

IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN

by Jim Steffner

A recent flea market or antiquing trip may have turned up some old poker chips. Where were they used, who owned the club, and what is “the rest of the story”. Only the name, initials, or numbers embossed on the chip separate the unknown from the known.

This article will discuss information sources available to help identify these unknown and usually forgotten pieces of clay.

Mold design, chip markings, legal records, personal research and contacts, news stories, street address visits, and information gathered from other collectors are the stepping stones on your path to a wealth of knowledge about the chips.

The mold design will identify the manufacturer/distributor, approximately when the chip was produced, and in what general area it may have been used. Records are available for the Hub, Chain, Crest & Seal, HCE, and a few other molds, but are missing for many others such as the Hourglass & the Flower. Tables below list manufacturer/distributors and area in which certain molds were used.

In the early days there were three major chip manufacturers; T.R. King, Los Angeles CA; Burt Co., Portland ME; and US Playing Card Co., Cincinnati OH. Burt made 95% of the compression-molded chips and in 1947 bought molds from US

Playing Card. Chipco started up in 1988 by acquiring Burt Co. Burt’s previous production manager sold all Burt molds to Atlantic Standard, which started up at same time.

Today, Paulson, T.R. King, Bud Jones, and Atlantic Standard represent the chip manufacturing market. Atlantic Standard and T.R. King are not licensed in Nevada.

Mold Manufacturers/Distributors

3 Dots	Joe Treybal
Arrowdie	Tommy Hains
C	H.C. Edwards
Cord	O’Neil & Co.
Crest & Seal	U.S. Playing Card Co.
Diamond	Jack Todd Co. to 1952, Christie Jones to 1988, then Borland
Die Car	Nevada Dice Co.
DieSquare	Pioneer Club Supply
DieSwirl	Burt Co, pre 1988. Mold owned by Midwest Game Supply
Ewing	Ewing Mfg. Co.
Flowers	George & Co
Harp	Taylor & Co.
HCE	H.C. Edwards
HHR	Langworthy & Co.
Horseshoe	TK Specialties
Hourglass	Rigdon Co.
Hub	Mason
LazyDiamond	Rigdon Co.
LgCrown	T.R. King
LgKey	B.C. Wills & Co.

L’s	C.W. Rice
Nevada	Nevada Dice Co.
Oval Chain	Hunt & Co.
Rect	Western Club Supply
SmCrown	T.R. King
SmKey	B.C. Wills & Co.
SqRect	T.R. King
S’s	Ryan & Co.
TK	TK Specialty
TriClub	Gamblers General Store
T’s	Taylor & Co.
Unicorn	Chipco
Wave	Bowman
Weave	Penn Specialties
ZigZag	Noll & Co.

Partial Geographical Usage

West Coast	LgCrown, SmCrown, L’s, Hub, H&C, LgKey
Northwest	Hub, DieSquare, RectDiamond, SmKey, Harp, Horseshoe, LgCrown
Southwest	Horseshoe, Cord, Diamond, Hub, T’s, L’s, Harp, LgCrown, SmCrown
Southeast	HCE, Harp, H&C, SmKey, Star, RectHeart, LgSqr, DieSqr, Hub, C, TK
Central/Midwest	SmKey, LzyDiamond, Hourglass, Hub, Rect, Flower, S’s, Cord,

Northeast

Weave, Dots, T's,
SmCrown,
DiaSquare, Diamond,
Harp, RectHeart
Chain, S's, Rect,
RectHeart, Hub,
SmKey, Dots



The Gaming Table, an excellent reference book, is a good starting point for information based on the inscriptions on the chip. The GT may list the name of the club, the location, and years of operation. Your information file is growing, but now you have to do some legwork.

Initials on the chip could represent the name of the club or the owner, or may have no connection to either. Numbers could be address locations. Most of the older clubs was being operated outside the law and the owners didn't need too much information on the chips that would lead authorities to link them to the operation. At times the initials on these older chips has no connection with the owner or operator at all.

For those chips not listed in the GT or for additional information, post a request, including a scan of the chip if possible, on Greg's board and the club board. Other members and collectors may have knowledge of your chip. Howdy Herz has the Hub mold records and access is available for a fee or chip trade. Mark Lighterman and Gene Trimble have produced a CD of available HCE mold information. U.S. Playing Card Company in Cincinnati Ohio has some records on Crest & Seal chips. Jack Todd of T-K has information on his company's molds. Howdy Herz has recently published a book of chain mold identifications from the Hunt Co. Other mold records may be made available as soon as they can be located and accessed.

You are getting closer, but now the hard part. At this point you may know the chip manufacturer, location where the chip was used, and approximate years the club was in operation. If you live close by, visit the library in the town where the club was located. Stop at the reference desk and ask to see the City Directories for the years the club may have been in operation. Search a few years before and after the dates you have. Look up the club name and the street address. Many directories will give you the owner or operator of the business. The street address will reveal adjacent businesses. Write everything down. Find out where the club owner or operator lived as well as any employees that may be listed. Check for other listings with the same name as owner or employees. Check local phone books for present day listings if the name is not a common variant. Call some of these people and inquire if they were related to the club owner. If you find a relative, they may remember the old club operation or provide other names, sources, and stories. If the weather is nice, look for older men walking in the area or sitting on a park bench in town. They may well have lived in the area at the time and can tell you some great stories. These older gentlemen may not be too prevalent since most of the illegal clubs operated in the 1930's to 50's, and a patron who played would be about 70 to 90 years old.



Visit the actual site where the club was located. What is at the address now? If it is still an old building, talk to the present occupants, see if the landlord is the same as in early years, and check adjacent businesses. If the present building occupant has been there since the time the club operated, there may be leftovers in the basement. Boxes left by the previous occupants could be found in a corner of a basement where the present occupant never got around to discarding. Visit the club owner's residence area. Talk with neighbors who may have lived there at the time, as well as the present occupant of the house. Track down flea market and antique dealers. They can sometimes provide historical information about happenings in the area. Most of these sources are more valuable in small towns where the community is closer knit. In larger towns and cities the library, newspapers and government offices will probably be the best sources. Don't forget to do internet searches on individuals last names as a good way to locate relatives. Social security death records provide date information and last location where an individual may have resided. The SS death records can lead to date information usable in newspaper obituary research. One very important source of information may come from the person who sold you the chips. Be sure and ask where they obtained the chips. While some flea and antique dealers may make up a story, any information is valuable in your research efforts.

By now, if everything is going well, you know the club name, address, years of operation, owner and/or managers name, employees names, where the owner lived and hopefully some stories and history about the club.

You're still a ways from "the rest of the story". The "morgue" at the local newspaper office may give you some additional information including news articles about the club, or obituaries to help locate relatives, who just might have more chips. And speaking of morgues, be sure and check the local funeral home in smaller towns. Many times they will know the individual or the family and can possibly supply additional information. Check the local police station to access old records, as well as the county court house for case records. While you are at the courthouse, check tax records for the property, which will list the legal property owner. Don't forget the local historical society. A lot of interesting information is just waiting to be found. Document everything you come across and make copies where possible.

Start your own history book. Whenever you see a posting identifying an old chip, keep a printout or file the information. You may come across one of these chips in the future. Michael Knapp wrote many great articles about UFC's (Unidentified Chips) in earlier issues of the club magazine which were a wealth of information. Other club members are walking encyclopedias when it comes to identifying older chips; Gene Trimble, Jim Perlowski, Ed Hertel, John Zoesch, John Benedict, Howdy Herz, Michael Knapp, Allen Meyers, and many others have a wealth of knowledge.

Now that you have some extra knowledge, be sure to share it with others in their search for the unknown.

Good luck in your search and have fun collecting.



Mold information
Approx. 80 different molds.

Crest & Seal	U.S. Playing Card Co, 4590 Beech St, Cincinnati OH
Diamond	Jack Todd Co up to 1952, then Christie Jones to early 80's, then Borland.
DieSwirl	Burt Co, pre 1988. Mold owned by Midwest Gaming Supply, Kearney MO
Ewing TriClub	Gamblers General Store
Flower	George & Co, 650 Main Street, Buffalo NY
Hat & Cane	Christie Jones and Paulson
HHL	C.W. Rice Co. Walnut Creek CA - early
Hourglass	Rigdon, Cincinnati OH, White Club Room Supply
Lazy Diamond	
LgSquare	Jones Bros., New Orleans, 1950's - 1980's Paulson - later
RectDiamond	Pioneer Club Supply, San Francisco CA, entered Nevada market late 60's
Sm Crown Chain	T.R. King, 1035 S. Olive, Los Angeles CA
Unicorn	Atlantic Standard

Geographical

West - CA	LgCrn, SMCrn, L's, Hub, H&C,
Northwest - WA, OR	Hub, DieSq, RectDiam
Southwest - TX, AZ	Horseshoe, Cord, Diam
Southeast - FL, MS, AL	HCE, Harp, H&C, SmKey, Star, RctHrt
Central - TN, KY, OH, MI	SmKey, LzyDiam, Hourgls, Hub, Rect, Flower, SSS, Cord, Weave, Dots T's, SmCrn, DiaSq, Diam, Harp, RctHrt
Northeast - NY, NJ, CT, ME	Chain, S's, Rect, RectHrt, Hub

