



It's All About the Chips

by Sheldon Smith

This column is devoted to the most commonly collected piece of gaming memorabilia: the CHIP

It is also called a CHEQUE, a JETON, or a CHECK and probably some more names as well. The CHIP as we will call it has been around for quite some time. Evidence goes back at least 200 years or more in the use of some sort of wafer, disc or some such item to be used in lieu of actual currency or coin. There is evidence of early Chinese "markers" used the same way chips are used today and they go way, way back – centuries, in fact! The earliest chips to which we can readily relate were carved out of shells from the sea or wafers sliced from whale bone or elephant tusks.



The early chips are highly sought after and there are great stories of the early poker chip sets being made for private ocean going yachts, a sample of which I have included in the pictures that accompany this article. As time progressed, chips were actually made of an early plastic substance called catalinite which contained a chemical composition similar to formaldehyde; yes, that's right, embalming fluid. A picture of that kind of chip is included as well.



Chips were also manufactured out of cellulose as well -- paper, to be clear, -- and millions and millions of those were made in the early decades of the 20th century before other materials became readily available. A picture of a sample of that kind of chip is also included.

Perhaps the reason that many of these chips are so highly collectible is because they came in so many different materials and represented so many different legal and illegal gaming houses/casinos across America! Gambling was perhaps the most readily available form of entertainment in a wide variety of circumstances in America and, indeed, around the world. Chips represented the medium by which you could claim victory or bemoan failure; they have become one of the staples of the gaming collectible world.

Chips have had many manufacturers over the years, many of them making chips for illegal as well as legal casinos and card rooms. The designs on and around the chips have become a specialized section of gaming collectibles as well. I have included pictures of the more popular chip designs.

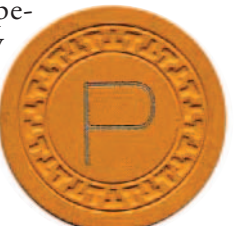
I could go on about chips: who made them, who distributed them, how

many are made, where and when they first appeared, etc., but, for right now, the pictures are worth a thousand words!

My next article will discuss relative values of collecting different casino memorabilia, especially in this economy! Why some are up and some are down!

Some photos courtesy of Robert Eisenstadt's web site with permission: www.antiquegamblingchips.com

The remainder are the authors' own images from his and his wife's own collection.



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Sheldon Smith is the Vice-President of the Casino Chip & Gaming Token Collectors Club, Inc. and is the club's Publicity Director. He and his wife Christine specialize in collecting Nevada Casino's \$1 chips. They currently have over 1400 of them!

