

# THE TURF CLUB HIALEAH RACE TRACK FLORIDA

CIRCA: 1932

By John Benedict

Hialeah race track had reopened in January of 1932, after Joe E. Widener, millionaire art collector, purchased the once failing and run-down operation from the original owner. A Grand Opening was held at its private and posh Turf Club with fanfare celebration, and such guests as the Vanderbilts, Whitneys and Huttons were present.

Widener used money, energy and intelligence to improve the operation of the race track which was originally built in 1925, but the conditions during the Great Depression caught even Widener unprepared financially at one point, and the race track was faced with the possibility of having to interrupt its schedule which was at the height of Florida's tourist season.

Widener had called upon Colonel Edward R. Bradley, a prominent casino operator in both Palm Beach and St. Augustine, Florida, for some financial help to keep operations up and running, and Bradley sent an armored truck with sufficient funds to make sure the horses would continue to run as usual, along with payoffs being quick. At that time few knew that it was Bradley that saved this recently opened track from an otherwise embarrassing situation. It is said that the favor was duly returned by Widener in allowing Bradley to operate a private casino at the Turf Club for the duration of the ten-week season.

Prior to Hialeah race track being purchased by Widener, betting of all types was illegal in Florida. In order to bet on a horse at the track, the "certificate method" was adopted to circumvent the law, and a bettor had to purchase shares of stock in the horse he favored and was issued a certificate on the spot. If the horse was in the money, a "dividend" was declared immediately. This legal curve-ball was only a stop-gap at the time. Widener, with huge sums of money being invested in Hialeah, saw a most urgent need for a pari-mutuel law, and through quick and skillful juggling, and money, was able to convince Florida's State Legislator, and a bill was introduced and passed in a few days!

I located the following chips in South Florida, about a twenty-five minute drive from Hialeah race track, and I'm going to assume that these chips were from the private operation Colonel Edward R. Bradley ran at the Turf Club until a better explanation comes along. If anyone has additional information on the Turf Club at Hialeah, or these chips, I would greatly appreciate knowing about it, especially if there are other colors and molds, because I would like to complete a set. Thanks!

The chips I found are of the following mold designs: Dots, Diamond & Squares and Circle of Rectangles. The colors are: red, yellow, blue and white, with the blue and white chips reading TC. A total of fifty-one pieces.

