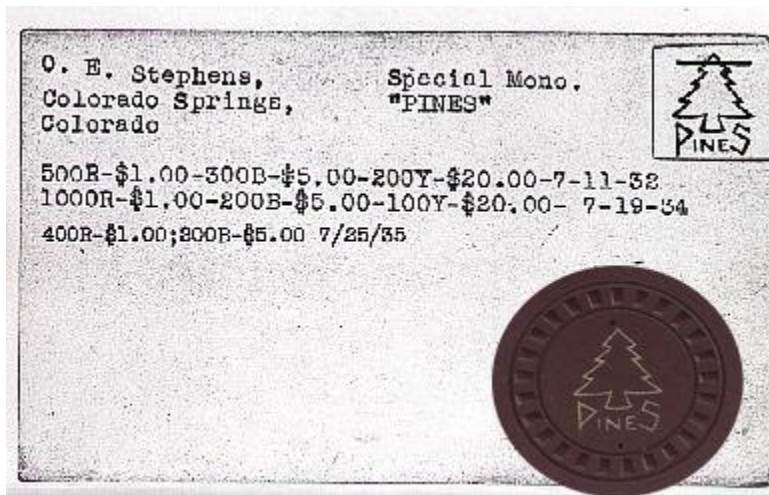


IMO, Ed Hertel has gone above and beyond on this one. The details of this one are in the top 5 "illegal Of The Day" research articles. If you take the time to read it, you will not be disappointed. I've had the red \$1 since 2003 and a yellow \$20 since 2000 without an attributable "Club" name. My yellow \$20 has the denom scratched off. Somewhere along the line, it was used for something else. The brown in Ed's scan is not on the card. It has the 2 small drill holes like many hub chips in the hobby. We believe the drilled chips came out of salesman sample books.

Enough of that, take it away Ed.

As like so many of these IOTD, this one started out with a chip and a name.



I was encouraged by the custom die and the idea of the chip having more than just initials. Usually this is a good indicator that the chips were more than an afterthought for a small backroom game. This person actually took the time and effort to put some energy into the chips. That was enough to get me to look further. What resulted were an embarrassment of information riches and one amazing story.

\*\*\* EARLY LIFE \*\*\*

The young O. E. Stevens (sometimes spelled Stephens like on the Mason card) was not originally from Colorado. He spent his early years in St. Louis, Missouri, where the city's bad influences were constantly a source of temptation. In 1909, in an attempt to start his life anew, he moved to Denver and worked as a bellhop at various hotels. It was here, among the wealthy patrons and Denver's gambling scene, that he first got a taste of what the good life could eventually be. Unfortunately for him, the life of a bellboy was not going to get him there.

So, four years later, in 1913, O. E. Stevens packed his bags and moved back to St. Louis where he knew people and thought he might be able to use this network to get him started on the road to success. For over a decade Stevens hustled and stole. He was a known gambler and a convinced thief and his record in St. Louis rolled out with 45 arrests, but only one short jail sentence. St. Louis proved to be a great

place to hone his skills and refine his business sense, but he was among thieves, and the pickings were spread thin. In 1926, he packed his bags and headed back to the only other place he knew – Colorado.

\*\*\* BUILDING A COLORADO EMPIRE \*\*\*

Stevens quickly built up a small gambling empire in the Denver and Colorado Springs areas. He was the well-known owner of two popular clubs called the Willows and the Star Ranch. Years later, an IRS investigation would reveal others clubs he owned during this time – mainly the Havana Club and Benswinger House.

Although not as well know, the Havana Club did receive a bit of notoriety in 1930 when a bank bookkeeper was found guilty of embezzling and it was shown that most of the money was spent at the club (along with another club called “The End”).

## McFarland Pleads Guilty as Padlock Order Made Public

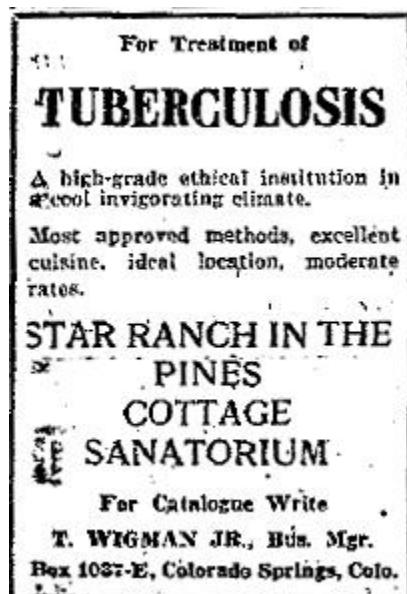
(Associated Press)  
Denver, May 16.—S. J. McFarland, former bookkeeper of the Stock Yards National bank accused of embezzling approximately \$50,000 of the bank's funds pleaded guilty to a charge of a confidence game when arraigned in West Side court today. At the same time in Littleton, District Judge Samuel W. Johnson granted District Attorney Joel Stone a temporary injunction padlocking two alleged Jefferson county gambling houses, “The End” and the “Havana Club” where McFarland is said by police to have lost the bulk of \$50,000. The action was one step in the move by police and Jefferson county authorities to clean up this territory of gambling houses in which McFarland said he lost the money he took from the bank.

The campaign to “clean up” the town of gambling would of course be a failure. A padlock on the Havana Club did not go very far in this effort and the other clubs easily absorbed the Havana’s patrons.

It was during this time in the early 1930s that O. E. Stevens, now nicknamed “Smiling Charley” after his alias Charles Belmont, ordered the “Pines” chips. I could not find anything to match with the Willows (although the tree motif had me intrigued) nor with the Benswinger House or Havana Club. I turned my attention to the Star Ranch and it is here that I have my potential match.

\*\*\* THE STAR RANCH IN THE PINES \*\*\*

Its full name was the “Star Ranch in the Pines” and it was a plush Colorado Springs retreat that had an interesting past. In the early 1900’s it served as a spa and getaway for the rich who looked for luxury and a bit of pampering. This lasted until the 1920’s when it’s clientele changed dramatically from the privileged to the dying as it was converted to a sanitarium for those with tuberculosis.



This retreat for the suffering continued until the 1930’s when Stevens purchased the place and converted it into a gambling club (hopefully after a good fumigation!) \*vbg\*

I believe this Star Ranch in the Pines is the best match for the “Pines” chips. I’m basing it really on nothing more than the timing of the chip order (1932 and 1934) and the name containing “Pines”, but at least it is consistently called that. In an article dated July 31, 1934 in the Colorado Springs Gazette, it says...

“Line to Star Ranch – The Star Ranch in the Pines, of which O. E. Stevens is proprietor, is the newest suburban customer of the municipal light and power department. A two-mile transmission line has been built to the ranch.”

The full name is again mentioned in 1937 when Stevens sold the place...

“Star Ranch in the Pines, historic ranch property near the exclusive Broadmoor residential area, which has been occupied for several years by O. E. ‘Smiling Charlie’ Stevens... has been sold to Frank C. Rand, Jr, of Stanta Fe, N.M.”

Is it a stretch? Maybe a little, but that is how it is going in my database. I suppose it could have been used at Stevens’ other clubs too as I don’t know of any other chips ordered for them, but I have even less to attached them there.

\*\*\* THE BLAKELAND \*\*\*

In 1933, Stevens opened a new club in Littleton, a suburb of Denver on the southside. Called the Blakeland Inn, it was located off the Colorado Springs-Denver highway, and like so many of his ventures, the Blakeland offered gambling as well as a popular night club.



With his gambling empire growing, Stevens tried his hand at some legitimate businesses, one being the ice rink called the Mammoth Gardens. As his attention went outside the clubs, he found people he could trust to run things while he was away. It was during this time that he made alliances with other gamblers in the area, as well as a few enemies. All these people would play a vital role in how the rest of the story would unfold.

\*\*\* THE BOETTCHER KIDNAPPING \*\*\*

In late February 1933, O. E. Stevens' time in the shadows would come to an end as he was suddenly thrust into the national zeitgeist with the kidnapping of a wealthy 31 year old investment broker named Charles Boettcher, Jr. Charles' father, the original Charles Boettcher, was immensely rich, and someone wanted a piece of his fortune. A ransom note demanding \$60,000 was followed soon after by a huge police effort to dig up information of who could be behind the crime. It did not take long to find an IOU

for gambling debts belonging to O. E. Stevens. Reports were the debt was between \$1,200 and \$20,000, but most pointed to the lesser amount.

Stevens was immediately picked up and questioned. Claiming no knowledge of the kidnapping, the police pressured him harder by raiding both the Star Ranch and the Willows Club, arresting Stevens' wife, mother-in-law and nephew. Still he held strong to his story and refused to confess to knowing anything about the kidnapping. With no evidence or leads, the police were forced to let Stevens walk out the door with the deadline to help the younger Boettcher quickly running out.

This might have been the end of Stevens' involvement if it weren't for the victim's wife and father. They requested a meeting with Stevens and asked that he be the go-between for the family and kidnapers. The police were weary of this arrangement and did their best to interrupt any of the family's direct contact, but in the end, the wealthy family would take care of things their way.

As the deadline approached, O. E. Stevens was given the ransom and told to get it done. The same man who claimed to know nothing of the kidnapping left with \$60,000 and returned with one unharmed Charles Boettcher Jr.

## **Kidnapers Free Denver Broker; Receive \$60,000**

**Millionaire Is Brought  
Unharmed to Home  
in Police Machine**

**Eyes Kept Covered**

**Says Abductors Drove  
Two Nights and Day  
After His Capture**



*Charles Boettcher II*

The young Boettcher would claim that he knew nothing of his kidnapers or anything that happened over the last week. O. E. Stevens was treated with suspicion but would not divulge any of the information regarding his dealings. His time as a reluctant hero would be short lived however.

\*\*\* LEO BARNES AND THE COTTONWOOD CLUB \*\*\*

The year 1937 would prove to be a tough year for Stevens. The genesis of his problem went back to his attempts to open some legitimate businesses, leaving the operations of his clubs to others. One person he put his trust in was an old running buddy from his St. Louis days named Leo Barnes. The two men had spent time on the other side of the law and both spent time in the St. Louis prison system. Stevens was popped for a burglary and Barnes for bank robbery. Neither of these men would be considered pillars of their community and as such, these brothers in crime kept in contact.

Fast forward to the middle 1930's and Barnes is looking for a place to start a club of his own. With the blessing of his absentee friend Stevens, Leo Barnes opened a club on the property of the Blakeland Inn. What was supposed to be a small, low-key operation flourished into the popular Cottonwood Club.

When Stevens' legitimate businesses floundered, he was back in charge of his clubs and the success of the neighboring Cottonwood Club was a little concerning to him. Even though he had invested none of his own money into the club, Stevens insisted that he should get a piece of the enterprise. He sent word to Barnes that he would accept no less than one-third interest in the Cottonwood. In a follow-up meeting, Barnes declined to give up any interest in the club, but did offer 20% of the cut.

Stevens went into a rage yelling, "If you don't cut me in, you won't live a week!" The date was December 4, 1933. Four days later, Leo Barnes' car would blow up with him and his wife inside.

Reports say that neighbors saw four men tinkering with Leo Barnes' car early on the morning of December 8<sup>th</sup>. Later, one was identified as being Eugene Smaldone, a craps dealer at Stevens' Blakeland Night Club.

Barnes and his wife were lucky that morning as the old cars of yester-year were built pretty tough. Leo would suffer severe injuries, but he would live. (His wife had minor injuries.) On the way to the hospital, Leo Barnes had no problem spouting off who he believed was behind it – Smiling Charlie Stevens. The police made their arrest and had no trouble rounding up the evidence.

Although there was no smoking gun, there was plenty of circumstantial evidence. Stevens was also hampered by his own lawyers who chose to bicker among themselves more than with the prosecution. One of his council insisted on objecting to everything, more than 400 times, which in the mind of the other lawyer only infuriated the jury. Hindsight shows he was probably correct.

In the end, Stevens was found guilty of assault with attempt to murder and given a sentence of 7 to 10 years. Along with Stevens, Eugene Smaldone, identified at the scene, and his brother Clyde were also

convicted. Clyde would eventually be released on a technicality after serving eight years, but the other two would serve out their sentences.

\*\*\* WOLHURST SADDLE CLUB \*\*\*

Once released from prison, Stevens was ready to get back to business. He dabbled in the stock market and became heavily involved in commodities. Once and gambler always a gambler, he started working both sides of the stocks, betting hard on the short side and getting caught on the wrong side of a market upswing. Cutting their losses, he and his longtime partner Eddie Jordan decided they would do what they knew best and open another casino.

In 1944, Stevens and Jordan both put in \$14,000 of their own money and financed another \$50,000 to purchase the Wolhurst estate from the widow of Horace Bennett, local real estate mogul. The estate was already a famous showplace in Littleton and had beautiful grounds and a large mansion, which the men quickly converted to a plush casino.

The clientele of the Wolhurst was the wealthy of Denver's elite. In 1946, this large assembly of wealth grabbed the unwanted attention of some thieves who swooped in on the club and relieved the place of \$150,000.

# Casino Holdup Nets Thieves \$150,000 Haul

DENVER —(U.P.)— The Rocky Mountain News said today in a copyrighted story that the fashionable Wolhurst gambling casino was held up Sunday morning by 13 heavily armed bandits who fled with \$150,000 in cash and jewelry.

The News said the gunmen looted the house of \$75,000 and took another \$75,000 in cash and jewelry from guests, many of them prominent Denver residents. The bandits took jewelry from the women guests and forced the men to turn over their wallets, the story said.

The Wolhurst club, located on the estate of the late Sen. Edward Wolcott South, is owned and operated by an ex-convict, O. E. Stephens, the News said.

One of the gunmen carried a machine gun, the paper said, and the holdup was completed in only 15 minutes.

The sheriff's office and the district attorney, Earle Foard, said they had received no report of the holdup. Sheriff Robert Campbell said Eddy Jordan, manager of the club, told him there had been no disturbance.

The taking of \$75,000 of patron's money cannot be overlooked. In 1946 dollars that is an immense amount of cash these people were bringing to the Wolhurst Club.

Later that year, O. E. Stevens is reported have asked to be cashed out of the club, and Eddie Jordan obliged by buying him out.

As for chips, in 1949, after Stevens had departed, Eddie Jordan made a purchase from Taylor and Company for chips for the Wolhurst Saddle Club.



NAME Ed Jordan SPECIAL MONOGRAM  
 Address Wolhurst Saddle Club  
 Town Littleton State Colo.  
 Per T. Stevens

**WSC**

Amount	Color	Initials Both Sides	Style Type	Initials One Side	Other Side	Style Type	Monogram Color	Date Shipped
1010	Red	WSC					Gold	8-12-49
504	Black	"					"	8-12-49
1010	Light Blue	"					"	8-12-49

My note: I need the WSC chips. Cough them up if you have traders. \*vbg\*

Tragedy would befall the Wolhurst Saddle Club in 1951 after a devastating fire broke out in the mansion, killing two workers. Although initial statements from the Jordan family (now incorporated and running the club) said the devastation was absolute and unrecoverable, the club was rebuilt and back to their old ways. In 1958, public officials finally had enough and ordered the club declared a public nuisance against gambling and padlocked.

\*\*\* STEVENS WINDS IT DOWN \*\*\*

It had been a hard, long road for O. E. Stevens and the life of a hustler can be grueling. In the late 1940's he spread his interests into Arkansas with the purchase of the Midway Hotel in Baxter County and the Silver Star Night Club in Marion County. Whether or not there was gambling, these ventures did not pan out financially. By 1949 he had sold these interests and moved back to Denver to open a club called "the Stockade".

Stevens only ran the club for two years and it was said to run mostly on credit. Perhaps Stevens was gun-shy after the big Wolhurst robbery, but most Stockade patrons bought in for credit and settled up at the end of the night, with the money then taken quickly off site. Where this money went was also no big secret. In an IRS investigation it was discovered that Stevens owned many bank safety deposit boxes that he visited regularly.

As well as accumulating cash, Stevens was using his ill-gotten proceeds to purchase land and real estate all over Denver, including many ranches.

With his interest in gambling waning, and his long life of staying on the hustle, O. E. Stevens slowed down his involvement in the clubs. Whether he had some quiet gambling action on the side it's hard to say. As the 1950s rolled in, his days of being the center of attention were behind him, and for him I believe that was a good thing. The man who tried for so long to get out of the business of gambling finally retired.

\*\*\* WRAP UP \*\*\*

This IOTD started with a single name on the "Pines" order card. I would never have imagined that in the end we would be able to add a large number of previously unknown clubs: Havana Club, Benswinger House, Star Ranch in the Pines, Willows Club, Blakeland Night Club, Cottonwood Club, Wolhurst Club, The End, and the Stockade.

Of the above clubs, why do we only know of chips from the Star Ranch and the Wolhurst Saddle Club? If I were to guess, these chips are probably out there, we just don't know it. Heck, we probably won't ever know it. If they are some initials on a B.C. Wills smey chip, those records were destroyed long ago.

Is the "Pines" chip really from the "Star Ranch in the Pines"? I think it's a pretty good "lean in that direction". I wish I had more, sure, but we don't.

Though, what I can be sure is that the illegal chipping community should be happy that this one chip opening up an entire history into the life of O.E. Stevens. It excites me to know that buried under all that information out there are these fascinating stories into gaming history.

Good night Smiling Charlie Stevens.

My note: Well gang! What do you think? Is that a lesson on illegal club history or what? \*vbg\* If it was out there to "Hustle," Smiling Charlie hustled it. \*vbg\*

Thank you Ed. Real nice research.