Peoria, Illinois was a large cluster of illegal gaming clubs. In the newspaper articles below you will read how the Shelton Gang ruled the city with brutal tactics to extract their pound of flesh for protecting the Clubs. The Shelton’s did not start the illegal clubs in Peoria.

They were originally farmers that saw a big bootlegging opportunity during prohibition. They became the “No 1 BIG” bootleggers in Peoria and oversaw a bloody era in Peoria’s history.

They saw the same opportunity in “The Era Of The Illegals.” They came out of retirement and ruled a 2nd bloody era in Peoria’s history.

It was “The Shelton’s way” or “The Hospital.”

As stated in previous “Illegal Of The Day” postings the history of “The Era Of The Illegals” repeats itself all over the USA. From Newport, KY, Detroit, MI, Upper NY State, East St Louis, Kansas City, MO, Oregon City, OR, to San Francisco, CA. The stories are all the same, bootlegging, bribery, killings, and blood, all in the name of the almighty $. Sound familiar?

Sort of like the drug gangs of today without AK 47’s.

If you don’t collect illegal chips, at least from the area you live in, you are missing out on some great history.

I got a grey Jack Adams Sportsmen’s Club chip from Janice O’Neal back in 2006. As usual we fought over her taking anything for it. I lost as usual. Rest easy dear friend.

Since there was a Club name on the Taylor Record card, I did not look further into it. Mike Vuolo found the pink ones on ebay last week. When I took a 2nd look at the Taylor card and noticed how big the order was, I decided to try and find some info on it. Big orders normally translate to big history. I was not disappointed.
Enough of that:
And now “The Rest Of The Story.”

Jack Adams
Sportsmen’s Club.
416 Fulton St
Peoria, IL
Chips delivered 1945-51
Enter my “Friend Of The Hobby.”

Jack Adams

John C. “Jack” Adams--not 100% sure, but there's a good chance he's the same Jack Adams who died in Las Vegas in 1967 age 67.

416 Fulton was the location of a bar/tavern as far back as the 1890’s. Adams was running a place there as early as the mid 1930’s. In the early 40’s he started calling his place the Sportsmen's Club and by the late 40’s he changed the name to the Clover Club. He also had a place called the Sportsmen’s Country Club located at 1001 Farmington Rd. In Dec.1953 he was described as “the former owner of a Peoria nightclub” and in June 1954, 416 Fulton was described as “formerly the Clover Club.”

The Sportsmen’s Club was described as “ornate and tastefully furnished, offering about any sort of action the gambling man could desire.” Taylor records also have this chip:
I need The Sportsmen’s Club” chip, if anyone has a trader.

*Chicago Tribune*—11aug1948; article about Shelton’s and Peoria, mentions Adams:
PEORIA KNOWN AS OPEN TOWN FOR MANY YEARS

(Chicago Tribune Press Service) Peoria, Aug. 10—This has been a "wide open town" since the days when river traffic on the Illinois waterway was the most important transportation in a new and rough frontier country.

The history of the Shelton gang here is but one interlude in a series of rises by one hoodlum group after another to leadership in the gambling and vice worlds that produced enormous illicit profits.

In the heyday of their power the Sheltons were collecting the major cut from more than 4,000 slot machines scattered throughout the county's saloons, restaurants, clubs, and roadside dining spots. They also were "muscle" partners in a dozen or more openly operated gambling palaces which packed the players in Peoria, Tazewell, and Fulton counties.

May Be On Way Out

Little if any of this underworld empire was developed by the Sheltons. It was functioning when they arrived here—lured out of their retirement as Fairfield, Ill., dirt farmers after a bloody but profitable era as the chief bootlegging gang in southern Illinois. And now that they apparently are on their way out as "important" people here, new leaders move in.

There are several stories concerning their first entry into this county. One has it that Carl Shelton was summoned here as bodyguard and partner in a punchboard business run as a sideline in 1938 by one of the automobile agency owners. Another is that Carl and several of his henchmen came up at the invitation of Clyde Garrison, a gambler who wanted their assistance against the Capone mob from Chicago.

Garrison gradually withdrew from local leadership and Carl Shelton took over. He then sent for Bernie Shelton. Carl told Peorians that Bernie always was getting into trouble and that only he (Carl) could control the younger man. Ray Walker and John Kelly were the other major figures in the Shelton group here.

Some Glossy Places

Initially the Sheltons claimed only rights over slot machines. In downtown Peoria, however, there flourished such glossy places as the Lyceum, where there were dice tables and roulette; the Empire, a cards and dice palace; the Mint, a bookie joint, and the Palace Arcade, with a bar downstairs and craps and "a wheel" on the second floor.

There also was the Clover club, run by Jack Adams: The Wilight inn, at Orchards Mines, within Peoria county, and the Para-Dice inn, just across the Illinois river in Tazewell county. Most of these were so-called "independents," banded together only to provide a pay-off kitty which left them all more or less undisturbed by police or sheriffs.

Demand Their Cut

With the slot machines in their grasp, the Sheltons moved in on owners of gambling places. The usual technique was to arrive at a gambling house in company with three or four gun toting "boys." Owners were told the Sheltons were taking a 30 to 40 per cent cut and a daily look at the books. The Sheltons boasted that they whipped their enemies silly instead of killing them and "bringing down the heat." One beating usually sufficed.

The Sheltons had little success in Tazewell county, however. Authorities there "closed down the county." This is the state of affairs today. The Para-Dice has been closed for three months because of a brawl, according to gossip, that developed when the Sheltons tried to collect their partnership take.

Bars Or Night Clubs

Today the Lyceum and the Palace Arcade are gone. The others are bars or night clubs but the gambling is soft pedaled.

Aside from their Golden Rule farm, the Shelton holdings in Peoria are only the pith of ground and the rough concrete block building housing their Parkway inn, a shabby little place where Bernie also kept his books and papers. Even here he had no liquor or official title. The inn was closed for several days after Bernie's murder on July 26, but it has reopened.
Peoria Journal Star—17feb1992; 18 years ago a guy who lived in Peoria during the wide-open days gave his recollections; mentions several gambling places and Adams; at the bottom of the article it shows that in the original hardcopy there were photos of 416 Fulton both as the Sportsmen's and Clover Clubs:
I believe the writer of the above article Bill Adams is Jack Adams son. We got the pink chip from a seller that said they came from Jack’s son.

Here’s a map showing the locations mentioned. None of the structures which housed these gambling locations exist today.

E=Empire  S=Saratoga  A=Alcazar  SC=Sportsmen’s Club  PC=Palace Club  PA=Palace Arcade  L=Lyceum  W=Windsor

More Taylor order cards from Peoria including the B&C Palace Club, Bernie & Carl Shelton chips. Both The Palace Club and Lyceum are on the above map.
I think Mike Vuolo has B&C chips for trade.

Michael Vuolo [mike@pokergurus.com]
I need the R<>M if anyone has a trader.