

It's been awhile since our last post. I got a new computer and have been busy trying to learn how to use Windows 10. It's been a nightmare for an old man. *vbg*

Enter Ed Hertel:

I've been spending a lot of time lately researching places I never dreamed would have as much history as they do. My write-up for the last CCTN took me to Omaha, Nebraska, where I learned that there was much more to the state than corn. This week, I take a peek into the gambling history of another previously thought of quiet town of Fort Madison, Iowa. It just proves that the history of illegal chips just keeps on giving, regardless of where they came from.

Years ago I received some chips from a local Iowan who said his grandfather, now passed away, was a former Fort Madison gambler and had left some chips behind. Having heard this story literary dozens of times before, I was a little hesitant, but like all such requests, I did some digging and did indeed find that these chips did have a connection to his local town. What I was able to find not only enlightened me on an area I had never heard of before, but also helped this guy understand his grandfather's life and times better.



The city of Fort Madison is located in the most southeastern county of the state, bordering both Illinois and Missouri. Its strategic location along the upper Mississippi River gave it an ideal position for the military fort that gave the city its name. The original Fort Madison served the young country in the early 19th century as a defense against Native America attacks and provided the backdrop for an important battle in the War of 1812.

The eventual abandonment of the fort proved a decisive moment for the town at large, dooming it to its fate of little future growth. By the 1930s-40s, Fort Madison's population peaked around 15,000 citizens, and has been on a steady decline ever since.

It was during this heyday of the city's growth that the chips in question were being used. The first one, marked "JEM" was given to me in a dark blue (almost gray) color.



JEM2

When this specific chip was ordered is impossible to say because there were 10 different orders, for a whopping 10,000 chips total, in a span of 14 years – 1937 through 1951. The fortunate thing however is that each of the orders all went to the same person and place:

J. E. Moore
Anthes Hotel
Ft Madison, IA

James "Jim" E. Moore moved to Fort Madison in 1919 already a seasoned gambler. His intentions of opening a gambling club were clear when he purchased a large house in the city's downtown area at 921 Avenue H. It wasn't long before his reputation as the local gambling boss would make him a target for reforming city officials. In 1922, Fort Madison implemented one of their first of many crackdowns on illegal liquor and gambling. Local police raided what they called the "Jim Moore's club", destroying a craps table and handed Moore a fine. A newspaper reporter, clearly frustrated with the new dull trend, lamented after the raids, "it is hard to get a drink in Fort Madison and more difficult for one to lose his money."

Unexpected police raids were one thing, but Moore would discover something much worse. On January 7, 1927, three men burst into Jim Moore's club brandishing guns and ordered the ten people gambling inside to put up their hands. Moore, in an act that can be described as either brave or suicidal, grabbed a nearby pistol and started firing wildly at the thieves who in turned fired back resulting in a hailstorm of bullets. When the smoke cleared, Jim Moore lay on the floor, alive but wounded, and the robbers were gone, leaving pools of blood throughout the house and into the street where their getaway car had been waiting. Moore had suffered two flesh wounds to the abdomen and forearm and one bullet had shattered the bone in the heel of his foot. He would walk funny from then on, but at least he was alive.

Eventually the police investigation would turn up a suspect. Leo Stover, a highwayman for the southern Illinois Birger gang (who were currently in a gambling war of their own with the Sheldon brothers – future IOTD) was found to fit the description of one of the robbers. He also happened to have been treated for some gunshot wounds around the time of the robbery. With the other two suspects

unidentified, the state put Stover up for the crime and quickly convicted him for the robbery and assault. He was given a five year prison sentence, but served only one month before dying of tuberculosis, possibly due to his weakened state after the shooting.

By this time, Jim Moore's reputation in Fort Madison was growing as both a gambler and a local hero. A newspaper article talking of the robbery said, "Officers here express satisfaction over the stand that Jim Moore took in shooting it out with the three bandits who held up his club. Such an attitude will give the city the reputation of being an unhealthy place for holdup men, they say."

Moore's days of running a club out of his house were over and by the end of 1927 he had moved his game next door to the Anthes Hotel at 907 Avenue H. Built in 1868 and steadily expanding its footprint ever since, Moore used the location of the newly built Anthes Pool Room as the base of his operation. It was here that locals and visiting guests could find a craps table and slot machines, as well as a poker game that was often played by Moore himself.



JEM3

In 1930, another crackdown on gambling resulted in a raid on the Anthes Pool Room where they found slot machines and a dismantled craps table. Apparently the warning had not come soon enough to finish the job of hiding the equipment. The police also raided Jim Moore's old club next door but found nothing. His move to the Anthes Hotel had been complete both with gambling and as a residence.

During the 1930s, Jim Moore expanded his holdings in Fort Madison to other taverns. In 1933 he took over the OK Tavern, followed by the Mississippi Tavern in 1935, both bars on Avenue H. In the late 1940s, he would also take ownership of the Friendly Tavern on Fort Madison's Seventh Street.

Whether there was gambling at these establishments is unknown, but given his reputation, I would bet there was. What isn't in dispute is that Moore continued running games at the Anthes Hotel. Even after the Anthes Pool Hall closed in 1934 due to Prohibition, gambling was still going on in Moore's personal rooms upstairs.

A lawsuit filed in 1943 claimed that the patron was entitled to over \$1,600 in damages caused by Moore and “the existence of the gambling nuisance” at the Anthes Hotel. A larger citywide raid in 1948 made sure that the Anthes Hotel was the first on the list to get hit. In Jim Moore’s room they found an active craps game in progress. The police however were eventually disappointed with the night’s results when their efforts were thwarted by what they called the “grapevine general alarm” going out warning others. They successfully raided only four other places that night – Elks and Moose Clubs (slots), Glass Bar Tavern (craps) and the Empire Billiards Parlor (poker). The police knew their night was done when they rolled up on the Elks Club and caught the manager running away with a slot machine in his arms.

Moore’s life as the gambling king of Fort Madison was coming to a close in the early 1950s. City officials were calling into question his liquor licenses based on his reputation as a known criminal. By 1953, other people were being fined for liquor violations as owners of his tavern and the Anthes Hotel had stopped being a center gambling. After three decades of being Fort Madison’s gambling chief, he settled in for a well-earned retirement.

As I said in the beginning, I was given multiple chips when the investigation started. The others all had special die stamps of “ACC” and most of them were ordered from Taylor, whose records are available to us (thanks to Trimble and Spragg).

Name		Address		Town		State		Per		SPECIAL MONOGRAM	
A.C. CHILDERS		2333 AVENUE "L"		FT. MADISON		IA		Harp + T		ACC	
Amount	Color	Initials Both Sides	Style Type	Initials One Side	Other Side	Style Type	Monogram Color	Date Shipped			
1000	BT. ORANGE	A.C.C.	SPEC.				SILVER	8-11-47			
300	Orange	ACC	"				Silver	8-16-47			
200	Green	"	"				Yellow	8-16-47			



From the card we can see that these were ordered at two different times – harp molds in 1942 and the T’s in 1947 by A.C. Childers, 2333 Avenue L, Ft Madison, IA.

Unfortunately, Childers’ history did not bare as much fruit as Moore’s. From what I could find, he was a tavern owner who evidently had a little gambling on the side. Although I can’t give a full biography, I can make a pretty good guess where the chips were used.

Alvin C. Childers shows up on the Fort Madison tavern scene in 1941 when he opens his Swing Club at 2333 Avenue L. His grand opening of early December would be unfortunately timed and news of his opening would be superseded three days later with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.



His ownership of the Swing Club in 1942, as well as the address of both the club the chips, point to this as being the home of the harp molds.

Childers wouldn’t stay at the Swing Club for very long. He would turn the location over to a Jacob Shumaker who opened the Saratoga Club in 1943, and then was immediately killed in a hit-and-run accident. The next owner opened the “L-Café” (for Avenue L) and also found problems with local police whose continuous harassing liquor/gambling raids ended in lawsuits and investigations into police corruptions. (This might be a story for another time perhaps).

Alvin Childers by this time had moved his action to the popular Avenue H and opened a tavern called the Elbow Room (aka Lincoln Tap) in the Lincoln Hotel. This move coincides neatly with the ordering of the T-mold chips from Taylor.



JEM6

Alvin Childers, like his fellow gambler Jim Moore, was winding it down as the 1950s rolled in. In February 1951 he moved the Elbow Room out of the Lincoln Hotel, but by December he was out of business.

So we moved around quite a bit here and perhaps need a summary of where I believe the chips in this IOTD belong.



JEM7

“JEM” – J.E. Moore, Anthes Hotel, Ft Madison, IA – 1937 – 1951

Location: Anthes Hotel, 907 Avenue H, Fort Madison, IA

Although Moore owned several places throughout this time period, the only one with known gambling throughout this period was the Anthes Hotel.



JEM8-9

“ACC” harp mold – A.C. Childers, 2333 Avenue L, Ft Madison, IA – 1942

Location: Swing Club, 2333 Avenue L, Ft Madison, IA

Although the records for the “rectangle” mold aren’t available, I put this green chip with the earlier harp mold because the T-mold chips already have a green counterpart.



JEM10-11

“ACC” T mold – A.C. Childers, 2333 Avenue L, Ft Madison, IA – 1947 (reused card, address outdated)

Location: Elbow Room, Lincoln Hotel, 839 Avenue H, Ft. Madison, IA

This is “Illegal Of The Day” # 315.