

Bones Remmer and the Menlo Club

by David Moore

Some of the most intriguing California chips are the crest and seals such as those from the SS Tango and SS Rex gambling ships and the Menlo Club “ER” chips. The Tango and Rex chips have a fascinating story behind them, which has been well-documented. However less has been known about the Menlo Club chips until now.



The Eastman and Jung-Pfaender catalogs of California chips along with The Gaming Table list the Menlo Club as being in Menlo Park, California but with no exact address or dates of operation.

Apparently the location of the Menlo Club has been an educated guess, since they have surfaced



over the years at flea markets and garage sales in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the name sounds as if it could have been located in the town of Menlo Park, California. But no documentation exists that a card room called the Menlo Club ever existed in Menlo Park.

However, a notorious card room called the Menlo Club operated during the 1940s in San Francisco, just 30 miles north of Menlo Park. And that card room was owned by Elmer Remmer, which would explain the “ER” initials on the Menlo Club crest and seal chips.

Remmer, better known as “Bones” Remmer, was an alleged organized crime figure and did constant battle with law enforcement in San Francisco during his long career as the city’s gambling czar. Edmund G. Brown, Sr. battled Remmer in the courts for most of his 8 years as district attorney of San Francisco. The publicity Brown received fighting gambling in San Francisco helped him go on to become California attorney general and then governor. His son, Edmund G. Brown, Jr., also served as governor of California, ran for U.S. President and is currently the mayor of Oakland.



But despite numerous raids on the Menlo Club, and subsequent trials, Remmer never served a day in jail on gambling charges. He was summoned to appear before the Kefauver organized crime hearings and eventually the government did send Remmer to Terminal Island prison for tax evasion, where he served two and a half years of a five year term. Remmer owned the Cal-Neva Lodge on the north shore of Lake Tahoe where he first came to notice in the press when he tangled with Hollywood's "It" girl, Clara Bow.

Remmer had tried to win favor from the actress with a gift of a case of whiskey. And Bow returned the favor by losing \$13,000 at the blackjack table. The

only problem was after she left the Lake she stopped payment on her check. No money was ever collected from Miss Bow.

Remmer became owner of the Cal-Neva Lodge after the previous owners, William J. Graham and James C. McKay, were sent to Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1939. Remmer managed their business interests during their imprisonment. Remmer sold the Cal-Neva in 1948 to Sanford P. Adler, best known for replacing Benjamin Siegel as owner of the Flamingo in Las Vegas after Bugsy was shot to death. Adler also owned the El Rancho in Las Vegas.

Remmer died on June 11, 1963. The large headline on the story in the San Francisco Chronicle said, "Bones Remmer Dies in Hospital," the implication being that few would have expected the notorious gambler to have died of natural causes.

As far as can be determined, no large quantities of the chips of the Menlo Club have ever been found since the police closed it in a final raid in 1948. Veteran chip collector and club member Dale Seymour says he first encountered the chip about 25 years ago. He has never seen it in large quantities

but only in ones or twos, as if the chips had been carried home from the club by a gambler.

The Menlo Club was located at 32 Turk Street in downtown San Francisco, just off Market Street. Today a parking lot is located where the club once stood. If you're looking to add a California chip to your collection this one seems to have it all: a crest and seal, an illegal, even a Nevada connection. And it seems to sell in the \$20 to \$30 range. ♦

