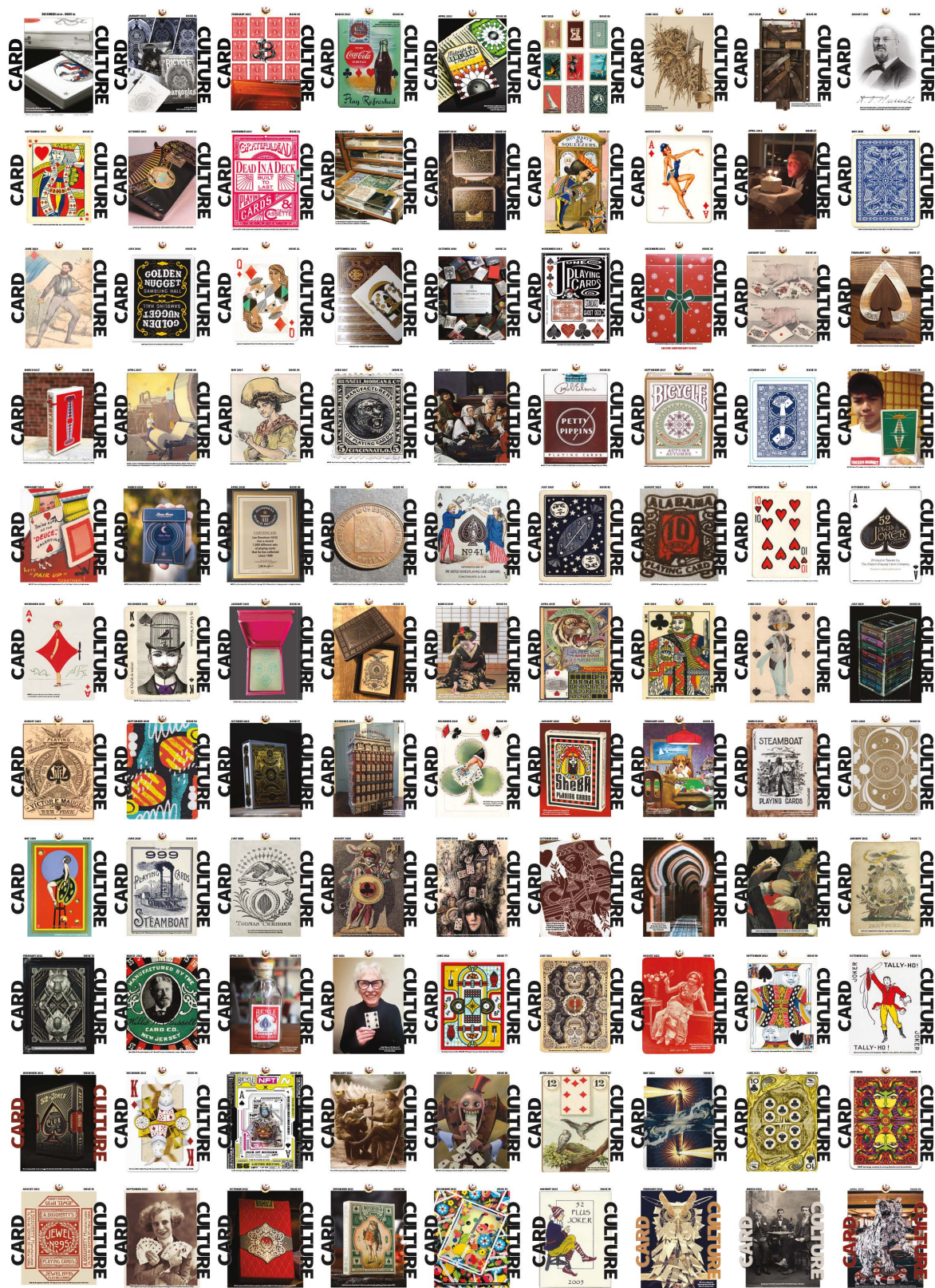




# CARD CULTURE

MONTHLY NEWS FROM THE EXPERTS AT 52 + JOKER PLAYING CARD CLUB ISSUE 100 - MAY 2023



Celebrate good times, come on. All 100 issues of CARD CULTURE magazine. What a journey!

## BICYCLE HERITAGE SERIES

Sherman Tsao cracks open a 4x carat case to show us some of his favorites.

## COIN CONTROLLED PLAYING CARD HOLDER

Two clever creators J. Coupal & L.E. Gray find a way to hold your deck.

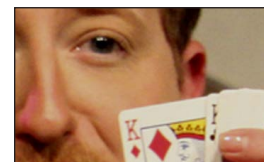
## THE REAL DEAL

Rosemary Reid interviews club President Lee Asher about his contributions.

## COVERSTORY

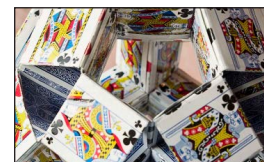
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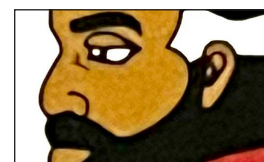


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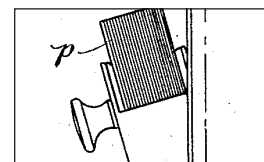
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The Queen of Spades is lost, so he uses a snapshot of his wife. How long since you've bought new playing cards?



52+J



EMAIL CONTACTS  
EMAIL THOSE WHO  
HELP OUR CLUB

[Lee Asher](#), President / Editor-in-Chief: CARD CULTURE

[Paul Bostock](#), VP / Editor-in-Chief CLEAR THE DECKS

[Judy Dawson](#), VP / Queen

[Steve Bowling](#), VP / Club Treasurer

[Doug Rickenback](#), VP / General

[William Kalush](#), VP / Playing Card Projects

[Don Boyer](#), VP / Director of Club Forum

[Brian Sarlo](#), VP / Director of Digital Affairs

[Alexander Chin](#), VP / Artists & Designers

[Dave Hofmeister](#), VP / Secretary

[Barb Lunaburg](#), VP / CPCC Historian

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[Jay McKinstry](#), Staff Writer: CARD CULTURE

[Sherman Tsao](#), Staff Writer: CARD CULTURE

[Alex Clays](#), Staff Writer: CARD CULTURE

[Greg Loschen](#), Staff Writer: CARD CULTURE

[Rosemary Reid](#), Staff Writer: CARD CULTURE

52 Plus Joker Presents

# Cleveland 2023



**Playing Card Collectors Unite  
October 11-15th, 2023**

**Cleveland, Ohio Calls Us.  
Reserve Your Spot ([click here](#)), Then Join Us For All The Fun!**



## CARD CULTURE RETROSPECTIVE

By Lee Asher | Editor-in-Chief

**I**ssue #100! Let's hear a 'WOW' from the crowd. We've come a long way, and it's hard to believe that eight-plus years have passed since this journey started.

We've reached this milestone thanks to your dedication and love for our publication.

To celebrate, here are some little-known facts about CARD CULTURE that might surprise and delight you.

### THE INCEPTION

At the 2013 convention in Las Vegas, Tom Dawson proposed I take over his presidency. My heart, however, was not prepared. I also knew that as Vice President, I could accomplish more while no one was looking. Our steadfast leader drew everyone's attention.

Not accepting no for an answer, Tom asked me to take over 'membership,' one of the more difficult positions on the board. He recognized that our group was aging and needed to improve our efforts to find new card collectors. We also required more effective ways to keep current members from leaving.

After returning from the Vegas convention, I considered how we could better connect with every current member. During this time, Tom purchased and donated to the club, the [world's largest playing card forum](#). He wanted us to digitally house 52 Plus Joker members there, while also giving the club a more substantial online presence.

Inspired by Tom's clever move, the idea for a digital newsletter presented itself to me. 52 Plus Joker could release something monthly,

in addition to our printed quarterly, with the idea that this new playing card forum would and could generate crowd-sourced content. More importantly, this new release enabled us to contact the membership twelve times more per year. Perfect! Who wouldn't want to keep in touch with the President regularly?

## THE PITCH

I recall convincing Tom that this digital newsletter would be at most five to ten pages per month. We could also 'unearth' older Clear The Decks articles that new members still needed to read. Furthermore, I was confident that the playing card forum would generate the remainder of the content required to fill each issue. And at first, that's what happened. Eventually, CARD CULTURE would become a robust digital magazine rather than a newsletter. What began as a handful of pages quickly grew to 30-40 pages per month.

To begin the initiative, CARD CULTURE required a strong and convincing editor-in-chief. So Don Boyer stepped up to claim the role. With him in that position, I agreed to work as an associate editor beneath him. Finally, we had a functioning skeleton crew.

## THE NAME

On November 3rd, 2014, in a group email to Don Boyer, Tom, and Judy Dawson, I wrote, *"After speaking with Tom today, I wanted to write everyone so we are all on the same page. Regarding the digital newsletter, it's important we take a few emails to discuss the name. Let's face it, while other organizations are out there; we're the world's premiere playing card collector's club.*

*Therefore, let's create and define the trend that everyone else follows. We need to have a name that encompasses card-collecting culture while not being cheeky or too clever. (ie. CARD CULTURE) It's just an example.*

*Let's start volleying thoughts, and we will land on the perfect name."*

After this note, we discussed a few possible names. Yet, it seems CARD CULTURE chose us before we even looked for it.

## THE FIRST ISSUE

With Tom as President, Don as Editor-in-Chief, and I as the Associate-editor, on December 15th, 2014, our inaugural issue of CARD CULTURE was emailed to the entire membership. What an exciting moment! Reactions were positive but mild. Nobody was sure what to expect. In retrospect, the issue was only eight pages long, but it was jam-packed with playing card goodness. That hasn't changed in a hundred



## TOM DAWSON

THE PRESIDENT'S REFLECTIONS

Welcome to our inaugural edition of **Card Culture**.

What is **Card Culture**?

It is a medium for the Club to keep members informed of important club matters and activities. It is up-to-date information about what is happening in the world of playing card collecting. It is a place to show you some new issues and new discoveries, intended to increase your knowledge of new, vintage and antique cards.

Why is **Card Culture** needed?

Things move quickly in this world of instant global communication and rapid, broad dissemination of information at anyone's fingertips. Our world is becoming smaller and events are taking place at an ever-faster pace. A short, all-digital monthly newsletter providing summary and context of events taking place in "card

culture" will help keep our members up-to-date as well as helping to attract new members to the Club. **Card Culture** won't be a supplement or substitute for *Clear the Decks*; it has its own editor and its own agenda. What it will become is a reflection of what our members need and want.

When will **Card Culture** be issued?

Between the 14th and 16th of each month via email to all our members. Don Boyer, the Chief Operating Officer of the Playing Card Forum, has agreed to take on the role of editor. Thank you, Don! Like all Club activities, your participation as club member is needed to make it a success - Don will want to hear what you think and, of course, he will always want material!

**Tom Dawson was the first to publish an article in CARD CULTURE Issue #1 (January 2014).**



issues. Like clockwork, we fill CARD CULTURE with reading-worthy playing card content every month.

[If you look at issue number one in Ask Alexander](#), you'll notice the 'unearthed' column. It's been running since the beginning. We stick to our plans.

### THE STAFF OVER THE YEARS

Many contributors have shared their articles and research with 52 Plus Joker members for over eight years via CARD CULTURE'S pages.

You may recall Andrea Whitlock's Decks on Decks Kickstarter monthly column, which ran from issue #12 to issue #36. Since issue #26, Alex Clays has been publishing his highly-popular article on playing card postcards. It's also in Issue #26 that I take over as Editor-in-Chief. Jason Mckinstry, a playing card historian and all-around badass, is introduced in issue #27 and continues to publish his writings with us each month. Ed Hughlett, a friend of two decades, took on the role of copy editor behind the scenes in issue #30. He's still editing every issue, making each one sparkle. Sherman Tsao began publishing his excellent 'What's in Your Carat Case?' article in Issue #39, and it's been going strong ever since. Alain Benoit, the famed playing card designer and Diamond Award

Winner, has also been the art director since issue #50. He makes each issue look fantastic, including our brand-new redesign.

Finally, the last two long-time contributors to join the CARD CULTURE staff are Greg Loschen, who began writing his outstanding card art series in issue #74, and Rosemary Reid, who started in issue #76. Her monthly column shines a light on those often overlooked in our industry. We hope to see many more fantastic contributions from these people and others in the coming issues.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

We are excited to continue providing you with the best content possible and to grow our playing card community. The CARD CULTURE team believes you will want to be part of our ongoing journey, and that we continue to inform, inspire, and entertain. Is that everything you've come to expect from this excellent digital magazine?

On behalf of everyone here at CARD CULTURE, please accept our heartfelt gratitude. Thank you for your loyalty and support. Thank you for joining our community and sharing your passion for cards. Finally, thank you for your assistance in reaching the incredible milestone of one hundred issues! ♦



THE NEW YORK  
CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.  
SQUEEZERS  
MANUFACTURERS OF  
PLAYING CARDS

## Advertising Special

# NEW YORK CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.

By Jason McKinstry | Contributor

Welcome back, playing card fans. It's been a while since I saw you last, but I'm back to celebrate two very special occasions. This month CARD CULTURE magazine crosses the threshold into three digits with its one-hundredth edition. I'm sure that our Club President and CARD CULTURE Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Lee Asher, can't believe that his baby is passing such an important milestone. To him, it must feel like only yesterday that he produced the first. Now over eight years later and with one of the collector's communities' most loved magazines, I hope he has a great sense of pride and satisfaction. I'd also like to express my thanks and admiration to everybody that makes the magazine possible, including the editors, contributors and club staff.

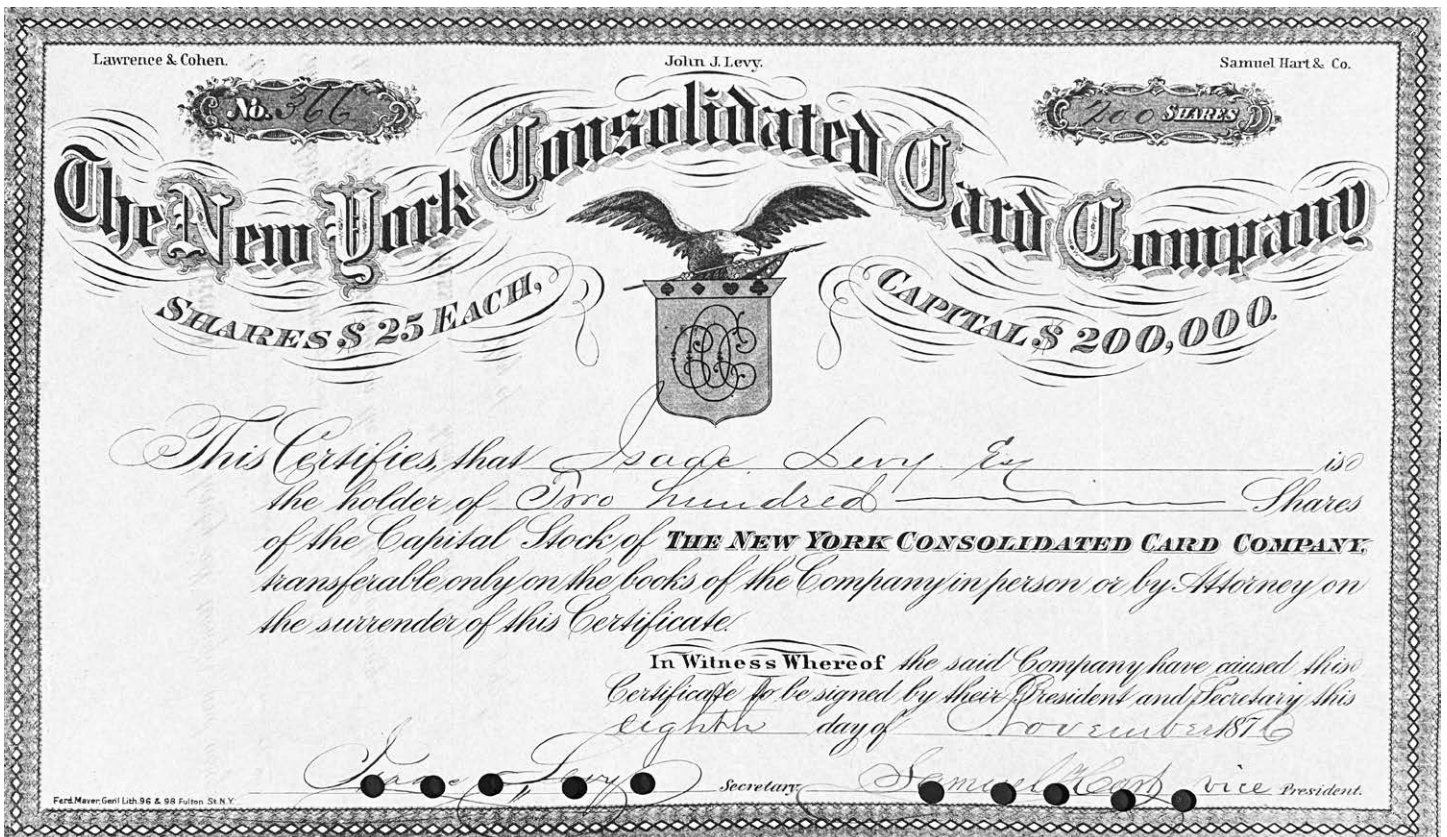
To make the party even more ruckus, this month marks a personal achievement of my own—the Forty-Eighth Issue of Collector's Corner. After four years of writing for CARD CULTURE, one may think we've exhausted all the avenues of antique/vintage playing card goodness. But as I strap on my party hat and ready the noise makers, let me assure you that we're just getting started.

To commemorate such a monumental occasion, I've put together a special edition for our exceptional readers. A subject that would be deserving of a celebration of its own. This month we will be looking back on the fabulous, colourful and often comical advertising of The New York Consolidated Card Company.

As we know, New York Consolidated was a powerhouse of a playing card company. It was formed in 1871 when the three family-related firms of Lawrence & Cohen, Samuel Hart and John J. Levy joined forces. With a deep history of card-making heritage behind them, this new entity was poised to make big moves in the growing industry. Boasting an established roster of playing card firsts and a long line of innovations and improvements thanks to its prestigious members, the company began to take the manufacture of playing cards to the next level. But this forward thinking and exuberance was not just isolated to playing cards. Advertising produced by the NYCCC would elevate the art of the sale, a fact that will be clearly demonstrated this month.

The first years of life for the NYCCC (1871-1874) consisted primarily of Lawrence & Cohen, Samuel Hart and John J. Levy selling off the remaining stock of playing cards produced before the union. They also spent this time discovering and perfecting the playing card designs that would be sold in the years

ahead. In a move to solidify the partnership, in 1875, the company moved into what would become its headquarters for the next forty years, 222-228 W. 14th Street. This centralized location not only gave them enough room to house their combined operations, but it also provided them with a much cleaner and upscale building in Lower Manhattan.



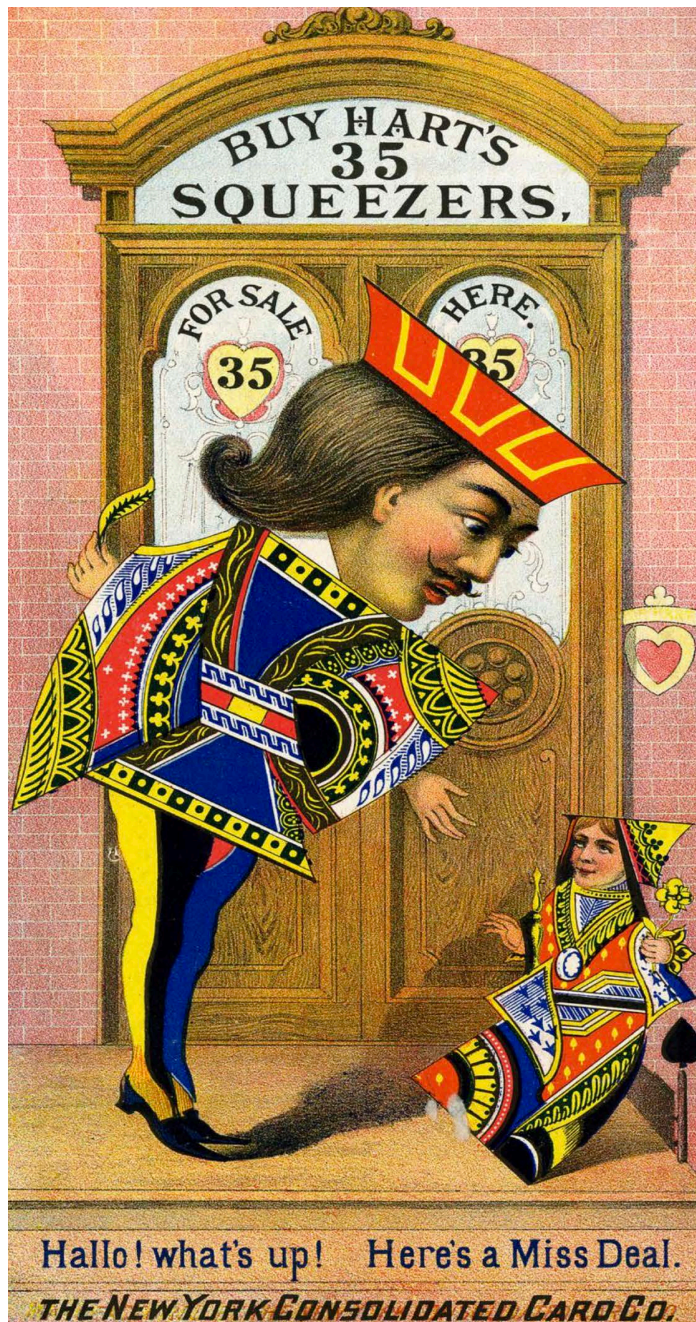


From the beginning, the NYCCC produced advertising that was typical for the time. Print adverts heavy on text were the norm, and the company produced many of them. But then, in the mid-1880s, something significant changed. A seismic shift occurred that heralded a new era of illustrative ads that lived alongside print adverts and eventually all but replaced them. This was true for many quality businesses as printing methods were improving at a tremendous speed. Now instead of describing the products and services in text format, they could instead display what was offered with graphic detail. The NYCCC took hold of this evolving technology, mastered it, and rolled with it into the future.

In 1884 Consolidated produced an advertising trade card that would set the mould for what was to come. It was made by Heppenheimer & Maurer and gave New Yorkers their first look at what would become Consolidated's signature and cheeky art style. This advertising trade card reads, "Hallo! What's up! Here's a Miss Deal", a comical reference to the fact that Squeezers had a reputation for stopping misdeals in various card games, such as Poker and Euchre. The characters were depicted standing in front of a building which reads "Buy Hart's 35 Squeezers" and a doorbell belonging to "Mr. Hart." As a classic all to itself, within only a few years, this black & white trade card would be revised and replaced with one in full colour.



The first full-colour lithograph trade card from the NYCCC also began circulating in 1884, and it was a sight to see. As a testament to what was possible at the time and also the company's new relationship with Heppenheimer & Maurer, this card featured the full roster of court characters showcasing how they spent their spare time. Presented was a dinner party scene where the Kings comically wooed the Queens, much to the chagrin of the Jacks. This card was distributed to dealers and was meant to be put on display either in a window of the shop or with the playing cards. The panoramic



card proudly read “*New York Consolidated Card Co’s Playing Cards, For Sale Here.*” Within only a few years, a new trade card would be introduced by Consolidated, again made by Heppenheimer & Maurer at their 22-24 William Street facility. This card was an upgraded version of their first. Gone was the black & white and realistic quality of its predecessor. Although conceptually identical, this new version was in colour and featured a hilariously oversized head on the Jack. Other refinements included the loss of Mr. Hart’s nameplate above the doorbell—a fitting removal considering that Samuel Hart had died in 1885.

Jumping forward a few years reveals NYCCC’s next round of standout advertising. In 1891, NYCCC began one of the most extensive campaigns ever created by a playing card manufacturer. The company’s new brand of playing cards, the Triton, was clearly the catalyst for this impressive push. It’s important to note that, at the time, it was Consolidated who was falling behind on advertising initiatives. Until 1891, Andrew Dougherty had been dwarfing them in the field, and they were currently being challenged by the USPCC, who was producing bright and colourful advertising almost daily. When Consolidated began to fight back, the stage was set for one of the largest battles the industry had ever seen. A contest that would take place between the pages of magazines and periodicals all across the country.



It was through this time that the company continued to develop its signature style, which became more precise and refined with every ad they produced.

1892 was perhaps one of the most pivotal years in the history of the NYCCC. As the advertising onslaught continued. Tritons and Squeezers were heavily promoted, and also present were new brands being added to the roster. More often than not, great things come from humble beginnings, and this 1892 (first mention) advertisement for Triton playing cards simply states, "Ask to see The "Bee." This unadorned line of text introduced the country to what would become a Legendary brand of playing cards. Bee No. 92 would beat out every other offering by the company and quickly become an essential part of Consolidated's sales. They are still popular and produced today by The U.S. Playing Card Company.

**"THE TRITON" BRAND OF PLAYING CARDS.**  
 SAMPLE PACK, 25 CENTS.  
 All Dealers have them.



Ask to see  
**The "BEE"**  
 also.

"THREE OF A KIND BEAT TWO PAIR."

**N. Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.,**  
 WEST 14TH STREET, NEW YORK,  
**BEAT ALL OTHER MANUFACTURERS.**

**ALL DEALERS HAVE THEM.**



**TRITON**  
 Brand of Playing Cards are  
 are  
 "Squeezers,"  
 and have  
**PERFECT SLIP,**  
**SUPERB FINISH.**  
 Our Cards are used by the  
 leading Clubs and Army  
 and Navy.  
**SAMPLE PACK MAILED ON  
 RECEIPT OF 25 CENTS.**

Be sure you see the word  
**TRITON** on the box and  
 wrapper of each pack. Ask  
 for **TRITONS**, they are  
 double enameled.

**TRITONS ARE THE BEST PLAYING  
 CARDS** ♦ ♣ ♥ ♠ **PRICE AND QUALITY UNEQUALLED.**  
 N.Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO. + WEST 14th Street, NEW YORK

Over a dozen adverts were produced in 1892 featuring the court characters in humorous scenes and situations. I've included as many as I could find (and own in my collection) for this month's special.



**"RAISING THE BLIND"**  
(Copyrighted.)

**TRITON**  
BRAND OF PLAYING CARDS ARE  
**"SQUEEZERS"**

AND HAVE PERFECT SLIP, SUPERB FINISH.  
FOR PRICE AND QUALITY UNEQUALED.

Our Cards are used by the leading Clubs and Army and Navy. **All Dealers have them.**  
SAMPLE PACK mailed on receipt of 25c.

Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**; they are double enameled.

**NEW YORK CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.,**  
West 14th Street, N. Y.



**TRITONS** ALL DEALERS HAVE TRITONS

— THE —  
**TRITON**  
BRAND  
OF PLAYING CARDS ARE  
**"SQUEEZERS,"**

And for Price and Quality they are Unequaled.

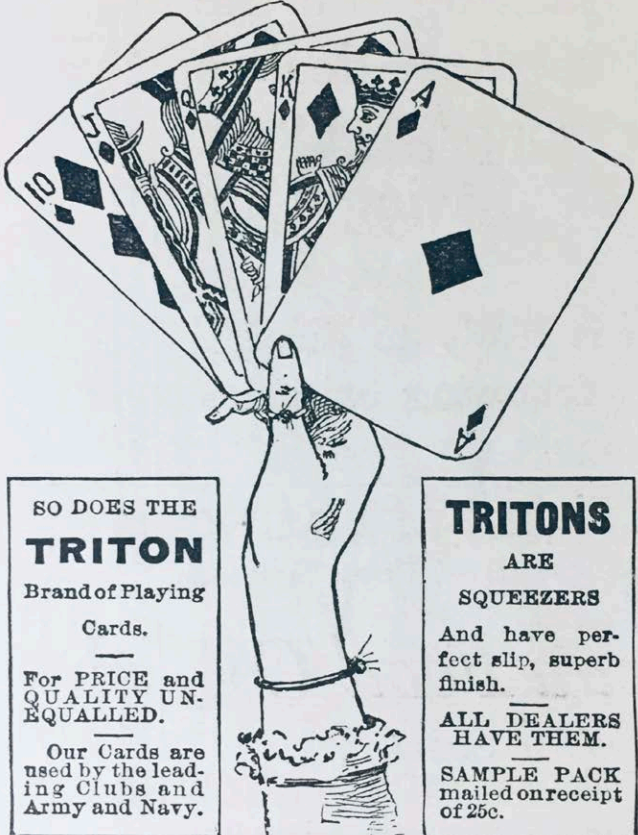
OUR CARDS ARE USED BY THE LEADING CLUBS AND ARMY AND NAVY.  
Sample Pack mailed on receipt of 25c.

Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**; they are double enameled.

**"A FULL HOUSE"**  
TRITONS have perfect slip  
And Superb finish.

**WEST 14th STREET  
N.Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO. - NEW YORK**

**A ROYAL FLUSH**  
**BEATS EVERYTHING.**



SO DOES THE  
**TRITON**  
Brand of Playing  
Cards.

For PRICE and  
QUALITY UN-  
EQUALLED.

Our Cards are  
used by the lead-  
ing Clubs and  
Army and Navy.

**TRITONS**  
ARE  
**SQUEEZERS**

And have per-  
fect slip, superb  
finish.

**ALL DEALERS**  
HAVE THEM.

**SAMPLE PACK**  
mailed on receipt  
of 25c.

Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**, they are double enameled.

**N. Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.,**  
West 14th Street, N. Y.

What are  
**Squeezers?**

The New York  
*Consolidated*  
*Card*  
*Company's*



*Playing Cards.*

222, 224, 226 and 228 West 14th St., N. Y.

The oldest manufacturers of Playing Cards in America. All grades and qualities. Ask your dealer for them.

"Opening  
A Pot."



Copyrighted.

# THE TRITON BRAND PLAYING CARDS

For beauty and quality unequalled. They are "SQUEEZERS," have SUPERB FINISH, PERFECT SLIP, and are double enamelled. The favorites in Parlor, Club and Camp. All Dealers have them. **SAMPLE PACK** mailed on receipt of 25c.

Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Our **MASCOTTE BRAND** is the best 15c. card made. Ask your dealer for them.

N. Y. Consolidated Card Co., West 14th St., N. Y.



Three of a kind and a PEAR

# TRITON BRAND OF PLAYING CARDS ARE "SQUEEZERS"

AND HAVE PERFECT SLIP, SUPERB FINISH. For PRICE and QUALITY UNEQUALED. Our Cards are used by the leading Clubs and Army and Navy. **All dealers have them.** **SAMPLE PACK** mailed on receipt of 25c.

Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**; they are double enamelled.

N. Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.,  
West 14th Street, N. Y.



Copyrighted.

# THE TRITON BRAND PLAYING CARDS

For beauty and quality unequalled. They are "SQUEEZERS," have superb finish, perfect slip, and are double enamelled. The favorites in Parlor, Club and Camp. All Dealers have them. **SAMPLE PACK** mailed on receipt of 25 cts. Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Our **MASCOTTE BRAND** is the best 15c. card made. Ask your dealer for them.

N. Y. Consolidated Card Co., West 14th St., N. Y.



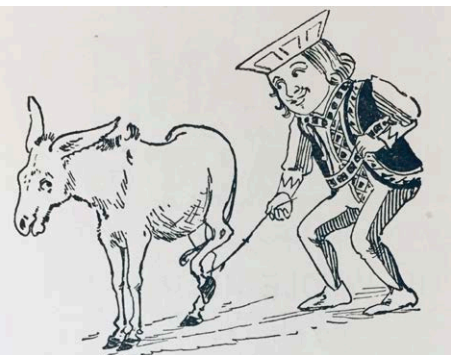
THEY HAVE  
PERFECT SLIP,  
SUPERB  
FINISH.

FOR PRICE  
AND  
QUALITY  
UNEQUALED.

# "STANDING PAT" (Copyrighted.) TRITON BRAND OF PLAYING CARDS ARE

"SQUEEZERS"  
Our Cards are used by the leading Clubs and Army and Navy. **All Dealers have them.** **SAMPLE PACK** MAILED ON RECEIPT OF 25c. Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**; they are double enamelled.

N. Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO., W 14th St., N. Y.



# "A PAIR OF JACKS" TRITON BRAND OF PLAYING CARDS ARE "SQUEEZERS"

AND HAVE PERFECT SLIP, SUPERB FINISH. FOR PRICE AND QUALITY UNEQUALED. Our Cards are used by the leading Clubs and Army and Navy. **All Dealers have them.**

**SAMPLE PACK** mailed on receipt of 25c. Be sure you see the word **TRITON** on the box and wrapper of each pack. Ask for **TRITONS**; they are double enamelled.

N. Y. CONSOLIDATED CARD CO.,  
West 14th Street, N. Y.



New York Consolidated went political in 1892 for the United States Presidential Election. This outstanding advertising lithograph featured the hopeful candidates playing a high-stakes game of cards. Easily recognizable are Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, James B. Weaver and their running mates. As all things in life that move only in the forward direction, this was also true for NYCCC's favourite lithographer; this card was made by Heppenheimer's Sons, William Street, New York.

In 1893 The Gentleman's Handbook on Poker provided one of the best-looking advertising pages made up to this date. New York Consolidated Card Co. claimed they "*Are the Oldest Manufacturers in America of Playing Cards*" and are "*Used by Leading Clubs the World over.*" Hart's Squeezers were the main focus of this ad and are shown in reduced size. Triton was mentioned here as well.

The New York Consolidated Card Co.  
WEST 14TH STREET, NEW YORK.

Are the Oldest Manufacturers in America of  
**PLAYING CARDS**  
Used by Leading Clubs the World over.

Made from the BEST STOCK,  
Have the FINEST FINISH and MOST PERFECT SLIP,  
LAST LONGER than Cards of any other make.

SOLE MANUFACTURERS OF  
"SQUEEZERS"



This is a reduced copy of the  
Ace of Spades of our renowned  
No. 35 "HART'S SQUEEZERS."



This is a reduced copy of the original,  
genuine "Angel" back made  
only by the N. Y. C. C. C.

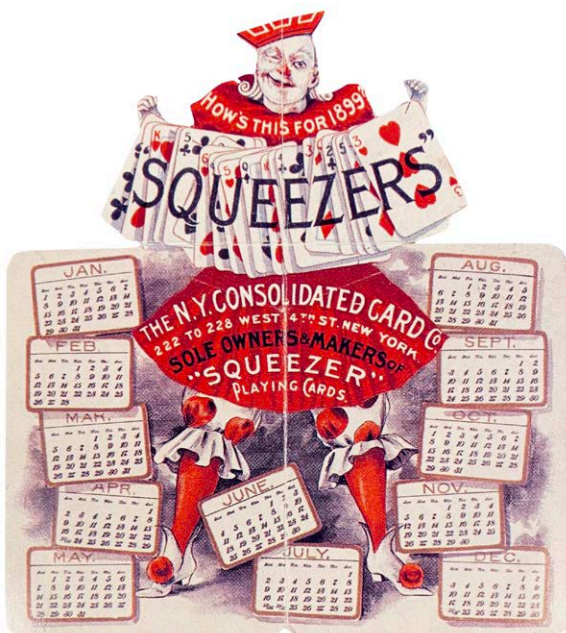
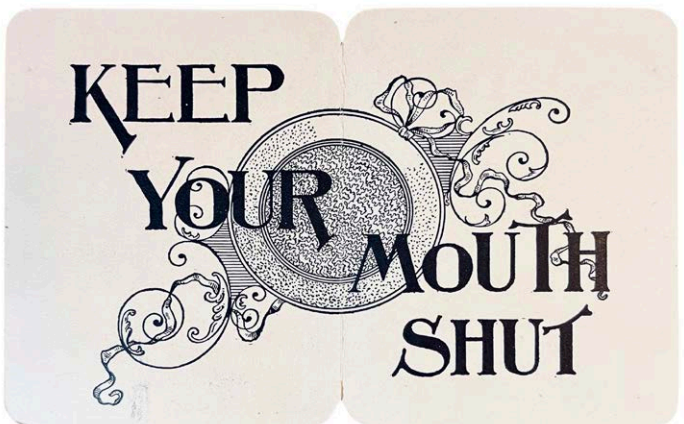
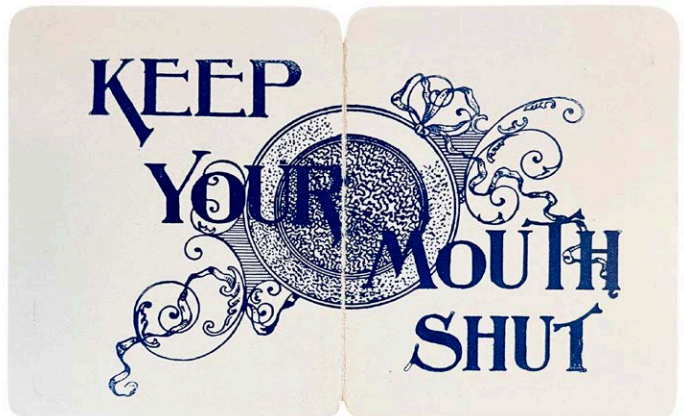
THE "TRITON"

Is a New and Magnificent Brand. Sold by all Dealers.

The New York Consolidated Card Co.  
WEST 14TH STREET, NEW YORK.

In 1894, after twenty years of independent operation (over sixty, including L.I. Cohen), the New York Consolidated sold to their rival competitor, The US Playing Card Company. Although under new management, Consolidated was allowed to continue operating with relative autonomy. With a new century fast approaching, the NYCCC, with the backing of the USPCC, began pouring money into colourful advertising and new and exciting products. In 1896, one piece they made was a real show-stopper and was undoubtedly designed to grab attention. It was a folding trade card claiming “Up-To-Date Rules for all Games.” When opened, the inside revealed the text “Keep Your Mouth Shut.” Items like this prove that even with a long and illustrious history, NYCCC was still capable of evolving and staying relevant. This spirited trade card was available in multiple colours and was produced for several years.

In 1899, Consolidated produced another playing card-sized advertising (Trade Card) fold-out in their own unmistakable fashion. It proclaimed “How’s This For 1899” and featured a winking jester holding a string of playing cards with the name of the company’s best-selling Squeezers playing cards front and center. This fantastic card was also a calendar giving it a great practical purpose as well.



The new century brought major changes to the company, and in 1901, a fresh trade card calendar was released. Because of the limited number made and the large cut-out design of the backer, not many survived with all their parts intact.



For 1906, the New York Consolidated Card Company strapped on a baseball glove and took to the diamond with an attractive trade card depicting a “Royal Game” of ball. The card claimed: “Anyone who plays with us is bound to win, and yet we can’t be beaten.” The reverse featured the 1906 Iowa State Baseball League schedule.



A new decade and a new wholesale price list. This one, dated July 1st, contained everything needed to know about the products offered by the NYCCC. It’s interesting to note that Hart’s Squeezers were still the main advertising focus (even 25 years after his death.) The price list declares Squeezers “The leading Club Card for over forty years.” This was true, and it was also the brand of card that earned the company a gold medal in Paris back in 1878. America loved the Angel Back Squeezers, and they were a true reflection of the country’s history with playing cards. The price list also shed light on the rise in popularity of the Bee brand. Bee was introduced in 1892 and had spent the better part of twenty years gaining traction in the market. Attention was paid to the brand in the price list, which stated, “The ‘Bee’ Brand No. 92 is the Best and Most popular mediumpriced card ever offered to the public.”



TRADE MARK	CLASS I.	PRICE PER 500'S
218.	STEAMBOATS Square corners, star, plaid and calico backs	\$10.00
218.	GILT Same as No. 218, but with gilt edges	16.00
220.	STEAMBOATS Round corners, star, plaid and calico backs	10.00
220.	GILT Same as No. 220, but with gilt edges	16.00
319.	EXTRA STEAMBOATS Assorted patterns, including "The Mustang" or "Game Star" (No. 319-C)	14.00
319.	GILT Same as No. 319, but with gilt edges	20.00
319.	HUSTLER Fancy backs, plain paper, high finish	15.00
94.	GILT Same as No. 94, but with gilt edges	21.00
444.	HART'S CROWN Fine quality, enameled, highly finished, new and novel assortment of fancy backs in colors and tints; the best low priced card made	20.00
444.	GILT Same as No. 444, but with gilt edges	26.00
CLASS II.		
69.	MASCOTTE A very popular enameled card, made in a large assortment of handsome fancy backs in varied colors, highly finished	27.00
69.	GILT Same as No. 69, but with gilt edges	36.00
92.	BEE (No. 92-C) A double enameled card of extra quality stock; finest finish and size; new and original designs; painted in several colors. This card is unrivaled by any card on the market at similar price. Also made in "THE NEW CAMBIE TRUST" which also carries them any other finish, and makes identical about responsible	30.00
92.	GILT Same as No. 92, but with gilt edges	39.00

There’s much more to the advertising history of the NYCCC. This month’s article only features some of the best and most notable. By 1910 the company still had many years and adverts ahead of them. But more will have to wait for another time. I hope you enjoyed this look back, and I also hope that you have gained a new perspective on this incredible and historically significant company.

See you next time ... ♦







The Afrocentric deck's value should be weighed in the scale of its cultural significance, original designs, and for its numerical scarcity.

## A Case For A Case

# THE AFROCENTRIC DECK

By Rory Rennick | Contributor

Several years ago my attention was arrested in the playing card world! I had the “*right to remain silent*”—lest anything I said could be used against me in a court of law— or public opinion. I’m keenly aware that I always run the risk of being misunderstood with written or spoken commentary. However, two of the beauties of getting older are: 1. I care less of what people think of me, and 2. the freedom to speak what little mind I have left. I will, however, try to resist a soapbox “*get off my lawn!*” rant.

Instead, I welcome you onto my courtroom porch for a brief look into a historically significant deck of cards.

Grab a seat, a pencil and your favorite beverage please. You’ve just become an instant member of the jury!

Under Miranda law I also, “*have the right to an attorney.*” Fortunately for me I retained the services of Attorney H. Russell Smith, co-founder of Blacks Factor to answer some questions about his **Afrocentric playing cards**

**Featuring Black Royalty deck.** There is an old adage (commonly attributed to Abraham Lincoln) in criminal law that says, “A man who represents himself has a fool for a client.” Nothing could be further from the truth in this instance. Mr. Russell ably shares his experience of entering the playing card world with me in a frank and sometimes humorous Zoom deposition-type interview. Both of our views will be represented in this examination.

I'd like to make an opening statement before Mr. Smith takes the stand.

Good evening people of the card collecting jury and public at large. My name is Rory Rennick. I'm not a lawyer—not even on television. However, in my twisted vaunted imagination I rank somewhere between Perry Mason and Denny Crane (Boston Legal) in case victories. Simply put, this case is about representation- or the lack thereof. Who was represented on playing cards- and who wasn't? Why were people of African descent scarcely discoverable on cards? Why would anyone overtly put the word “Afrocentric” on the front of a deck case? We will establish beyond a reasonable doubt the need for such a deck, especially, at the time of its creation. I contend that the deck in question is only guilty of much needed representation.



Today is Wednesday, September the 15th, 2022. The time is 6:30 p.m.. Location- Zoom meeting room. The case is number 54-BLK365: *The Afrocentric Deck versus Joe Public Perception.* Will the witness please state his name and occupation for the record.

**Russell:** “H. Russell Smith. H is for Harold-but most everyone knows me as Russell. I’m an attorney by trade, but what you’ll gather from this, I guess I’m an artist as well- well at least I’ll claim that anyway. I’m also an entrepreneur.” (He said half laughing.)

**Rory:** “Do you promise that the testimony you give today will be the truth?” I asked.

**Russell:** “Yes. What, am I on trial?” he chuckled.  
**Rory:** “No, just your deck. Trust me– just go with me on this.”

Now Russell seemed to notice me smiling. His full gray and white beard, balding head and contemporary glasses suggested a familial respected wisdom. However, when he smiled you instantly knew this sage was acquainted with fun times as well. Mr. Smith had a black and white African mudcloth design as a virtual background -the new back design of his relaunched deck.

**Rory:** For those who don't know, what was the motivation for creating the original Afrocentric deck of cards?

**Russell:** Me and my friends would play a lot of cards together- a lot of cards. I probably could have minored in cards in college. We would mostly play poker, bid whist

**H. Russell Smith pictured with the African mudcloth designs for his relaunched deck.**

and spades. One day I just got inspired. My black friends and I would play with white-faced cards and wondered why we couldn't create a black deck of cards.

According to a 1991 article in the Lansing (Michigan ) State Journal, James' friend and soon-to-be business partner said one of their poker nights, "I'm tired of playing with cards that don't look like us". Everyone at the table laughed. The following week the men combed shops and bookstores looking for playing cards with black faces. There were none".

**Russell:** Although I do remember seeing an ad in a magazine a few years earlier for a deck that featured black people- but I never saw the actual cards. I also remember a man named John Lockhart who created a very artistically rendered poster of the King of Spades that was inspiring.

I told Russell there were at least six other decks from 1957 until the deck he produced in 1988 that featured black royalty cards. There is another deck that I'm researching that may also fall in that time frame. Of course, these early afrocentric decks predate the internet and had more or less regional impact- with the exception of the East African souvenir playing cards and the African Heritage deck by Purellann? I will address those decks in a future writing.

**Rory:** Were you classically trained as an artist?

**Russell:** No. I grew up on comic books from the 60's, 70's and 80's. Even though I never really sat down and tried to draw comic book figures, I would draw things here and there and I figured I could at least do line art drawings- so there was no real formal training. I did prefer DC Comics.

**Rory:** DC? Seriously- I should object, but I won't hold you in contempt, or hold that against you. I was a Marvel man myself. From the idea of making a deck to actual production back then had to be a huge leap. I read that you had a business partner.

**Russell:** My partner was my life-long friend James Foster. We went to high school together. He also became an attorney. We were in our early 30s when we launched our cards. I had already left the corporate world after being disenchanted with a few companies that didn't seem to want blacks to succeed- but only to assimilate. And the last place teetered on criminality- so I got out. But we won't get into that right now.

**Rory:** Sometimes, it's the spark of dissatisfaction that ignites the flame of entrepreneurship.

**Russell:** It sure does- in fact I was launching an ice cream business nearly the same time as the cards. The name of our card company "Blacks Factor," was taken in part from the cosmetic giant makeup company Max Factor. Their slogans were, "The Make-up for the Stars -- and You," and "The Make-Up Of Make-Up Artists." We



**King of Spades poster created & drawn by artist John Lockhart.**

# Blacks Factor

Logo for Blacks Factor, a play on Max Factor's makeup company name.

would jokingly say our slogan is, "We paint the faces black."

**Rory:** Nice! (I laughed a little.) I had often wondered where your company's name came from. By the way, the actual slogan on the case is, "Let us change the face of your game," (below). I really like that- Did you come up with that?

**Russell:** I can't remember if it was me or my partner James.



**Rory:** What was the research process like?

**Russell:** It was a lot of labor in those days. There was no internet or Google. I remember going to the Detroit Public Library, rifling through the card catalogs and finding books and lists of manufacturers-and making the cold calls. I found several and informed them that I wanted to create a custom deck. Brown & Bigelow was the only company to respond positively. They had an agent in the Detroit area and guided me through the process. I believe that they are out of business now.

Brown & Bigelow of St Paul, Minnesota, were printers with a division called Stancraft that produced playing cards in the U.S. from the late 1920s - 1980s. Stancraft sold brands like Hoyle, Remembrance, Kent, Trump, Nu Vue. They also had licensing agreements for a number of alcohol brands like Jack Daniels, as well as other novelty and advertising decks. B&B sold this division to USPC in 2001. B&B is still in business printing, just not playing cards. Brown & Bigelow seemed to be a good choice, as they were involved with a few other cards that featured African diaspora people. [An excellent article about the company](#) can be read in the December, 2021 edition of *Clear the Deck* by fellow member, Steve Bacon.

**Russell:** I forgot- another point of inspiration for me was from actor- comedian Robert Townsend. Townsend needed to finance and finish producing his movie *Hollywood Shuffle* himself. He put together a budget of \$100,000 primarily financed through credit cards. He was able to complete his movie, which earned about \$5 million at the box office. I thought I would do the same to finance my first run...when my credit was good.

**Rory:** Do you remember how many decks you initially made, and what the cost was?

**Russell:** I believe our initial launch was about 5000 decks at \$20,000 -so about \$4.50 a deck. That included all of the artwork, set-up and plates. Included in that \$20,000 were



The King of Spades with the balding head and white beard on a black man gave some real diversity within the royal choices that had not been artistically explored before.

approximately \$2,000- \$3,000 in extraneous costs. We also ran into extra costs as we were customizing the backs as well as the fronts-which was not yet popular. Because we were doing line art, as opposed to photographic images the plates had to be designed with 4 color separation. I would have done more colors if I had more money. I discovered that I could screen for a few more colors. For example I could make gray from the black ink, pink from red and a lighter gold color from the yellow. I left the brown the same for the skin tone. There was only a small surcharge to change from black ink to red for the back-which other printers were ready to charge a separate run fee. So of the 5,000 decks we were able to do 2,500 of both colors (red and black backs) relatively cheaply. But we still took a loss on the first run-but just wanted to get them out there.

By 1991 Blacks Factors had their cards in small shops and bookstores in Rochester, NY., East Orange, NJ., Memphis, Tennessee, Denver, Washington D.C., and Atlanta. Brown & Bigelow provided the generic gold boxes (with a glued card showing its back) for the initial run. Later in the mid 90s, is when Russell believes that the standard deck cases came about. They would

order the cellophane wrapped decks then, "manually stuff and seal the boxes," themselves.

**Russell:** I don't think I mentioned that I used to have a card in the deck as a mail order form to buy more. We were also in several gift catalogs around the nation. We took out ads in several newspapers-mostly in the midwest. Some of the ads and our story, I later found out, were duplicated in the south and some in the east.

**Rory:** That's really impressive and quite the clever investment.

**Russell:** Another cost-cutting measure was the decision to make the cards bridge size. Do you know what the difference is between the bridge size and the poker size?- about a quarter inch. Do you know why smaller bridge cards were initially created?

**Rory:** I believe that the popularity of the game of bridge attracted a number of women that typically have smaller hands.

**Russell:** That's correct. I guess we were making girl cards and didn't even know it.

It was brought to my attention that perhaps the smaller bridge-sized cards had to do with the fact that the game of bridge and certain whist games required up to 13-card hands, while poker and other similar and popular games needed fewer cards per hand. The narrower bridge cards would be easier to hold for males or females.

**Rory:** I noticed that your relaunched decks are poker sized.

**Russell:** We actually went to poker-sized decks when we achieved an agreement in principle to supply the Motor City Casino in Detroit. Unfortunately that deal fell through, but we continued to sell our new resized decks.

**Rory:** A casino- now that could have been huge! Let's go back to the black royalty faces in your deck. Were they fantasy or actual historical figures- who were they based on, or inspired by?

**Russell:** There weren't any people in particular that I modeled the actual face cards after. However, there's a little bit of a tweak on one of the cards -it's the King of Diamonds.

**Rory:** I guess this would be exhibit A? (*see beneath*) Without objection, I would like to submit for the record the King of Diamonds

**Russell:** (He chuckled, as I looked for the card in my collection.)

I was a big fan of blaxploitation movies in those days and I was trying to extort a nose on the profile that kind of looked like either Jim Brown or Frederick Douglass for the King of Spades or Diamonds- or something like that. The rest of them were all sort of out of my imagination. I had themes that I was going for with each of the different suits.

**RIGHT: Both Exhibit A (King of Diamonds) and Exhibit B (Queen of Spades).**



**ABOVE: One of the several back designs for this deck.**



With the Spades I tried to be as regally African as I could. The Queen of Spades- I suppose this would be exhibit B, has a necklace like one I saw in either Essence or Ebony magazine. I gave her a little spear. They're just finding out about African female warriors. She's wearing a bit of a traditional crown. However, I gave her some dreadlocks and braids that were still kind of new in the early 80s.

The queen of hearts has a sort of African royalty motif as well with a little modernized look. I also gave her some more modern-looking tools and weapons.

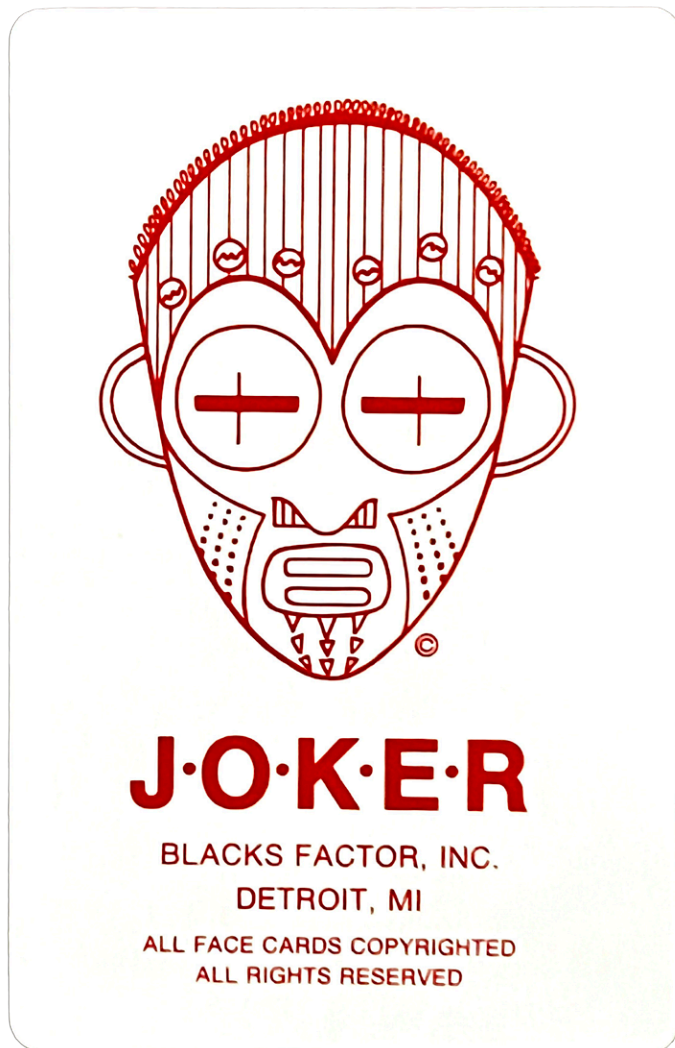
The King of Spades you can tell he's bald also with the white beard. I didn't have a white beard when I created this king (chuckle).

**Rory:** I guess you finally grew into your character. I like the king of spades with the balding head and white beard on a black man. I think that it gave some real diversity within the royal choices that had not been artistically explored before. A bald black king- nice choice.

**Russell:** Thank you. As you can see, with the Jack of Spades I gave him a ponytail that was kind of big right about that time. He also has a Superfly type of mustache. The Jack of Hearts has sort of a t-shirt on and gold chains - again, really big now. So as I reflect back on the last 30 years the design and styles have not changed a whole hell of a lot. The styles cycled through a couple times so the Jack is a little more modern. The King of Hearts is really kind of a throwback to Old European royalty- you at least got the ermine around the the sides of the plating on his chest. So you see I kept some of the conventions of traditional cards.

The last thing to note of the King of Diamonds is the white streak on the side of his head. I actually looked like that for a while. But I also got inspired by Mr. Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four.

**Rory:** Yes! The white temples are pretty cool. Reed Richards- Marvel. Need we say more?



**Exhibit D - The Joker that looks like famous basketball player, Dennis Rodman.**

**Russell:** O. K., moving to the Jokers. It is the only card that was kind of inspired by an actual person. At that time I was a really big Detroit Pistons fan and the Bad Boys. I used to have a mask that my aunt gave me when she was stationed in Africa with the state department. So I modeled the Joker from that mask and added the ears and kind of the long face after Rodman.

**Rory:** (laughing) OK, I can see that now. Wow, I guess a lot of people would call Rodman a Joker of sorts. Exhibit D for Dennis?

**Russell:** Although I didn't mark the Jokers with "big" and "little," I made one red and one black. With the newly relaunched deck, I enhanced one, the black joker with some gray shading.



**Cards of Color playing cards by artist, Melvin King.**

**Rory:** Another African diaspora deck came along a couple of years after yours that had Joker cards with no pictures or illustrations— just the words “Big Joker,” and “Little Joker,” in red and black ink. The deck was called “Cards of Color,” out of Chicago. Have you heard of them? When we played spades in the hood, we would usually write “big” and “little” on the Jokers to indicate their values.

I showed Russell the Big and Little Jokers from the Cards of Color deck.

**Russell:** I guess the Cards of Color were sort of our only active competition in a sense, but I didn’t know a lot about them. The artwork for their cards was fabulous. Clearly they had an artist that did an excellent job. Sadly, I don’t know his name.

**Rory:** That man is Melvin King.

**Russell:** Although the artwork was beautiful, they departed from certain conventions that I find useful for everyday card playing.

**Rory:** Everyday cards for everyday people. Hey Russell, I have to change my line of questioning for a moment. In making a case for black imaged playing cards- I have to ask, did you ever get any pushback, or racial attacks for a card case labeled “*Afrocentric- Featuring Black Royalty*”?

**Russell:** Actually we never really did. We initially sold to black establishments and events, like Black bookstores and festivals. Eventually we got into 150 Target stores for a brief moment- and that’s a story in itself. But I guess there was one incident I recall hearing about, where someone returned the deck back to Target after discovering the black images.

**Rory:** I wonder if that person really looked at the box cover. I forgot that the early decks were in the generic gold boxes with only the back of the card (silhouette of the African continent with the words BLACKS FACTOR) shown- and not the illustrated figures. But it’s good to know that you didn’t experience widespread racial hate for your creation. I guess you guys kinda flew under the radar before the internet.

**Russell:** It was during a time when Black consciousness was reemerging in the country, and people were seeking culturally relatable items. We filled a market niche. We were in a few local drugstore chains as well.

**Rory:** When I started collecting your Afrocentric decks, I found different backs besides the Kente cloth design. I found some with the African continent in red, black or blue. Another deck I discovered has four ladies artistically displayed- which I also own. So you did custom backs?

**Russell:** Due to the low quantities that some people were requesting, we tried to avoid doing custom backs. However, we did do decks for the





Screen captures from the 1994 television show *Living Single* featuring Queen Latifah as Khadijah, John Henton as Obie, Wakefield Jones, and Terrence C. Carter as Kyle.

NABJ (National Association of Black Journalists), Jack & Jill and one for the A. K. A. sorority. The deck with the blue African continent was for Pinochle decks that were popular in the Black community on the East coast.

**Rory:** So the deck with the four black women on the back was custom too?

**Russell:** I can't exactly remember when, but I reached out to Synthia Saint James—the acclaimed artist of Terry McMillan's *Waiting To Exhale* 1992 book cover. The book was really popular at that time. I got into a licensing agreement with Synthia and printed and sold about 5000 decks. This was before the hit movie came out.

Synthia Saint James is a mixed heritage American artist, author, educator and keynote speaker. The card back design used by Blacks Factor was based on the original painting entitled "Ensemble."

I remember getting letters from Oprah and Bill Cosby who we sent decks to. Both of them were on the rise at that time. I heard that our cards were seen on the shows *Hangin' With Mr. Cooper* and *Living Single*—twice. I tried to find those episodes.

**Rory:** Wow! I remember those sitcoms.

After the interview I was able to find the

Afrocentric decks on the show *Living Single*, season 1, episode 23 "Five Card Stud" (1994). The red and black backs with the continent of Africa were prominently featured throughout the episode (see above).

**Rory:** So your deck also had a connection to a famous movie and artist—I did not know that. But what I do know, is that your deck has been connected to a famous individual in the fashion industry who just recently passed.

**Russell:** Skip to the year 2020, when I had recently had a business posting on a Facebook page. I was contacted by Louis Vuitton in Paris. Somebody who was associated with Virgil Abloh said that Virgil wanted to use my cards in a give-away package to announce one of his world wide shows. At first I thought I was being pranked. It turned out to be legit. He remembered my deck from years ago. We worked out an agreement to use the images. We increased the size of the cards to Poker size. They paid a lump sum and gave me about 30 of the extra decks. I have about 22 of those 30 left. I heard that Virgil had only about 600 decks printed. The invitation package with playing cards contained 2 decks each. The poker-sized decks are beautiful and have metallic gold gilded edges. I guess this would be another exhibit—I can't remember where we are with that (he laughs).

**Rory:** Let's just say V, for Vuitton or Virgil—since we're near the end of the alphabet and this case.



## VIRGIL ABLOH AND THE DESIGNER'S DECK

Virgil Abloh was born in America to Ghanaian immigrants. After earning a degree in civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he went on to receive a masters in architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. His proximity to hip-hop culture was bolstered as a talented DJ. Abloh's hard work and creativity caught the attention of many and eventually landed him the highly coveted position as Louis Vuitton Men's Artistic Director and the CEO of the streetwear label Off-White. Time magazine named him as one of its 100

most influential alive. He became arguably one of the most successful black designers of our time. Given the fashion industry's racial make-up Virgil's presence made an indelible impression that has inspired many people of color around the world. Representation matters.

Abloh's blend of haute couture and streetwear made headlines with pieces created for Chadwick Boseman, Kanye West and Michael B. Jordan. When Abloh announced his Louis Vuitton SS22 show for June 2022 in Paris, France, he sent VIP, influencers, friends and family some creative invites. For the occasion, he sent



Only 300 of those invite packages  
(containing 2 decks each) were  
created and sent around the world.

several sets of board games, including beer pong sets, a puzzle and another contained dice, LV sheets (bundled like dollar bills) with two decks of cards.

It is these decks of cards that are so interesting. Abloh chose not to use the traditional white-faced court Louis Vuitton playing cards. Instead, he used Blacks Factor's Afrocentric cards that featured Black Royalty faces. Sadly, Virgil passed in November of 2021 of cancer—several months before his 2022 Summer Show.

**Rory:** Your deck has had a lasting impact. That must feel good. So, are you going to sell those extra decks? At this point they're quite valuable in the collecting world, as I'm sure you understand.

**Russell:** I may auction off some of the Louis Vuitton decks to go toward the relaunch of the new Afrocentric decks. [I'm tweaking a few functions on my website in preparation.](#)

**Rory:** Great! Let me know so that I can get a couple. Have you seen some of your old decks being auctioned off for \$35.00 and higher? How does that make you feel?

**Russell:** I have, and was pleasantly surprised to be quite honest. I never created them to be collected-but to be played with. But I guess it's good to know that as we relaunch them.

**Rory:** This seems like a good place to rest the case. **The Afrocentric deck Featuring Black Royalty** was a timely deck that proved to have had a lasting impression on the black community and the card community as well. Any collector wanting to fill a niche would be fortunate to have your card designs in their possession. Thank you for your work and testimony. I have no further questions at this time.

**Russell:** (laughing) Thank you- it's been quite a ride! Well, there is more to tell and hopefully more decks coming soon.



The cards for the invitation are Poker size with metallic gold edges.

**Rory:** To my makeshift jury- thank you for your time and attention. Please finish your drinks and think about what you've witnessed today. Deliberate if you will, and come back with a verdict of "guilty"! **The Afrocentric Deck Featuring Black Royalty** is guilty of fair cultural representation in an industry of artistry and advertisement; guilty- of inspiring people to ancestral pride, and guilty- of simply reimagining a different kind of royalty in the playing card world. On all of these counts- guilty as charged! Your opinions matter. Representation matters.

### All cards can matter.

The Afrocentric deck's value should be weighed in the scale of its cultural significance, original designs and for its numerical scarcity. If you can find an original deck or purchase a relaunched one at [blacksfactor.com](http://blacksfactor.com)-you can judge for yourself. I hope that you judge justly.

After this interview, I was very lucky and fortunate to locate and buy one of the rare and expensive invitation packages that contains two Afrocentric decks with the Louis Vuitton design on the back. Only 300 of those invite packages (containing 2 decks each) were created and sent around the world. I've got the feeling that many of those invitation recipients had never seen a departure from conventional playing cards-muchless seeing black-faced royalty on playing cards. And for that Virgil, I believe that I speak for many in our beloved card collecting communities when I say "thank you," for being an international ambassador for our industry.

As this trial concludes, I imagine the thunderous sound of hundreds of gavels hitting the wood blocks in the affirmative. However, there are more decks to be judged and decided upon; more single cards to be sentenced, more hearings to be held and more evidence to be examined in our wonderful world of playing card collecting.

~Adjourned. ♦



The Afrocentric deck is  
"Guilty" of a few things.



Lee Asher performing card magic in Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), China.

## Our Fearless Leader

# THE REAL DEAL: LEE ASHER

By Rosemary Reid | Contributor

At the same time as we celebrate 100 issues of CARD CULTURE Magazine, The Real Deal column marks its 25th installment. It seems there is no better way to celebrate these fantastic milestones than by featuring this magazine's creator and 52 Plus Joker's fearless leader, *el Presidente*, Mr. Lee Asher. Asher is a second-generation magician, born to doctor/semi-professional magician Mark Horowitz, who played an instrumental role in developing the drive, work ethic, and unbridled creativity you'll read about in this article. Living at the intersection of playing cards and magic,

Asher has spent decades fostering love and appreciation for all things playing cards on an international scale. Ripple effects from his contributions to 52 Plus Joker, historical research on cards and magic, and his custom playing card projects, will be felt for decades to come. Lee Asher is the *Real Deal*.

### 52 PLUS JOKER

Although he now serves our club as President, Asher's contributions to 52 Plus Joker began almost immediately as he walked through the



Most people are unaware that Lee Asher has spent as much time performing in front of the camera as he has directing from behind the camera (Dominican Republic 2015).

door to his first club convention in October 2009. As the youngest person in the room, it quickly became clear Asher was the missing link between the older and younger generations of playing card lovers. Since then, Asher has methodically and effectively brought the club into modernity by growing and engaging with membership, successfully pivoting and fostering a virtual club community, and acting as an international spokesperson for 52 Plus Joker.

### **GROWING & NUTURING MEMBERSHIP**

Providing value to current members so that they stay, and participate, in club activities is equally as vital as gaining new members. CARD CULTURE Magazine is one of Asher's initiatives designed to engage our community. CARD CULTURE arrives in your inbox on the 15th of every month, like clockwork, ensuring regular and consistent engagement for the past eight years. In addition to his Patent File articles each month (more on these later), Asher manages all of the volunteer writers, edits our copy, and lays out each article's photos. Now, we have 100 issues of print-quality CARD

CULTURE Magazines documenting important developments and historical events in our industry. Amazing! Through this publication, Asher has given a voice to card lovers like me and the others whose articles you read monthly. Plus, he encourages everyone who has something to share to participate in this ongoing project. Doing so fosters an inclusive community that unites our international membership. Be sure to congratulate *el Presidente* on the mammoth accomplishment of 100 issues!\*

\*Thanks to Eddie Hughlett and Alain Benoit for all of their help behind the scenes in producing CARD CULTURE with Asher every month.

### **MODERNIZING 52 PLUS JOKER**

Understanding the significance of an 'online presence' long before it became part of our vocabulary, Asher ushered 52 Plus Joker into the digital age. During our interview, he shared how modernizing 52 Plus Joker was a joint effort between him and Tom Dawson.

Asher explains, “*Old Clear the Decks share 52’s label as an ‘antique, American playing card club.’ Tom [Dawson] understood that antique, vintage, and modern collectors needed to be housed under one roof to evolve and removed the word ‘antique’ during his presidency. During my current presidency, the Chicago Playing Card Collectors Club merged with us, and I removed the word ‘America’ from our description. So it was a tag-team effort between Tom and me to create what we now have today.*” When Asher arrived on the scene, our club lost more members than we gained. Fortunately, that is no longer the case. Under Asher’s leadership today, we average twenty new members monthly and are the world’s largest playing card collectors club!

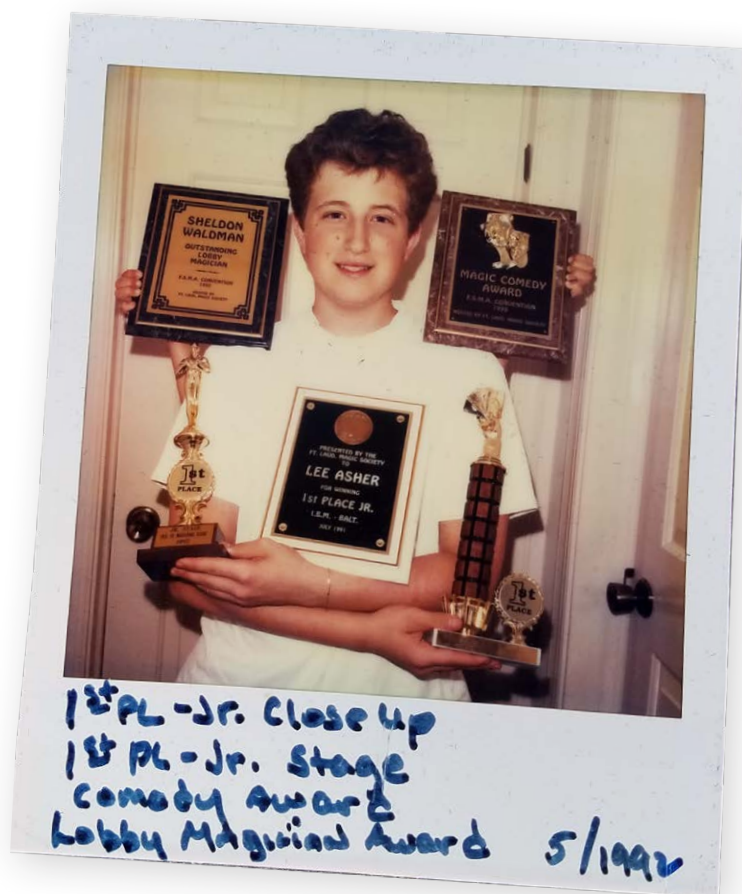
Hopefully, you are already familiar with [AskAlexander.com](http://AskAlexander.com). It’s the world’s most extensive online magic library, and your membership to 52 provides free access to this valuable online resource. Before he sat on the board, William Kalush contacted 52 Plus Joker about digitizing our club newsletters for this library, along with those from the *International Playing Card Society*, the *English Playing Card Society*, and the *Chicago Playing Card Collectors Club*. Thanks to Asher leading the charge, full files of club magazines from each are archived there, easily found by a keyword search from future researchers.

Navigating our club community through the recent global pandemic by pivoting to a virtual convention tested Asher’s leadership skills. He rose to the challenge like an ambitious card to the top of the deck. Applying lessons from his years performing in front of the crowd and directing from behind the cameras, Asher assembled a team that produced a professional quality, virtual playing card convention, complete with guest speakers, a virtual auction, and our Academy Awards Show - *The Diamonds*. Incidentally, the Diamond Awards are the brainchild of Asher and Don Boyer, and are now coveted titles for playing card artists and producers. You may be surprised to learn that only a small fraction of 52 Plus

Joker club members attend the yearly in-person conventions, so the virtual convention presented a new opportunity to connect. To continue including all club members even when we returned in person for our October 2022 convention, Asher facilitated a live-streamed final evening and Awards Show. (**Side Note:** The live stream is now a tradition, so we’ll see you on the Red Carpet in Cleveland this October).

## INTERNATIONAL SPOKESPERSON

Did you know that many club presidents are not world-renowned experts in their club’s subject? Crazy, right? Asher’s resume is so dense it’s easy to forget he’s been an award-winning magician since the age of 13, toured the world several times lecturing on his unique sleight of hand, and continues to create some of the world’s most incredible magic with playing cards. In fact, Asher was asked to speak about



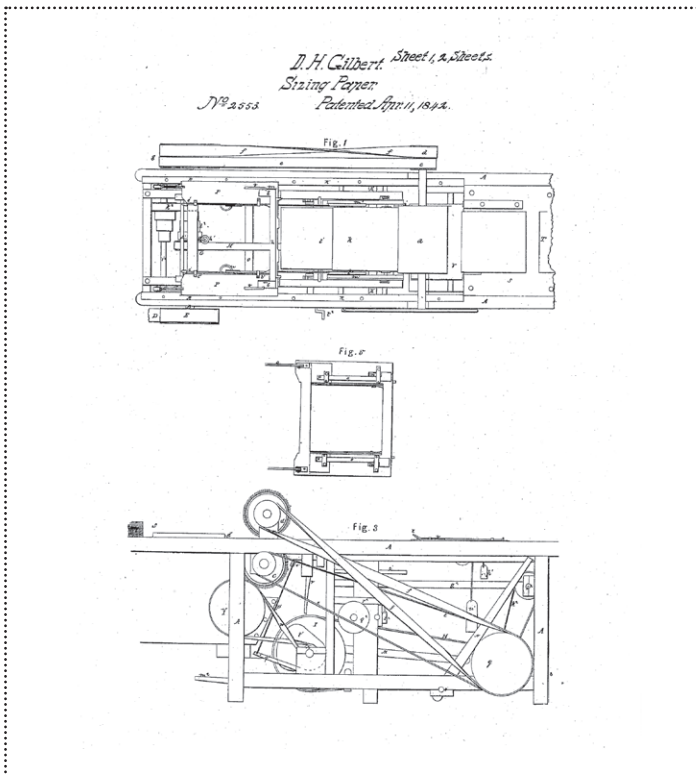
**A decorated winner at age 15, rumour has it the thought of competing against Asher proved too much for his competition, most of whom dropped out last minute.**



the history of playing cards at 2022's Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques (FISM), the most prestigious global gathering of magicians. As a result, thousands of magicians who may not realize the depth that exists in the playing card niche had the chance to appreciate and fall in love with their favourite magic medium in a new way. With Asher at the helm, we welcome more playing card lovers to our ranks and continue to shrink the gap between generations of collectors.

## HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Discovering how important pieces of history connect and their role in shaping our present-day is one method for understanding the world around us. Passionate historians, like Asher, are collectors of information. He has mapped out stretches of playing card and magic history previously undiscovered using available digital resources. Asher continues to build the most vital foundation possible for future generations of researchers and historians.



Among Lee Asher's favourite patent finds is the 1842 David H. Gilbert patent for sizing and gluing playing cards. It took him months of searching to discover it.

## NEWSPAPERS.COM

In the 'Members Area' on our website, have you noticed the clickable option '[Card Newspaper Clippings](#)'? It takes you to Newspapers.com, the largest online newspaper archive currently available. Specifically, you'll find over 2,000 articles digitally clipped and labeled, one by one, over several years. They are easily searchable by keyword and get referenced regularly. Believe it or not, hundreds of articles in these clippings mention previously undiscovered past female magicians. That fact alone warrants an entire *Real Deal* article! Go have a look, and notice that each one is credited to Asher, beginning in December 2018 and continuing to the present day. You'll even find the clipping where he pushes American playing card history back by a few years. Impressive!

## THE PATENT FILES

Unless you're a new reader, you've spent years appreciating Asher's Patent Files every month. Did you know that only a fraction of the patents he's found get shared in this magazine? Since his obsession started, Asher has discovered over 600 (!) playing card-related patents. He searches for them through every available resource, then organizes what he finds by date and name, beginning in the 1830s and continuing to the modern day. When viewed sequentially, they visually represent the innovation and development of American playing cards over the last two hundred years.

Notably, his work unearthing patent files also informs the history of card magic. With the delivery of his FISM speech, Asher became the first historian to acknowledge that what magicians refer to as the Modern Era of card magic is a direct result of advancements in playing card production technologies. Shortly after FISM, the New England Magic Collectors Association (NEMCA) asked Asher to deliver his lecture at their bi-annual Yankee Gathering. World-renowned magician and expert historian Jim Steinmeyer was in the audience. Steinmeyer later shared, "I've never heard anyone connect



Lee Asher was the senior magic consultant on JSBC's *Amazing Magicians* the world's largest and most expensive magic television series ever produced. Filming took place in Nanjing, China.

*playing card production and the development of card magic. It makes perfect sense!"*

How do playing card production advancements influence card magic?

Improvements in automation methods, the shift to rounded corners followed by the punch machine, higher quality paper/finishes, and the inclusion of indices all helped set the stage for an explosion of magic innovation. In his lecture, Asher explained that, *"From the 1800s to the 1900s, printing methods are evolving, making cards more consistent to use and thus easier to perform with."*

*But more than bettering sleight-of-hand moves, this period also ushered in the rise of playing card manipulation acts worldwide. Cards were high-quality enough now that you could stand on stage, amazing your audience by fanning, springing, spreading, scaling, and back-palming cards had arrived. Undoubtedly, manipulation has become a significant breakthrough for card magic.*

*Plus, all this increase in popularity would set the stage, no pun intended, for the next century of card manipulators who would dub themselves flourishers and cardists.*

*As I sifted through the research, all I could think to myself was, "Would any of this have manifested without higher-grade playing cards?"*

Thorough in his work, Asher recently published *Lee Asher's Card Magic & Playing Card History Timeline*. It's a 104-page book of hand-picked citations that begin in ancient Egypt and continue to modern times. It melds magic and playing card history into a singular timeline, showing important events and innovations occur concurrently rather than in isolation. [The book is a new modern classic](#) deserving of a space on the bookshelves of magicians, card collectors, and print technology enthusiasts.



**Asher's book is a selection of hand-picked citations about playing cards and card magic that takes us from ancient Egypt to modern times.**

Asher's Newspapers.com clippings, carefully sourced patent files, and *Card Magic & Playing Card History Timeline* are a tome of vetted information. He single-handedly discovered thousands of articles, unearthed hundreds of patents, and produced a timeline of significant moments throughout playing card and magic history. Tom Dawson is surely smiling down from above.

## HIS CUSTOM PLAYING CARDS

Over the years, Asher has brought several playing card projects to market. He's released them privately through his website and mailing list, as well as publicly through platforms like Kickstarter.

You might be familiar with some of his work, including popularizing the notorious Jerry's Nugget Casino Playing Cards, consulting on Conjuror Community's club deck, partnering with Rosemary Reid on the Sisterhood Playing Card Project, and working with Bill Kalush to

produce 52 Plus Joker's club decks each year. Asher has also consulted behind the scenes for numerous other custom-playing card projects.

Did you know that before the projects listed above and long before Tom Dawson chose him as a successor for president, Asher produced his own deck of custom playing cards from scratch? They're called the Fournier 605s and have been described as *"The highest quality deck that has been produced in the last two decades."* Fournier 605s even come insured by Lloyd's of London, the largest insurance company in the world! Asher shares that when attending his first ever 52 Plus Joker convention, he carried *"a deck of 605s and a deck of Jerry's Nuggets. I didn't know much besides what I learned through producing those two projects and never could have predicted becoming an authority on playing cards and their history."*

When asked about magic, Asher shares that, *"Ten percent of magicians create magic for the other 90%."* Perhaps we can say something similar



Lee Asher's 605 Signature Series playing cards are manufactured by the famed Spanish maker Fournier and insured by Lloyd's of London.

about the playing card industry. A relatively small number of playing card designers and producers seem to create custom card decks for the larger world to enjoy. In both industries, Asher falls into that ten percent. When narrowing down your collecting niche, including Asher's projects is wise. Pinpointing the exact moment they turn into highly valued collectibles is ineffable, though it seems to happen soon after Lee Asher's name appears.

Hopefully, it's not too disappointing to learn that Asher's Fournier 605s have just been declared 'sold out,' with no reprint planned. Is that the sound of hearts breaking? Don't despair! Asher's illustrious career as a world-class playing card expert is in its prime, with many exciting projects on the way.

During Lee Asher's years on the board and as president of 52 Plus Joker, our membership has tripled, our treasury has doubled, and our international presence as one of the world's best playing card collecting clubs has been cemented. Through his ongoing research, Asher continues building our database - our collection - of information. The decks of cards he has brought to market, and his support for creative, out-of-the-box initiatives in both the playing card and magic industries worldwide, will be felt and appreciated for generations to come.

Accomplishments like these are only possible under the leadership of individuals who understand their role in the bigger picture. Leaders also must lean on their own support network from time to time, and Asher is grateful to share his life's work with his wife of twelve years, and friend of over twenty years, Christina Galonska. There can be no doubt that Lee Asher, *El Presidente*, is the *Real Deal*. ♦

**Congratulations to everyone who has helped produce 100 wonderful issues of CARD CULTURE Magazine!**



Lee Asher and his beautiful wife Christina live happily ever after in Toronto, Canada.



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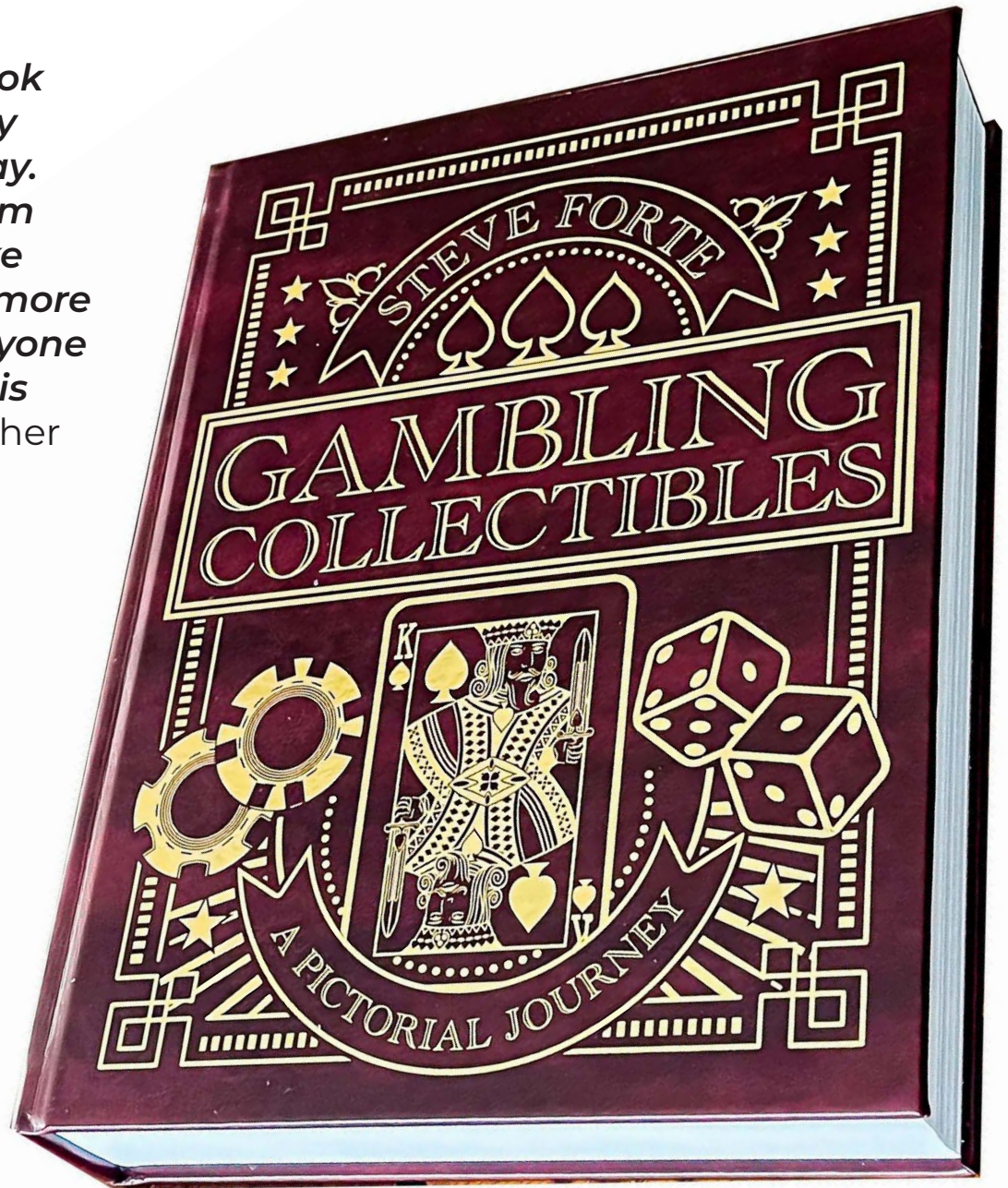
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in your language

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The PCCS Hyper Sphere. Our Hyper Sphere is based on Heinz Strobl's original origami design. Strobl's structures come from paper strips folded into squares. Once transposed, these designs fit the PCCS technique, and I found the results fit perfectly.

## Card Art

# PLAYING CARD CUSTOM SHOP

By Greg Loschen | Contributor

**W**e've covered many great card artists here at CARD CULTURE, so this seems the perfect time to spotlight some of my original work. Playing Card Custom Shop, or PCCS for short, is a small business I started in 2011. PCCS has released several original pieces of card art that are also functional pieces of furniture.

The company began when I discovered a unique technique for folding cards together. While working behind the counter of a magic shop, I found a big stash of old and used playing cards. I also subsequently came across Harry Eng's "The

Cube," in the Art of Astonishment book series by Paul Harris. This influenced me to start building little boxes out of playing cards. To say I was hooked is an understatement. If you remember, we covered Harry Eng's Impossible Bottles in the first year of this article. Harry contributed unique concepts and ideas for card art and magic for those unaware.

I researched Harry's work and found a similar technique used in origami, which I began to expand upon. The more I integrated these new ideas into my work, the more I realized

The PCCS New Era Card Star made from USGCC-made Bicycle cards. This card star has an inner chamber for stashing and storing small items. It also differs from George Hart's version or any other type of design published.





The Suicide Kings Coffee Table. This is one of the earliest concepts I developed for PCCS, and we still use it today. The table's design is so structurally sound it works incredibly well. Without a doubt, it makes a fantastic conversation piece in any setting.



♥ ♣ ♠ ♦ ♥  
*Playing Card  
Custom Shop* ♠ ♣ ♠ ♣ ♠

The design that changes the game is the Meta Case. These are display cases for playing cards made out of playing cards. Hence, the name Meta. Carry magic props, playing cards, or anything that fits your heart's desire. Many styles are available, and the first one was a commission piece.



that I had never seen these combinations of techniques. The real A-HA moment came when I connected several boxes to create larger structures. The vast majority of card artists using similar ideas hadn't even come close to the sturdiness and durability I could achieve with the combination of techniques I was utilizing.

For those interested, the items made by PCCS are for sale online. We have also created many commission projects over the years. It took over four years to find suitable materials to coat and protect the sculptures and furniture.

All the items made by PCCS are water-resistant and will last a lifetime.

As you can see, these concepts aren't something I only research and write about. These are the roots of playing card art. I hope you've enjoyed the art we cover and will continue to discuss here in CARD CULTURE. ♦

**For more information and to stay updated with PCCS, [check us out on Instagram](#) or [visit the official website](#).**



## LONGLEY WEBSITE LAUNCHES

By Dave Seaney | Contributor

You have most likely heard stories about the Longley Brothers. In the Hochman the Longleys take up a number of pages about the playing card companies they created or were thought to be connected to. At that time, 40 years ago, the information available was limited. I have now greatly expanded that story and untangled those connections with new information from a Longley descendant and family historian.

I have not answered all the questions, but I believe I have answered most. Such as.....

- *Did Servetus Longley sell his card company to Russell and Morgan to start their business?*
- *Did Andrew Dougherty have anything to do with Card Fabrique's Eagle Cards?*
- *Did Samuel Cupples produce his own Eagle Cards? How many card companies did the Longleys really have in Chicago?*
- *What went wrong with Paper Fabrique in Basic City?*

- *Why did Elias Longley's "secret cipher" get him imprisoned?*
- *Why does Abner Longley Sr. have a city park named after him in Indiana?*
- *Which Longley brother was a long-time Communist?*
- *Why do so many Globe and Card Fabrique cards look alike?*
- *Why was a sign about Elias and his wife erected in Cincinnati recently?*
- *What was the strange accident that killed Septimius Longley?*
- *What was the 4-11-44 Globe Playing Card all about?*

I'm sure there is more family history here than you may want to know. But, the Longleys have impacted history in many other areas than playing cards. ♦

[The new website about the Longleys is found here.](#)



## WHAT'S IN YOUR CARAT CASE TODAY?

By Sherman Tsao | Contributor

### BICYCLE HERITAGE SERIES PLAYING CARDS

The Bicycle Heritage Design Series, released in 2011, features four historic playing card designs that have been out of print for eighty years or more:

**Cupid Back (No 21)** – First introduced in 1894, the Cupid Back went through a few iterations before it was discontinued in 1943, though since then, it has been revived a few times for limited printings. The Cupid back has grass under the wheels and is referred to as the Sod back by collectors. Around 1896, the grass was replaced by the crosshatch pattern, which has been used ever since.

**Emblem Back (No. 28)** - Introduced ca. 1892 and discontinued in 1943, the Emblem Back is a simple, yet elegant one-way design that was



ABOVE: The Bicycle Heritage Series 4 Deck Set produced and printed by the United States Playing Card Company in a Carat X4 Four Deck Case.

never revised or adapted to be symmetrical. A curious aspect of Emblem is that while the design is decidedly one way, the background graphic is almost perfectly symmetrical.

**Model No. 1 (No. 46)** - Introduced in 1895 and discontinued in 1907, the Model No. 1 backs are one of the Bicycle back designs that featured the League of American Wheelmen logo, which was a bicycle wheel with 3 wings. As the three wings makes the design one-way, the Model back was updated to include a four-winged wheel as the central motif, which became the Model No. 2

**Safety Back (No. 65)** - Introduced in 1892 and discontinued in 1943, but is another design that was revived for a few limited printings since.

One thing to note about this series, as well as the Heritage Series from 2012 released by T11 and USPCC, is the numerical designation on the side of each tuck, which corresponds to the number assigned to each design in Mrs. Ruth Robinson's 1955 pamphlet for Bicycle Card Collectors.

Special [thanks to Joseph Pierson and his incredibly informative website](#), which is where most of the facts in this post are from. If you are interested in learning more about vintage Bicycle decks, you should be following Joe & check out his amazing website.

[Repost from Sherman Tsao's Instagram account.](#) ♦



**A set of Bicycle Heritage Series playing cards.**

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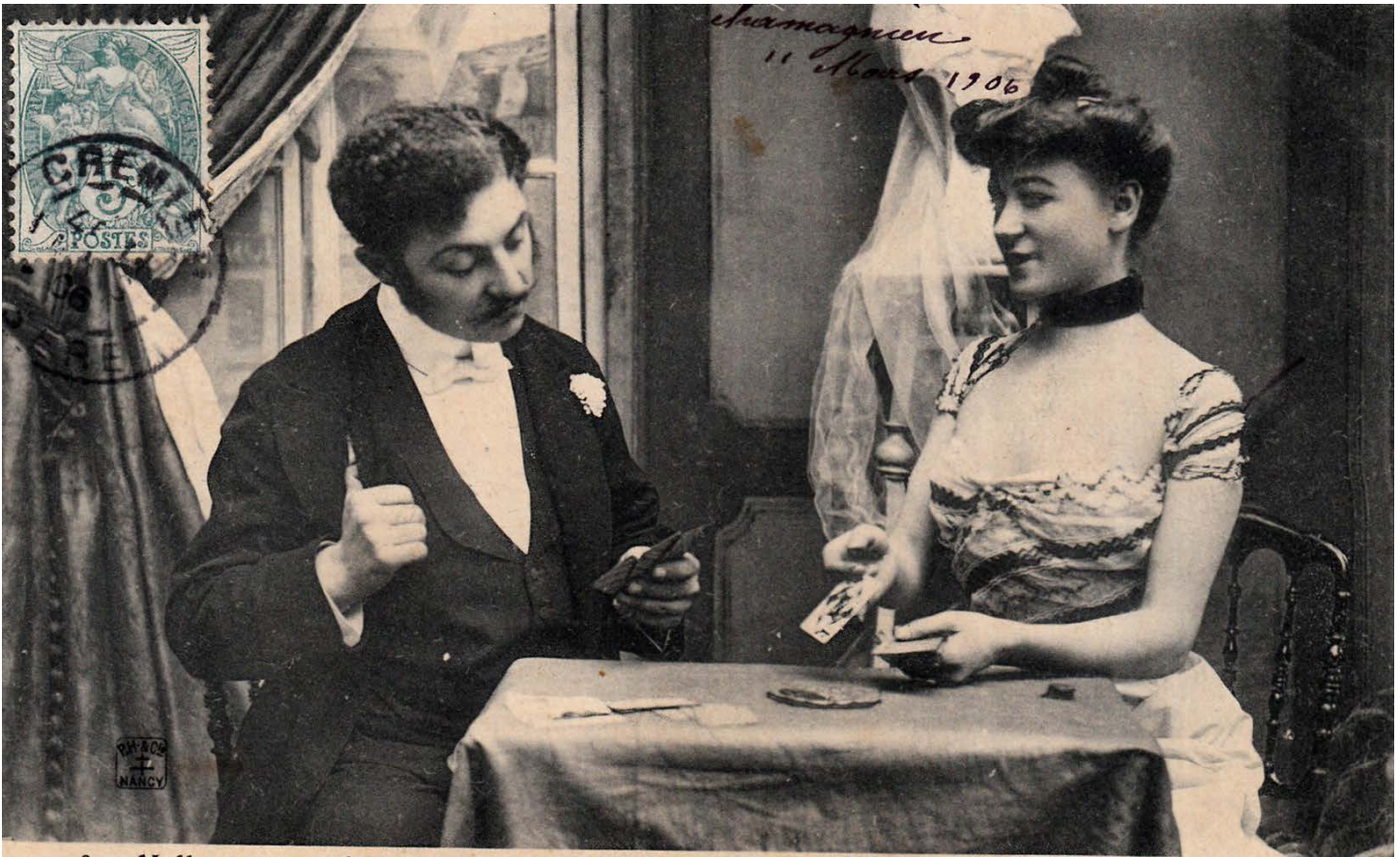
## MORE CARD-THEMED PLAYING CARD POSTCARDS

By Alex Clays | Contributor



1 — Malheureux au jeu, heureux en ménage.

ELLE. — Pique, carreau, trèfle, je gagne !...



2 — Malheureux au jeu, heureux en ménage.

Lui. — Je n'ai pas d'atout, ma compagne.



3 — Malheureux au jeu, heureux en ménage.

ELLE. — Banco ! votre mise a sauté !





REPUBLICQUE FRANCAISE  
POSTES  
10

805

AS de CŒUR : Bonnes Nouvelles





AS de CŒUR : Bonnes nouvelles .



805


**D**AME de TRÈFLE : Femme qui vous aime





804

GROS

 VALET de TRÈFLE : Mariage prochain .



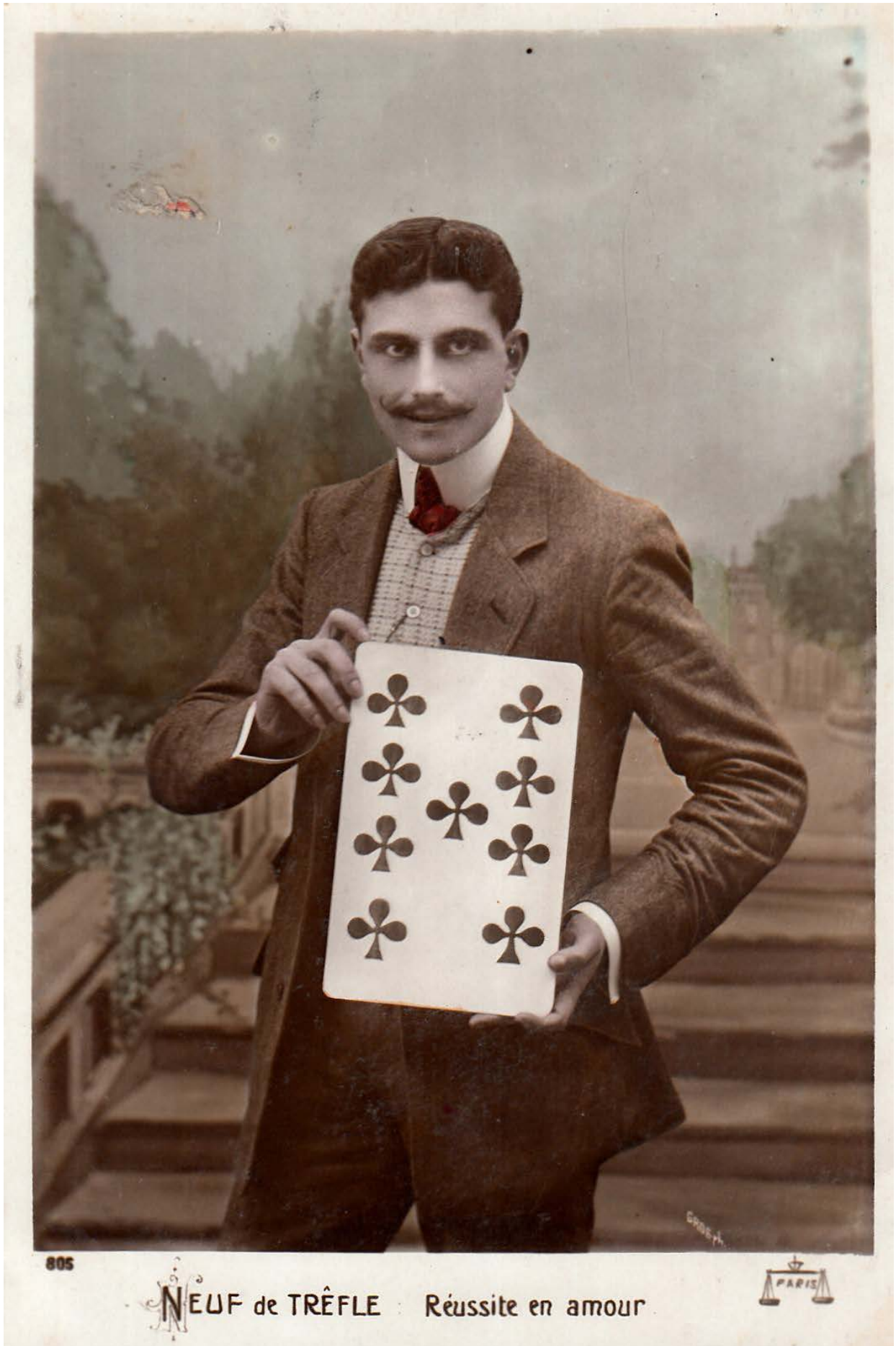


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GROSCH



AS de TRÈFLE : Argent..

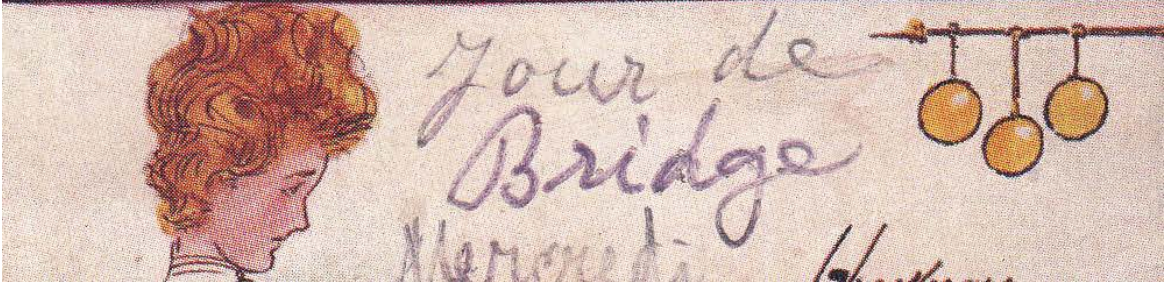


805

NEUF de TRÉFLE Réussite en amour











Auf der Insel, der Monarchen  
Lebt man in Saus und Braus!  
Nachts kann man gemütlich schnarchen,  
Tags, spielt man Karten blos!.....

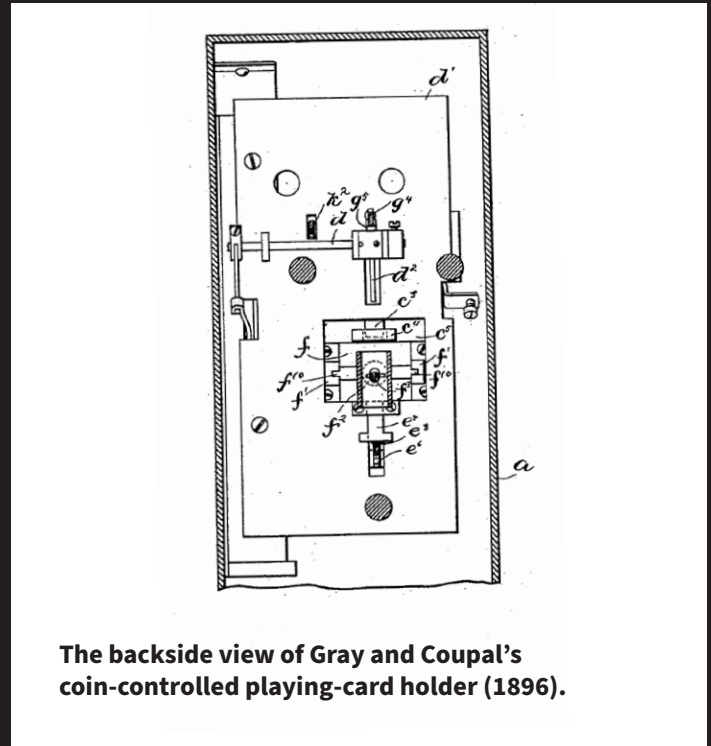


# COIN CONTROLLED PLAYING CARD HOLDER

by Lee Asher | Editor-in-Chief

A few years before the turn of the 20th century, two Bostonians invented a novel way to profit from allowing people to rent cards from a dispenser. Interestingly, little to no information about the creators or their inventions is found. All we have is the patent.

The 1896 paperwork states, “the arrangement being such that upon the insertion of a coin a holder containing a pack of cards is unlocked from the casing of the machine, while upon the return of the holder with the pack of cards contained in it into the casing the holder is locked and a second coin deposited in the machine with the coin which caused the unlocking of the holder is delivered to the operator, who is thus given an inducement to return the cards to their proper place, the said second coin setting the apparatus so that the next coin inserted will unlock the cardholder.” How fun would it be to bring this machine back to life? ♦



The backside view of Gray and Coupal’s coin-controlled playing-card holder (1896).

JOSEPH COUPAL, OF WINCHESTER, AND LUKE E. GRAY, OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, ASSIGNORS OF ONE-THIRD TO JOSEPH COUPAL, TRUSTEE, OF WINCHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS.

## COIN-CONTROLLED PLAYING-CARD HOLDER.

SPECIFICATION forming part of Letters Patent No. 573,810, dated December 22, 1896.

Application filed April 16, 1896. Serial No. 537,750. (No model.)

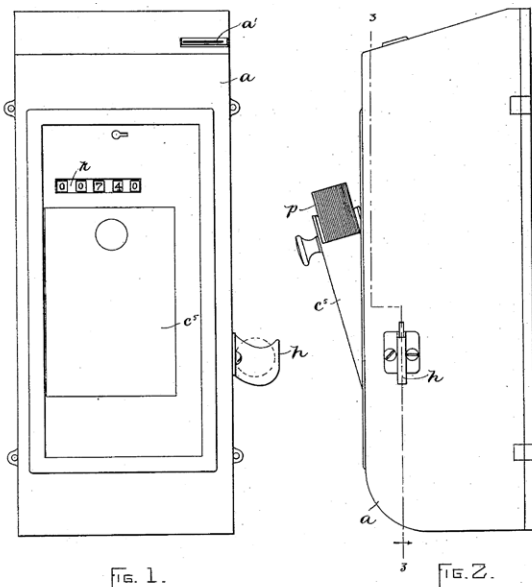


FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

APPLICATION PATENTED  
ON DECEMBER 22nd, 1896  
[PATENT NO. US573810](#)  
(Boston, Massachusetts)

WITNESSES: A.D. Harrison and  
A.D. Adams

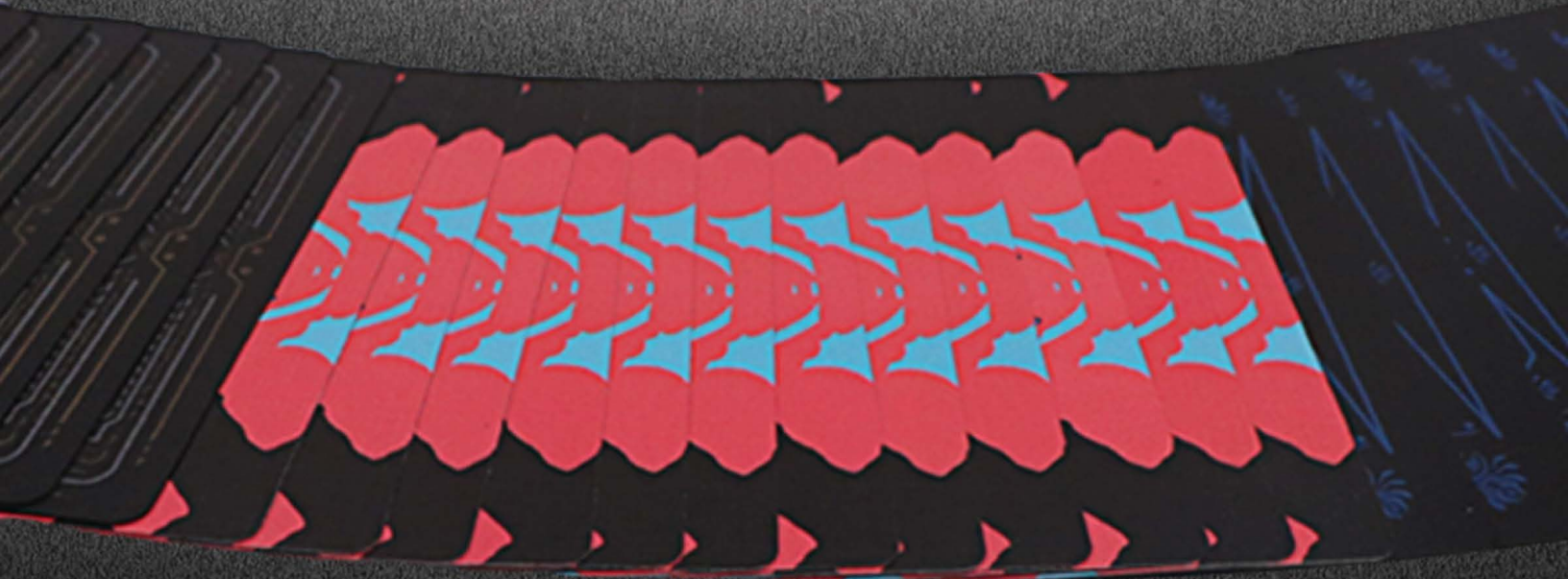
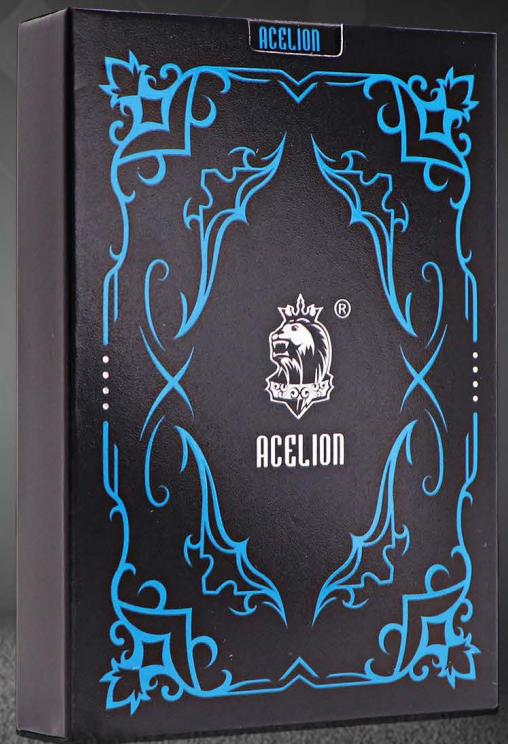
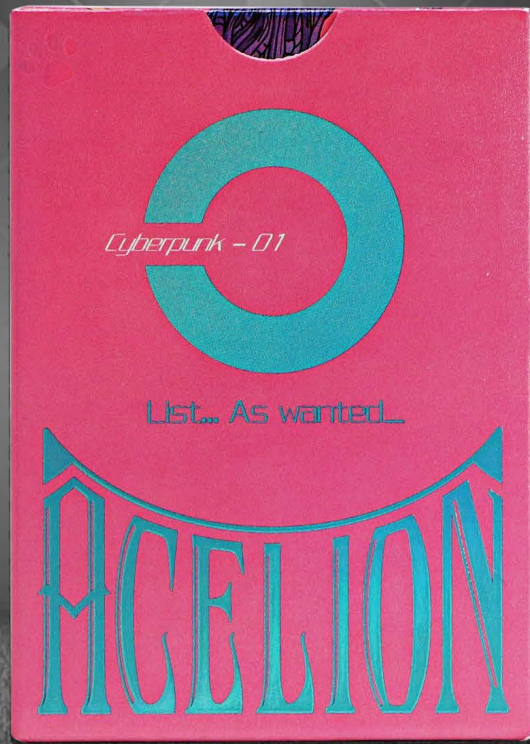
INVENTORS:  
J. Coupal  
L. E. Gray  
by Wright & Bennett  
Attors.

WITNESSES:  
A. D. Harrison.  
A. D. Adams

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- 300+ SIZES OF CUSTOM ART TEMPLATES
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## DECORATED CARD BACKS

By Paul Bostock | Contributor

Unearthed from **CLEAR THE DECKS - Vol. 32, No. 3, September 2018 (pg. 4)**

**D**ecorated card backs are essentially an English addition to the standard design. For more than 400 years from their origins and until about 1840, cards had nothing at all on the back – so it was simply ‘card-colored’, which usually meant somewhere between pale ivory and beige. Occasionally, cards were stamped with a regular pattern, or had a layer of colored paper on the back.

Card backs are so simple that we have to ask: why did this idea take so long to happen? Before the 1830s, the problem was that the manufacturers did not have a printing technology that could reproduce anything more interesting.

The pioneer was Thomas De La Rue, who learned printing as a newspaper apprentice in the Channel Islands, and then moved to London.

De La Rue was an entrepreneurial spirit, and realised that making playing cards was a huge opportunity as the tax on cards was falling and card games were gaining popularity beyond gambling games.

In 1832, De La Rue obtained a patent to manufacture cards using lithography. All the other card makers had wooden blocks to print the outlines and stencils for adding color.

In other words, beyond inventing the card back, De La Rue revolutionised playing card making, taking it out of the artisans’ workshops and into fully manufactured production. ♦

[Click Here To READ THE FULL Bostock ARTICLE found in Clear the Decks Vol. 32 No. #3.](#)

THE QUEEN OF SPADES IS  
LOST, SO HE USES A  
SNAPSHOT OF HIS  
WIFE!



The joker in this situation is that the nearest store, only ten minutes away, has a fine selection of snappy, new U. S. Playing Cards. Incidentally, aren't you about due to treat the boys to new decks? ♠ Bridge,

poker, pinochle, rummy, hearts—they're all more fun with fresh, clean cards. Whatever price you pay, your top value is one of the many popular brands made by The United States Playing Card Company.

How long since you've  
bought new cards?



The  
quality favorites,  
wherever you live,  
are among  
these 6 brands

WIDE \* OR NARROW, BRIDGE-SIZE  
(CONGRESS: NARROW, BRIDGE-SIZE ONLY)