

# PLAYBOY CHEQUES, CHIPS AND TOKENS

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Here, passing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Playboy Magazine*, the Playboy Casino issues continue to be a challenging series to collect. Where else can you find, under one name, the variety that the Playboy issues provide? There are Jetons, plaques, tokens, cheques, and currency with at least eight different mold patterns and in three different currencies originating from nine different casinos. Many of the chip types used haven't even surfaced in collections yet. This is a still-evolving area of chip collecting.

Now, in addition to the chips used by Playboy at their casinos there are limited edition issues by the Hard Rock Café and the Palms Casino commemorating Playboy Magazine and some of their accomplishments.

You can't walk into a store and purchase a complete set of Playboy cheques mounted in an attractive display holder. Many of these cheques are very rare, as in one or two known examples. If you want to collect the older Playboy cheques you're going to have to do a little work.

When I started researching my book on Playboy it was amazing how many misconceptions and half truths there were about Playboy chips and casinos. Understandably so, information on the casinos and chips was scarce at best. In spite of having one of the world's best-known trademarks, details of the Playboy Casinos have been, for the most part, a mystery. Published information about Playboy's Casinos and the gaming pieces used was practically non-existent.

First, to make things easy, from here on cheques, chips and tokens will be grouped into one phrase, cheques, unless further discrimination is called for. The difference between the three is, a *cheque* is a clay or plastic *chip* with a denomination or value written on it, the chip has no denomination. A *plaque* is a rectangular, high denomination cheque and a *token* is a metallic coin substitute.

Playboy's first casino was actually a Playboy Club and Casino, opened in London on June 29, 1966. It was a new, five-story building located at 45 Park Lane, overlooking Hyde Park. Managed by Victor A. Lownes, a confidant of Hugh Hefners, and boasting 27 tables offering Blackjack, Baccarat, and Roulette, gambling was provided on four floors, as well as rooms, restaurants, and a disco. It was a moneymaker from the start and remained a golden goose until closing in 1982.

In the 1970's, as Playboy Magazine matured and encountered competition, profits dropped, at the same time gaming profits from the London casino kept rising, making future expansion into gaming very attractive. In the spring of 1972 the Clermont Club in Berkely Square, famous for it's high rollers and celebrity clientele, was

purchased. Also added to the organization in 1972 was Stocks House, a 42 room Georgian Mansion located outside Aldbury in Hertfordshire that was used for training new bunny croupiers (as well as Victor Lownes residence). 1973 saw the addition of the Manchester and Portsmouth Casino Clubs. In 1978 the new Bahamas Playboy Casino, located in the Ambassador Beach Hotel in Nassau, was added. Playboy celebrated their 25th successful year in 1979 during which, in Britain, the Victoria Sporting Club was acquired. In addition, work was started on the future Atlantic City Casino building. Bunny croupiers even set out to sea. In 1971-72 Playboy operated the casinos aboard the Caribbean cruise ship, R.H.M.S. Atlantis.

1980 was a banner year for Playboy's Gaming Organization. \$31 million of the \$32 million in profit reported by Playboy Enterprises that year was from gaming. Unfortunately, it was their last. With the gaming license approval for the Victoria Sporting Club in February 1981, Playboy Enterprises became the largest, and, table for table, one of the most profitable gaming operators in the UK. They had three London casinos, two provincial casinos, interests in two others, 72 off track betting parlors, and six bingo parlors. In these casinos they attracted some of the highest of the high rollers and societies' upper crust.

The British had always been uneasy with a foreign controlled casino operating in London. Due to a number of administrative snafus, the firing of Victor Lownes and the following appointment of Chicago management, combined with some mud-slinging in London referred to as the "Casino Wars", Playboy lost their operating license in Britain.

The timing couldn't have been worse, it was April 1981 and, in partnership with Elsinore Corporation, they had just opened the new, \$135 million Atlantic City Casino. The repercussions from London reached the New Jersey shores in no time. The problems found in Britain along with a reported bribe paid to the New York State Liquor Board 20 years earlier to secure a liquor license for the New York Playboy Club tipped the scale. The New Jersey Casino Control Commission would not renew Playboy's temporary license to operate a casino in Atlantic City with Hefner in charge.

All Playboy properties in the UK were sold in November 1981 to Trident Television. The new Atlantic City Casino continued to operate until April 1984 while appealing the license decision. The Nassau Club and Casino was closed in August 1983, never having been a big money maker. Playboy Enterprises, Inc. reported a 1982 loss of more than \$51 million. The next couple of years would see the sale of the Playboy Clubs and Hotels, the DC-9 "Bunny Jet" and the sale of publishing and recording assets in an effort to regain profitability.

Cheques and tokens of lower denominations from the Atlantic City Casino are relatively common and well documented. The Bahamas cheques and tokens are similar in style and denomination with the Atlantic City series. Both use a Bud Jones Co. nickel-silver inlay surrounded by the colored collar with Playboy rabbit head logos and various inserts. The lowest denominations, like the Bahamas 50 cent and the training school cheques are hot stamped. The lower denomination Bahamas pieces are also reasonably available.

Playboy Casino Cheques used in the UK were of the classic compression style as well as the European jeton and plaques. A few common pieces from the London (Park Lane) Casino and the London Training School, or Stocks House, can also be found at various prices. We may never know all the varieties of cheques produced over the fifteen years the casinos were in operation. Cheques as high as £100,000 were used by the high rollers attracted to the London Playboy Casinos. Cheques and tokens from the short-lived Manchester, Portsmouth and Victoria Sports Club Casinos are rarely seen. However, the growing popularity of chip collecting in England is bringing new items into the market.

The Rhodes, Greece Playboy Casino and Beach Hotel opened the second week of March 1999. This is Playboy Enterprises' re-entry into gaming since the closures of 1982. Playboy and a local consortium of major local companies were awarded a 12-year exclusive casino license on the Greek Island of Rhodes, a popular Mediterranean tourist destination. Before opening Playboy Enterprises sold their equity share and entered into an agreement to license the casino to use their name.

The casino, located on two floors in the hotel "Grande Albergo Delle Rose" had 300 slot machines and 30 table games. It closed quietly in the Spring of 2000.

Sadly, this was probably the last attempt by Playboy to establish a casino under their name. Their emphasis has now shifted to internet gaming and electronic entertainment.

The most recent activity using the famous Bunny trademark are Limited Edition issues produced by the Hard Rock Café and the Palms Casino.

