

When Vice was King

A History of Northern Kentucky Gambling 1920 - 1970

Part 1

by Jim **Linduff**
with Roy **Klein** and Larry **Trapp**



Preface

Much has been written about organized crime in the United States, primarily about activities in major cities: New York, the city of origin; Chicago, home of Al Capone; Miami; Tampa; New Orleans, with its possible connections to the assassination of John F. Kennedy; and of course, Las Vegas, the city that crime built.

Northern Kentucky has been included in some studies, most notably one by Hank Messick, the crusading investigative reporter for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* who made his career writing about the illegal activities there. Several excellent articles listed in the Sources section of this article have described the Northern Kentucky scene, some including descriptions of chips, dice and other memorabilia of interest to collectors.

Why then, our article? We asked this question several times throughout the project as we searched for long-forgotten references and recollections of clubs, some not being in the news for over 60 years! First, and of most importance to us, is our need to further document the people and locations that made the Northern Kentucky gambling era unique.

Also, as collectors, we are a scurvy lot who never stop looking for new finds—a chip not previously known to be at a given joint, dice that surface from places not thought to have had gambling at all, ash trays, dinnerware, swizzle sticks...all the “stuff” we keep and share with others. If these new treasures evoke some jealousy in our fellow collectors, so be it! We certainly aren’t in it for the money! God knows we buy way more than we ever sell.

Finally, we view our work as a continuing process. We believe we have updated and significantly expanded the knowledge of both the people and places in the Northern Kentucky gambling history. We have also tried to further describe how and why Northern Kentucky became a gambling center and to what extent the “reform” actually helped the area. Our section listing chips from the area will certainly be challenged, but it represents our best effort to provide a summary of the authenticated and undocumented chips from each location. We have not tried to place values on the chips, as these tend to change frequently as new batches are found, and because they are worth what someone is willing to pay at a given time.

It is our hope that others will correct and update what we have done so that information about the area will not be lost over time. It’s been fun putting this together and we welcome comments.

We want to fully credit and acknowledge the valuable help we received from Gene Trimble, Dave Horn, Ed Hertel, Allen Meyers, Rich Ritchie, Lou Coletti and many others in the Casino Chip and Gaming Token Collectors Club. Their written work and answers to our questions were a vital part of our study.

Introduction

The scope of this study begins in about 1920, the start of Prohibition. While gambling and prostitution thrived in the Northern Kentucky region prior to 1920, particularly during the Civil War, as prostitutes and gambling halls serviced the soldiers stationed in Cincinnati, the influence of organized crime in the area caused gambling to flourish in the 1920s and into the 1930s. During Prohibition, criminal activities became more respectable to citizens who

demanded alcohol and the gambling associated with it. Large amounts of capital became available to buy and/or build distilleries, distribute the booze made therein throughout the Midwest and establish lavish carpet joints for people to drink and gamble. Northern Kentucky was near the booze supply, centrally located for distribution and its public officials had a history of looking the other way.

One of the first major players in the bootlegging business was George Remus who came to Cincinnati from Chicago in 1920. While he had little direct influence in the gambling and prostitution business, he built a massive bootlegging operation in the early Prohibition days and many people in his organization became players in Northern Kentucky during later years. It took the Cleveland Syndicate to jumpstart gambling in Northern Kentucky. The Cleveland Syndicate became part of a nationwide mob organization that controlled illicit activities coast to coast.

The Cleveland Syndicate received the Ohio/Northern Kentucky area at the first national Organized Crime Commission in 1928. The Syndicate became one of the most powerful outfits in the country.

The Cleveland Syndicate was first headquartered in Cincinnati at the Arrowhead Inn, in Branch Hill, Ohio, east of town. Joseph Bauer, an independent gambler, started the Arrowhead Inn in the late 1920s and ran it free from interference until 1932 when the Syndicate took over and put Sam Nason in as operator. In 1937 reform officials raided the joint and shut it down. Nason, a local with Syndicate ties moved to Elmwood Place in 1933, first at the Valley Walk-A-Show club, then to the Fox and Crow in Montgomery in 1944.

The Syndicate turned attention to the Coney Island Race Track in Cincinnati. The track was opened in 1925 and had Eastern mob ties. Dutch Schultz, a member of the Eastern mob took over the track operation in 1932. After he was gunned down in Newark in 1935, the Cleveland Syndicate took over and renamed the track River Downs.

The Syndicate entered Northern Kentucky, first by taking over Latonia Park and a dog track in Florence. In the mid-1930s, they “acquired” Beverly Hills and the Lookout House from locals and began what was to become an almost total takeover of gambling in Northern Kentucky.

Major Players

Cleveland Syndicate

Moe Dalitz—head of Cleveland Syndicate

Sam Tucker—operated boats that ran booze from Canada

Louis Rothkopf—ran booze stills

Morris Kleinman—ran brewery in Cleveland

Modern organized crime began in 1920 with Prohibition. Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano were the national heads. The Cleveland Syndicate received the Kentucky area at the first Organized Crime Commission in 1928. Also known as the Cleveland Four, the Syndicate was one of the most powerful crime outfits in the United States. The four heads each brought specific skills to the organization led by Dalitz who came to Cleveland from Detroit where he was a member of the Purple Gang, the crime syndicate there.

Originally the Cleveland Syndicate was involved in bootlegging liquor from Canada and distributing it nationwide in the United States. Gambling and illegal casinos followed in the 1930s and 1940s and by the 1950s the Cleveland Syndicate was deeply involved with the expansion of Las Vegas enterprises.

New York and Other Mob Influences

The Levinsons: Ed, Mike, “Sleepout Louis”—from Detroit. They came to Newport by way of Chicago in the late 1930s and took over the Flamingo/633 from Art Dennert.

The Millers: Berman, Joe and Martin—from New York. They took over the Yorkshire from Jimmy Brink in 1944.

Screw Andrews—A Cincinnati numbers runner, Andrews took over Black joints in Newport. Andrews was involved with all aspects of illegal operations in Northern Kentucky and associated with both the Eastern and Cleveland Syndicates.

The Payne Brothers: Charles, Steve, Larkin (Ollie, Bull)

The brothers were active in local crime since the 1930s. Steve Payne was killed in 1948 as part of Screw Andrews's takeover of Black Newport numbers and bar business. Screw hired both remaining brothers in his Central Avenue joints. Bull was killed by Melvin Clark in 1952, Charles died of natural causes in the early 1950s. Melvin Clark

An associate of the Payne brothers, Clark ran Black joints until they were taken over by Andrews. Andrews shot and killed Clark in 1955.

Local Bootleggers

George Remus

An early influence, Remus was a booze runner, pharmacist, lawyer and the king of the bootleggers.

Peter Schmidt

A truck driver for Remus, Schmidt started at the Glenn Hotel in 1932, and opened a room in the hotel called the Glenn Rendezvous in 1941. Schmidt opened Beverly Hills in 1934. The Syndicate burned the Beverly in 1936, and Schmidt turned over control to the Syndicate in 1940. He sold the Glenn Rendezvous to the Levinsons and Art Dennert in 1948. He opened the Playtorium in 1951 and the Snax Bar (previously the Belmont Club) in 1954. Tito Carinci became the manager of the Glenn Rendezvous in 1957 and the name was changed to the Tropicana in 1960. The joint burned in 1962.

Red Masterson

A Remus associate, Red was also allied with the Cleveland Syndicate. In 1936 Masterson was given control of the Merchant's Club as payment for burning the Beverly.

Buck Brady

A local mobster and Remus associate, Brady opened the Green Lantern, a Black joint on Licking Pike in 1931. In 1933, he bought the old Bluegrass Inn also on Licking Pike and renamed it the Primrose. After trying and failing to kill Red Masterson in 1946 (Red had told Buck he had to get out of the Primrose), Buck finally “sold” the Primrose to the Syndicate. The joint was again renamed the Latin Quarter, managed by Dave Whitfield, one of the people who helped burn the Beverly in 1936. Present-day, the club is called Bobby Mackey's bar.

The Farleys: Rip and Taylor

The brothers were bootleggers out of Clay County, and Remus associates. Rip robbed the Flamingo in 1946, and was shot and killed. His brother Taylor was wounded in the shootout, but survived and ran the 345 Club for the Bridewell brothers (see below). The Farleys also ran several gambling/whorehouse joints including the 316 Club at 316 W. 4th Street.

Major Local Independents

Art Dennert

Dennert operated the Club Alexandria and had points in the Flamingo and the Glenn Rendezvous. He also operated the H. Dennert beer distributing company in Cincinnati.

Jim Harris

The owner of the Hi-De-Ho (previously the 19 Club) in Wilder while also serving as police marshal during the 1930s and 1940s, Harris opened the Stark Club in Newport in the late 1940s. In 1951 the Hi-De-Ho was raided and closed, an event precipitated by the Syndicate. Harris continued to run the Stork/Stark until the mid-1950s when it became primarily a strip joint.

Jimmy Brink

Brink opened the Lookout House to gambling in 1933, then sold it to the Syndicate in 1941 remaining as a manager/front-man. Part of his settlement with the Syndicate included points in the Beverly and the Lookout House. The Carr Brothers, long associated with Brink also got points in the Lookout House. In 1956 the Carrs and Brink's widow sued to get a piece of the Kentucky Club, claiming a financial interest there but lost in court.

The Bridewell Brothers: Emile, James, Ralph, Ray

The brothers ran several bust-out joints including the 345 Club, the 202 Bar, Ray's Café at 116 W. 4th, the Mecca and the Kid Able Club behind Monmouth Cigar.

Layoff Operators

In the early 1940s, a national betting layoff operation was established in Newport under the control of Meyer Lansky and the New York mob. Providing a service for bookmakers, the layoff operators covered bets too large for the locals for a service fee. Located at the corner of 4th and York, the bank covered most of the layoff action in the Midwest. The Lassoff brothers ran the operation under the heading of Bobben Realty Company.

The Lassoff Brothers: Bob and Ben ("Big" and "Little Porky")

The Lassoffs ran a major sports layoff operation as Bobben Realty.

Nig Devine

A partner of the Lassoff brothers, Devine started as a local caterer to the Syndicate joints. Devine was tied to Screw Andrews and the Lansky operation, but was a local in scope.

Gil Beckley

Beckley took over Bobben with help from Eddie Levinson in 1950. Beckley started layoff betting in Indianapolis in the mid 1940s, moved to St. Louis, then on to Newport and became a national figure. Due to the heat from the Kefauver hearings in 1951, Beckley moved the operation to Canada, then back to Newport in the Glenn Hotel in 1955. He is believed to be a victim of a mob hit in about 1970 and was officially declared dead in 1977.

Other Locals

Albers, Louis: 222 Club, 222 Pike, Covington

Carr, Ping: Carr Brothers Café, 1916 Madison, Covington

Connelly, Ed: Columbia Café, 101 W. 4th, Newport, whorehouse w/ gambling

Cottingham, Ray: 333 Club, 333 Central, Newport

Eisner, Sammy: manager of many clubs including 202 Bar, 310 Club, Newport

Frombes, Sam: Surf Club, 2nd and York, Newport

Kensella, John: Horseshoe, 6th and Monmouth, Newport

Lester, Charles: Syndicate lawyer

Maggard, Smokey: Dog Patch, Victory Club, 2nd and York, Newport

Meador, Ed: Teddy Bear Lounge, 1541 Sleepy Hollow Road, Covington

Orr, Ernest: Orr's Café, 1918 Madison Road, Covington

Roth, Charlie: Dogpatch Manager, 2nd and York, Newport

Stanfield, Robert: Midwestern Bar, 602 Central, Newport.

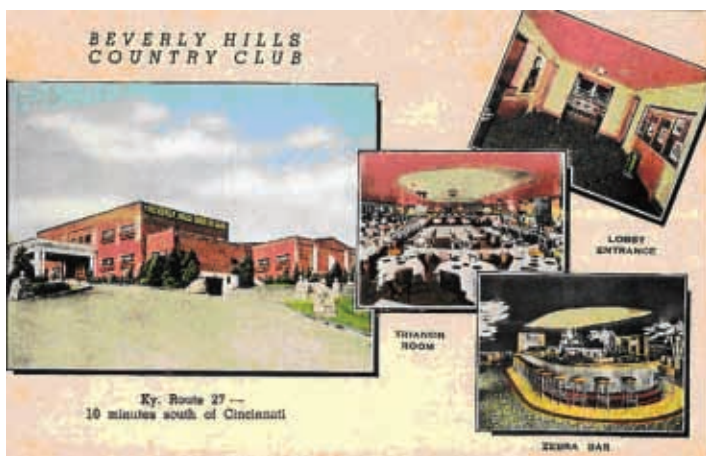
Delbert Spicer was a bartender here

Taulbee, Boots: Tin Shack, 309 York, Newport

Major Clubs

The clubs listed as "major" are somewhat arbitrary, but represent establishments that played a significant role in the history of Northern Kentucky gambling. Beverly Hills and the Lookout House became the top "carpet joints" run by the Cleveland Syndicate. The several clubs run by Peter Schmidt, an independent who fought control by the Syndicate all his life, were major at least in the events that took place there. Others, like the Flamingo and the Yorkshire Club, were run by the Eastern Syndicate with agreement from Cleveland. The Merchant's Club and the Primrose Club had a longevity that deserves the title of "major."

Beverly Hills



Beverly Hills Country Club was the crown jewel of the Northern Kentucky illegal club scene, located on a hill in Southgate, Kentucky. The location dates back to the 1900s, when it was named the Blue Grass Inn. The club burned in 1915 and the property was sold. Next came a joint called the Old Kaintuck Castle. In 1934 Peter Schmidt, a local bootlegger, bought the property, and built and opened Beverly Hills.

Schmidt tried to run the operation without interference, but after being burned out by the Cleveland Syndicate in 1936, a fire allegedly set by Red Masterson, Schmidt sold in 1940.

The Syndicate ran the club very well, bringing in top entertainment to supplement the large-scale gambling that took place there. To offset the constant raids and hassles from local police, the building was equipped with electronic surveillance and a separate power plant.

By the early 1960s, it was apparent to the Syndicate that Northern Kentucky could no longer be defended and was not strategic to their overall gambling operations. The club was sold and gambling shut down. In 1977, the club was completely destroyed by fire, killing 175 people.

There is a large amount of memorabilia remaining from Beverly Hills, the most valuable of which came from the gambling period. Chips range in value from common to rare.



Beverly Hills Country Club Chips

Flamingo Club

In the late 1930s, Arthur Dennert opened the Flamingo Club at 633 Monmouth Street. Dennert was a local bootlegger who subsequently opened Club Alexandria and was a partner in a beer distributing company. The Eastern Syndicate, with full concurrence of the Cleveland Syndicate (who “owned” the Northern Kentucky area), forced Dennert out of the Flamingo. The Levinson brothers, Mike, Ed and “Sleepout” Louis, representing the Eastern Syndicate headed by Meyer Lansky, ran the Flamingo and made it into a major player in the Newport gambling scene. The back room featured a large gambling area complete with horse boards for all major tracks, roulette and craps and poker tables.

The cooperation between the two syndicates was unusual, but there is evidence that Cleveland shared in the profits coming out of the Flamingo, so they could allow the Eastern Syndicate’s presence without financial harm.

The Flamingo was also known as the 633 Club due to the address and much of its memorabilia has “633 Club”



printed on it. Most illegal clubs tried not to advertise their intentions, but the Flamingo did so with the 633 Club tag.

Gambling ceased operation in the early 1960s and the location became a teenage dance club.

There are many different chips from the club as well as dice, glasses and other items used there.



633 Club - Flamingo Chips



Glenn Hotel/Glenn Rendezvous

Another of the Peter Schmidt operations, the Glenn Hotel was bought in 1932 and a small casino with slot machines was set up. The joint became a haven for organized criminals running from indictments and/or arrests.

In 1941, after being run out of his Beverly Hills operation, Schmidt opened a larger club on the second floor of the hotel and named it the Glenn Rendezvous. A bust-out joint, the Cleveland Syndicate sought to take it over so as not to taint the image of Newport gambling with the high rollers coming to the area.

Schmidt sold the club to members of the Eastern Syndicate, including the Levinson brothers and Art Dennert to keep it away from Cleveland, but after Dennert died in an auto crash under mysterious circumstances in 1952, the Cleveland Syndicate took over.

In 1958, Tito Carinci was brought in from Cincinnati to run the Rendezvous. Tito had been a local football star at Xavier University in Cincinnati and was an outgoing front man for the club. He decided to clean up the joint in 1960



and in the process, renamed it the Tropicana. This was the place that in 1961 was used to frame George Ratterman, a true reform candidate for sheriff. Ratterman was drugged and placed in a room at the Tropicana with stripper April Flowers. Pictures were taken. The job was totally botched however, and Ratterman used the incident as fuel for his campaign, landing him in office and sealing the fate of illegal gambling in Northern Kentucky.

Chips have been attributed to the Glenn Hotel and the Glenn Rendezvous, but not the Tropicana.

on the Syndicate-run Merchant's Club by others on the police force loyal to Schmidt. Several complicated legal manipulations later, Schmidt continued to run the Playtorium, but moved the gambling operation next door to what was previously the Belmont Club, calling the joint the Snax Bar. Peter Schmidt died of natural causes in 1958. The operation was taken over by Charles Lester, a longstanding mob lawyer.

Many chips and other memorabilia exist from the Playtorium. Belmont Club and Snax Bar dice are highly collectable, but no chips from those clubs appear to exist.



Glenn Rendezvous Chips

Glenn Schmidt Playtorium/Snax Bar

Peter Schmidt in 1951, after losing the Glenn Rendezvous, opened a large establishment at 18 E. 4th Street. Named the Playtorium, the building housed a restaurant, cocktail bar, bowling alley and casino, which was located in the basement. Considered an act of defiance by the Cleveland Syndicate, raids were conducted by mob-run officials. Retaliation came in the form of a raid

Most agree that the Snax Bar used chips from the Playtorium.



Harry Duckham,
% Glenn Hotel,
928 Monmouth St.,
Newport, Kentucky

Special Monogram
Fancy "KD" in gold



3200B-2400G- Detroit #530 - 4-15-37
400 Lav. -(Choc. & Lav. have spec. inlay on
edge in green) Blue are regular Hub.
3200 White - Det. Req. 1495 - 3-25-38 Inv. #327
500-B-9 White - 500 -B-9 Choc. with special green
inlay edge - 4/26/38 - Det. Req. #1555

Harry Duckham, New Style Mono.
% Glenn Hotel-928 Monmouth St., "KD" in gold
Newport, Kentucky

KD

2000 R- 200 P- 200 Y- Detroit #266 - 12-1-36

6/26/39 - Inv. #2763

2000 B-9 1 9/16" S.E. Hub Checks - Blue.
Inv. #2835 - 11/21/39: 1200 B-9's; Light Blue
Inv. #3295 - 12/2/39: 1200 B-9's. Reg. Blue.



H. D. Duckham,
Glenn Hotel,
Newport, Ky.

1000 Black } Gold-letters
200 Green }
400 Yellow } Silver Letters

Mono "HDD"

1000 Black, 2000,- Gold Letters
400 Yellow, - Silver letters:
10-3-34

Det. 1/4/34



Harry Duckham,
% Glenn Hotel,
928 Monmouth St.,
Newport, Kentucky
6-30-36:

Old Style Mono
"HDD"



3000 - Red Square Edge 1200 - 11-1-36
Special Checks - Regular Hubs with 2 chocolate
Inlays - 1600 Y- 200 P- 200 G- Det. #308-11-6-36

300 B-9 Hub Checks 200P- 100B- Det. Req. #308
3-30-36

1400 B-9 Hub Checks Square Edge- 1000H- 400Y
Req. #967 -Det. 9-2-36

200P- with 2 chocolate edge inserts- spec. hubs
Detroit #968 - 12-1-36



Glenn Hotel Chips
Harry D. Duckham & L. Kaufman



Glenn Schmidt's Chips

Hi-De-Ho/19 Club

The 19 Club in Wilder was purchased by "Big Jim" Harris in 1940 and immediately renamed the Hi-De-Ho Club. Gambling and prostitution were the club's standard fare. Harris, who had previously opened the Stark Club in Newport, determined that his joint in Wilder was easier to operate and that local officials were more tolerant primarily because he was at the time the marshal of Wilder!

The place became notorious as a bust-out gambling operation and the whore's rooms were wired so that customers could be blackmailed with photos and audiotapes. The Cleveland Syndicate, concerned by the loss of gambling business at the Lookout House nearby and worried the blackmail scheme would cast a bad light on their clubs, convinced the Kentucky State Police to raid the Hi-De-Ho in 1951, effectively shutting down the club. After a long trial process, Harris was sentenced to three years' jail time in 1955. Harris would return to run several strip clubs later, but it was a great example of Northern Kentucky justice that he continued to be the Marshall throughout his early brushes with the law.

Local collectors have never authenticated chips from the 19 Club, despite efforts to do so. Hi-De-Ho chips and memorabilia are in demand. The chips attributed to the Hi-De-Ho were actually delivered to the Glenn Hotel.

Latin Quarter/Primrose Club/Bluegrass Inn

Located on Licking Pike in Wilder, this location has one of the most colorful histories of all the Northern Kentucky clubs. Built in 1895, the building originally was home to a slaughterhouse.

In the basement a well was constructed to collect drained blood and refuse from animals killed in the rooms above. Closed in 1890, the building became a gathering place for occultists. In 1896, two men were convicted for dismembering a young woman during a satanic ritual after a sensational murder trial. The two were hanged after being found guilty of killing Pearl Bryan. Interestingly, her head was never recovered, giving fuel to the ghost stories that circulate about the building even today.

After Prohibition ended in 1933, E.A. "Buck" Brady, a truck driver who started working for the Cincinnati bootleg king, George Remus, purchased the building, turning it



ENQUIRER PHOTOGRAPHER THREATENED AFTER HI-DEE-HO RAID.
 The top photograph, made by Ran Cochran, Enquirer photographer, shows the front of the Hi-Dee-Ho Club, 19 Licking Pike, Wilder, Ky., which was raided by Kentucky State Police yesterday. Inset is James Harris, the town Marshal of Wilder, who was caught in the club by the raiding troopers. The lower photograph was taken by Kentucky State Police before the startled players at this dice table could grasp that a raid was in progress. After Cochran took the photograph of the exterior of the club yesterday, he was threatened by two men in an automobile, which was traced through its license number to a man who was sentenced to serve life imprisonment in the Kentucky Penitentiary in 1941 for a fatal stabbing.

into a tavern and gambling facility. The joint was originally called the Blue Grass Inn, then the Primrose Club. This Bluegrass Inn should not be mistaken with the bar of the same name located in Southgate, the original Beverly Hills location.

In 1946, Brady decided to take on the Cleveland Syndicate, who were trying to take over his club, by shooting Red Masterson, a Syndicate operative and manager of the Merchant's Club. Brady gunned down Red outside the Merchant's Club, but Red survived and Brady was arrested for disturbing the peace! Red did not testify and Brady was dismissed.

The Syndicate gave Brady two choices: Get out of town or be killed. Brady chose to retire to Florida. The Syndicate now had control of the Primrose and renamed it the Latin Quarter, then enlarged the club. Brady committed suicide in 1965.

To this day the building, now Bobby Mackey's, a country and western bar, is a location visited by ghost theory groups.

Chips have been authenticated from the Latin Quarter. While Primrose chips have been listed in various publications, they have not been authenticated.



Latin Quarter Chips



Post Card - Primrose

Lookout House

The Lookout House has a long history, beginning in the 1880s. In 1912, Bill Hill opened the Lookout House with picnic tables in the large dining room. The building, on the Dixie Highway in Covington, had a view of the Cincinnati skyline. In 1933, Jimmy Brink, another Remus bootlegger, purchased the Lookout House and began running a very successful gambling joint that almost immediately interested the Cleveland Syndicate.

After witnessing the harassment toward Peter Schmidt at the Beverly, Brink decided to negotiate a deal with the Syndicate, and in 1941 sold the club for \$125,000, retaining 10 percent of the profits of both the Lookout House and the Beverly and remaining as the local manager of the Lookout House. This was a great deal for Brink and an unusual deal for the Syndicate, who generally favored just taking clubs outright. The Syndicate now had large gambling operations in both Kenton and Campbell Counties, so the when the respective grand juries were in session in



Lookout House Glasses

one county, gambling operations could be shifted to the other county without interruption.

A major raid in 1952 closed the gambling operation at the club. Jimmy Brink died in a plane crash later that year. After being rebuilt as a restaurant in 1963, the building burned to the ground in 1973.

Chips and other memorabilia exist in large quantities from the Lookout House. Chips with a lighthouse logo, initially thought to have been from the Beacon Inn in Wilder, have been attributed to the Lookout House and are rare.

Merchant's Club

The Merchant's Club was located on 4th Street in Newport, within sight of the county courthouse, and operated from the early 1940s until 1961 as a gambling joint. After Peter Schmidt's alleged involvement in the Beverly Hills fire in 1936 which effectively convinced him to hand over control to Cleveland, Red Masterson was given the job as club manager at the Merchant's Club by the Cleveland Syndicate. Red was also known as an enforcer for the Syndicate and was known to be involved in several murders during his career in Newport.

Chips exist from the club, most in large quantities.





Merchants Club Chips

Yorkshire Club

Located at 518 York Street, The club was opened in 1941 by Jimmy Brink, then beginning in 1944, run by the Berman (a.k.a. Miller) brothers, Joe and Martin, two Meyer Lansky employees from New York. The casino was large, over 7500 square feet, and housed a bookie operation with horse boards. Like the Flamingo Club, the Yorkshire appeared to be run in cooperation with both the Eastern and Cleveland Syndicate groups. Both were high-end, “carpet joints,” run openly in Newport throughout the modern gambling area from the 1940s until the early 1960s.

Chips and other memorabilia from the Yorkshire are generally available in large quantities, however specific chips are rare, primarily the oldest ones from the 1940s.



Yorkshire Club Chips



Yorkshire Club Chips



Part 2 of this story will be in the next issue of the magazine. It will include the minor clubs, Newport Central Avenue Clubs and the reform movement.

When Vice was King

A History of Northern Kentucky Gambling 1920 - 1970

Part 2

by Jim **Linduff**
with Roy **Klein** and Larry **Trapp**

Minor Clubs

Many of the clubs described in this section played an important part in the history of Northern Kentucky gambling and some, like the Old Homestead, have historical significance beyond gambling. They were, for the most part, run by local operators and represent hundreds of similar bars that operated in the area. It is important to understand the prevailing attitude of those who lived in Northern Kentucky; it was one that allowed and supported the invasion of organized crime syndicates in the 1930s. Prostitution and illegal booze sales fueled that process as well as the love of horse racing in the Bluegrass state. Tougher laws in Cincinnati helped the Northern Kentucky gambling operations also. When taken as a whole, Northern Kentucky found an industry that could help support an otherwise depressed area and elected officials actively helped keep the gambling and prostitution businesses going.

Bellevue

Avenue Nite Club, 181 Fairfield

The club was originally called the Clifford Mile Café, at least as early as the late 1930s, and was named the Avenue in 1949. Duke Mile took over from his father in the early 1950s and ran the club until August, 1963, when the club burned, killing two people. Efforts to reopen the club were not successful and the property was sold in 1978. Gambling was openly conducted in the basement of the joint. Chips from the Avenue have been attributed.

Barney's Old Homestead, 713 Fairfield

Perhaps the oldest hotel in Kentucky, the building dates to at least 1865, when it was used as a warehouse for goods coming to Fallon Landing on the river to send to the military at Fort Thomas. Part of the building was also used for temporary overnight rental rooms.

In 1905, the Sproehnle family purchased the building and it became a hotel and restaurant. The building was listed as Barney's Old Homestead through the 1930s until 1970 when the name was shortened to the Old Homestead. In 1980, Walter Gruner purchased the property and ran it as an antique store until 1993 when it was sold to the current owner. Barney Sproehnle ran gambling games in the back room of the restaurant and on the second floor. Chips and dice have been attributed to this location.



The Avenue Chips





Barney's Old Homestead Chips

Covington

222 Club, 222 W. Pike Street

In a study conducted by Eastern Kentucky University (*Sin City Revisited*, DeMichele and Potter), the 222 Club was listed as a Black joint in Newport in the 1940s, later located in Covington. We find no evidence of a Newport club, but in Covington there was a 222 Club located at 222 W. Pike Street. Run by Louis Albers, the 222 Club existed from at least 1927 through 1950 when it became Collett Liquors. In 1955 it was listed as A and Z Furniture. When run by Albers, the joint was busted for slots in 1929 and in 1931 for punchboards. The building, now vacant, remains, at the corner of Pike and Craig Streets.

514 Club, 514 Scott Street

Owned by George Hunt, the bar was operated from 1943 into the late 1960s as the 514 Club. Raided several times for the operation of a sports book, the club may have had other forms of gambling, but no chips have been found.

Carr Brothers, 1916 Madison Avenue

Located next to Orr's Café on Madison Ave., Carr Brothers was in operation from at least 1938 until 1955, when the building was sold to Brock Furniture, a business located north of the Carr building. During the joint's history it was named Carr's Mecca Café from 1943 to at least 1948, giving credence to those who believe the Mecca chips found came from the Carr location vs. the Newport club by the same name, but no one familiar with the club remembers the use of chips there. Carr's was basically a horse handbook. Charles "Ping" Carr operated the bar until his death in 1949. Ping was active in horse racing circles and was long associated with Jimmy Brink.

Club Keeneland, 1053 Madison Avenue

The joint was listed in the Covington phone books in the early to mid-1950s. Russell Hundley owned the bar. Glenn "Bulldog" Wright was the manager in the mid-1950s prior to his purchase of the Woodland in 1975. The interest in the location by collectors is due to chips found that were thought to be from the club. But these are not attributed and not likely to be from there. A race book was run there, but no one has stepped forward to try to authenticate chips.

Club Kenton, 432 Scott Street

The bar was listed in the Covington phone book from the mid-1940s until 1951, when it was listed as vacant. Chips have been authenticated, but not much is known about the operation.



Golden Horseshoe, 1234 Madison Avenue

Little is known about the club except that it was raided in 1950 for operating a handbook and it was listed in the 1951 Covington phone book. Lawrence Brockmeier, an old bootlegger who was arrested in 1928 for selling beer, owned the building. This was a small bar with a handbook, not likely to have had formal gambling. There are chips thought by some to be from the club, but they have not been attributed and we do not feel they are from there.



Kentucky Club, 627 Scott Street

The club operated from as early as 1943 until the mid-1950s when the contents were sold. Robert Sweetzer and Lee Burns were listed as the last owners, but were sued by the estates of Ping Carr and Jimmy Brink who alleged they were partners in the gambling operation. The suit was denied and the club's contents were sold for \$80,000. Chips from the club have been authenticated.



Magnolia Hotel, 118 Pike Street

This location operated as the Magnolia Hotel from 1943 through 1954, then as the Holiday Hotel until 1966. Gambling was conducted at the Magnolia and chips have been attributed.



Orr's Café, 1918-1920 Madison Avenue

One of the oldest locations still existing, Orr's was in operation since at least 1920 until 1948 when it was sold and renamed Kay's. In 1951, the name was changed to the Derby. It had several owners, and it remains the Derby, although it is for sale at this time. Like the Carrs, the Orrs ran several bars in the area, including Orr's Rural Rendezvous in Winston in the early 1940s. The Rural Rendezvous became the 44 Club from 1943 until 1956. A horse book was run out of the 44 Club.

Collectors have long sought chips from the Madison Avenue location. Just two years ago, some surfaced at a yard sale. Two different yellow chips have been found and there are rumors of red chips as well, but to date, they have not surfaced.



Press Club, 607 Scott Street

Located in downtown Covington, the Press Club had a



small gambling operation in a room behind the bar. The club was in operation from 1943 until 1966. Chips from the location have been authenticated.



Rocket Club, 417 Scott Street

Several studies suggest that a Rocket Club was located at 2nd and York in Newport and a chip has been identified as being from there. Jeff Laudeman suggested that a Rocket Club was located at 417 Scott Street in Covington. We find no evidence of a Rocket Club at the Newport location from phone books beginning in the 1930s, news accounts, and interviews with several people that were active in the Northern Kentucky scene as early as the 1940s. The Covington location at 417 Scott Street is first listed as a restaurant, the Spencer/Porter Restaurant in 1945, then the as Times Café in 1948, the King of Clubs in 1954, and the 417 Bar in 1959. Some remember gambling at the joint and it is possible that the gambling room was known as the Rocket Club during the Times Café ownership. Based on what we know, the Rocket Club chip (black, "RC" inscription, small key mold) is listed as a UFC.



Turf Club, 10 W. Southern

The club was in operation from the late 1930s until 1966. Primarily a horse book, no chips have been found from the club.

Newport

Columbia Café, 101 4th Street

Owned by Ed Connelly from 1942 through 1957, the joint was renamed the Columbia Café from 1959 through 1962. Connelly was busted on a prostitution charge in February, 1955. In April, 1956, Connelly was listed as the owner of the Stark Club at 633 Monmouth, perhaps as a front for Jim Harris.

Haidi Club, 116 W. 4th Street

This location was best remembered as the Haidi Club, a whore house run by Hattie Jackson who in November, 1956 testified that several County Commissioners were regulars at the joint. Earlier, in January, 1956, a raid at the same location listed Ray Bridewell as the owner. The club was called Ray's Place. The Bridewell Brothers operated several bust-outs including the 345 Club on Central and the Mecca and Kid Able clubs on Monmouth. Hattie Jackson first came on the scene in 1947 as a prostitute working for Vivian Schultz, the madam who ran the 316 Club.

316 Club, 316 W. 4th Street

The club was run by Taylor Farley. Farley was indicted on a gambling charge in February, 1948. In 1944, John "Boots" Taulbee was listed as the owner of the restaurant. Taulbee was in the news as early as 1929 for a murder charge involving a customer of Mary Jane Rohan, who ran whorehouses at 316 W. Southgate and at Taulbee's location on 4th Street. Taulbee also is listed as the owner of the Tin Shack at 309 W. 4th Street in 1949.

Stark Club, 613 Monmouth Street

Jim Harris opened the location as the Stark Club in the early 1940s and the joint had many names. Phone records and news accounts indicate the following names:

- 1949: An ad called the club the Stark Club.
- 1950: The Cincinnati Yellow Pages listed it as the Stark Club
- 1952-1953: The Newport phone book listed it as the Stark Club
- 1954-1955, and 1956-1957: The Newport phone book listed it as the Stork Club
- 1955 the Cincinnati Yellow Pages listed it as the Bongo Club
- 1958: The Newport phone book listed it as the Club Bongo

- 1959: One ad listed it as the Stardust, another as the Silver Slipper
- 1960: The Newport phone book listed it as the Silver Slipper
- 1961-1963: Ads listed it as the Frolic
- 1964-1965: Vacant
- 1966-1975: Listed as the Galaxie Club
- 1976-to date: Listed as the Brass Ass/Mule

Messick recalls visiting the club as the Stardust in 1958. We remember the club as being the Silver Slipper in 1959-1960. Of course, it's likely the name was fluid and as in other locations, the gambling part in the back may have operated under a separate name. Chips from the days of the Silver Slipper and the Stardust have been found in Newport, but it is our feeling that these chips were never used in play at the clubs. Under all of its various names, the 613 Monmouth bar was more of a strip joint than a gambling location and it is very unlikely that the small back room where poker was played had chips, particularly in the denominations found. This was a bust-out, cash joint. The chips were more likely to be advertising tokens, not chips used in games.



Interior of the Silver Slipper, 1959



Silver Slipper Chips



Stardust Chips

Club Alexandria, 2124 Monmouth Street

In 1949, Art Dennert opened this club which featured floor shows and a large circular bar. The building had previously housed several other clubs including the Riviera Club in 1947 and the New Look Club in 1948. The New Look featured female impersonators. Dennert, who had previously been involved in the Flamingo in Newport, ran the club until 1952 when he was killed in an auto crash. The building was sold to the Farr family in 1954 and converted to a trade mart. During its short history as Club Alexandria, gambling was conducted and chips from the club are among the most sought-after collectables in the Northern Kentucky area.



Dog Patch/Dog House, 2nd and York

The location of the Dog Patch has been listed at various addresses in Newport and Covington. Matches from the Dog Patch listing the address as Riverside Drive/Monmouth Street in Newport have been found. To make matters more confusing, matches from the Dog House have been found with the same address. We think the club was called both names, probably first the Dog House, then the Dog Patch. A May 1943 article about the Surf Club indicated that the Dog Patch was the previous name for the Surf Club at 2nd and York Street in Newport.

Jockey Club, 604 W. Riverside Drive

The Jockey Club operated in Newport from the 1930s until the mid-1950s. Owned by Hallman "Shorty" Mincey, the club featured black jack and poker. Chips have been identified, but not authenticated.



Kid Able/Monmouth Cigar, 941 Monmouth Street

Owned by the Bridewell brothers who also ran the Mecca Café, the joint was a small gambling operation with hookers working the bar. The front of the joint housed the Monmouth Cigar Store. The Bridewell operations included several bust-out joints including the 345 Club, the 202 Club and Ray's Café in addition to the Kid Able Club and the Mecca. Chips have been authenticated from the Kid Able Club.



Mecca Café, 924 Monmouth Street

Owned by the Bridewell brothers, the Mecca operated in the 1950s across the street from the Kid Able Club. In the late 1940s the Carr Brothers place at 1916 in Covington was listed as Carr's Mecca Café. The chips from the Mecca are thought by some to be from Carr's, but several people interviewed remembered chips at the Mecca on Monmouth and that Bridewell's had chips across the street at the Kid Able Club. The truth may be elusive, but for now we are listing the chips from the Newport location.



Ray's Café, 202 York Street

Another Bridewell joint, it was the William McDaniel Café from at least 1938 until 1952, when the name changed to Ray's Café. In 1955, the joint operated as the 202 Bar until it burned in 1957. Several mid 1950s arrests were made for having pinball machines. Sammy Eisner was listed as the manager during the raids. Eisner had a long record of gambling arrests and was married to the stripper Callie Blaine.

Rocket Club, 2nd and York Street

See the description in the Covington section. It's another mystery that may never be solved except to restate that no written evidence has been uncovered that the Rocket existed in Newport and the chip thought by some to be from there has not been authenticated.

Sandwich Shop, 609 Monmouth Street

This was a small joint located next to the Stark Club. Building records show that after being Leo's Auto Parts Store until 1965, a restaurant license was issued to a T & A Enterprise in the name of John Ahbrund. The location was listed as a billiard lounge in 1969 then the Sandwich Shop in 1970. The club was raided on August 26, 1969, and two craps tables, two card tables, five chip boxes, twenty-five decks of cards, two adding machines and four croupier sticks were confiscated. A fugitive warrant was initiated for Benjamin Sumpter who was thought to be running the joint, but he was not apprehended. Sumpter later ran porn shops in Northern Kentucky. After being listed as the Monmouth Street News in 1971-1972, the location was vacant after 1973. Chips from the Sandwich Shop have been authenticated. They appear to be the last chips made for the Northern Kentucky area.



Stag Café, 225 E. Seventh Street

Located at 225 E. Seventh at Roberts Street, Clarence Peters owned the bar that was named after him from 1940 through 1957. In 1958, the name was changed to the Stag Café and remained as such until 1965. The bar had a book and may have had a small gambling operation.

Tin Shack 309 W. 4th Street

Listed only in the 1948 phone book, the Tin Shack was owned by John "Boots" Taulbee, a longtime gambler and bar owner in Newport. A chip from the Tin Shack has been identified and while not totally authenticated is considered by most collectors as from the club.



Walton

Woodland Inn, US Route 25

Located several miles south of Covington in Walton, the building housed a small gambling operation behind the restaurant. In 1975, Bulldog Wright purchased the restaurant and it remains in operation. Chips from the location are common. These would have been used prior to Wright's ownership and little is known about the gambling operation.



Woodland Inn



Woodland Inn Chips

Newport Central Avenue Clubs

Central Avenue in Newport housed many bars, whore houses, gambling joints and even a few restaurants and was an area that catered primarily to Black patrons. Central Avenue started at the Ohio River, and was an area that often flooded. It also had the highest crime rate in the city. History is clouded about specific locations since joints moved, addresses changed and most buildings were nothing more than old frame structures that originally may have been private homes. In addition to written studies about the area, we have researched phone books, news articles, interviewed people who were there and used a 1940 street map located in the Kenton County Library. Our own experiences were limited to the timeframe just prior to the razing of the area as part of the Newport Housing Authority project in the late 1950s to early 1960s. The following locations have been identified for their significance in the history of gambling in the early Newport days.

208 Central: The frame structure was the home from 1942-1949 of Ray Bridewell, a local bar owner. There was no indication that the location housed gambling and/or prostitution.

300 Central: From 1954/55 to 1960, the location operated as the Central Café.

310 Central: The club operated as the Oscar Citron Restaurant from 1938/39-1949, then the Club Alibi in the early 1950s through 1958, and finally the Golden Lounge until the building was demolished in the early 1960s. This location was a key gambling location for Screw Andrews who gained control in 1952 from Oliver, “Bull” Payne and Melvin Clark. The joint “changed hands” when Melvin Clark shot Payne. Clark was convicted of carrying a concealed weapon and told to leave town. Later, in 1954, Clark came back to Newport and tried to reopen Coconut Grove at 5th and Patterson. Screw considered Clark a

threat to his numbers operation, so he shot and killed him in 1955 in an incident determined to be self-defense by the police.

Several local characters were listed as managers of the place, including Sammy Eisner in 1951 and Christie Matz, who ran the joint in the late 1950s while Screw was in jail for tax evasion. While the Golden Lounge, big name entertainment was offered including blues singer Charles Brown who, because of his gambling habit, worked almost as a servant to Screw who held his gambling chits.



315 Central: The building was the home of Oliver “Bull” Payne in the 1940s and was used as a barber shop.
325 Central: The location operated as the Congo Club in the mid 1950s, the Newport “office” of Albert “White Smitty” Schmidt, a prominent numbers operator and a rival of Screw Andrews. Perhaps due to the rivalry, the club burned in 1956. Arson was immediately suspected, but never proved. The joint was reopened as the Sidewalk Restaurant during 1959.

327 Central: Listed as the residence of Ellis Cork from 1938/39-1949, the location was of interest because Cork later owned the notorious Cork’s Bar at 345 Central, described below.

330 Central: Probably the most prominent bar in the area, the location became the Sportsman’s Club in the mid 1940s, operated by Steve Payne until 1948 when Payne was found murdered on a deserted road. The murder may have been orchestrated by Screw Andrews, but this was never proved. The property was titled to Irvine “Nig” Devine, an associate of Mike Coppola, boss of the East Harlem numbers racket who then passed it to Andrews.

Screw ran the club at this location until the building was demolished in the early 1960s. He then built a new club at 9 E. 4th Street in 1961. There have been several references to an original Sportsman's Club located in Southgate Alley. Research suggests that a club was operated at 208 W. Southgate Alley. As early as 1938, Bull Payne was listed as running a club/tailor shop with A.J. Mayo at that location. Bull was the youngest of the Payne brothers, all who had long rap sheets beginning in 1931, when they were held for murder. A.J. Mayo was no stranger to the law, having been arrested in 1932 for a drug bust at the Southgate location. Beginning in 1942, the location was listed as being owned by Steve Payne, Bull's brother. Located directly north of 330 Central Avenue, the location of the Sportsman's Club, by 1948 the Southgate Alley building was actually attached to 330 Central. It was in these buildings that the Sportsman's Club was born. Some collectors have claimed the Southgate location was once called the Royal Blue Palace, partially due to chips found stamped with RBP. The Royal Blue Palace does not show up in news accounts or phone books and no one interviewed remembered the joint with that name. It is possible that 208 W. Southgate operated as the Royal Blue Palace, but it would be most unlikely that chips were made for the joint since no other Payne/Clark/Andrews clubs had chips at all.

333 Central: The location was first operated under the name of the Robert Cottingham Restaurant in 1942, became the 333 Bar in 1949, then the Copa Club from 1954-1960. Cottingham, who lived at 339 Central and may have run gambling out of both locations, was arrested in 1931 when horse boards and slots were found there. Cottingham then moved his operation to 325 Central, which later became the site of the Club Congo. The 1939 floods in the Bottoms caused Cottingham to sell part of his gambling operation to Charlie Drahmman, an associate of Jimmy Brink. For the next several years they ran a suc-

cessful gambling joint at 333 Central. During the early 1950s the operation was taken over by the Payne/Clark group. In 1954 the club was named the Copa Club under the control of Screw Andrews. The Copa Club also featured name entertainment and gambling, catering primarily to the Black population until it was demolished in the early 1960s.

339 Central: The home of Robert Cottingham, the building was used as a gambling facility in the 1930s and may have provided a place to use when Cottingham's bar at 333 Central was raided. Cottingham died in 1949.

344 Central: Aaron Fogel operated a grocery store at the location. He was indicted several times over the years for gambling and liquor violations. He owned the building at

325 Central that burned in 1956 when known as "White Smitty" Schmidt's Congo Club.

345 Central: The bar was operated as the 345 Bar in 1952/53, then as Cork's (or Corky's) from 1954-1960, when it was torn down. As Corky's it was as notorious a bust-out joint as any in Newport. Hookers had rooms on the second floor and occasionally gambling was conducted. The Midwestern Bar, just up the street at 602 Central was a "knife and gun" club often thought to be as crooked as any, but Corky's left many broke and beaten during the late 1950s.

Little has been written about the Central Avenue area because the Syndicate stayed out of the area, except for what influence they may have indirectly had on Screw Andrews. These were small bust-out joints with relatively small takes and caused too much publicity to be worthwhile to the Syndicate. In their interest in being invisible to the public and because the clientele were primarily Black, the area didn't offer enough to be considered worth the effort to the mob.

The history of Northern Kentucky, particularly of Screw Andrews would be incomplete without this knowledge, however. Andrews, who started as a small-time bootlegger in Cincinnati became a major player in Newport and was perhaps the most colorful character in the region's history. His death in 1973 when he either fell or was pushed from a window at St. Luke Hospital in Fort Thomas, officially ended one era of Newport that influenced the lives of almost all who lived there.

Reform Movement

Over the years, attempts to reform Northern Kentucky were ongoing but generally futile. Since the 1900s various groups and even a few local elected officials made





Screw gives an “attitude adjustment” to a photographer who stuck a camera in Screw’s face.

attempts to shut down illegal activities, but there was not much support from the general populace because these activities brought money to the region. Local clergymen attempted to organize several times without much support from Catholic leaders, who were much more tolerant of gambling than their Protestant brothers.

In the early 1950s a group of ministers in Kenton County actually got some action that resulted in the closing of the Lookout House in 1952 and the Syndicate decided to keep the place closed for gambling as a concession to the reformers. The “reform” movement in Campbell County at that time was totally compromised when the Syndicate was able to get Red Masterson to head the Newport Civic Association (NCA) under the slogan of “Clean Up, Not Close Up.” The NCA was a pawn of the Syndicate and after several circus-like raids in Newport, gambling continued through most of the 1950s.

In 1958 however, clergy in Newport helped organize a legit group called the Social Action Committee (SAC). After several unsuccessful attempts to get grand jury action in Campbell County, in 1960 a visiting judge dissolved the old grand jury, seated a new group and indicted several officials including the circuit judge, the county judge, the mayor and the police chief.

Formed in 1961 by local businessmen, the Committee of 500 convinced George Ratterman, a retired pro football player living in Fort Thomas to run for sheriff. Acting with the SAC, the Committee of 500 hoped to get more active support from Catholic members using Ratterman’s college football career at Notre Dame as a ploy.

Tito Carinci, president and manager of the Tropicana, sitting next to Juanita Hodges, a.k.a. April Flowers, at the Ratterman trial.

There was a failed effort by Tito Carinci to drug Ratterman and place him in a hotel room with a stripper, the lovely April Flowers. Carinci had been running the Tropicana and used one of his dancers, Flowers as the setup. The scheme backfired when blood samples proved Ratterman had been drugged. Ratterman won election in November, 1961 and coupled with Robert Kennedy’s new crime squad at the Justice Department, the Committee of 500 claimed victory and that they had “driven vice out of Newport.”

In the aftermath, about the only losers may have been the people of Northern Kentucky that had to stay. As early as the mid 1950s, the Syndicate had realized the end was in sight in Northern Kentucky and the leaders had moved to Florida, Nevada, Arizona and Cuba to further their cause in these locations. The Syndicate had never wanted publicity and as the demographics of the country changed, Northern Kentucky was no longer needed to be the center of operation. As it became clear that serious trouble was on the way, the Syndicate and all those working for them that could do so, left town for Vegas, Miami, Havana, etc. Those who had to stay were in worse shape than when the Syndicate ran things.

Since the Committee of 500 and the SAC had no other agenda than running out the gamblers, the void was filled by strip joints, drug dens and a few bust-out gambling clubs and the area went into a thirty-year period of decay. It was not until the reforms of the early 1980s and the use of the land on the river began that the area started to rebound to where it is today.

In part due to the paralysis in local government in Cincinnati, the Newport Levy, Covington Landing and the refurbishing of adjacent properties have enabled Northern Kentucky to flourish. Should Cincinnati ever become a viable entity (not likely in the near future) there will be some sorting out necessary in Northern Kentucky.

The state of Kentucky, like most states without legalized gambling, (except horse racing) wrestle with how to

compete with adjoining states that have built casinos and allowed card rooms at their tracks. It would be ironic if Kentucky voted to allow gambling casinos and that one would end up in Northern Kentucky, perhaps near the site of one of the old joints. It has been a long time, but one would suspect that there would be no shortage of dealers, club managers and others ready to staff such an effort!

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