

I know you Illinois boys need a fix, *vbg* So, here it is.

Ed Hertel finally got back from sunning himself in the Caribbean. How's the tan, Ed? *vbg.

Take it away Ed.

Earlier in the year I found some of these chips and immediately went to the records to find out what they were. The info I got back was what we illegal chip researchers call a slam dunk.



LRB1att2

Leonard Brassus
Smoke House Billiards
Danville, IL
1946

Ok, good, easy one. Nothing to do but do a little looking online, find this Smoke House Billiards (and hopefully some articles about gambling raids) and paper it up. Well, of course we know never to look a gifted horse in the mouth (not really sure what that means) because the more I looked into this attribution, the more muddled it got. First, there is no mention the Smoke House Billiards during this time. Second, initial looks brought up nothing with "Leonard Brassus". Shoot. It looks like I bricked that slam dunk. Let's see what I can unravel.

First things first, where is this Danville?



Located on the eastern side of the state, Danville straddles the Illinois and Indiana border. Its 120 miles south of Chicago, 35 miles east of Champaign and 90 miles west of Indianapolis. In other words, it's way out in the middle of nowhere. It grew from a small town to a bustling industrial city after it was discovered that it sat on top of a rich coal deposit. Suddenly Danville was a happening place and with an influx of miners and factory workers came those wanting to make a profit off of them.

I said I couldn't find a Leonard Brassus in the Danville records. This was easy to rectified when I realized the Mason records just misspelled his name. It was Leonard Brasus (one "s") and then things started to come together.

Leonard R. Brasus was born in Chicago, Illinois in October 1921 Frank and Helen Brasus, recent immigrants from Lithuania. The Brasus family moved to Chesterton, Porter County, Indiana where Leonard finished his schooling which included one year of business school at the University of Indiana in 1941. His father Frank opened the Brasus Barbecue and by 1942 Leonard was managing the restaurant which included a little gambling as well. Its location right across the street from the state police barracks led to an embarrassing raid in 1942.

SLOT MACHINE RAIDS BY DOWNSTATE FORCE UPSET NORTH INDIANA

Police men in the Indiana state police post at Chesterton, Porter county, were reported still upset yesterday by a sudden raid conducted in Porter county late Tuesday by state police men from Indianapolis. The Dunes Park post at Chesterton knew nothing of the raid until the visiting police men drove up with a truck load of seized slot machines, placed them under lock and key in the Dunes Park post and drove away, taking the key with them.

An embarrassing angle to the raids, which were made at five places, was that among them was the Brasus lunchroom on U. S. 20, directly across the road from the state police barracks. Five machines were taken from there. The Spa at Porter, said to be run by one Harry Day, also was visited.

Among the places not visited, however, was a new bookie joint said to be operating in the rear of a tourist camp in Willow Creek, five miles east of the Lake-Porter county line, under direction of Sammy Mullen of Michigan City. Observers said the new spot is doing a land office business since the voluntary closing a few days ago in Lake county of the Big House at East Chicago and the 2800 Club in Ridge road between Hammond and Gary.

LRB3att2

My note: States and local cops often clashed over raids on illegal joints. One or the other were often paid to stay away. *vbg*

In 1946, Leonard Brasus was ready to move and start out on his own. It was in this same year that he ordered the "LRB" casino chips that he moved to Danville and purchased the Tea Cup Tavern at 2011 E. Main Street and opened the East Side Recreation Billiard Hall next door at 2013 E. Main. He made an apartment for himself right between at 2011-1/2 E. Main so he could look after both.

It was also here that Leonard fell for a divorcee named Mildred and in 1947 they were married. With her came her two sons, Jimmy and Dennis, who also helped in the family businesses. Even as recent as 2002, Leonard's stepson Jimmy was still running the Tea Cup Tavern.

So what do we know about this Tea Cup Tavern and how does it play into the casino chips ordered by Brasus? In 2002, an article about the tavern was written up in a local Danville paper spotlighting local restaurants. In it, Jimmy Richards, Leonard's stepson, and at the time 66 years old, told the story of the building and restaurant. Built in the 1890s as a stage theater, it was a popular spot and entertained for decades. In 1917, it was upgraded to a nickelodeon picture show where it earned the name it would wear for almost a century. As a promotion, patrons were given free admission if they brought in the ends of 10 tea bags. Why? Who knows, but it stuck and in the 1920s when the movie house turned into a prohibition busting "soda" shoppe, the tradition continued. Jimmy goes on to explain that his stepdad (he always refers to Leonard as simply "my dad") took over the bar in 1947 that he converted it into a nice restaurant with a couple rooming houses on the second floor for traveling businessmen (and maybe visiting gamblers??). Any question of gambling is quickly answered by Jimmy himself, who worked at the Tea Cup as a young man. He is quoted in the article, "We used to have, and this was a long time ago, a pretty good-sized poker game in the back room. On weekends hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars would change hands – and we're talking about back in the '50s."

So now we find Leonard in Danville, casino chips ordered and gambling confirmed by his son in the back room of the Tea Cup Tavern. So no problems, right? Wrong! What about that "Smoke House Billiards" on the Mason records?

My sources were limited on Danville, so I reached out to the Danville Public Library and found some very helpful people. For a small fee, they dug into their records and found a lot of information (much described above). I asked specifically about the Smoke House Billiards and what they found was a bunch of nothing. The only time anything called the Smoke House Billiards was one listing in 1950 at 614 E Vermilion, on the other side of town from Brasus and his places. From what we could find, there was no connection to Brasus and the listings for the billiard hall disappeared the next year.

I mentioned in the beginning that Brasus opened the Tea Cup Tavern at 2011 E Main and next door he had the East Side Recreation Billiard Hall. This is where we have to take leaps, but I believe he probably intended the East Side to be the Smoke House when he ordered the chips in 1946 (the year before the billiard hall opened). I can't confirm this, but nowhere can we find anything remotely related during these few years.

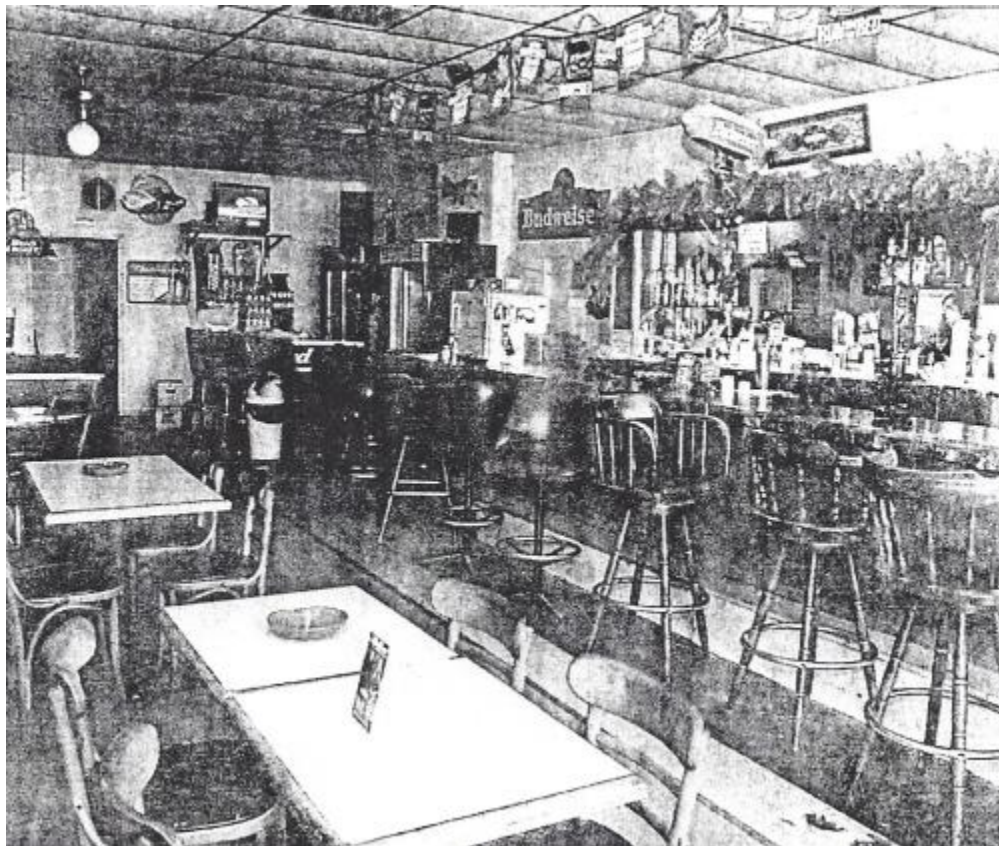
I have no problems attributing these chips to the backroom of the Tea Cup Tavern at 2011 E Main, Danville, Illinois. The name on the Mason records is a little puzzling, but sometimes we have to make some assumptions. If the chips said "Smoke House" then I would be more worried. Since they only

show the initials on the Leonard R. Brasus, I feel much more comfortable attributing them to a known club than one unassociated that opened up a few years later.

To round out the story, Leonard Brasus continued to run the Tea Cup for decades. During the 1970's, Danville was suffering and the Tea Cup was no exception. The restaurant was closed and the upstairs rooms were boarded off because of electrical problems. The Tea Cup reverted back to a bar only and continued into the 21st century.

In the 1980s, while still running the Tea Cup Tavern, Leonard got into the vending machine business when he started the Danville American Vending Co. In the old days, this screamed "slot machines" but it's unknown if Leonard changed his ways and stuck to legitimate vending machines. Regardless, it wasn't in business long. Leonard passed away in November 1993 at the age of 72. Five years later he was joined by his wife Mildred leaving the Tea Cup to Jimmy.

Picture of Tea Cup interior in 2002:



LRB4att2

Picture of building today:



LRB5att2

DANVILLE BONUS!!!

In celebration of the holidays I'm bringing a Danville illegal gambling bonus!

A few years ago I picked up this unknown chips figuring I'll probably never know where this thing came from (the records from these Jack Todd chips are not available – if they exist at all).



LRB6&7att2

During my Danville research I ran across an auction from 2007 from a local Danville auction house that was selling these (and some of the \$5.00 that I don't have) with no description. Thinking maybe these were local I started digging a little more and found a matchbook for a Danville place.



LRB8att2

So I think we have a match. I haven't done any looking into this club, but thought since we were on the subject of Danville that I would share.

My note: I need the 8 1/2 chip if anyone has traders.

I have a yellow LRB if anyone needs it.