

ALBERTA REGIONAL BRIDGE TOURNAMENTS

With the 1950's popularization of bridge, interest in the game surged world wide and bridge leaders in Calgary started thinking about hosting a Regional tournament. A number of intrepid bridge aficionados gained sanction for the inaugural 'Northern Rocky Mountain Regional' for July 16 – 22, 1962 at the Palliser. The Regional achieved over 1200 tables; a charity game alone hosted 130 tables, raising over \$2,500 to benefit a local charity. Charles Goren (1901 – 1991) was the invited special guest, his fees sponsored jointly by Unit 390 and Sick's Brewery in Lethbridge. Goren participated in 3 days of the Regional (often partnering with Hattie Joffe). Goren was initiated into the Blackfoot tribe as 'Chief Deer Horn', a designation derived from the original significance of his family name (and perhaps because of his many points!). Pat Smolensky served as host for Goren and recalls him as brilliant, frugal, and an amazing statistician related to sports of all kinds. A feature of that tournament was a bridge symposium held at the Jubilee Auditorium with Goren lecturing and his 'girl Friday' (Pat) assisting by writing the demonstrated hands on a blackboard. On one hand, Pat listed a 14th card and an audience member pointed it out. Goren quickly and smoothly quipped, 'I work my side of the room and my caddy works the other side'. After the Regional, Goren sent a 'thank you' letter to Pat on his custom stationary, simply and elegantly headed with, "Charles H. Goren, 111 East 56th Street • New York 22, N.Y." and signed "Charlie". Numerous other 'superstars' of bridge attended the Regional, including Oswald Jacoby (1902 – 1984) who was initiated into the Blackfoot tribe as 'Chief Morning Plume'. One of the many highlights of the Regional was promising Director, Harry Morrison getting married between sessions.

The second Regional was held at the Calgary Inn (Westin), July 17 – 23, 1967 (a couple of months before CBF's inaugural national final held in Winnipeg that September). By then a very active bridge community had evolved in Calgary – there were about 8300 Life Masters in the world and 9 lived in Calgary – the highest number in the province. This second 'White Hat' Regional achieved 1555 tables, bettering the 1962 count by 28% and setting a District 18 record. The panel show (Marilyn Johnson, Peter Rank, Mary Jane Farrell, Hermine Baron and Phil Wood) alone attracted a capacity crowd of over 300.

Eric R. Murray (1928 -) and Sami R. Kehela (1934 -) were invited guests for Calgary's 3rd Regional July 20 – 26, 1970 at the Calgary Inn, and they were also initiated into the Blackfoot Nation, Murray as 'Chief Ermine Horn' because he was a Toronto Barrister (and wore robes in his profession), and Kehela as 'Chief Running Rabbit'. About 500 attended the brunch at which Murray and Kehela received their honorary designations. The third 'White Hat' Regional achieved 2195 tables, 40% increase over 1967 and a new District 18 record.

A newspaper account of the 1970 tournament mentions several factors as contributing to the fabulous turnout:

- 1) Tremendous program staged by the Unit headed by Tournament Coordinator Jack Murphy. The Unit spent more than \$2000 of its own funds on the Regional.
- 2) The sumptuous playing area of the venue.
- 3) Coinciding meeting of the Canadian Bridge Federation.
- 4) Tremendous promotion by the Unit, the Western Conference, and the Canadian Tourist Bureau.

In following years, the 'every third year' White Hat Regional tried a number of venues including the Marlborough and more recently the CrossRoads/Radisson. At one time Red Deer was included in Unit 390, and with growth emerged as its own Unit (248) hosting Regionals. Now Regionals in Alberta travel up the Queen E Highway, Calgary, then Red Deer, then Edmonton, with Lethbridge as an extra Regional every third year. The game has changed a lot – smoke free venues, zero tolerance play, and bidding more and more with less and less, but no Calgary Regional ever surpassed the 2195 tables of 1970.



Photo of 1962 Regional Planning Committee

(Standing) from left to right, Jack Cherkow, Arlin Smith, Marg Gardner, Frank Kettner, Charles Goren, Sophie Kettner, (mystery man – possibly a visitor from ACBL), Wally Luthy.

(Seated) Betty Katzin, Ted Smith, Pat Smolensky, Pat Sanford, Jean Davis.

(In front) Jack Martin.

With thanks to Pat Smolensky and Sami Kehela for their recollections

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Ken Scott