

Alan Truscott, Times Bridge Editor Since 1964 Dies at 80

Alan Truscott, the contract bridge columnist of The New York Times for the last 41 years, whose lifelong profession grew out of the card game he learned as a British schoolboy in an air-raid shelter during the London blitz, died yesterday at his summer home in the Adirondacks. He was 80 and he lived in the Bronx.



The New York Times
Alan Truscott in a 1964 photo.

The cause was cancer, said his stepdaughter Katherine Hayden Thurston. A tournament player, a teacher and an author as well as a columnist, he became The Times's bridge editor on Jan. 1, 1964, succeeding Albert H. Morehead, The Times's only other bridge editor. Mr. Morehead began the column as a weekly feature in 1935, and it became daily in 1959. By 2000, Mr. Truscott estimated, his byline had appeared in this newspaper at least 12,000 times.

He traveled the world, filing articles on the progress of major tournaments. But most of his bylines were over his column, which was an artfully constructed puzzle involving a bridge deal, with the four hands shown along with the bidding and a description and analysis of the play, a form that has varied little since modern contract bridge evolved in the 1930's. Readers could cover the bidding and try to guess it; then they could try to figure out how they would play the contract, whose solution was rarely straightforward.

While many of the deals that interested him were taken from the world's best players and involved advanced bidding technique, Mr. Truscott often liked to begin with a digression that put the reader in a comfortable chair in someone's living room:

"Bridge can be played and enjoyed by the very young and the very old. An example of the latter, with some unusual features, takes place every Wednesday afternoon in Wyckoff, N.J. It is exclusively for retired men, a sex restriction that would be barred in tournament play, and three of the best players are nonagenarians. Partnerships are formed randomly in order of arrival. Results are distributed by e-mail an hour or two after the game.

"Joe MacDougall reports the diagramed deal in which two of the nonagenarians, Murray Socolof and Quentin Wiest, sat North and South. North was full of the optimism that afflicts many at the extreme end of the age spectrum, and raised his partner's one no-trump opening bid to game. Theoretically, this had no chance, barring a ridiculous lead of the club queen."

Mr. Truscott was executive editor for all six editions of *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, a thick compendium of bidding, play and defense, player biographies, tournament records, rules, bibliographies and just about everything else involving the game. Mr. Truscott also wrote books classifying all of the game's simple and complex bidding systems, a task something like trying to classify all the world's street signs.

Mr. Truscott also liked backgammon, puzzles and stories of little-known people with a profound impact on history. At his death, he had been working on a book about the major changes that would have resulted from minor changes in statesmen's actions. In 1986, at age 61, he ran in and finished the New York City Marathon.

Mr. Truscott and Dorothy Hayden, who later became his wife, played a major role in uncovering the most famous of all bridge scandals. During a world championship match in 1965 in Buenos Aires against the British team of Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro, the American expert B. Jay Becker noticed what he thought were unusual finger movements by his opponents. He mentioned this to his playing partner, Mrs. Hayden. Eventually he, Mrs. Hayden and Mr. Truscott, who was covering the tournament for *The Times*, determined to their satisfaction that Reese and Schapiro were using a finger code to signal the number of hearts in their hands: when they held their cards, one finger behind them meant

one heart, two fingers meant two hearts, and so on. Long heart suits were supposedly indicated by spread fingers.



Hall of Fame member Dorothy Truscott with Alan Truscott, winner of the Blackwood Award.

The British captain suspended Reese and Schapiro, who denied everything. Later investigations led to opposite decisions by the British Bridge League (acquittal) and the World Bridge Federation (guilty). The incident, which was never fully resolved, helped lead to the introduction of table screens at major tournaments, placed between partners to deter even the suspicion of illegal signaling.

Mr. Truscott was born April 16, 1925, in London. He learned to play bridge in an air-raid shelter during the blitz while attending Whitgift School in Croydon. From 1944 to 1947 he was an officer in the Royal Navy. He graduated in 1951 from Oxford, where he was chess champion for four years and where, he said, he "played chess and bridge seriously and did a little work on the side." He represented [Britain](#) three times - 1951, 1958 and 1961 - in the European bridge championships, winning in 1961. In 1962, his team finished third in the world championships. He moved to the [United States](#) in 1962. He married Mrs. Hayden in 1972.

Mr. Truscott's contributions to bridge were varied and prodigious. He served as secretary of the British Bridge League from 1957 to 1962. As a player, he represented the United States in world mixed pairs six times from 1970 to 1990, along with other national and international appearances.

He invented the Truscott Card, a device to prevent seating errors in team play. He was the author of several bidding conventions. One of his most significant areas of strategy was in the theory of restricted choice - knowing when to assume that a player had made a move because his cards had forced him to do it.

Mr. Truscott wrote many books, including "The Great Bridge Scandal," about the 1965 Reese-Schapiro incident; "On Bidding," written with Phillip Alder; "Contract Bridge for Beginners and Intermediate Players"; "The Bidding Dictionary"; "Practical Bridge"; "Bridge From First Principles"; "Master Bridge by Question and Answer"; "Basic Bridge in Three Weeks"; and, with his wife, Dorothy Truscott, "Teach Yourself Basic Bidding" and "The New York Times Bridge Book: An Anecdotal History of the Development, Personalities, and Strategies of the World's Most Popular Card Game."

Besides his stepdaughter Katherine of Cambridge, Mass., and his wife, Mr. Truscott is survived by 2 sons from his first marriage, Philip, of New York, and Fraser, of London; a daughter from his first marriage, Frances Collins of London; two other stepdaughters, Margaret Cooke of Celebration, Fla., and Bobette Thorsen of Lititz, Pa.; four grandchildren; and 10 stepgrandchildren.

MICHAEL POLLAK. Published: September 5, 2005

Correction Appended :

Because of an editing error, an obituary on Monday about Alan Truscott, the contract bridge editor of The New York Times, misspelled the given name of a stepdaughter. She is Catherine Hayden Thurston, not Katherine.