

West Virginia: "Take me home country roads."

For some reason, that song always makes me feel nostalgic and think about my grandmother and her home in Kings Mountain, KY. She went on to the "Big Hillbilly" in the sky in her 108<sup>th</sup> year. She chewed at least one pack of Redman, everyday of her life. Rest easy Granny.

I played some poker in private games in Wheeling, West Virginia and Steubenville, Ohio mid to late 1960's. I will leave Steubenville and it's mostly houses of ill repute for a future post. The games in Wheeling were good. Players were mostly the "Movers and Shakers" in the city and county. Games were mostly legit. I did spot shades in the game one night. I bellied up in the 4 seat at once! It can be a good night if you know what to look for.

The Pirate Café chip could be considered my first chip since I acquired it about 1962. I got it as a gift from a special friend in a bag of chips. The bag started my quest for chips and history. I choose not to call it my first chip and will make a post on what I consider my first chip that was in the bag at a later date.

The Pirate Cafe is a special request by Jim Linduff. Now get those Rigdon records!

Enough of that:

#### **Pirate Cafe: Wheeling:**



5061

Sorry for the bad scan. It is one of 1<sup>st</sup> scans I ever did.

Pirate Café was located at 2253 Main Street in South Wheeling north-west corner of Main & 23<sup>rd</sup>. Structure which housed the address no longer exists.

Operated from 1940-1957 by Nick Miller (AKA Nick Vosvick) and the Lias brothers: John & "Big Bill." A restaurant and bar out front and gambling rooms in the back which were entered through electric buzzer doors (a game called barbout was apparently popular there).

In August 1957 Nick Miller told acquaintances that he was off on a two day vacation. He was actually paying a visit to some syndicate guys in New Kensington, PA (near Pittsburg). They strangled him to death, placed his body in the trunk of his new luxury convertible and drove it to a quiet neighborhood in Wilksburg, PA where his corpse was discovered several days later when the postal carrier noticed the car swarming with flies and giving off a foul odor.

(Geez, are we seeing a pattern here? Bodies in trunks of cars. Remember Dewey De'Angelo from the Biloxi, MS post? Actually murder is entangled with many of stories of the illegal operators. One of the worst stories of murder is a young girls death during the fight to control Beverly Hills in N KY. A story for another day.)

# Body of Murder Victim Found Stuffed in Trunk Of Car in Wilkinsburg

An autopsy failed today to reveal the cause of death of a former Weirton gambler and ex-convict whose decomposed body was found crammed into an expensive automobile in Wilkinsburg near Pittsburgh Thursday.

Pittsburgh police believed that Nick Miller (Vosvick), now of Wheeling, who had a long criminal record, was the victim of a gangland slaying. However, a coroner's pathologist said after the autopsy that the cause of death was unknown. It was first proposed that Miller had met death by a gunshot wound.

Pathologist Theodore R. Helmbold said today the body bore no carbon monoxide traces, fractures or wounds.

Miller's body was found Thursday morning, clad only in undershorts and socks, in the trunk of his flashy hardtop convertible, which had been parked on a quiet street in suburban Wilkinsburg for six days. A mail carrier called police when he detected a strong odor emanating from the trunk. The body had been jammed in the trunk head first.

Identification was made by Milan Vosvick, Edgewater, W. Va., a brother of the victim and business partner.

Miller, formerly known as Vosvick was reared in Weirton. He was born in Johnstown, Pa. and came to Weirton at an early age. A brother preceded him in death about eight months ago and a sister, his father and his former wife reside here as do numerous cousins.

Miller, according to Wheeling police, was once one of that city's most powerful gambling operators who had a record of 37 arrests, 32 of them on gambling charges. They said he had last been seen in Wheeling Saturday when he said he was "going on a vacation."

Miller's present wife and three young children were located at a vacation lodge in Ogelsby park Thursday.

Wheeling police tied Miller with William (Big Bill) Lias and said today the two had been friends for years. Lias is the former Pittsburgh Wheeling rackets czar and one time owner of the Wheeling Downs race tracks.

The 46 year old victim was co-owner of the Pirate Cafe, a tavern and reputed gambling spot in South Wheeling. His real name was Vosvick, but legally changed it to Miller in the last 15 years when he took up Wheeling residence.

At first police believed Miller may have been shot in the head, but said today "there are no new clues" on how he died.

The Miller car had been tagged by Wilkinsburg police Wednesday for overtime parking because workmen intended to clean the street Thursday. A mail carrier first spotted the car Wednesday, however no report was filed. Thursday, the carrier noticed thousands of flies swarming on the car windshield and called police.

Locksmiths opened the car trunk and the body was found Thursday morning. It was not until late in the evening, that positive identification was made due to extreme decomposition. A tattooed dancing girl, seen under ultra violet rays, a gold cap on teeth and finger cuts aided in the identification.

Pittsburgh detectives were in Wheeling today attempting to trace Miller's movements Saturday and Sunday. They reported at

## FORMER

(Continued from Page One)

noon, "there is nothing new on the case."

Wheeling police Lt. William Finnegan said he had learned that a used car salesman, identified only as Jack Russell, and a young red haired woman had gone to Wheeling Thursday of last week to see Miller.

Finnegan said that no arrest order had been issued for the salesman or the woman. Miller's brother Milan who identified the body said that he had talked to his brother Saturday. Then, Miller said, he was going on a vacation, but failed to reveal the vacation spot, Miller said.

A sister, Mrs. Patricia Arbutina, described Miller as "Lias' right-hand man" and said he had been with "Lias for many years."

Deputy Coroner Joseph Dobb's said Milan told him he ran the Pirate tavern while Nick maintained the gambling operations in the rear of the establishment.

Miller served time in the Ohio Penitentiary on a receiving stolen property charge. He was paroled August 15, 1944 from Ohio's London Prison farm where he had been transferred from the Ohio Penitentiary after serving four years.

He also served time in Ohio Penitentiary on an assault to rob charge and in the West Virginia Penitentiary at Moundsville. Miller was involved in a shooting more than ten years ago. A man named Patty Bonovich walked into a cafe where Miller sat with three other men, fired several shots and then ran out into an alley police said. Miller was wounded. Bonovich's bullet-riddled body later was found in the alley but his death was never solved.

Stuffed in the trunk of Miller's \$6,000 car with the body were three baseball mitts, a softball, a baseball and a July 29 issue of a Wheeling newspaper. A gray sports coat monogrammed, "N. M." was found on the front seat. The name "Nick Miller" was found inside the coat pocket.

On Saturday, Miller reportedly was at the Pirate Cafe at 23rd and Main streets in Wheeling and left there in his car about 7:30 p.m. with Albert Simon and John Gowdy. The men went as far as Sixteenth street and Main, police said.

As to the possibility of the slaying's being a continuation of what has been termed a "war" following several bombings in Wheeling and Eastern Ohio, none of the Wheeling officers nor those in Allegheny county would venture a guess.

After his death the Pirate changed its name to Billy's and continued on business as usual (Billy's="Big Bill"). A lot of info out there on "Big Bill" Lias. Appears to have been a legendary figure in Wheeling.

Weriton (WV) Daily Times--23august1957:

Not only was "Big Bill" the big man in Wheeling, he was big period:

The photos below taken at Lias's, Wheeling Downs;



Pirate café 3



Pirate café 4

Photos below are in a courthouse--I'm not positive, but I think the guy with Lias might be Nick Miller:



Pirate cafe 5



Pirate Café 6

Lias and Miller leaving a courtroom:





**NOT TOO HAPPY,** William G. (Big Bill) Lias is shown as he emerged from the Federal court room in Wheeling on Nov. 24, 1948 after being fined \$10,000 and sentenced to five years imprisonment for income tax evasion. Lias had pleaded guilty, but fumed that he had been "double crossed" when Judge William E. Baker included the five year prison term in his sentence. He later was permitted to withdraw plea and was acquitted after trial in Fairmont. Shown with the angered Lias is Nick Miller, a Lias associate, while at left is Carl Galbraith of Wheeling, then one of Lias' attorneys.

**Domino Club:**

Charleston  
1935-1942 chip deliveries



10763



Domino Club  
C. H. Smith, Mrg. New Style Mono  
1607 Quarries St., "DC"  
Charleston, W. Va. both sides in gold.  
Inv. #4710 - 1/12/40: 100 B-9's; 70 P, 30 B.

DC

100 B-9 1 9/16 SQ. EDGE HUB CHECKS 70 RED  
30 GREEN NEW STYLE MONO DC BOTH SIDES IN GOLD

Domino Club, ~~17 McFarland St.~~ New Style Monogram  
~~915 1/2 Quarries St.~~ "DC" in gold  
Charleston, W. Vir.

DC

25 R- 15 Or- 15 B- 15 C- Detroit-11-9-36  
100R-150 Or-150B-100C- Detroit 10-14-36

3/23/42 Inv. M 1029  
200 B-9 Hub Checks  
100 Yellow 100 Blue  
Mono DC New Style both sides in gold  
Inv. M 1218 4/6/42  
500 B-9 Hub Checks Yellow  
Mono DC New Style both sides in gold



Three different addresses on the chip cards:

17 McFarland St. was the address of the club for the 1935-36 orders.

915 1/2 Quarrier was the address of the club for the 1940-42 orders.

1607 Quarrier was the residential address of Charles H. Smith during those years.

Smith was the manager/president of the Domino Club Inc.

The club was raided in November 1942 (the same year as the last chip order) and gambling equipment was confiscated and used in the prosecution of the person arrested during the raid on the charge of operating said equipment: Farris S. Tabet (1904-1955).

At the time, Tabet was the proprietor of a place called Monarch Billiards.

Charleston Daily Mail--3may1943:

# TABET'S TRIAL IS UNDER WAY


Farris Tabet went on trial Monday in intermediate court after his counsel, D. Jackson Savage failed to obtain the quashing of an indictment against the defendant by Judge Cyrus W. Hall.

Farris was charged in the indictment with the operation of gaming tables at an establishment, identified as the Domino club, in the 900 block of Quarrier street.

Mr. Savage, former intermediate court judge, contended that the indictment attestation signature was placed there after the grand jury acted in Tabet's case, thus was not proper legally.

P. C. Napier, an investigator for the sheriff's office, testified that Tabet issued him a membership card for the Domino club and later played dice at the establishment losing \$67.

Gambling equipment, including dice and "black jack" tables were brought into the courtroom. They bore labels identifying them as confiscated at the Domino club by deputy sheriffs.





## Gambling Equipment Displayed in Intermediate Court

Above is part of the equipment, which police reported was seized in a raid at the Domino club in the 500 block of Quarrier street last November, and which was introduced in evidence Monday before a jury found Farris Tabet, Summers street pool room proprietor, guilty in intermediate court

of operating gaming tables at the club. Judge Cyrus W. Hall sentenced Tabet to nine months in the county jail and fined him \$200. A 60-day stay was allowed on motion of Defense Counsel D. Jackson Savage. The chief witness for the state was N. P. Napier, investigator for the sheriff's office.

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## **POLICE PICKUPS**

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Farris Tabet, young boy who has been playing truant from school and who was brought to police headquarters Sunday by his father on charges of gambling, was before Judge Wertz today and was turned over to a magisterial court for probable commitment to the boys industrial state school. After court the lad's mother came to headquarters with a plea for his release. She said the lad's father had turned him over to the police more to scare him than anything else. It will be necessary for the parents now to go to Justice Acree for his release.