



Hartford Bridge Club

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June 2021 Newsletter

This month, we're focusing on two topics—one that looks forward and one that looks back. Looking forward, if you haven't yet reviewed them, please look at our website for the [protocols for reopening](#) that we recently announced. We can't tell you how excited we are about the club reopening for live play and the challenges and opportunities that presents. We expect to learn and adjust and learn and adjust, as we try to best meet the needs of our nearly 450 members, many of whom now join us online from distant states.

As we celebrate our coming together again, we also want to celebrate and memorialize our rich and resilient heritage. This is our 90th year as the oldest continuously operating club in North America. This month, we have a series of articles devoted to that heritage. There is a brief history of the club, along with a list of the 13 homes the club has enjoyed over the past 90 years; a profile honoring Joy Bacci, our club's historian, who is 98 years young this month and without whose efforts much of the club's history would have been lost; a short piece on the club's connection with Charles Goren; a piece by Pat Salve, who has worked tirelessly for many years as the club's legal counsel on all manner of matters for the club; a piece by Frank Merblum recalling what his early years at the club as a teenager were like; and a piece by Donna, about her history with the club and tenure as its club manager. We are hoping in future months to gather memories from other members in our continuing celebration.

We're also excited by the fact that members can now make tax deductible donations to the club and can also designate the Hartford Bridge Club as a charity under the AmazonSmile program. More about those two items appears below and on our website.

Lastly, of course, we want to continue to celebrate the milestone achievements of our members. Their always poignant remarks conclude this newsletter. See you at the tables on June 15.

Excitedly,
Donna and Felix

Donations and the AmazonSmile Program

The Hartford Bridge Club was recently granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. This means, among other things, that donations to the club are now tax deductible and also that the club can now be a beneficiary of the AmazonSmile program, whereby an amount equal to .5 per cent of your Amazon purchases can be directed to the club.

The club intends to use monies received through the AmazonSmile program as well as those received through direct donations to enhance its educational offerings and to otherwise fulfill its mission as a bridge club and 501(c)(3) organization.

To make donations to the club, click [DONATE](#) here or click the **Donate** button on [our website](#).

To sign up for the AmazonSmile program, please click [here](#) or, if you need additional help, instructions can be accessed on our website by clicking [here](#).

We know many of you support many other organizations, but please consider the Hartford Bridge Club for both donations and for the AmazonSmile program.

Thank you for your support.

A Very Brief History of the Club's Founding And its Thirteen Different Locations

During 1931, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence E. Emery organized and held bridge games at the Hartford Golf Club and the Hotel Bond. On March 10, 1932, Mr. Emery leased the premises at 550 Farmington Avenue in Hartford and announced the opening of

the Hartford Bridge Club as an entirely private venture. By June 15, 1932, the club had a membership of more than 50 people and, on that date, at the first annual meeting of the club, the Emerys turned the club's management and ownership over to the club's members. It has remained a member-owned club ever since. Josiah H. Peck, the first volunteer for the club, drew up a set of incorporation papers and bylaws without charging a fee. The only orders of business at the first annual meeting were the acceptance of the bylaws and the election of officers and directors. The officers were John R. Larus, President, Mrs. Richard H. Deming, Vice President, and Theodosia V.N. Emery, Secretary-Treasurer. Warren Mansfield, who later served for 10 years as president of the club, was first elected a director at that first annual meeting in 1932.

The club moved several times in its early years. It resided at the corner of Whitney and Farmington Avenues in Hartford for only two years (1932-34) and then moved to 29 Highland Street (close to Fern Street) in West Hartford for two years (1934-36) before moving to 685 Prospect Avenue in Hartford in 1936. It resided there until 1943, when it moved to the University Club at 30 Lewis Street in Hartford. The University Club hosted Charles Goren during his visit to HBC in 1945 (see more about that visit later in this newsletter) and was also the host of New England sectional tournaments, at which Hartford Bridge Club players did exceedingly well. In 1951, HBC merged with the Capitol City Bridge Club and moved to 15 Gerard Avenue in Hartford. Two addresses on Farmington Avenue in West Hartford served as its next homes—698 Farmington Ave (1955-1966) and 901 Farmington Ave (1966-1976). Thereafter, the club moved to three different locations at Bishop's Corner in West Hartford—2475 Albany Avenue (1976-1982), 740 North Main St. (1982-1990) and 342 North Main St. (1990-95) before relocating to its current address in 1996. The club has pictures of 11 of these 13 homes in its back room. It's not at all hyperbole to say we've come a long way through some rough patches to get where we are today.

HBC's Connection to Charles Goren

On June 7, 1945, Charles Goren's bridge column first appeared in the Hartford Courant. Warren Mansfield, then president of the club and quite a good player in his own right, seized on the occasion to write to Mr. Goren and invite him to play at the 14th Annual Southern New England Bridge Championship to be held at the Hartford Bridge Club in July. Mansfield noted that the event attracted many

players from Boston and New York. He offered himself as a partner to Goren if Goren would come and didn't have a partner he wished to bring. Goren accepted both invitations and came and played with Mansfield in the event. Alas, we do not know how they did. We do know that Mansfield and his teammates tied for the team championship the previous year with another team from the Hartford Bridge Club. The tradition of excellence at the Hartford Bridge Club started early. We also know Goren stayed three nights in Hartford and his lodging cost \$4.00 a night. Correspondence from this visit is framed and on display at the club. Goren returned in October of 1964 with Harold Ogust to play in another event at the Hartford Bridge Club. There were two sections. Goren and Ogust came in third in their North-South section while Mansfield and his partner came in first and Hilda Silverman and her partner came in second. Howard Merblum, Frank's father as well as president of the club from 1959 to 1961, and his partner Elliott Sperber came in first in one of the East-West sections.

Joy Bacci



Last month, we spent a delightful couple of hours with Joy at her condominium in the Farmington Woods complex. Joy went through the 1½ banker's boxes of materials she has kept concerning the club's history, materials she had accumulated through her long tenure as the club's historian. We learned so much from Joy that neither of us had known, much of which would not have been preserved but for her efforts.

Joy has been a member of the club for nearly 60 years. Her first memories of her acquaintance with the game of bridge are with her girlfriends on Staten Island when they dealt out the cards and called it bridge. Much later, when she and her husband moved to the Hartford area, she took her first bridge lessons with Don Lash and she was hooked. She loved the challenge that bridge presented and that her brain had to work hard, but she particularly loved the people she played with. She regularly traveled to bridge tournaments with Dixie Mastrandrea, Donna, and Gini Naugler, with whom she partnered. For Joy, being at the table and playing bridge was winning in and of itself. If she did well, that was an extra bonus. She says that playing bridge has a lot to do with living into her late 90s. "It has kept my mind alert."

Perhaps the best summary of Joy's importance to the club and club's history are a few paragraphs from a December 2010 letter Bill Watson, then president of the club, wrote recognizing her accomplishments for the club.

"You have assumed the duties of recording and storing many of our important documents and correspondence without which our club's history would rely entirely on recollection. You have researched our early years and, in turn, communicated with persons within the bridge world to ensure that our club has received proper recognition for its many accomplishments.

"You were personally responsible for providing all the necessary documentation so that in the year 1997 we received a Certificate of Achievement from the American Contract Bridge League denoting us as the oldest continually operating club in North America. Your efforts helped HBC be honored at the 2008 Boston National Tournament with Sunday of the Tournament being designated as Hartford Bridge Club Day; the first such recognition for any local club at a national tournament. You have done all of the above quietly and thoroughly and we are indebted to you for your services. Please accept our thanks and our continued recognition as the Hartford Bridge Club historian."

Joy is also responsible for the framed pictures at the club of the club's places of operation during its history, the framed letters behind Charles' Goren's visit to the club in 1945, and the plaque featuring the names of the club's past presidents. She worked tirelessly on behalf of the club for many years and was singlehandedly responsible for organizing a hugely successful event honoring the club's 65th anniversary in 1996 as well as garnering considerable publicity for the event and the club.

We owe a huge debt to Joy for her dedication to the club. She is the archetypal volunteer who has inspired many others to provide service to the club. We can do no better to honor Joy than by continuing her legacy of volunteerism to the club and cherishing and sustaining its proud history.

My "Other" Career Pat Salve



Joan and I moved to West Hartford in 1989. Prior to that, we had played "mom and pop" bridge; therefore, we decided to join the Hartford Bridge Club as a means of making some new friends. The club at that time was composed of only about 50 to 60 members, many of whom were in no danger of receiving Ms. or Mr. Congeniality awards. After several months, I was asked to join what was then called the Board of Directors of HBC. At the first couple of meetings, I encountered a fellow board member, whose name was Donna Feir. Donna and I came to some disturbing conclusions regarding the HBC. One was that the club was close to being insolvent. At that time, HBC was located in cramped quarters at Bishops Corner and paying rent that was appropriate for that location. The other conclusion was that HBC appeared to be in a death spiral with regard to the size, sustainability and growth of its membership.

Upon the expiration of the then-current lease, Donna and her dear friend Dixie Mastrandrea were able to locate new premises (our now-current location) and asked me to help with the negotiation and preparation of the lease. I hesitated because I didn't know a darn thing about real estate law, but I came to the conclusion that even if I messed up, I wouldn't be sued for malpractice, because HBC didn't have enough money to hire a lawyer to sue me. I've continued to work on the lease renewals up to the present time.

During the early days at the new location, I had the honor of serving as the president of the club for two terms. This was a period of steady growth as we assimilated several other bridge clubs in the greater Hartford area, and HBC grew from a small fifty-to-sixty-member club into the thriving multi-hundred-member club of today. During this period, we also took aggressive measures to deal with members who were rude, unfriendly and even cruel. Over the ensuing years, I prepared several contracts relating to the operation of the club and also rendered assistance on other legal matters such as employment law, tax law, and even a constitutional law question. Again, many of these areas were not in my field of expertise, because in my work life I was a corporate, regulatory and litigation lawyer. I did, however, learn how to do legal research while attending law school at

the University of Pennsylvania, so I—perhaps impetuously or even imprudently—helped to address these issues.

At some point, I also became HBC's risk manager, i.e., the person who purchases property, liability, director and officer liability and crime insurance for the club. These matters are closer to being within my area of expertise.

Many of the things I did for the Club were interesting and challenging, but at the end of the day I only did things that lawyers do. It was Donna, Dixie, the game directors, the people who teach classes and the volunteers who work on the website and purchase the supplies who changed the Club from a small and unfriendly group of insiders to a vibrant "club with a heart."

Frank Merblum



I have had a wonderful life, which includes my association with bridge for the past 65 years or so. It all started when my parents brought me to a regional in Maine (I must have been somewhere between 8 and 10 years old) and let me loose in town while they were competing. A couple of years later, my parents brought me to a sectional tournament at the Norwich Inn and I was asked to caddie by Owen Rye (along with Maury Braunstein, the lead tournament director in New England). I was paid \$5 per session and I was now hooked for life, though I didn't know it at the time. I continued to caddie at sectional, regional, and national tournaments up through high school. I even got a chance to see outgoing president Dwight David Eisenhower at the 1960 summer nationals.

My first playing experience was at the Suburban Swim and Racquet Club in Bloomfield. Little did I know that I would be spending most of adult life not too far away from that location. When I was in junior high school, I played once a week at the Jewish Community Center in West Hartford. I would play once a week with each of my parents on an alternating basis. Once I made it to high school, I started to play at the HBC with my father when the club was across the street from Temple Beth Israel. I even remember the evening when Charles Goren and Harold Ogust came to the club. The games were smoke filled and contentious—lots of yelling and screaming. Remember, zero tolerance was a long way from becoming a

reality back in the 1960's. Of course, everyone seemed old to me back then, but it was a great way to learn against the best players in the Hartford area. I have to say, I was a bit intimidated at times, but it toughened me up to eventually play at the highest level.

I continued to play lots of bridge while in college and up to the time I got married. I never stopped playing at the HBC as it moved to a few different locations at Bishops Corner and finally to our current location. A lot has changed at the HBC over the past years. In my early days, I only played at night and always looked forward to masterpoint night where you could win ONE whole masterpoint if you won. Now most of the games are played during the day and points are basically handed out like candy. All events are stratified, which was not the way it was when I was playing. I am grateful that I had to play against tough competition from the very beginning. It took me a while to get used to playing during the morning at the HBC after I retired from the work force, but it turned out to be a great way to compete and socialize with so many wonderful people. I have met most of my many friends through bridge and continue to enjoy playing this amazing game even if I now play only online.

I love what the HBC has become. The membership has grown in record numbers and there are lots of members who volunteer to make this one of the best clubs in the country. I also want to thank my lovely wife, Susan, for putting up with me all these years as I continue to pursue my passion of playing bridge and trying to be a better person and player.

Donna Feir



As we begin to take steps to reopen our club on a limited basis, my thoughts have been going back to my beginnings at HBC.

In 1980, with 3 lessons, I jumped into duplicate bridge with 3 feet. Shortly after, at Sid Stein's game on Park Rd., I met the special person who became my chosen sister and best friend, the one and only Dixie Mastrandrea, HBC's Queen of Hearts.

Shortly after, Dixie brought me to Hartford Bridge Club and I knew it was where I belonged. In those days, the atmosphere was highly competitive, not at all friendly or welcoming and, believe it or not, there were NO

novice games. Most days, I went home in tears, but I was hooked on this incredible game and, somehow, I knew HBC was where I needed to be.

By the mid 80's, I was already volunteering when Susan Patricelli, an inspiration to me, convinced me to be on Jim Cleary's board as secretary. So hard to believe, I have been attending board meetings ever since.

The club struggled through the 80's and early 90's until 1995; with 120 members, no money, and an immediate need to lower our expenses (some of us were actually lending the club money to survive), we moved to Andover Drive. This was not a popular decision among our membership as HBC had been in or around Bishops Corner for many years. Previous to our move, we were in a small basement room with no windows. I called it the Hell Hole.

In 1994, Dixie, then HBC's president, approached Marie Killoran about being our fulltime manager. That meant bringing her local games to HBC. We later added Sid Stein's and Loren Bernau's games to our club until they both retired and left them to us.

When Dixie and I first saw 19A Andover Drive, we had a vision. Thanks to Pat Salve, our volunteer legal counsel, who helped convince the board and Marie that this move would be a good one. Pat then negotiated our first lease in October 1995. At that time, we moved in using one third of our new facility.

Unfortunately, Marie was only with us for a short time due to her move to the Carolinas. Since she was doing most of the directing, she agreed to train a group of us before her departure. NOW who was going to volunteer to manage OUR CLUB?? With much trepidation, Clayton Parker and I, brand new directors, put our hands in the air and volunteered. Clayton and I had a few fun years together until he and his bride, Edie, moved to Arizona in 1999. A sad day for me!

And then, there was **one**, the consummate volunteer who loved the Hartford Bridge Club and its people, her extended family. By the time Clayton left, we had changed the culture of our club. We had become the Club with a Heart.

In January 2000, due to a generous donation from a deceased member, we were able to do an extensive renovation of our facility, with a lot of volunteers involved in the work. Unfortunately, later that year, a tragic accident at our facility caused

us to renovate again. From adversity, we gained strength, became more visible, and our membership began to increase.

In 2005, with a detailed letter to ACBL, Pat Salve applied for, and we received, the Jane Johnson Club of the Year award. Next, in 2007, Pat, building on Joy Bacci's efforts, saw that we were formally recognized by the ACBL as the oldest continuously operating bridge club in North America. Then, in November 2008, we had the honor of Hartford Bridge Club Day at the Boston Nationals, where we showcased our club to the bridge world. Around the same time, we were visited by Craig Robinson, president of the ACBL, who was touring 100 clubs in 100 days. His letter to us after his visit was extremely complimentary.

There are so many people to thank for their devotion to HBC and for their support through these many years. Each president and board of trustees brings a new and interesting dimension and certainly helps to keep our club vibrant. Thanks to the directors for their continued support and flexibility. You all know who you are and I appreciate each and every volunteer. HBC is member-owned and -run, truly a family. We need and your support and volunteerism to keep us vital as we enter our 90th year.

I have missed you all so much during this pandemic and look forward to being together again soon.

Hugs, Donna

Milestone Achievements

Roz Sternberg: 1000 Masterpoints-Silver Life Master



I want to thank the Hartford Bridge Club and all of the members for a very positive change in my life. Prior to retiring, I was totally absorbed in my career and missing the joys of life. Joining the club introduced me to many good friends and the challenges of playing duplicate bridge. I also want to thank my partners who have shared their knowledge and made me a better player.

**Carol Tellar:1000 Masterpoints-Silver Life Master
On Making Silver Life Master and How I Survived the Pandemic**



Bridge is a game I learned after I retired. I quickly fell in love with it and all that it offered in the way of challenges and keeping me on my toes. I took lessons at HBC—many lessons—and, as an added bonus, discovered it was a great place to make friends.

When bridge had to go online, I was happy to be able to play mostly with my regular partners. I wasn't thinking about my points until I realized I was close to making the next rank. Then I became excited. I wanted my final points to be made playing with my regular partners, who, to my delight, each wanted to be the one to bring me over the finish line and offered to play extra with me.

Remember the song "I Can Get By With A Little Help From My Friends"? It's true. With their help, I not only earned my SLM, but I got through the pandemic with their much appreciated moral support.

Joe Peled: Life Master



I appreciate the club's recognition. It took me almost 10 years to get to this point, especially because of the new requirements for Life Master. I couldn't have asked for a better environment than the Hartford Bridge Club to grow and progress to this level. I would like to thank everybody in the club, with special thanks to my regular partner, Michael Nader, and also to Lucie Fradet and Renee Janow. Thanks to all, and I hope to see many more players getting their Life Master certificate.

John Willoughby: Life Master



My bridge experience began at home at age ten when my sister and I alternated as the fourth or kibitzer with my parents and grandmother. I learned the basics a la Goren and Schenken. A non-ACBL sanctioned duplicate bridge game finally came to Martha's Vineyard in 1964 or 1965, in the basement of the director's home, and I was one of the initial players. I played sporadically until sixteen years ago, and since 2009, I've played most weeks in a Hartford Bridge Club game.

At times, the march toward satisfying the criteria for Life Master status seemed to go so slowly, but I focused on the joy and satisfaction I received by playing weekly with friendly, patient, and knowledgeable partners. I have always preferred to play with someone who was warm and supportive rather than those with lots of points but little patience. After all, the game is to bring joy, not disappointment or deflation. For that I thank current members, especially my frequent evening partner Cecilia Vasel, John Pelegano, Sue Wavada, Debbie Katz, Bob Kuzma, Peggy Arseneaux, Mike Shore, and Buz Kohn.

A club game that offered a combination of red and gold points actually put me "over the top." I inwardly enjoy the work and pleasure I obtain from this great game. I have been retired for two years, which allows me to play three or four times a week, and I have felt a need to give back to the game that has given me much joy and entertainment. So, I am currently on the club's Board of Trustees and volunteer for some club activities. This has been extra special as it has increased social connections during the pandemic era, but I look forward to seeing other club members around the club's bridge tables in the near future. Best wishes to all!!