

“BLAST FROM THE PAST” CHIP SHOW REVEALS CONFLICTS OF COMMUNITIES WITH ILLEGAL GAMING ESTABLISHMENTS

by Christine Marsalis Waters

The police raids on the illegal gaming establishments along the Gulf Coast began on the last day of June, 1966, after all gambling was shut down for a drying out period as the result of Mississippi's legalization of alcohol. Up until this time, operators paid a black market tax to the state, allowing the sale of alcohol alongside gambling. With the passing of the law, alcohol and gambling could no longer co-exist. The state ABC board was formed forcing gambling underground, with attendance at poker, craps, and other games by invitation only. And thus began almost three decades of conflict between the communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the authorities, and men like Rip Poulos and Mickey McKoul who ran the illegal establishments. Sitting on the MS/AL border, with each state thinking the other had jurisdiction, the Sage Patch was the only club escaping the scrutiny of the police and subsequent raids until it shut down in 1992.

Sharing stories such as these and authenticating decades old illegal gaming chips, Rip Poulos, life-long resident and club owner, captivated those attending Bob Gabel's *Gulf Coast Shows* production of "Blast From the Past" Casino Chip and Memorabilia show hosted the weekend before Thanksgiving by the President Broadwater Hotel and Resort in Biloxi, MS. Verta Lee Swetman, who issued the warrants to close the illegal gaming facilities, also sat and talked with those interested in hearing more about the decades of illegal gaming.

Rip's career, spanning the better part of four decades that began in the late 50's, included such early jobs as poker and craps dealer in the famous 406 and Magnolia Clubs. Later a partnership formed with Mickey McKoul and the Tahiti Club. Ignorant of the law at that time, Rip ordered chips and dice from a company in Vegas; as a result, Mr. McKoul was indicted for interstate transportation of illegal gaming supplies and turned over the management of the club to his partner. Another of their establishments was the Porter House Steak House and Bar, located at the intersection of Highway 90 and Courthouse Road, offering behind-the-scene roulette, craps, and blackjack.

Additional stories cleared up the myth that the 406 and Magnolia Clubs were housed on separate floors in the same building. In reality, the 406 Club sat at that address on Magnolia Street with the Union Bar and its upstairs Magnolia Club, offering bookings on horse races and all other sports, sitting back-to-back. The 406 offered a two-dollar poker game until 5:00 p.m. when no-limit stud poker and boure' became the popular choice of gamblers.

Local communities along the Coast held different opinions toward gambling. While Biloxi was always more liberal and the first to legalize gambling, Gulfport

held out until the second vote. And to this day, the people of Long Beach do not allow gaming along their stretch of the gulf coast.

Also in attendance at the show were a group of men and women who enjoy the collecting of casino chips and memorabilia from across the United States, as far away as Beverly Hills, CA; Las Vegas, NV; New Mexico; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; Michigan; Atlanta; and Pompano Beach, FL; and as close as Alabama and other Mississippi communities. These collectors brought posters, buttons, match books, pens, and chips (obsolete and current, legal and illegal) and other memorabilia from Indian Reservations, poker rooms, riverboats, land-based casinos, and racing tracks, around the world. Janice O'Neal, Vice-president and historian of CC>CC, represented the national hobby and membership of the American Numismatic Association's (coin collectors) member club, Casino Chips & Gaming Tokens Collectors Club. Included in this weekend's festivities of sharing chips and information was Bill Akeman, publisher of the privately issued Gaming Times magazine.

Greg Susong, designer of the forum and gathering place for on-line chip collectors, represented his website www.chipguide.com, posting pictures and information for those unable to attend the show. The chipboard, under construction for the past two years, is continually upgraded to meet the demands of the public and advertisers. There are 3500 pictures of different U.S. chips found on Susong's website along with links to different collectors, FAQ's for newcomers, contests, email addresses, and a map allowing viewers a peek at current and obsolete chips from selected casinos.

When asked why they collect chips, one receives answers as varied as the collectors themselves. Coming from backgrounds that include professional degrees in fields such as teaching and engineering, independent businessmen and women self-employed, and retirees, you hear explanations such as: history, travel, camaraderie, profit, challenges, pastime, variety, artistic design, investment, interest in gambling and many, many more.

Being a newcomer to the hobby, the show gave me an opportunity to meet the different collectors I have conducted on-line business with over the past year, putting a face with the email and phone conversations. The "*Blast From the Past*" offered opportunities to join the national collectors' organization, CC & GTCC, to subscribe to magazines such as Gaming Times and add to our different collections before we parted on Sunday and began our journeys home in anticipation of next year's show.

(Note from CC>CC Vice-President) Christine Marsalis Waters is a free lance writer for publications and newspapers in the southeast, especially around the Biloxi-Gulfport riverboat casino area. She is one of our newest club members. Due to doing news coverage of the Biloxi show and getting to meet other collectors, she is now avidly pursuing her chip collecting hobby. I have invited her to participate in articles for Chip & Token News when she can find a spare minute in her busy schedule.