

# Boots Place, Dogs & The Tin Shack



**By Jim Linduff**

A recent match book purchase initiated research resulting in learning about dog fighting in Northern Kentucky, a series of murders that took place associated with prostitution and drugs and more information about the Tin Shack in Newport, a joint that may have used a much sought after Northern Kentucky illegal chip.

The common thread in our story is John (Boots) Taulbee, a person often described in print as a “prominent member of the Newport underworld” who was born in about 1891 and quickly became associated with gambling, prostitution and drugs in the Newport “bottoms” area, near the Ohio river bank, a run-down series of streets lined with bust out bars, whore houses and illegal

drug sellers.

In June, 1927 Boots faced murder charges stemming from a fight at the “home” of Mary Jane Rohan, 432 W. 4th Street, who was a madam and dope dealer. Several young men from Cincinnati attempted to visit Rowan’s whore house at about 3 am and were denied entrance by Taulbee

who pistol whipped and shot one of the men, Victor Neff. Neff died an hour later from injuries to the head and a gun shot wound to the leg. Taulbee denied the shooting saying that the intruders had the gun which was discharged during the fight.

Boots was acquitted by a jury in Campbell County after convincing them that the intruding youths broke



Newport “bottoms”, W. 3rd. Street



windows and tried to kick down the door and that Taulbee acted in self defense even though previously denying having a gun. After deliberating 45 minutes, the jury agreed with their fellow Campbell County resident Boots and he was free even though his criminal record included several arrests for fighting and a jail term for stealing cars.

Later that year, Sue Taulbee, who ran a whiskey still in her house and restaurant at 343 Isabella Street was fined a whopping \$9.50 for operating the still. While not confirmed, it is likely that Boots was involved with this family enterprise: it fit in his area of interest and he subsequently ran the location as Boot's Place.



Troops destroy stills, 1920s

Mary Jane Rohan next appears in court in 1928 when a Cincinnati man died of strychnine poisoning from home brew made by Rohan (and perhaps her companion Boots) at a joint run by Rohan near Isabella Street. After a five year "effort" on the part of the Newport police Rohan was jailed in connection with a drug bust and in 1934 entered prison for 5 years.

Feeling the pressure prior to her conviction on drug charges, Rohan and her companion Boots purchased property in Cold Spring, Kentucky, then a rural area south of Newport. In early 1931 they began operating dog fights on weekends. Dogs fought to the death and Boots was the alleged owner of the toughest bull who won several fights for a purse. Spectators bet on the outcome and several fights were held each day. Dog fighting had been reported in Northern Kentucky as early as the late 1800s, but Boots and Rohan revived the "sport" in conjunction with fights taking place in Hamilton, Ohio.

Despite pressure from the public, Campbell County officials could never find sufficient evidence to convict anyone because their raid plans were tipped off. During this period Boots operated the Taulbee Restaurant at 343 Isabella

Street, renaming it Boot's Place and advertising the joint to be where "All Good Dogmen Meet" and as the "Terrier



Inn". The pit bull is in the terrier family and the notations on the matches were thinly disguised advertisement for his dog fighting enterprise.



When Mary Jane Rohan went to jail in 1934, the dog fights had run their course and Boots turned to other interests including the robbery of Nash Tailoring Company in Covington, Kentucky. The case was continued several times and subsequently dropped by the Covington police when a bartender at a local saloon testified that Boots had been a customer at the bar during the time of the robbery.

Boots continued to manage west end joints during the early 1940s including a bar at 316 W. 4th Street, long a bust out gambling location and whore house. The place







was owned by the notorious Farley Brothers, Rip and Taylor, bootleggers out of Clay County who also owned other Newport sewers and in 1946 attempted to rob the Flamingo Club only to be shot (Rip died in the shooting) by a hit man from Pittsburgh who was brought in by the Flamingo owners.

In 1948, Boots became listed as the owner of the Tin Shack at 309

W. 4th Street, across the street from the 316 Bar. He ran the joint until the early 1950s when the area was razed by the Newport Housing Authority where low income row houses were constructed.

The Tin Shack remains somewhat of a mystery, but gambling did take place there and a red lazy diamond mold chip has been offered as being from the location. The lazy diamond mold was distributed by White's Card Room Equipment Co., Cincinnati, OH during the time frame of the operation of the Tin Shack and the hot stamp inlay of "309" is consistent with the joint's address.



Given the connection with the address and the fact that the lazy diamond mold showed up in other Northern Kentucky locations including the Woodland Inn, The Sandwich Shop and the Press Club, the Tin Shack chip is as well attributed as many in our hobby. It is somewhat unusual to find chips from the west end bottoms of Newport where most bars were cash operations, but the Merchants Club several blocks east of the Tin Shack had verified chips so it's possible that the Tin Cup did also.

While the design of the chip and the 309 address would point to a "soft" attribution, there are a couple of other considerations that



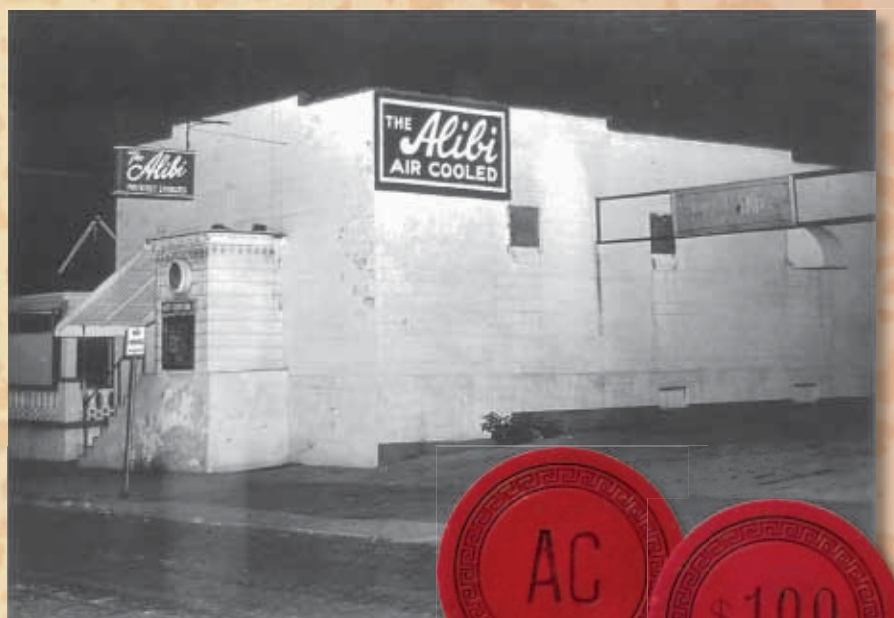
further muddy the water.

As pictured to the left, the matches from the Tin Cup circa 1948-1949, advertise "Entertainment for All" and "Come Up and See Us". "Entertainment for All" was a common advertising gimmick to indicate the black patrons were allowed. Further "Come up and see us" suggests patrons from the bottoms were being targeted, since only the bottoms streets were below 4th Street.

Even the name Tin Shack implies the joint was modest at best. Two "survivors" of the period both remember the club from the outside,

at least. Their rather fuzzy recollections sixty years later, indicate the Tin Shack was a true knife and gun club...if you tried to enter without either, they gave you one!

In all the research about Northern Kentucky chips, it is generally agreed that clubs from the bottoms area rarely if ever used chips in their gambling operations. The major clubs from this area included the Alibi Club, The Copa Club, The Golden Lounge and the Sportsman's Club and ran cash-only operations in their gambling rooms. Chips and club specific dice have never been found.



Alibi Club





Also, the buildings in the area were for the most part, wooden structures, cheaply constructed and often originally built for single family occupancy. For instance, the aforementioned Mary Jane Rohan's house at 432 West 4th Street was sold for \$268 when she was sent to prison. Therefore, any gambling/whore houses in that area wouldn't likely buy chips...cash was the only name of the game.

Given all of this, I continue to consider the 309 chip to be a UFC.



Copa Club, white building in center of photo

Boots Taulbee died in May, 1955 at age 64. While not as well known as several of the other local characters that preceded the control of Northern Kentucky vice by the Cleveland Syndicate, Boots certainly did his part in keeping sin alive, be it booze, dope or whores; stirring in dog fighting and murder for a complete underworld mix. Suffice it to say, he was not missed by most public officials (those not on the take), but he made for lively reporting by the newspapers and along with guys like Buck Brady, Peter Schmidt, Jimmy Brink and the Farley Brothers defined the early gambling scene.

Thanks to Roy Klein and Larry Trapp for their assistance in providing material for this article. All chip images provided by Roy Klein.



Merchants Club chips



Press Club chip



The Sandwich Shop chips



Woodland Inn chips