

Once again Ed Hertel takes us back to his home state of Texas and puts a "Club name to the WCS hub. I've had the Mason card on the WCS for over 10 years but never had the chip. Thanks to post on the BB and John Zoesch, I now have the chip.

Enter Ed Hertel.

Today's IOTD takes us to my home state of Texas which is full of gambling history. Most people know about Galveston's extensive history and Dallas / Fort Worth has the violent Binion gambling wars. But not as much is known about eastern Texas – specifically the Beaumont area.



WCS1att2

From the Mason records:

Walter C. Sekaley

1509 Gladys St

Beaumont, TX

11/16/1939

The Texas city of Beaumont sits by the Gulf, on the border with Louisiana. It was a small town until 1901 when a prospector decided to drill a hole into a hill outside of town. What gushed out was a geyser of oil which started the Spindletop boom, the most productive oil field in the world at the time. Beaumont grew from 9,000 to 30,000 people in the span of two months. Suddenly, the city was busting at the seams with oil field workers who wanted to find ways of spending some of their hard earned money. Beaumont, as well as neighboring towns, developed plenty of ways to service their desires with liquor, women and of course gambling.

It was the bustling opportunities that brought the Sekaly family to Beaumont (note the spelling is slightly different from the Mason records). Walter was born Vladamir Constantine Sekaly in 1897 in Tripoli, Syria. At the age of three, his parents boarded a boat and ended up in Beaumont where Walter would spend his entire life.

Picture of Walter Sekaly (I think he looks a lot like Omar Sharif)



WCS2att2

Walter had a couple small run-ins with the law, mainly involving liquor violations, but it wasn't until the time of the chip order that we see him openly participating in the gambling trade. But before we talk about Walter, we need to turn the clock back to the beginning of 1939 and move our focus to the neighboring state of Louisiana.

As mentioned earlier, Beaumont's growth affected not only itself, but many of the neighboring towns including Vinton, Louisiana, which developed its own gambling cottage industry. In February 1939, the newly appointed police juror of Vinton had had enough and ordered raids of the three biggest gambling clubs in town – the Grove, Border Café and the Showboat.

Examples of chips from two of the raided clubs:



WCS3att2

I need the Border Cafe chip. Cough it up if you have a trader. *vbg*

The Showboat was not the usual nightclub in that it was an actual boat. It moored itself to a dock and used its large interior to give both celebrity entertainment and room for a small casino. This ability to move gave it a distinct advantage as witnessed one month later when the police again showed up only to find the boat had floated across Sabine Lake, over to the Texas side. Without jurisdiction, they could only shake their fists in the air and call their neighbors in Port Arthur, Texas, to alert them of the ship. When Texas officers arrived, they found the Showboat anchored just offshore and nobody was really sure if they had the right to board.

During this time of playing cat and mouse across the Texas/Louisiana border, the three owners of the Showboat were E.E. Bailey, Theodore Gormley and Joe Jombo Giambo. This partnership, along with its wandering location was only temporary however. By June 1939, E.E. Bailey was looking for new associates and a location that was a little more permanent.

His first order of business was finding a dock he could tie the boat to, which he found in the back of the Beaumont Country Club. The second item on his list was finding some new associates who knew the area and had some influence. It is here that our man Walter Sekaly, along with another local named John Angelo, enters the picture as operators of the Showboat.

The transition however wasn't quite as smooth as E.E. Bailey had wished. His former partners sued for a restraining order to stop Bailey and crew from using the furniture on the boat. In the courtroom, Gormley and Giambo argued that they owned the equipment and feared the new owners would damage it if allowed to operate. Listed among the items were "three large gaming tables." After hearing both sides, the judge dismissed the order and the Showboat was allowed to open.

It was autumn 1939 when the Showboat started operating in Beaumont, and this was also the same time the chips were ordered. Can we be sure the "WCS" chips (delivered to Sekaly's house) were used at the Showboat? Not 100%, but all indicators point to it. Walter Sekaly is brought into the Showboat at the exact same time the chips were ordered and I have found no evidence that he was involved in any other club at this time. I would put it at "very probable".

By 1940, all was not roses at the docks behind the country club. The Showboat was still vulnerable to police harassment and Sekaly and company decided on a radical solution. They would steam their ship off the dock and park in the middle of Sabine Lake. To shuttle patrons back and forth they hired a ferry service to operate from the unused and dilapidated Pleasure Pier in Port Arthur.

An ad from 1940:



WCS4att

It seemed like an ironclad idea, and for a while the club flourished. However, within a couple of years the novelty wore off and the patrons started to weigh the fun against the hassle of getting on and off the ship.

In 1942, the Showboat night club was shut down and the boat sold (it caught fire soon after).

That was the end of the Showboat, but Walter Sekaly had a lot more life to lead. By 1945 he was running the Texas Club in Beaumont and up to his old tricks of offering gambling and selling overpriced liquor (he was charged with violating the wartime price controls).

In January 1960 the Texas Club and six others were raided, all for offering gambling. The state formed a Texas House General Investigation Committee to find out why gambling was rampant in Beaumont and discovered that political officials and law enforcement were on the casino's payrolls. Sekaly himself was called to testify about eyewitness accounts of him handing envelopes full of money to the Beaumont City Detective Chief. It was a severe blow to Beaumont's reputation.

His notoriety continued for another decade. In 1962 the IRS nabbed Walter and charged him with tax evasion. He got off this time, but in 1966 he was found in the Chalet Club taking wagers without a federal stamp. He paid his fines and went right back to work. In 1972, the now 75 year old Walter was still going strong and was arrested in a round-up of gamblers who were taking bets on football games.

Walter Sekaly finally earned his peace and passed away in 1980 in his hometown of Beaumont. He was 83 years old.

And as an amusing footnote I leave you with a snip from the 1939 article where the Vinton police juror is taking credit for ridding Vinton of ALL gambling...

He spoke briefly, telling of his appointment two weeks ago by Governor Leche, and his subsequent promise to clean up gambling in this ward. Then he said, "The speech I intended to make here tonight, I now find is unnecessary. I said I would stop gambling in my ward, and there is no gambling in Ward 7 tonight."

Cash Prize Awarded

With those words he stepped down and then, from the same platform, a \$20 cash prize was awarded to the holder of a lucky ticket in what was described as a regular occurrence on "Vinton Trade Night," which is held every Saturday. Tickets for the cash prize are obtained by purchases of 25 cents or more worth of merchandise from Vinton stores during the week.

WCS5att2

My note: Hypocrisy played a big role during "The Era Of The Illegals." *vbg* He took credit for closing the gambling, which was a lie and by the way we are holding a lottery. *vbg*

Once again we need to give the "Illegal Of The day" team a big "Thank You" for putting "Club" names to chips that are not much better than "UFC's" without their efforts.