

These are the first ever recorded chips from the Kellison & Poncia Cigar Store, Sparks, NV. A token, shown below, was previously known.

I bought these chips with a strong guarantee they were Nevada, although the owner had thought it was more likely North Lake Tahoe, and had to take a significant risk as I had no chance to research anything first and could have been in competition over their acquisition.

The chips are available for \$40 each shipped, or \$70 shipped for the pair.

Ordered through T.R. King, the chips were shipped to

H.B. Matlock

824 B Street

Sparks, NV

On 14 June, 1948



First stop was Harvey Fullers licence of indexing. Plenty of establishments listed on that street around the time, a thriving gaming area, but the only listings I see are for 824 are the Saddle Club and Tommy Parsons, for which the dates don't match, and neither the 'K' or the addressee for the delivery make any sense. I spot the listing for Kellison & Poncia, but the dates don't match and Harvey lists it as 924. Could there be an error or typo in the listing?

Next stop will be a friend who has many old telephone directories from the area.

"We have a 1942 City Directory that shows Kellison & Poncia Cigars at 824 B Street. We have 1946 and 1950 phone books, they both show Kellison & Poncia Cigars still in operation at 824 B Street."

My note – OK, we know they existed at that address, but were they licenced and were these chips actually for them or was that just a delivery address, and maybe they were even illegals??

Before I have any more time to think, my friend follows up with...

“The plot thickens...

I checked our 1939 phone book (the only one we have prior to the 1942 City Directory), and it lists Kellison & Poncia at 924...!

So I searched through the addresses in 1939, looking for 824 B, and couldn't find anything. Back to the 1942 City Directory to see what they had listed at 924 B. They didn't have a listing for 924 B (some addresses are listed and say "vacant"...924 isn't listed at all).

Checking out a couple of other nearby addresses, The Sierra Pacific Power Company is listed at 920 B in both 1939 & 1942. 1939 lists Shaber W R Justice Court at 814 B; 1942 lists Sparks City Library Building, Billingsly W D Constable, Justice of the Peace at 814 B. 1939 lists Owl Club at 734 B; 1942 lists Owl Bar at 734 B. 1939 & 1942 both list Hilp's Drug Store at 938 B.

On the other hand...1939 lists the Toggery at 930 B; 1942 lists the Toggery at 928 B. 1939 lists Baker's Grocery at 936 B; 1942 lists Baker R W Grocery at 922 B. So at least a couple of addresses are slightly different...or the businesses have moved nearby.”

My note - So they were at the 924 address at the time Fuller lists, but that was years before. Did some street numbers change? Did a block burn down and everybody move? (Bakeries have a good history of starting large fires *g*)

Time for one of our more regular ‘friends of the hobby’ to make an appearance *g*

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At the time of the chip order 824 B Street was the location of a cigar store and bar called Kellison & Poncia.
ad from 1948:



KELLISONS & PONCIA
CIGAR STORE
824 "B" ST.

Kellison & Poncia opened up in Sparks in the 1910's at 924 B Street and did business at that location until around 1941 when it moved to 824. The proprietors were Walter Bailey Kellison and Girolomo Jerome Poncia. Poncia died in 1933 and Kellison continued the business until his retirement in 1951. Poncia's son Raymond, who had been working with Kellison, then took over and renamed the place "The Cigar Store" (around 1955 the location became the site for the "Saddle Club" which lasted for several years).

The guy who ordered the chips, Harold B. Matlock, was born in 1913 and grew-up in the San Francisco Bay area. During WW2 he served in the Merchant Marine. After the war he returned to San Francisco. He moved to Sparks right around the time he ordered the chips.

The only thing I could find out about Matlock's gambling activities in Sparks is that around the time of the chip order his occupation was listed as "dealer."

A month prior to the chip order, in May 1948, Kellison & Poncia had its bar and gambling licenses renewed by the Sparks city council—exactly what games were included I don't know. In March 1948 the city council had approved a race horse keno game for the place. A race horse keno game was by far the most expensive gaming license issued by the Sparks city council. It's annual fee was \$500. By comparison—\$200 for craps and 21; \$160 for poker; \$100 for pan.

Four months after the chip order, in October 1948, Walter Kellison's petition to put an "additional" 21 game at 824 B St. was approved by the city council—this suggests that there was probably at least one 21 game operating at the place when the chips were ordered.

A year later in October of 1949 Kellison got approval to operate a poker and craps game at the place. Kellison had gotten a license for a poker game at the place in prior years as well. The only name I saw associated with gaming licenses for 824 B St. in the 1940's was Walter Kellison. Probably safe to assume that the "K" on the chip stands for Kellison and that Matlock apparently was a dealer for Kellison and ordered the chips for him.

In the summer of 1935 there were only two licensed gambling games operating in Sparks—both at Kellison & Poncia.

The structure which housed the address still exists and is now part of the Sparks Heritage Museum facility <http://sparksmuseum.org/> .

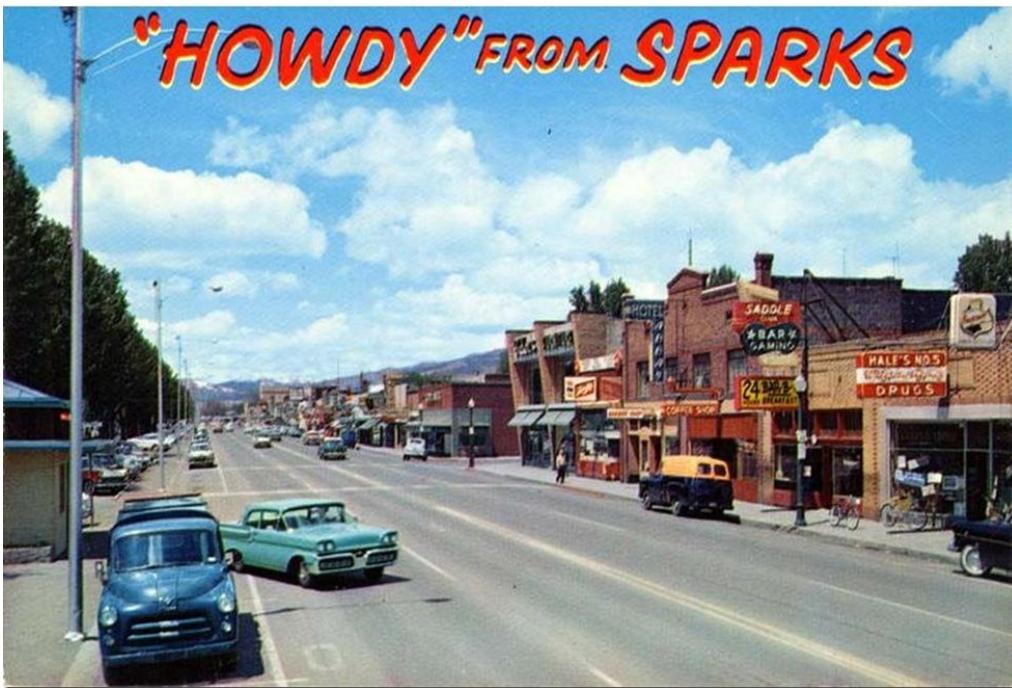
B Street is now Victorian Avenue. Some more related images are shown below.....
current view:



pic showing location during the 1930's and today:



view from the 1950's when the "Saddle Club—Bar—Gaming" operated at the address



prohibition era pic from 1924 at first location, 924 B St.; sign is partially obscured-- "Kellison & Poncia—Cigars—Candy & Soda":



Token, and ad from 1939:



Kellison & Poncia
FOOTBALL DOPESTER
HEADQUARTERS
Cigars -- Magazines -- Bar
924 "B" Street

SPARKS
STEWART ()—vs.—FALLON ()

Another collector subsequently passed me some further information.

There are at least 2 (two) more tokens that have Herry Poncia's name on them. A 5c token (shown below) as well as a 25c token (no scan available).

Hope this information is of some help.

A comment posted with the 5c token states: "According to the records (1913), Jerry Poncia was licensed to sell alcohol and operate slot machines in Sparks"

