

What Do You Collect?

by Joe Shaw

“What do you collect?” A question that has been asked of me countless number of times over my years of chip collecting. The answer would be “Depends”. My chip collecting interests have changed numerous times and what I would like to do is to share my chip collecting interests and experiences over the years. Along the way, I would also like to share some of my favorite Silver Strikes and chips.

Oddly enough, my foray into chip collecting did not start with chips, but with Silver Strikes. Flashing back to June of 1994, I remember being with the family taking a vacation to Reno. It was late in the evening and we were waiting for the tram at Circus Circus to take us back to the wing that we were staying at. I recall seeing a slot machine that had 2 interesting looking “coins” on display. One had a lion and the other had an elephant. I was impressed with it, but oddly enough, I did not play the machine. The next morning we checked out, so I never got a chance to play the machine. I did get matches from all over Reno, which was something that I did collect at the time. On the drive back, I remember thinking that I wished I got one of those coins before I left. Maybe next time.

December 1994. I was in Las Vegas on business. Staying at Harrah’s. To my surprise and amazement, I found the same looking “coins”. Put a \$20 in and left with 3 Silver Strikes. Pretty cool. On the same trip, I then found the same at the Mirage, Treasure Island and the

old Hacienda on the strip. Guess that is when I started collecting Silver Strikes. Every trip back to Las Vegas I would always look for Silver Strike machines at every casino I went to (since I was already hooked, a better description might be “went to every casino looking for a Silver Strike machine”).

The most exciting moment in my Silver Strike collecting experience probably was when I decided to tackle the \$200 Silver Strike machine at Bally’s in LV. That was the only Silver Strike machine that I have not played. Compared with the normal 25¢ - \$10 Silver Strike machine, \$5 a pull was a big jump for me. I was determined to go for the one-pounder token. I was ready for the euphoria of when the bells went off and when they came presenting a one pound Silver Strike in a blue velvet case. I started with \$50, and after playing for close to an hour, I still had not won the Silver Strike. However to my amazement, I had close to \$600 in credits. That is when I decided to intercourse the Silver Strike and take the money and run. To this date, I still have never won a \$200 Silver Strike.

Other memorable and not so memorable moments in Silver Strike collecting for me include:

- Hitting for 3 - 7’s at the Hacienda (on the strip), only to realize that it was on the 2nd Pay Line.
- Cashing out with 12 Silver Strikes after putting in \$20 at the Riviera.
- Put in \$140 trying to win a \$20 Silver Strike at the Tropicana, and

not getting one. Only to have a fellow collector put in a \$20 seconds later and hit for 2. (and to top it off, they were selling those at the cage at face at the convention 2 years ago)

- My first trade was for a Silver Strike. It was with Dick Covington. First convention that I went to (at the Aladdin) was for Silver Strikes. That is when Dick Covington introduced me to Doug Saito.
- Hand carrying close to 80 Silver Strikes as traders to the convention, and coming back with over 150 after the convention. (I do not check in luggage when I fly by myself)

As time went by, my interest in collecting Silver Strikes started to lessen in favor of chips. I was tired of hauling what seemed like my equivocal body weight around each show or meeting. I was also disenchanted with the standard designs (Miner, Stagecoach etc) along with some of the casinos reissuing the same design Silver Strikes, but with a new year on it. Soon after, I migrated from Silver Strike collecting to chip collecting.

As with other chip collectors, my chip collecting started with commemorative chips. At the same time that I was collecting Silver Strikes, I started buying commemorative chips. On the frequent trips that I would make from the Bay Area to Las Vegas, I would always buy the latest commemorative from each casino that I went to. That was all that I collected. Never bothered with house chips.

However, my commemorative/LE chip collecting would only last a very short time. One of the first chip shows that I went to was Bill Akeman's Superbowl show at Arizona Charlie's. My intention was to go to the show and pick up some of the older commemoratives that I was missing. The very first dealer table I went to had what seemed like 3 - 4 tables full of commemoratives. Seemed like there were hundreds of them. My first thought was, "I am never going to get them all". Worse part being, there is going to be more, as new ones will be issued. Not to mention that some of them were coyote ugly. 30 seconds later my commemorative/LE chip collecting days were over.

I now had a new dilemma. I knew enough to know that I cannot collect everything. I had to "specialize" in one area. Problem being, I did not know what that area was going to be. Should I collect by mold? By denomination? By type? By casino? Over the next years, I would end up specializing and collecting Arodies, Dove-Tails, Quarter Pies, Paulson Metal Centers, Brass Cores, \$2.50's, 25¢ chips, 50¢ chips, \$1 chips, Rectangle molds, Hard Rock chips, Christy & Jones chips, Christy & Jones sample chips, Harrah's Lake Tahoe/Reno roulettes, MGM (LV) chips. In looking back, maybe I was trying to collect everything. I just did it a bit at a time. Just wait till you hear the area that I collect at the end of this story. But that will have to wait.

When I abandoned collecting commemoratives, I started getting interested in obsolete Nevada chips. Collecting current chips did not interest me until later on. In the beginning stages of my chip collecting, I was fortunate enough to

be introduced to Doug Saito. More specifically, his publication, Chip Chat. What caught my eye at the time, was a pair of 50¢ dove-tail chips from Fort Lucinda, along with a Brown/Yellow quarter pie \$5 chip from Jim Kelly's Nugget in Lake Tahoe. Those chips became my very first "obsolete" chip purchase.



I decided that dove-tails was the area that I was going to collect. A pair of Diamond Jim's & Lucky Nevada Club 50¢ Free Plays was soon added to my collection. A pair of Castaways \$1 Free Play Craps Only was also added to the collection. Unfortunately, it sort of stopped there. That was when I found out that ones that I wanted or needed still were hard to come by, and it was going to cost a wee bit more than what I had planned on paying (especially as a beginner). I kept what I had and over the years, managed to come up with a few nice ones. I've always liked dove-tails and still do. Never found one that I did not like. Shown are my favorites from the Mustang Club, Thunderbird & the Monte Carlo.

Even though I loved dove-tails, there were two things about them that bothered me. One was the fact that they were always hot stamp chips. Never an inlay on them (guess an inlay would have covered up the "tail" and made it a half-pie instead). I never cared too much for hot stamped chips, but they were still great looking chips. The other was the fact that since they had 2 different colored "tails", that also meant that I had to get both chips. Aside from

having to spend twice as much, there was also the challenge of getting the right colored tail that I was missing.

What intrigued me even more than dove-tails were quarter pie chips. Not just any quarter pies, they had to be Christy and Jones mold quarter pies. No small crowns for me. There was something about the color combinations of the quarter pies and those shiny Christy and Jones mold hats that I just loved.

Best of all, unlike dove-tails, they had inlays. One of the most interesting facts about C&J quarter pies is that you can actually still get one at face! Shown is the \$25 black/green quarter pie still in use at the Commercial Hotel in Elko. Also shown is my all time favorite - the companion \$5 purple/grey quarter that is *not* in use (IMHO, a real tough chip that I was fortunate enough to come up with)



Arodies. I also managed to venture very very briefly into Arodies. I actually had one in my collection. A Cal Neva Biltmore \$1. Even though I thought that Arodies were a great looking mold, I gave up on that idea after a quick reality check on pricing of Arodies. Sometime later, I did come across

about 60 ND arodies from the Palace Club in Fallon. Always liked the fact that I can brag about having a collection of 60 arodies. Granted that the conversation goes downhill when they ask the question of “Where from?”. Recently, I did manage to get a few of the Binion’s Horseshoe arodies. From the low denomination 25¢ all the way up to the \$500.



Next came Paulson Metal Centers. Price was reasonable. Compared to Arodies, everything was reasonable. Not too many to collect either. Which can translate into a blessing or a curse. Depending on how you look at it. I soon found that I had most of the Paulson Metal Centers, which again meant that I had to look for something to collect. What also set me looking for something else to collect was that Metal Centers start looking the same. They were always H&C mold, along with a round-octagonal-shield shaped metal center, and mostly the same old red color (if it was a \$5 chip). Just got boring after a while. I never managed to get the one Metal Center that I impressed me the most. It was the Hacienda \$100. Something about a black chip with a red shield metal center that still sticks in my mind. However, I did end up getting the companion Landmark \$2 & \$5 chips shown.



Low denom 25¢ and 50¢ chips were also on my list of collecting interests. At least for a short period of time. I also soon realized that most of them also had the curse of being hot stamps. Kind of hard to find low denoms with inlays. I was also wrong in thinking that they would be cheap. How much could an obsolete lowly 25¢ or 50¢ hot stamp chip cost right? Wrong! Shown are what I thought were nice looking hot stamp and inlay low denoms. All are in Christy and Jones mold.



Brass cores were probably the one specialized area of collecting that I managed to get everything up to and including the \$100’s, except for 2 chips. The Crystal Bay Club \$5 & \$100. Surprising thing about it was that it took very little time and cost to complete everything. I even got all of the California brass cores, such as One Two Eight Pai Gow Club, Top of the Vine, Viejas, Lucky Chances and Hollywood Park Year of the Tiger, Ox, & Rabbit series. Only thing about brass cores that still puzzles me is why does the Reno Ramada \$100 not match up with the other denominations?



I don’t know who came up with the idea or suggestion, but \$2.50 chips were next in line. For the first time, I also ventured into collecting chips outside of Nevada. I was now collecting \$2.50 chips from everywhere. This was one area that I had a lot of fun collecting. I remember going to a chip show at the Four Queens years back. Picked up tons of Riverboat \$2.50. Best part was majority of them were under \$10 each. I soon found myself with binders full of pinkies. Not a very “man-ly” colored chip according to my wife.

Because of the overlapping collecting interests, there were certain \$2.50 chips that I liked more than others. Take the Harrah’s \$2.50 yellow chip. It was a \$2.50 and it was a brass core. Even better was the Mint, \$2.50. It was a \$2.50 chip, a dove-tail, and a Christy. It had a fulfillment factor of 3! Collecting chips was certainly getting to be fun (and expensive). In looking back, I have passed on chips early on because I did not have the funds, or as a beginner, spending \$200 on a chip was a lot. I’ve managed to get most of the chips eventually later on. There was one chip that I regret passing on. I still have not seen one for sale since. It was a Primadonna, Reno purple H&C \$2.50. I was still a beginner, and passed on the

opportunity to get the chip for \$350. How I regret that to this day. There is a good ending to the story though. Instead of getting the Primadonna, I bought a Lady Luck \$2.50 instead. It was in used condition (something I do not usually buy), but it was such a pretty chip. Turns out the \$100 spent on this chip was a decision that I never regretted.

The bulk, in terms of number of chips, of my collection lies in what I have been collecting in the past 4 or 5 years. Majority of which are \$1 chips. More specifically, \$1 chips from Las Vegas (and N. Las Vegas). I stopped counting after 600 different ones. Close to that number are the Christy and Jones mold collection. Hard for me to explain why I love

Christy & Jones mold chips, but I'll try to next time, along with the rest of what I collect. How can anyone not like these.

