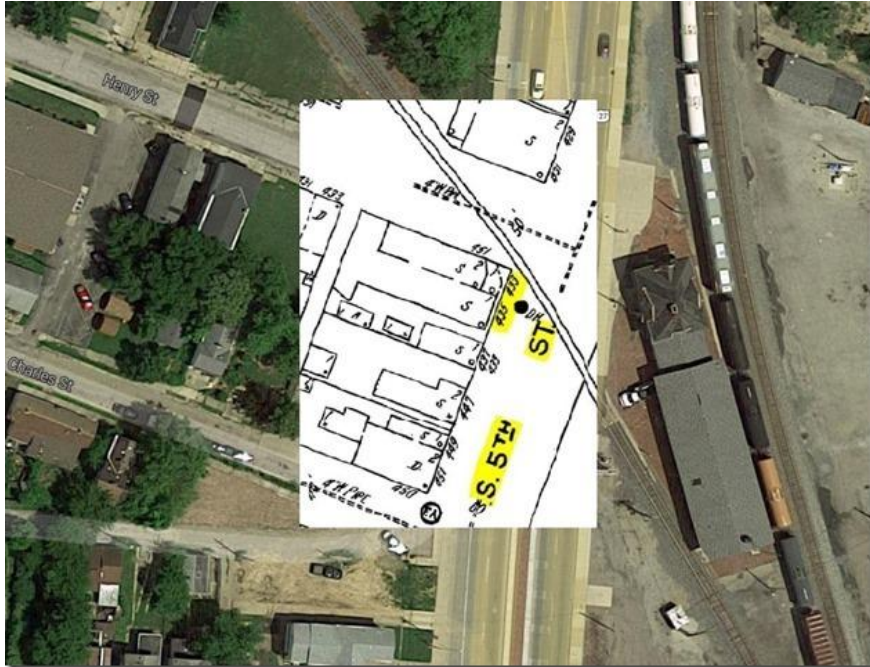
1921-22 Hamilton city directory:

WILLIAMS LYMAN,

Cafe and Restaurant; Pool Room in Connection, 433-435 S.
5th, opp. B.&O. and C.I.&W.R.R. Passenger Depot; 'Phone
861; Residence, 233 Chestnut. (Gertrude)

HCW4

The corner on which Lyman had his place no longer exists, nor does a big chunk of South 5th, both removed by the re-routing of Route 127 (the passenger depot and many of the surrounding structures still stand, including the railroad track which passed only a few feet from the front door of Lyman's saloon). Below is a current aerial with a street map from the 1920's superimposed showing the location of Lyman's place at 433-435 S. 5th:



HCW5

Current street view--Route 127 running left to right, Henry Street dead ahead:



HCW6

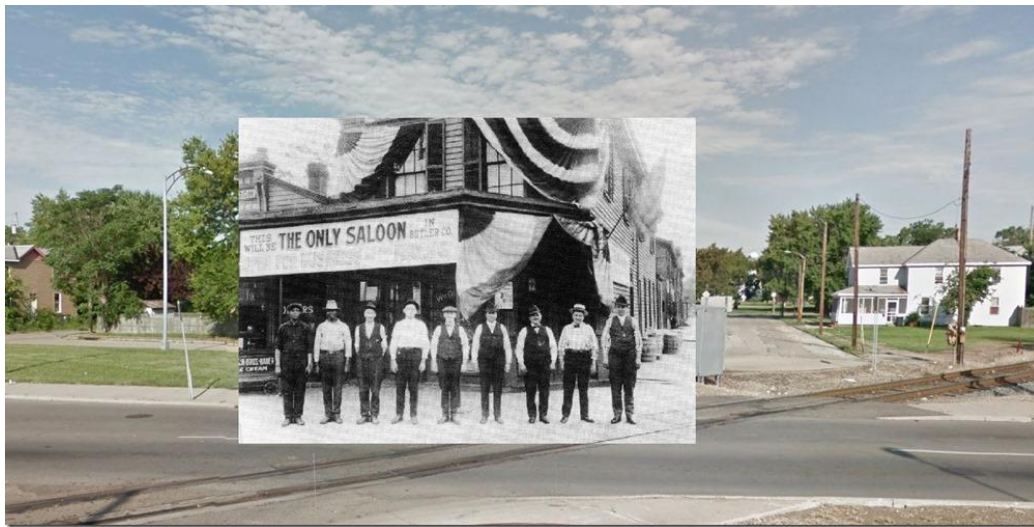
Lyman Williams, an Ohio native born and raised northeast of Cincinnati, moved to Hamilton around 1910 where he worked as a bartender and headed the local bartenders union. Lyman purchased the saloon at S. 5th & Henry in 1915 and from that location helped Hamiltonians wet their whistle well into the 1920's, both during the last years of legal booze as well as the dry days of prohibition.

Below is a photo of Lyman's place from May 1919. Lyman is standing 4th from the right:



HCW7

current street view with the 1919 photo superimposed (the man on the far right is standing inside the railroad track):



HCW8

The sign out front says "This will be the only saloon in Butler Co. open for business Monday May 26." The State of Ohio made itself dry before the 18th Amendment forced it to. At midnight, at the end of Monday May 26, 1919 Ohio's prohibition would go into effect. However, all Ohio liquor licenses were set to expire two days earlier on May 24th. To remedy this, the State of Ohio decided to offer a 1 day liquor license good only on the 26th. Out of the 117 saloons in Butler County (76 in Hamilton) Lyman's was the only one to pay the \$305 fee for a license (statewide, only 163 out of around 5,000 saloons bought one). On the 26th, from 8AM until midnight, 14 bartenders served up last call while 6 hired police officers helped keep things orderly and peaceful at the only place in Butler County where you could legally buy a drink.

Lyman's place the "Last Oasis" according to a Hamilton newspaper, May 26th 1919:

THE LAST OASIS.

Today is not bargain day at Lyman. Williams at Fifth and Henry streets, but the crowd is larger this morning than at any cut-rate sales which have been held in this city.

And there's a reason. The last day to put your foot to the bar, lean on your elbow and partake of the old beverages. Many were making use of the final day at the only place in the city this morning and the proprietor of the cafe is expecting a fire-sale business until twelve this evening when the final rounds will be served and the last wet spot in the city will be obliterated.

HCW9

Of course, as we all know, the idea that Lyman's place was the last oasis before entering a new dry world is a pure mirage. Over the next decade Lyman went from being a popular saloon operator to being described by "authorities" as a "recognized leader among Hamilton bootleggers."

The HCW chips were shipped on April 19, 1922. Less than 2 months later on June 7th Lyman's place was raided by Federal prohibition agents. Lyman and his bartender were arrested. Agents found over 7 quarts of whiskey and 100 bottles of beer on the premises. Agents said they also saw in a back room at least 18 revolvers, half a dozen rifles and shotguns as well as knives and clubs. Lyman plead guilty to illegal possession of liquor and paid a \$350 fine.

In early 1925 a group of reform minded citizens went out into Hamilton seeking evidence of liquor and gambling and, not surprisingly, they found some. What they saw they swore up into affidavits which were then forwarded to the Governor of Ohio. The Gov then sent them to the Mayor of Hamilton with the recommendation that he suspend the Chief of Police in an effort to get better law enforcement in Hamilton (the mayor complied).

One of the affidavits was made by a hired investigator from Youngstown who spent about 2 months from early March to early May looking for booze and gambling. During that time he found 14 places selling booze, including Lyman's where he said he found both beer and liquor available. Here's his list of 11 places where he found gambling (a lot of poker in Hamilton):

- 1.—Southeast Corner Maple Avenue and Third street. race books.
- 2.—Oriental club, 20 South Third street, upstairs over a pool room, poker game, two tables.
- 3.—132 High street. Harry Swayne, in rear of first floor, poker, two tables.
- 4.—Between 9 and 16 Main street, race book place, owned by Adolph Schraam.
- 5.—Arcade Billiard parlor, 319 High street, John Hart, proprietor crav and stud poker in back room, race books, doors open.
- 6.—16 North B street, Hubert Hall runs a place for Jesse McDaniel, poker.
- 7.—5 South B street, proprietor, Bob Johnson, poker.
- 8.—Fairview and Benninghofen avenues, poker game in rear.
- 9.—Hotel Lee, Wood street and Monument avenue, crap table and poker.
- 10.—Fifth and Henry streets, Lyman Williams, proprietor, poker in back room.
- 11.—91 Walnut street, Crescent Aid club, gambling.

HCW10



HCW11

Oh grow-up Mr. Bean...

One of the men who made out the affidavits stated that he talked to the proprietor of a gambling room who told him that the right amount of money put into the right hands in city government could buy you a protected poker or craps game.

The HCW chips were most likely used at Lyman's saloon. Research up to this point has not determined what the initials on the chip stand for. If we assume the W is for Williams then the H and the C most likely would have been Lyman's partners in a gambling operation located in his saloon. However, it's possible that Lyman may have been involved in another enterprise somewhere else, perhaps a roadhouse, but nothing has come to light to suggest this was the case at the time of the chip order.

Lyman put his own initials on this saloon token:



HCW12

In the late 1920's Lyman became associated with another "soft drink" cafe, this one located in downtown Hamilton at 117 Court, directly across the street from the Butler County courthouse and next to the county jail. The place was raided numerous times. When it was raided in January 1929 a Hamilton newspaper had this description of the place:

The playhouse of some of the most prominent persons in Hamilton was broken up Saturday evening when police conducted a sensational raid on a gambling and bootlegging den at 117 Court street adjacent to the county jail. Books are in possession of police showing a list of 100 names of persons having charge accounts at the place and receipts and expenditures showing a \$200,000 a year business being conducted.

HCW13

(\$200,000 in 1929 is roughly equivalent to \$2.7 million in 2014)

On May 14, 1929 117 Court was raided again and Lyman was charged with "maintaining a nuisance" and liquor possession. A week later on May 20th a couple of bootlegging regulars of 117 Court named Joseph "Turkey Joe" Jacobs and Robert "Foxy Bob" Zwick touched off a little "bootleggers war" in Hamilton, a city which locals were starting to call "Little Chicago."

Jacobs, described at the time as a "beer and whiskey runner and strong arm henchman for a bootleg gang" and Zwick, described as a "killer, hijacker and gangster," had concluded that a fellow bootlegger named George Murphy was stealing from them. On the evening of May 20th they confronted Murphy in a Hamilton alleyway and "filled him full of lead." They then picked-up Murphy's girlfriend or "moll" and drove her to a bridge over the Miami River where Zwick put a bullet in her brain (she was said to have realized what was happening to her a fraction of a second before Zwick pulled the trigger, just long enough to let out a slight "peep"). They tossed her corpse into the Miami where it was found downstream several days later.

The killing of Murphy and his girl did not sit well with a friend and associate of Murphy's named George "Fat" Wrassman. Wrassman was a former Hamilton bootlegger and Court Street cafe proprietor who had moved to Cincinnati in the late 1920's where he was described at the time as being a "gangland ruler" (in 1918 an FBI agent visited Lyman's saloon at 5th & Henry; he was looking for Wrassman who had apparently been buying booze from Lyman in a then wet Ohio and taking it across state lines into a dry Indiana; Wrassman, who was over 6 feet tall and weighed more than 300 pounds, was described by the FBI as "a big heavy man with the appearance of an overgrown boy").



HCW14

To avenge his friend Murphy's death Wrassman had a Hamilton bootlegger set up a fake booze transaction with Zwick and Jacobs. About 5 miles south of Hamilton, in the early evening of May 27th (one week after Murphy's slaying) Zwick and Jacobs were sitting in a car waiting to do the liquor deal when a vehicle pulled up, a machine gun popped out and within a few seconds Jacobs was dead and Zwick was severely wounded. When Jacobs wife heard a rumor that her husband was dead the first place she called to find out what happened was 117 Court (Zwick, who managed a dramatic escape from death, would find himself imprisoned in 1933, paroled in 1968 and dead of natural causes in 1997 at a Cincinnati nursing home, just shy of his 100th birthday).

Shortly past midnight on June 11th, two weeks after the Zwick and Jacobs shooting, Wrassman was leaving a Chinese restaurant in downtown Cincinnati when he encountered a police detective named Joe Schaefer who had been walking the streets looking for Wrassman. According to police Captain Walter Fricke who witnessed the event, as soon as the two laid eyes on each other:

“The firing started at about 35 feet.” Fricke said “and both men showed their gameness by walking toward each other, their guns spitting fire. The shooting ended when they were about 10 feet apart. Neither man wavered a bit. It was the most remarkable show of courage I ever hope to witness.”

HCW15

Wrassman crumpled to the ground mortally wounded, Schaefer stood over him untouched.

Within minutes of Wrassman's death Schaefer was receiving death threats and within an hour the saber rattling by Wrassman's friends and associates was so loud at a Cincinnati cafe that the police arrested 6 of them in order to cool them down (the police expressed the opinion that Wrassman's successor would come from one of these 6).

Those arrested were: Harry Truesdale, 20, 5732 Montgomery Road, Cincinnati, a famous figure in the Remus case and a racket man run out of Hamilton less than two years ago; Edward “Wildcat” Reynolds, 32, salesman, Cincinnati; Lawrence Merragh, 24, who lived at Wrassman's home; Sam Nason, 31, salesman, Cincinnati; Isadore Gettleman, 24, Cincinnati, and David Pollinsky, 22, Cincinnati garage owner.

HCW16

You can read about the Nason's and their activities in Gene Trimble's excellent 5 part article here:

<http://www.marlowcasinochips.com/links/genetrimble/arrowhead/arrowhead4.htm>

My note: Sam and Harold Nason were Cleveland Syndicate and bootleggers in Ohio, and Kentucky long before opening the Arrowhead Inn after prohibition ended. Sam's listing as a salesman is true. He sold booze. *vbg* In the late 1920's Harold killed a member of the Purple

Gang when they tried to hijack his liquor truck in eastern Kentucky. It was said Harold was the only man to kill a Purple Gang member and live to tell about it.

The Remus listed in the above article was George Remus. He was a very wealthy Cincinnati lawyer and the biggest bootlegger in the tri state area. He was ruthless. He transposed into owning several breweries after prohibition. He owned 2 large houses on Garrard street in Covington, KY. One for his wife and next door one for his mistress, connected by an underground tunnel. He shot his wife on a Cincinnati street in front of many witnesses and was found innocent by a jury. *vbg* In 1959, I lived in a house 7 doors from those houses.

A little more from Jim Linduff who proof read the article:

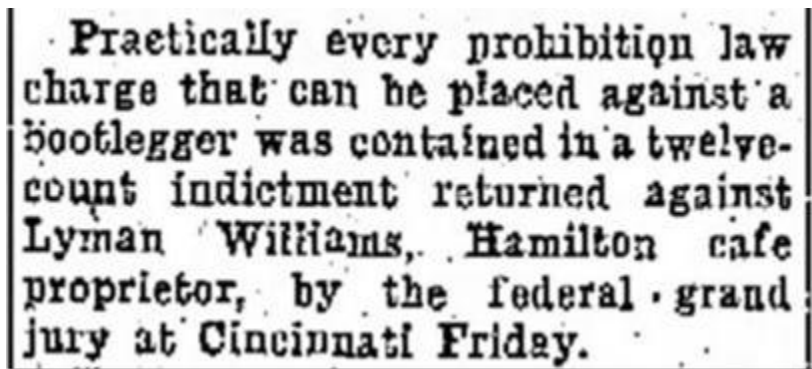
Gene:

Another great one. Hamilton was before my time, but the names in your work include a lot of guys who were in the Newport scene,, Izzy Gettleman, David Polinsky both associated with Bob Zwick, the Licavoli Gang guy from Detroit who lived in the Glenn Hotel on Monmouth ST, in Newport, KY.

Truesdale was the guy who testified he was paid to kill George Remus by his wife....all a scam to get George off of killing his wife...and it worked!

Enough of the back stories, back to Lyman's story and our "Friend."


While these "bootlegger war" killings were going on Federal Prohibition agents were putting Lyman and 117 Court under heavy scrutiny. The killings led to a large Federal crackdown on booze in Butler County. In October 1929 the Feds threw the book at Lyman:



Practically every prohibition law charge that can be placed against a bootlegger was contained in a twelve-count indictment returned against Lyman Williams, Hamilton cafe proprietor, by the federal grand jury at Cincinnati Friday.

HCW17

In January 1930 Lyman plead guilty on two counts and was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta.



The Journal is essentially a home newspaper. Constructive in its policies and possession of an unusual degree of reader-confidence. **HAMILTON EVENING JOURNAL** Page SIXTEEN THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1930 The best comics and features in the country today may be found every night in the Journal.

LYMAN WILLIAMS SENTENCED TO ATLANTA PRISON

HCW18

After Lyman's release from the pen he returned to Hamilton and over the next several years operated numerous bars and cafes.

Here's a couple of ads showing some of Lyman's activities during the 1930's:

JEFF'S GARDEN
DINE DANCE
WEDNESDAY NIGHT
SPEED JONES
AND HIS
TONE'S
FROM LOUISVILLE, KY.
featuring
HATTIE SNOW
WELL KNOWN
ENTERTAINER
TASTY SANDWICHES — BEER
CONCESSION UNDER NEW
MANAGEMENT OF
LYMAN WILLIAMS
ADMISSION 25c

HCW19



HCW20

On February 22, 1963 Lyman passed away in Hamilton at the age of 80.



HCW21

On the day that Lyman's saloon served up last call before prohibition this was printed in a Hamilton newspaper:

The Last 'Morning After'

Good-by, buffet and cabaret,
And other features urban,
Where bright lights shine on ruby wine
And gleam o'er rye and bourbon;
No more we'll stir with cheerful whir
The succulent martini,
Or keep with Scotch the midnight watch,
To wake up feeling beany.

No more we'll stop for just a drop
Of orange blossom rosy,
To end the night by getting tight
In some small barroom cozy;
No more we'll sip the pungent flip,
In spite of doctors' warnings;
No more the whiz of frosty fizz
Will cool our throats of mornings.

We'll never quaff, with ribald laugh,
Concoctions that are risky,
But seek our cheer in ginger beer,
Instead of bonded whisky;
We'll mourn with grief the clover leaf,
The highball and the rickey—
On pleasure bent, we'll be content
With something sweet and sticky.

No more the clinks of cooling drinks
Will sound along the hallways;
Our thirst we'll slake when we awake
With aqua pura, always:
No more, with pop, fat corks will hop
Mid bacchanalian laughter;
Our thirst allayed with lemonade,
We'll dread no morning after.

HCW22

My note: Prohibition was the biggest failure of a law in the history of the USA, IMO. It did not stop anyone from drinking alcohol. It did give rise to crime families all over the country. The existing crime families got bigger and richer. It also gave rise to smaller crime families in every state.

Hamilton, OH was not a big city. In this story I count 2 major crime families, Licavoli Gang out of Detroit, Cleveland Syndicate, and 3 local crime families, Remus, Wrasman, and Reynolds gangs. Kind of proves my point. *vbg*

I have 2 donated HCW chips. Guess how many illegal chips I have in my collection. The 2 people that come closest under or over to the total gets one. One guess per person and guess must be in subject line of your post.