

PLAYBOY CHIPS AND TOKENS
The Rise and Fall of the Bunny Chip
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Most collectors have, at some time, seen one of the Playboy Casino chips or tokens go by with its familiar rabbit logo. No matter what your opinion is of Playboy Magazine or the Playboy Philosophy, the Playboy Casino story is an interesting tale. The Playboy Casinos played a very important role in the rise and fall of Playboy Enterprises during the 1960's through the early 1980's.

The first casino was actually a Playboy Club and Casino, opened in London June 28, 1966. It was a new, seven story building located at 45 Park Lane, overlooking Hyde Park. Managed by Victor Lownes, a confidant of Hefners, it boasted 27 tables offering Blackjack, Baccarat, and Roulette. Gambling was provided on six floors, as well as rooms, restaurants, and a disco. It was a money maker from the start and remained a golden goose until closing in 1981.

In the 1970's, as Playboy Magazine matured and encountered competition, profits dropped, at the same time gaming profits from the London casino kept rising, making future expansion into casinos very attractive. In 1972 the Clermont Club in Berkely Square, famous for its high rollers and celebrity clientele, was purchased. Also added to the organization in 1972 was Stocks House, a 42 room Georgian Mansion located outside Aldbury in Hertfordshire, that was used for training new bunny croupiers (as well as Victor Lownes residence). In 1978, the new Bahamas Playboy Casino located in the Ambassador Beach Hotel in Nassau was added. 1979 was a busy year. Playboy celebrated their 25th successful year. In Britain, three casinos, the Manchester and Portsmouth Casinos and in London, the Victoria Sporting Club were acquired. In addition, work was started on the future Atlantic City Casino building.

1980 was a banner year for Playboy's Gaming Organization. \$31 million of the \$32 million in profit reported by Playboy Enterprises that year was from gaming. Unfortunately, it was their last. The British had always been uneasy with a foreign administrative snafus, combined with some mud-slinging in London referred to as the "Casino Wars". Playboy lost their operating license in Britain. The timing couldn't have been worse, it was April 1981 and they had just opened the new Atlantic City Casino. The repercussions from London reached the New Jersey shores in no time. The problems found in Britain along with a reported bribe paid to the New York State Liquor Board 20 years earlier to secure a liquor license for the New York Playboy Club, tipped the scale. The New Jersey Casino Control Commission would not renew Playboy's license to operate a casino in Atlantic City with Hefner in charge.

All Playboy properties in the UK were sold in November 1981 to Trident Television. The new Atlantic City Casino closed in 1982 along with the Nassau Club and Casino. Playboy Enterprises, Inc. reported a 1982 loss of more than \$51 million. The next couple of years would see the sale of the Playboy Clubs and Hotels, the DC-9 "Bunny Jet" and the sale of publishing and recording assets in an effort to regain profitability.

COLLECTING PLAYBOY CASINO CHIPS AND TOKENS.

Chips and tokens of lower denominations from the Atlantic City Casino are relatively common and well documented. The Bahamas chips and tokens are similar in style and denomination with the Atlantic City series. Both use a Bud Jones Co. nickel-silver inlay surrounded by the colored collar with Playboy rabbit head logos and various inserts. The lowest denominations, like the Bahamas 50 cent and the training school chips are hotstamped. The lower denomination Bahamas pieces are also reasonably available.

Playboy Casino Chips used in the UK were of the classic clay or composition style. A few common pieces from the London Park Lane and Clermont Casinos and the London Training School, or Stocks House, also can be found at various prices. We may never know all the varieties of chips produced for the fifteen years the London clubs were in operation. Chips as high as L100,000 were used by the high rollers attracted to the London Playboy Casinos. Chips and tokens from the short-lived Manchester, Portsmouth and Victoria Sports Club Casinos are rarely seen.

In 1979, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Playboy, all keyholders were given keychains containing a "\$25 International" chip good at any of the casinos. Typical of the chip style, it was white with six black rabbit head logos, encircling a nickel-silver inlay.

The fun of collecting is in the hunt and collecting Bunnys will provide a long term challenge. I would welcome hearing from anyone who owns or is interested in these chips and tokens.