

# THE LOOKOUT



# Journal

Monthly Newsletter on  
Gambling Establishments  
from Every State in the US



Vol. 1, Num. 1

**PREMIER ISSUE**

January 2002

## LETS GET STARTED

Welcome one and all to the premier issue of *The Lookout*. This journal serves as the voice of the new Illegal Collectors Club, whose purpose is to focus attention on the illegal gambling establishments and create a centralized place for the exchange of ideas and information. I hope you enjoy this issue and will participate in the growth of our hobby.

Let me take this opportunity to introduce myself. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Ed Hertel and I have been collecting Illegal Gambling Paraphernalia for over eight years. I have a webpage dedicated to illegal history at <http://chipster.net> as well as numerous articles in the now defunct Texas Chip Collector's Club Newsletter. Subscribers to that newsletter will find some duplication as I republish some of the more helpful and interesting material in upcoming journals.

I'll try to leave Page 2 of this and future Journals for club news and events. I hope you enjoy this effort and I encourage any and all feedback. Thanks.

### In this Issue:

- The Crystal Club in Galveston, Texas, is examined and chips are put to the test.
- **The "I Can't Believe You Collect That" column examines matchbooks.**
- "Galveston: Island of Chance" is the subject of the "Illegal Book Shelf."
- The definition of "Illegal Chips" is analyzed.
- New Finds, Club News and more are all included in this premier issue.

# I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU COLLECT THAT!

In this hobby which is so focused on casino chips, we have to remember that there are all kinds of collectibles related to illegal casinos. In the search for history, one must look to all sorts of items to gain knowledge of these sometimes hidden clubs and casinos. This reoccurring column is intended to focus on particular items which are sometimes helpful, and often overlooked, in researching illegal gambling clubs.

## MATCHBOOKS

One of the common artifacts remaining from the illegal gambling clubs are matchbooks. During the 1920s and 30s, smoking was not only popular, but fashionable as well. Hollywood stars, athletes and business tycoons were either puffing away on cigarettes or large cigars. Clubs were thick with smoke and the illegal gambling clubs were no exception. Matchbooks in these clubs played a dual role as both facilitating the smokers need for a light as well as potential advertising for the club. As a result of the second issue, many clubs personalized their matchbooks with all sorts of information useful to future historians.

Information on matchbooks varies from the very limited (sometimes nothing more than a name), to the very detailed. Details about address, operators/owners and dates can sometimes lend important information to the researcher. In many cases, clubs can infer gambling activities through their advertising. Such an example can be deduced by the many clubs boasting “Racing results by live wire.” Although the club operators may argue this feature was available for information purposes only, many of these clubs were booking operations. They may not have contained roulette wheels or casino chips, but they were illegal gambling operations.



The Hollywood image of the plush illegal gambling nightclubs of prohibition times are a small part of the total gambling establishments. The largest population of these clubs were small, dark rooms with a few tables and little else. These clubs spent little resources of nonessential things like matchbooks. They were more functional than decorative and usually had little more than the name of the place and possibly some other random information such as an address or operator.



Functional and cheap, most clubs used plain looking matchbooks.

The more fanciful clubs proved their status in everything they did. Clubs such as the Flamingo Club (633 Club) in Newport, Kentucky, and the Balinese Room in Galveston, Texas, made their matchbooks works of art. These matchbooks are collectible not only to the historian, but to other matchbook collectors as well and are sometimes difficult to come by. Although these clubs did not boast gambling as a function of their business, this fact was well known in the area.



Examples of more fanciful books. These two examples are unique in that they represent "Feature" matchbooks, meaning the matches themselves contain writing or graphics.



Since gambling was illegal in the areas for our focus, the advertising related to it was potentially limited. It would be difficult to convince local authorities that illegal gaming was not taking place in a club if thousands of circulating matchbooks advertised such. As a result, most clubs omitted this fact from personalized material.

There are bold exceptions to this rule however. New Orleans casinos ran differently from most as gambling was an acceptable law to break. Some matchbooks, such as those of those from the New Southport Club and O'Dwyers Brothers clubs, boasted pictures of roulette wheels and dice and unabashedly listed available games (the reverse of the New Southport Club has stamped "Open Daily 11 a.m. to 6 a.m. Horse Racing – Black Jack – Dice – Roulette – Keno"). Another exception was in Covington, Kentucky, where the Lookout House showed a drawing of a roulette wheel and dice. In these clubs, gambling was such a well-known fact that hiding it from the public served little purpose.



The varying degrees of the information makes finding matchbooks desirable for the researcher as well as the illegal gambling collector. Even the most mundane of information might help make a connection somewhere down the line. These are artifacts from a bygone era and should not be overlooked.