

The New York Times



Bridge

By Alan Truscott
Published: Wednesday, December 30, 1992

One of the last links with the earliest days of bridge was severed a week ago when S. Garton Churchill died in Hendersonville, N.C., at the age of 92. He learned auction bridge in 1916 while at school in Ohio, became a convert to the new game of contract in 1928 and lived to be the Grand Old Man of bridge. In later life he was a Pickwickian figure, known to all as Church.

On the way to one of his three national victories, the Life Master Pairs in 1948, he had a record single-session score of 77.4 percent in partnership with Cecil Head. He was the first to introduce the important concept of balancing, and his other theoretical ideas, though sometimes bizarre, were thought-provoking. He did not believe in counting high-card points and was indignant when the American Contract Bridge League required him to enter point-count descriptions on his convention card.

Most of his bridge was played in Manhattan, where he worked as a lawyer. Long lunch-hour breaks were invariably devoted to bridge argument. He sat South on the diagrammed deal, played at the Grand Slam Club, a predecessor of today's Beverly Club, and his partner was the late George Kennedy, another New York veteran.

- The diagrammed deal is not archived by The New York Times -

When one club was overcalled with a pre-emptive jump to two hearts, North was tempted to bid diamonds. His honor strength was hardly adequate and he passed, but came to life on the next round. When his partner followed up with four spades over four hearts he jumped to six clubs.

East doubled on the somewhat greedy assumption that he would score two diamond tricks in defense. West led the heart ace, a rather poor choice since the dummy was likely to be void. Dummy ruffed, and Churchill now set up dummy's diamonds by ruffing twice, using a trump entry for the second ruff. He made a doubled overtrick without any need to guess in spades.

Church reported this deal in his magnum opus, "Churchill Natural Bidding Style at Contract Bridge." He pointed out that East should have saved in six hearts, and even in seven hearts over six spades, since the North-South bidding made it probable that voids were lurking in the red suits. Even if North was inspired to lead a diamond, allowing the defense to take four tricks, the save would be worthwhile.