

The Saskatoon Bridge Club by Douglas A. Schmeiser - January 15, 2005

Organized bridge began in Saskatoon during the 1930's at the CNR clubhouse, located on the site of the present Midtown Plaza. I can recall playing my first duplicate bridge game there in the winter of 1957-58, partnered with Otto Lang. The only other player from that time who still competes actively is Herb Cronin.

The first involvement with the ACBL came in 1956, when four players from Saskatoon, Jess Drinkall, Hazel Larson, and Mona and Doug Scott travelled to Winnipeg for a sectional tournament. They learned that bridge players were not competing for prizes but for masterpoints that could be recorded by the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL). Ken McGuirl wrote to the ACBL for information about joining the ACBL.

In November of 1958, the Saskatoon Club voted to join the Manitoba Unit of the ACBL, secured a franchise, and began playing for masterpoints. The first tournament was held in April of 1959 at the Memorial Union Building on the University of Saskatchewan campus and future summer tournaments were soon organized for the northern resort of Waskesiu, Saskatchewan.

Bridge was a much different game in the early days. There were no computers to do the scoring, and it was done manually at the end of the game. Matchpoints were much more difficult to earn. A first in a session would give .08 to .16 of a point, and the winners would receive little certificates which they sent in to ACBL for recording and credit. There were some games during the year where the winner received a full point, and these were attended by almost every player.

Bidding was much more standardized back then. There were few conventions played other than Stayman, Gerber and Blackwood. Nobody utilized forcing no trump, negative doubles or weak two bids, but a few adventuresome players dabbled with ACOL.

The bridge stalwarts in the early days of the Club included Ken McGuirl, who directed the local games and many of the sectionals before professional directors came on the scene. He often played with Winston Goodhew, who manually did the scoring after the games. Doug Scott often played with his wife and favourite partner, Mona, worked tirelessly to organize the social activities of the Club. Other active players from the early days included Bess Rutledge, Marg Walton, Gladys Farrell, Herb Cronin, Dan Sheehan, Mikel and Anne Kalmakoff, Gertrude George, Ruby Edwards, Otto Lang, Doug Schmeiser, Bert Crawford, Marj Thierman, Doris McGuirl, Maxine Wentz, Sadie Cowan, Sico and Helen Resnick, Gertrude and Everett Harvey, Gerry Sugarman, Bill Stitt, Keith Crocker, Connie and Ches Robertson, Ed Ashenhurst, Ken Paine, Madge Tubby, Pat Boyle, Helen Chapman, Ruth Greenaway and June Ogilvie, who were among the first Life Masters of the Club.

In the late 1950's, the Club rented space in the Turner Building on Eighth Street. It was a beautiful large building with kitchen facilities, and the Club expanded rapidly.

Five years later, when the lease came up for renewal, club members were shocked to find that the owners of the building wanted over two and one-half times the existing rent. It was the most fortuitous "bad news" that the Club ever received. The membership secured financing to build their own club. The building was built by Allan Tubby, a local contractor and the husband of one of the Club's long-time members (Madge Tubby). The first tournament was held November 19-21, 1976.

As we all know, the Club has flourished ever since. The mortgage on the building was paid off in 1994, seven years ahead of schedule. Plans are now made being for an extension to the building. The Club has 450 members, with a total of 160 Life Masters to date - a remarkable number for a Club of our size.

The Club has succeeded because of the high level of dedication and volunteer work of the members. As long as that spirit continues, the Saskatoon Bridge Club will remain one of the great clubs of the ACBL.