

Ed Hertel recently found a number of new to us, Texas illegal chips. It was the most new Texas chips found at one time, that I can remember. This one brings my Texas illegal chips count to 346 different ones. Once again Ed comes through with a Club name that was not on the Mason chip record.

Take it away Ed.

Today we go back to San Antonio and another one-off gambling club.



DLT-1att2

Sent to:

Ben Bonds

227 No. St Mary's St

San Antonio, Texas

1935

After research: Tipton's

First things first, let's get rid of the name. Ben Bonds, if he ever even existed, is irrelevant to this story. I could find no information on him or his association with gambling. My guess is that he was either an alias or a migrant gambler in San Antonio for a short time. Lucky for us, there is much more relevant information about the chip.

The address of 227 No St Mary's Street belongs to a restaurant called Tipton's, owned and operated by a man named Dee L. Tipton. We now have a club name and a match to the "DLT" on the chips. It's time to find out what this Tipton was up to.

The year the chips were ordered would prove to be an excited one for both the restaurant and the man, although this was the kind of excitement most gamblers did not welcome. In this year, Tipton would be visited by the police three times – once about a slot machine complaint, another about a missing man last seen by him, and the third about him murdering a longtime friend in front of the restaurant. It was a banner year, and one we will walk through now.

D. L. Tipton, along with twenty other downtown bar and café owners, was at the center of controversy when a constable decided it was his duty to clean up all the bars of their horse-racing machines. These pseudo slot machines were designed to be miniature horse racing contests where patrons could wager on various outcomes. It was deemed illegal by the state and the police were well within their rights to confiscate them. Well, usually within their rights. In this instance, Constable Cain decided that he would seize all the machines, even those outside of his district. Tipton and the other downtown club owners were obviously not happy about this clear overstep of the law and complained. It would however fall on deaf ears as the judge upheld the Constable's raid validity but added that "hereafter it would be better to remain in his own precinct."

The second instance in 1935 where Tipton was the focus of police questioning occurred with the investigation into the disappearance of a man named C.K. Gravis. With his last known sighting at Tipton's restaurant, it would be there that the investigation would begin. D. L. Tipton was not shy when questioned. He stated that Gravis, an acquaintance of Tipton's, had visited the restaurant and when asked why he looked worried answered cryptically, "They'll soon be looking for me." Gravis left the restaurant and disappeared. Tipton claimed he knew nothing more.

For a man with no knowledge about the disappearance, it seems ironic then that Tipton would be the one who eventually finds Gravis. Two days after disappearing, Tipton delivers the missing man to a hotel. Gravis' explanation for where he had been?

MISSING OIL MAN AMNESIA VICTIM

C. K. Gravis Jr. Found Wandering on Street

C. K. Gravis Jr., oil operator of San Diego, Tex., who has been missing since Saturday was found wandering in downtown San Antonio Friday, apparently a victim of amnesia.

He was found by D. L. Tipton, 227 North St. Mary Street, who saw Gravis Saturday. Since then Gravis' brother, H. J. Gravis of San Diego has asked police and friends to look for his missing brother. Tipton, a family friend, took the man to a hotel and notified Lee Minner, 1019 Alamo National Building, another friend who is caring for Gravis until relatives arrive.

As if D. L. Tipton didn't have enough going on in 1935, the biggest event would have to be the ending of his eight year long friendship, in the most violent of ways, with Sam Nami in May of that year. It seemed inevitable that this tumultuous relationship would eventual end in disaster. Witnesses said the two businessmen were constantly butting heads over one scheme or another.

The year before, in July 1934, Tipton had just opened his new restaurant when he found two guys up on a pole rewiring his phone line. When asked what they were doing, Sam Nami interrupted and claimed that he ordered it. It seems that Sam had the good idea of wiretapping the bookie joint next door in order to find out the racing results before anyone else. Of all of Sam's schemes, this one was too far for Tipton, who claims to have thrown the entire crew out the door and asking that they never do business again.

Fast forward to May of the next year when Sam Nami needed to conduct business and thought Tipton's restaurant was the perfect place to deposit a handful of slugs into Tipton's telephone. Furious, Tipton approached Nami and a fight broke out. A couple of police officers in the restaurant split the men up and held Nami back, resulting in him threatening future reprisal, "These policemen won't sleep with you."

What happened next depends on who is telling the story. Tipton says he was helping a customer pick a cigar from behind the counter when Nami burst into his restaurant, hand in his pocket, shouting, "Come on out of there or I'll smoke you out!" In a terrified act of self-defense, Tipton grabbed a gun and shot Nami twice, who then stumbled out of the restaurant and died on the street outside.

From the newspaper showing street scene and Tipton (left) and Nami (right)

SHOOTING SNARLS TRAFFIC



ST. MARY'S STREET AFTER KILLING
Arrow points to spot between two cars where Sam Nami fell.



DLT-3att2

In the ensuing trial, state witnesses testified that although Sam Nami was a bit agitated in the restaurant, he wasn't in a killing rampage. If he did indeed say he was going to "smoke you out" he was talking to a cigar and not Tipton as both witnesses claimed Nami was in the process of lighting a cigar when shot.

Nami's widow claimed that Sam was in the restaurant to collect payment for a loan he had given to Tipton. Whatever the motivation for Nami being there, the outcome was still tragic. One man was dead and the other stood accused of murder. The state wanted the death penalty and Tipton would settle for nothing less than self-defense.

It took only two days for the jury to come back with a verdict of "Not Guilty". It was reported that the outcome was greeted from the audience with a "ripple of applause."

TIPTON FREED IN NAMI DEATH

A Bexar county jury had cleared D. L. Tipton, bar operator, in the killing of Sam Nami, stock promoter, Saturday.

The jury returned a verdict of acquittal in Criminal District court shortly after 2 p. m. Friday after about 20 hours deliberation.

Tipton was charged with shooting Nami to death in Tipton's place, 227 North St. Mary's street, May 11, 1935.

When Judge W. W. McCrocy read the verdict to a crowded courtroom there was a ripple of applause, but order was quickly restored. The judge warned against any further demonstration.

Tipton shook hands with the jurors and thanked them.

None of the members of the family of the deceased was in the courtroom when the verdict was received.

Tipton claimed self defense, testifying that a moment before he fired at Nami the latter said to him:

"Come out of there you ———, or I'll smoke you out."

Tipton said that he fired at Nami from behind his cigar counter in the front of his place of business.

The jurors revealed they stood eight to four for acquittal most of the time they were locked up. After they had a portion of the testimony of a defense witness read to them Friday forenoon, they quickly agreed on a verdict, it was revealed.

DLT-4att2

The trial marked the end of his troubles, at least for a while. He would later open up another restaurant, but never give up his gambling ways. Fifteen years after his whirlwind year of drama he would again see the inside of a courtroom when in 1950 he and three others were charged with running a policy game. Tipton would eventually plead guilty and receive a light sentence of two years of probation.

Felony Policy Term Given

D. L. Tipton, 1950 address listed as 217 Broadway, was given two years probation by Criminal District Court Judge W. W. McCrory Wednesday when Tipton pleaded guilty to keeping and exhibiting a policy game.

It was the first felony conviction known to have been obtained in Bexar County on that charge.

The case was one of four re-opened by Dist. Atty. Austin Anderson from a dropped docket left over from last May when Anderson succeeded Harvey L. Hardy.

Facing identical charges are Richard A. Schaller, E. A. Skifter and H. L. Neill, 1950 addresses listed as 2311 Broadway. The four were arrested on Oct. 4, 1950.

DLT-5att2

My Note: "Policy" is another name for the "numbers" game. Players can bet from 1¢ to any amount on usually 3 numbers that is defined by the next day's stock market closing or a certain horse race top 3 finishers, among other things.

The "numbers (policy) racket" was the forerunner to the "lotto" of today. It was a big racket in most states and specially big in the Afro American sections of cities. Numbers tickets were sold in bars, restaurants, and other business locations. Numbers runners would pick up the tickets and cash by a certain time daily including Sunday's. They brought them back to the numbers operator.

Screw Andrews for many years was the numbers king of Northern KY and Southern Ohio. The last few years of his reign he operated out of his new Sportsman Club in Newport, KY. The Feds took him down in the early 1960's. They gave him a paid vacation in Terra Haute, IN. I and 2 friends took over the Sportsman in the mid 1960's and operated a bingo. We found a small hidden room in the huge basement with maybe 100 telephones and several boxes of generic chips in it. We left them there as Screw would be coming home in a year or so. *vbg*

This is "Illegal Of The Day" #299.