

Martinique: What's in a Name?

Martinique derived its name from founder Jack L. Martin (1919 – 1997) who established the club in late 1953 at his home at 633 - 5th Avenue SW (at least one Unit 390 member recalls playing there as early as October 1953; also the name does not appear in the November 1953 AGT Directory, and 'Martinique Bridge Club Studio' does appear in the July 1954 AGT Directory). The Martins lived upstairs and hosted bridge on the main floor. A distant reminder of that era was the switch from 6 digit phone numbers to exchanges in early 1958 – Martinique's changing from 692061 to AMhurst 9-2061. In late 1959 / early 1960 Jack relocated the club to the basement at 815 – 7th Avenue SW (below Fernando's Hideaway restaurant). In late 1963 / early 1964 the club again relocated, this time to the main floor at 715 – 10th Street SW (where Westmount Place condominium now stands). Jack had been an accountant and assessor for 'Dominion Income Tax' and had a facility with numbers. He was known as an excellent teacher of duplicate bridge and, at the Intermediate & Advanced level strongly emphasizing mathematics – percentages, safety plays, etc. He even taught bridge on the Calgary TV station and wrote a bridge column in the *Albertan*. As mentioned in an obituary in the *Ontario Kibitzer* (Summer 1998, Volume 44, No. 2), Jack was also "an accomplished trumpet player and a lifelong fan of Billie Holiday and Dixieland jazz".

Walt G. Alex (1924 - 2007) acquired Martinique in c1965 (the June 1965 AGT Directory shows a slight name change to 'Martinique Bridge Studio' and this might have been done by Walt). The Club remained at the 10th Street location for further 12 years. The 10th Street Martinique received some interesting publicity when Ike Landon won \$10,000 in a package of cigarettes, insisting he purchased the lucky pack at Martinique. The cigarettes may actually have been bought at a nearby drug store but the story sure livened up the bridge table chatter for some period of time! Walt directed most of the games with Marguerite Swanson (Perry) and Helen Walker also directing. In 1967 Marguerite achieved her Director's certificate under Walt's encouragement and a month following her passing the exam, Walt and Erna married and took a 1-month honeymoon to Australia giving Marguerite an opportunity to solo her new craft. Walt taught a lot of novice and intermediate bridge in the early years. Joyce Millward was a bridge teacher of towering strength in that Martinique era, providing a wide range of bridge education including 'chalk talk' sessions before each novice game.

Joyce was Alberta's 3rd person to achieve 'Life Master'. When Joyce died in c1986, a 'Queen of Hearts' game and trophy were held at Martinique in her honor for many subsequent Valentine's Days. The 10th Street site is also where Rick Tewari taught lessons for several years. One of the many innovations/generosities Rick introduced was to 'recycle' 30 or so of the many trophies he had won at Sectionals by removing his name and awarding them to his students for their achievements in learning duplicate bridge. Lucrative aligned businesses for Walt were Canadian Bridge Supplies (created by Walt in 1960 and later – in 1988 – sold to Don and Louise Holtom), and also operation of Martinique as a coffee shop, primarily to serve Mount Royal College (then located at 7th

Avenue and 11th Street) students at lunchtime until the College relocated to its present location.

In late 1978 / early 1979 Walt relocated Martinique to the lower floor of 1134 – 8th Avenue SW. (At the time, land was being assembled for the Westmount project so the club needed to relocate). Walt was a very, very helping kind of guy – even when directing he would be careful to be maximally gentle so as to keep any offence to an absolute minimum. Walt liked parties, and may have been the originator of the annual Martinique Christmas Party. Two of the signature games for Walt were the Saturday evening ‘Hot Dog’ game which ran for many years and for a time, the Wednesday evening popular rookie-master Handicap Game (no two Life Masters could play together).

Arlene and Pat Todd with Joan Severin purchased Martinique from Walt in 1980. After a few months, Joan transferred her shares to Dave and Hattie Whitmore and the Todd/Whitmore partnership operated Martinique for the next 7 or 8 years. In the fall of 1981/spring of 1982 Martinique was relocated to the basement of 213 – 19th Street NW (now ‘Patricia Plaza’). In early 1985 Martinique was again relocated – this time to the Knights of Columbus, its current location at 2419 – 54 Avenue SW. Stan Matheson, Maureen Bailey, John Davison, and Gord Sharp (as well as Pat and Dave) directed games for the Todd/Whitmore ownership. In about 1987 the Todds/Whitmores sold the Martinique to Gordon Sharp, Lois Dunsmore, Brenda Murchison, Maureen Bailey & Les Nordlund. Les’s shares were then acquired c1988 by Frank Ayer & Alex Knox.

In c1989 Delores Hedley and Gordon purchased everyone’s shares and operated Martinique for the next few years. Gord was a very good teacher of bridge and an early proponent of 2 over 1. He created a 2/1 course that many studied at that time, and the materials continue to be re-read by many southern Alberta players today. In 1992 Gord and Delores sold the business to Barbara Webster who brought Dann Kramer (from Edmonton) into the partnership in 1995. When Barbara relocated to BC, her shares were acquired by Brenda Bertrand. In 1998 Dann’s shares were purchased by Elaine Stewart & John Hinde. Maureen Bailey acquired Elaine and John’s shares in September 2001 resulting in Brenda and Maureen being the ongoing owners.

Half a century after its creation, Martinique became the largest club in Calgary, serving about 500 players a week. Its energy and focus were inspired over the years by 20 or more shareholders and even more game Directors including, in recent years games under the Directorships of Brenda, Maureen, Pat Purvis, Michael Farebrother, Barry Pashak, Martin McDonald, Dan Bertrand, Dann Kramer, Carol Lee Bellam, and Marilyn & Murray Haggins. And then there are the thousands and thousands of players who have loved every moment of Martinique as it evolved.

The Knights of Columbus sold the building to the Calgary Free Reform Church in mid June 2012 and Martinique closed its doors after the evening game June 28, 2012. What’s in a name like ‘Martinique’? A lot!