

The 7♥ Gallery

By Pietro Campanile



This may come as a shock to most of you but I feel that this is right time for me to come out of the closet and publicly confess to my addiction. Other people may collect stamps, coins, matchboxes, old books, well I have a much less expensive and perhaps unique hobby: I collect bridge hands. Yes, you read that right: bridge hands. Not just any hand, you understand, but those which have some historic or artistic significance and have made a definite contribution to my enjoyment of the game. For instance, I have neatly filed away the legendary 7♣ hand which gave the Blue Team their win in the 1975 Bermuda Bowl (the one bid without the ♣K and which needed specifically ♣Kx onside for it to make), but also the first hand I played with Migry when serendipity struck and we happened to meet in an online bridge game (and the rest is history...). Let me take you through a guided tour of my collection. We shall start from one of my favorites: the Seven Hearts Gallery, I hope you will find it interesting.

Here in this corner we have one of the oldest specimens in my collection: a hand from the 19th century belonging to the shady world of cardsharps who would take advantage of unwary whist and, later, bridge players by giving them a chance too good to refuse. Imagine yourselves leisurely traveling on one of the picturesque steamboats which used to criss-cross the Mississippi; it is hot, the day goes on slowly and while looking around for something to do, you spot a table where four distinguished looking gentlemen are playing money bridge. You approach them and ask to kibitz, they nod and you pull up a chair to observe their play. A few minutes later one of them begs off and you are asked if you would care to fill in. Naturally you oblige, after all they did not seem to be such good players

and you are looking forward to teaching them a thing or two about the game. As expected, your superior skill slowly starts to tell and your winnings start piling up at a steady rate. After an hour or so, one of the gentlemen suggests increasing the stakes to "give them a sporting chance to recoup their losses". You agree and next thing you know, the Gods seem to reward your cavalier gesture by dealing you this monster:

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♠ -
♥ AKQJ109
♦ AKQJ
♣ AKQ
  
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You could open 7♥, but what is the fun in that? So you cunningly decide to go slowly and start with 2♣, lefty interferes with 2♠, partner doubles and naturally you remove the double to 7♥. Lefty shakes his head and doubles and you redouble with gusto, chuckling to yourself. Before leading, lefty loudly doubts your mental sanity and dares you to double the odds. Despite feeling a little sorry for the guy, not only you agree to that but you challenge him to quadruple them!! The hand is now worth an awful lot of money but you are still very confident as the predictable lead of the ♠A hits the table. Alas you have just joined the long list of people who have fallen into the trap of the "Mississippi heart hand" for this is the whole devilish layout:

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♠ 95432
♥ -
♦ 1098
♣ 109876
♠ AKQJ106
♥ 8765432
♦ -
♣ -
♠ 87
♥ -
♦ 765432
♣ J5432
♠ -
♥ AKQJ109
♦ AKQJ
♣ AKQ
  
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No matter what you do, you will only be able to take your six top trumps and the sum of money needed to pay off a penalty of seven redoubled undertricks will make your trip an unforgettable one!

For some strange reason, 7♥ appears to be the choice contract of the "less-honest" among us since it also figures in another "swindle" hand from the same period, but this time it is the defender who is well and truly fixed. You are dealt

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♠ 92
♥ J97543
♦ K854
♣ 9
  
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Your partner opens 1♠ and the bidding soon spirals out of control until your opponents land in a seemingly preposterous 7♥ which of course you double with conviction. South's redouble closes the auction, which would usually have proceeded along the lines detailed below (remember that Blackwood had not been invented yet):

West	North	East YOU	South
1♠	Dbl	Pass	2♦
3♣	Dbl	3♠	4♥
4♠	5♥	Pass	6♥
Pass	7♥	Dbl !!	Rdbl
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Your partner leads the ♠K and the dummy is strong but nowhere near strong enough to justify his incredible bid, only holding ♥AK2 of trumps. You already start counting the undertricks they will have to concede but a few minutes later your smile has turned into a grimace. 7♥ redoubled and made!!



The start of the “Battle of the Century”: the players from left to right are Oswald Jacoby, Ely Culbertson, his wife Josephine and Sidney Lenz

Once we play the ♥3, West is in dire straits: if he pitches a diamond, then we can cash ♦A and a diamond which will again force him to relinquish control in one of the black suits and concede us the thirteenth trick. A swifter fate awaits him if he pitches a black card as that will immediately promote two tricks for us. As most of you have guessed, the technique we have used this time is a repeated squeeze.

Let us go forward a few more years and turn the spotlight on the “Bridge Battle of the Century” as the Culbertson-Lenz match was described. The challenge between the established Lenz and the up and coming Culbertson and their entouages lit up the imagination of a public starved of good news in the middle of the bleak depression following the 1929 Wall Street crash. The result was an amazing amount of press coverage which reported as headline news the latest developments from the match which began amongst much pomp and ceremony on the 7th of December, 1931. Lenz’s team started well but Culbertson soon made up the lost ground and the two teams were roughly even just before the halfway mark. On the 18th December a 7♥ contract took to center-stage and became the turning point of the match.

Dealer South – Both Vulnerable

		♠ AQ103	
		♥ A	
		♦ AQ97	
		♣ A752	
♠ 985			♠ 62
♥ K6	W	N	♥ 1032
♦ 5432			♦ KJ1086
♣ KJ98	E	S	♣ Q103
		♠ KJ74	
		♥ QJ98754	
		♦ -	
		♣ 64	

In those early pioneering years there was hardly a consensus on what constituted an opening bid and many experts put more stock in distributional values than points when deciding whether to open or not. Still, had he guessed the incredible outcome caused by his ultra-light 1♥ bid, I am sure that Oswald Jacoby, a very talented but also very aggressive player, would have refrained from opening. This is what ensued:

West	North	East	South
Culberston	Lenz	Lightner	Jacoby
			1♥
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♥
Pass	4NT !!	Pass	5♥
Pass	6NT !!	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	7♥
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Pass

The amazing competition between Lenz and Jacoby to secure the contract seemed to have finished in favor of the first, until Culbertson doubled “on general principles”, since his Kings were hardly safe tricks with the strong no-trump hand after him. As we can see, 6NT would make on a non club lead as declarer would have time to give up a heart trick, however Jacoby understandably did not sit the double and went on to 7♥. The contract was one off and the outcome clearly unsettled Lenz who made some uncharacteristic mistakes later in the evening which contributed to a disastrous minus of almost 5000 points. A few sessions later, after being subjected to yet another unjustified tirade by Lenz about his “reckless” bids, Oswald Jacoby got up and when the director asked him if some more hands would be played that evening, he replied curtly: “Not with me in it!”. The change in the line-up predictably failed to improve the team’s performance and Culbertson cruised to a victory which he shrewdly turned into the cornerstone of his fortune. Interestingly enough, Culbertson in his post-match commentary publicly conceded that Jacoby had been by far the best player on the Lenz team.

Let’s jump forward a few decades to 1966 and watch a very curious 7♥ hand reported by Tony Forrester and played by John Collings, a British expert and a true wizard of the 52 cards. Here he is tackling a contract which even the most optimistic among us would have long given up on and yet with a little help.....

		♠ AKJ	
		♥ -	
		♦ AKQ10974	
		♣ A84	
♠ 54			♠ 10972
♥ K	W	N	♥ Q1075
♦ J86532			♦ -
♣ KQJ3	E	S	♣ 109652
		♠ Q863	
		♥ AJ986432	
		♦ -	
		♣ 7	

I will spare you the painful bidding. Suffice to say that North, a weak player, opened 2♣ and then single-handedly pushed on to 7♦, which Collings corrected to 7♥, in



John Collings



Roger Trezel

In the closed room the Brazilians played and made 4♥. This was the auction in the Open room:

West	North	East	South
	Stoppa		Trezel
		Pass	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♣	Pass	7♥
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Pass

the perhaps correct belief that, however poorer the contract, it would have better chances of making with himself at the helm rather than 7♦ declared by his partner. Naturally the sight of dummy must have come as a shock: despite his immense talent not even Collings could hope to play a broken heart suit like that for no losers. Or could he?

West led the ♠K to dummy's ♣A. Declarer played the ♦A and East, thinking that declarer was trying to pitch a losing club from hand and oblivious to the need of keeping his trump holding intact, trumped in with the ♥5, overruffed with the ♥6. Collings saw a very distant ray of light at the end of a long tunnel. He continued with a spade to the ♠A and played another top diamond. Now East gave the play more thought and knowing of Collings' skill, decided that declarer had to have something like

♠ Qxxx
♥ AKJxxxx
♦ -
♣ xx

and was trying to set up the seventh diamond (!!) while reducing his own trump length to pick up East's ♥Q10x. There were clearly a lot of holes in this assumption but East, having already compromised his great trump holding, decided to trump in again to stop declarer from pitching his supposed club loser. Another overruff, followed by a spade to the ♠K and the ♦Q. When East did not hesitate in completing his very own Hara-Kiri Grand Coup by ruffing a third time with the ♥10, an elated Collings overruffed with the ♥J, cashed the ♥A dropping both the ♥K and the ♥Q and claimed his impossible slam. Before

writing down the score, Collings turned to his partner and remarked caustically "We were lucky trumps broke."

To finish off this quick tour of my Seven Hearts gallery, here is an item which should put a smile back on the faces of all those, me included, who have ever made a mess of Roman Keycard Blackwood. Let us move forward to 1971 in Taipei, where that year's edition of the Bermuda Bowl was being played. France and Brazil, two strong contenders, meet in the one of the last qualifying rounds and little do they know that our 7♥ friend will once again take center-stage in their match with devastating effect.

Dealer East – None Vulnerable

♠ KJ43			
♥ 10972			
♦ KJ976			
♣ -			
♠ 862	N	♠ A10975	
♥ A54	W	♥ 6	
♦ A105	E	♦ 8432	
♣ A542	S	♣ 876	
♠ Q			
♥ KQJ83			
♦ Q			
♣ KQJ1093			

A print of a typical steamboat cruising the Mississippi towards the end of the 19th century

