

Ed Hertel is getting pretty good at this research stuff. *vbg* Especially with chips most illegal chip collectors have had in their collections for years with only partial information. The quest for all the history of our chips is very important to most of us.

Take it away Ed.

IOTD – Washington

The Ranch, Seattle, WA

Today's IOTD started with another misattribution. I've had in my collection for years the following chips:



HCC1att2

Years ago I sent my money for the ID card and received a copy saying "Hilltop Country Club, Troup, Texas (No date)." Great, Texas chips! (Even though I had no idea where this town of Troup was.) And so for years they sat in my Texas folder, gathering dust until I did some clean-up in my database and found a problem. I had in my possession two Mason records for the "HCC" hot stamp. The Hilltop Country Club card showed chips with denomination, which my chips did not have. The other card, without denominations, was:

My note. I got 3 colors of the HCC chips in 1999. (lavender is the 3rd color) Unlike ED, I was smart enough to look at both HCC Mason cards. *vbg* I listed mine as Seattle but without a "Club" name until now.



HCC2att2

Oops...

(Side bar – eight colors of 250 chips each... roulette?)

So I set out to find out more about this O.W. Owen in Seattle to see if I could attach him to some kind of gambling. The first thing I did was track down the address hoping it would land on a club of some kind. No luck. The chips were delivered to Owen's house (I call that "dead information" when it doesn't help the search). The next thing to do was search out this Owen guy. Using my sources, I was able to find that he did live in Seattle during this time and in one year his profession was listed as "restaurant" but that was all I could find. I contacted a local librarian in Seattle to see if she could help with the search, and help she did.

Using the internal library database, she was able to find a newspaper clipping talking about an O.W. Owen, proprietor of a place called "The Ranch." She then guided me to the website of the Seattle Daily Times archives (not available in other newspaper aggregate sites). I purchased a rather expensive 24 hour pass and started gathering information (a.k.a. downloading everything gambling related I could find!)

Once I found this source, the information was easy to come by. Orin W. Owen was born in 1888 in Missouri but had moved to Seattle to find his niche. His night club, called The Ranch, was located eight miles outside of Seattle on the Everett Highway. It was very popular in the early 1930s and was able to book some of the finest acts of the day.



HCC3att2



HCC4att2

They offered a whole range of acts, sometimes seven a night, from comedians to singers to fan dancers. Whatever was popular at the time was booked through the Ranch.



HCC5att2

This popularity prompted a complete remodel in 1935 which included new booths, updated lighting and a new dance floor. They were particularly proud of their ceiling which included "lustrous satin ceiling

done in gold, orange and red and providing a luxurious color effect over the dance floor." If a patron wanted big entertainment in Seattle during the 1930's, the Ranch was the place to be.

Away from the dance floor, the Ranch found some publicity they weren't expecting in July 1935. The July 1, 1935 Seattle Daily Times reported:

19 ARRESTED IN NIGHT CLUB RAIDS

After the biggest spurt of liquor and gambling raiding Seattle and King County have seen for months, in which Liquor Board inspectors, state patrolmen, deputy sheriffs, but not Seattle police, joined to "knock over" two city night clubs and three highway resorts, hearings were set today on revocation or suspension of the beer licenses of at least two of the places. Nineteen persons were arrested in the raids.

Col. H. W. Meyers, chief of the Liquor Control Board's department of inspection and investigation, announced hearings will be held in Seattle next week on the licenses of seven King County places, including the Ranch and the Horseshoe Tavern, which were among the places raided during the weekend.

Swoops Down on Ranch

A few hours earlier State Patrol Capt. Charles O. Jackson and a party of patrolmen swooped down on The Ranch, on the Everett Highway, arresting three men and breaking up gambling games, they reported.

The HCC chips were ordered right after this raid. Perhaps they were replacements for chips that were confiscated? Unfortunately, I have been unable to make sense of the "HCC" monogram. It doesn't appear to be for O.W. Owens, and it doesn't stand to The Ranch. Is it possible he had another club in Seattle? Maybe something "Country Club"? I doubt it. I looked through the phone books and articles around that time and couldn't find anything that would match. We've established that the Ranch did have gambling. My guess is that it stands for something unadvertised within the Ranch. Owen's wasn't a gambling kingpin with many casinos. He was a hands-on hardworking manager of a very popular club. To think he had the time for more casinos elsewhere is a stretch (but not impossible).

My note: I will take a shot at the HCC monogram. It was not unusual for legitimate operators to make deals with illegal gambling operators. They would give the owner some cover when the busts came down. The gambler in many cases would use his initials on the chips. In this case the owner could not hide behind the gambler as the Liquor Board staged the raid.

Being a success does have its problems however. In 1936 the following article ran in the paper:

**CAFE MAN FOILS
2 HIGHWAYMEN**

By a cool display of wit, Orin W. Owen, proprietor of The Ranch, Everett Highway resort, frustrated the attempt of two hold-up men to rob him early today.

Owen had just returned to his home, 7758 Corliss Ave., he told police, and drove his automobile in his garage at 4:30 o'clock. Two men entered after him.

Owen stepped out of the machine, saw the men, and sprang back into the automobile and slammed the door. The men, apparently fearing he would back the machine over them, fled.

"They certainly were amateur robbers," Owen commented today. He told police the men evidently believed he carried money.

HCC7att2

I like all the information in the article. Just in case any would-be robbers are reading the paper is gives his address, time he gets home and the idea that he carries money.

Tragedy would come quickly though. On 19 Dec 1938, Owen would be involved in a head-on car collision which sent him to the hospital with severe injuries. His condition bounced around for over a week until he took a turn for the worse and passed away ten days later.

The driver of the other car, the son of a successful Seattle attorney, was treated for his severe injuries and was eventually released only to find a subpoena waiting for him. Orin's widow Wanda wanted restitution for his death and she came up with the very specific amount of \$189,403.95. (And who says you can't put a price on a life?)



Wanda would settle for \$12,500 from the driver's family. As executrix of her husband's estate she thought she was entitled to the entire amount. Her step-daughter, on the other hand, thought she was entitled to half and followed with another suit asking for it.

Wanda would continue operating the Ranch into the 1940s. Articles of her hob-knobbing with the entertainers and celebrities always made the papers. There were no more mentions of gambling, so that might have stopped with the passing of Orin.

Thank you Ed.

My note. This is "Illegal Of The Day" #216. The IOTD posts started out as a whim to show other chip collectors what this part of the hobby was all about. Mostly chips with known ID's, info from my head, and my database.

My hope was to bring more collectors into "our world." With the addition of our "friend of the hobby" and now Ed Hertel, they have turned into a real history lesson. Why do I feel obsolete? *vbg* Many others have contributed to the IOTD's. Way too many to list as I am afraid I would leave someone out.

Most illegal chips are fairly cheap.

Think about it , cheap chips and free history. *vbg* Joins us in the quest for the history of our chips.

BTW, the Indiana boys need to keep watching. *vbg*