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Western Massachusetts Bridge Association Records

1957-2007
12 boxes (16 linear ft.)
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Read collection overview

Established in 1957, the Western Massachusetts Bridge Association (WMBA) Unit 196 was created by founding members of the Springfield Bridge Club eager to share their love for the game with the wider western Massachusetts area. The unit played a prominent role in teaching interested individuals to learn to play contract bridge by reaching out to colleges, clubs, and churches. Over the years, WMBA has remained an active unit in the New England Bridge Conference District 25, one of the largest districts of the American Contract Bridge Association.

Records of the WMBA and District 25 document the growth of contract bridge in New England. From the earliest days of the unit, members drafted by-laws, oversaw membership services, organized tournaments, and tracked finances. Materials in the collection shed light on every aspect of these activities.

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[Massachusetts \(West\) Sport](#)

Background on Western Massachusetts Bridge Association

WMBA tournament brochure

The Western Massachusetts Bridge Association (WMBA) Unit 196 was born out of the Springfield Bridge Club in early 1957. Jack Kushner, known as "Mr. Bridge" throughout the area, started his own bridge game in Springfield in late 1931 or early 1932; soon after the game moved from the office building to the Clinton

Hotel and then the Hotel Bridgeway. Through Kushner's efforts, the game continued to grow and over time he convinced the Springfield Daily News not only to promote local tournaments, but to support winners by paying expenses to regional tournaments. After World War II, Kushner purchased a house on Mill Street to be the new headquarters for the bridge club, where it remained until the 1960s when the club moved again, this time to 194 Sumner Avenue location. By the late 1950s, Kushner and others decided to organize a Western Massachusetts bridge unit of the American Contract Bridge League, and in November of 1957 the unit ran its first sectional at the Hotel Kimball.

During the early days of Springfield Bridge Club and later the WMBA, leaders of the club, in particular Kushner and William August, developed a system for instructing novices to play bridge. Lessons were conducted at different venues throughout the area, including colleges, churches, clubs, and served the dual purpose of making the game more accessible and recruiting new members for the unit. Ultimately, Kushner published a book based on his method of instruction called *Playing the Hand*. Throughout the subsequent decades membership in WMBA remained strong and the game continued to flourish in the area.

WMBA Unit 196 is part of the New England Bridge Conference District 25 of the American Contract Bridge League. District 25 is comprised of units from the six New England States and is one the largest districts in the ACBL.

Scope of collection

The collection documents both the history of the Western Massachusetts Bridge Association from its establishment in 1957 and the unit's participation in the activities and tournaments of the New England Bridge Conference (NEBC) District 25 of the ACBL. Early records chronicle the founding of the WMBA, its growth over the years, and its relationship to other units in District 25. During this formative period and well beyond, Eileen and Bill Lenville assumed various leadership roles in the WMBA and District 25, including secretary, district tournament manager, and members of the executive committee; their contributions are reflected in the collection.

One of the major activities of the both the WMBA and NEBC is to participate in and organize regional tournaments. There is a significant body of records that document these efforts from the late 1960s to mid-2000s; the materials are rich in the details of planning and publicizing several annual tournaments.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. WMBA](#)

1957-2004

History of the WMBA is documented in records from the first planning meetings in 1957 and the development of the by-laws to meeting minutes and correspondence. Early materials cover the contract bridge program at the Springfield Bridge Club as well lesson plans and teaching instructions used by Jack Kushner and Bill August from the 1950s-1970s. Correspondence files demonstrate the active role the unit secretary played, in particular involvement in collecting membership and dealing with membership problems as they arose.

[Series 2. District 25](#)

1967-2007

Since the Western Massachusetts Bridge Association is a part of the New England Bridge Association (NEBA) District 25, there is some overlap with between the records of both groups. Materials in this series deal specifically with the governance and business of District 25, including correspondence among units, by-laws, executive committee reports, photographs, and secretary and treasurer reports. Tournament records focus on the responsibilities of tournament managers, site selections for regional tournaments, and participation in national tournaments, not the particulars of planning and publicizing individual tournaments on an annual basis.

[Series 3. Tournaments](#)

1969-2007

Planning and publicizing tournaments for members is a primary activity of each district in the ACBL, and as one of the largest districts the NEBC was responsible for organizing between 6 and 10 New England tournaments a year. Records document activities involved in overseeing an annual tournament cycle such as communications among members of the board and hotels or conference centers, feedback from players, and financial reports. Other topics captured range from tournament etiquette and trends to player satisfaction and success of venues.

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