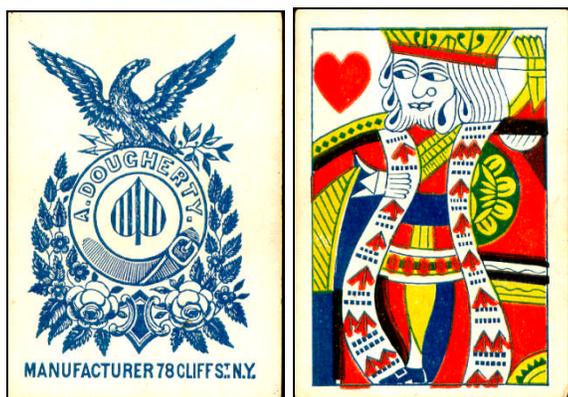


SHUFFLING ALONG WITH HISTORY

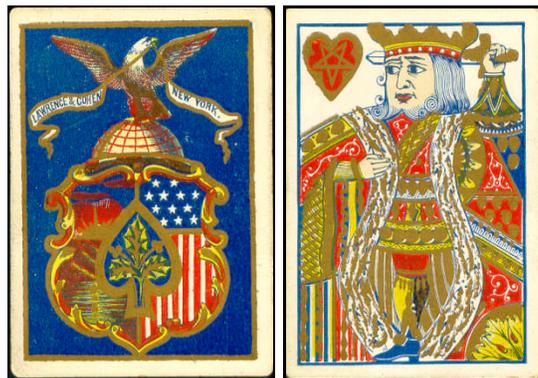
By Rod Starling

There is no doubt that the collecting of playing cards in and of itself is a most satisfying and enjoyable occupation. It needs no further recommendation, it is a pleasure complete unto itself. Nevertheless, I have found it to be of additional interest whenever I am able to fit certain decks of cards into a particular historical time frame and to try and get the feel for what kinds of decks were in use while certain events were taking place in the world. In the hope that you may find the exercise to be of interest, I shall set forth just a few of the events that have occurred at the various times when some of our favorite American decks were introduced or at least in use. Because it is not always known exactly when such decks were made, the historical connections may be approximate but certainly close enough to establish a sense of congruity or perhaps the lack thereof. I have tried to select those events that I felt would be most readily recognized and have limited the time frame to certain years from 1848 to 1908.

When Andrew Dougherty started his playing card business in 1848, the AD1a deck was among those he issued that year. It was also the year Wisconsin was granted statehood and that saw the end of the Mexican-American War. When the AD1f deck was run off the Dougherty press in 1851, the New York Times started its presses and Isaac Singer invented the famous Singer Sewing Machine. A year earlier, in 1850, Dougherty issued AD1c from his 78 Cliff Street N.Y. address with the one-way Thomas Crehore court cards.



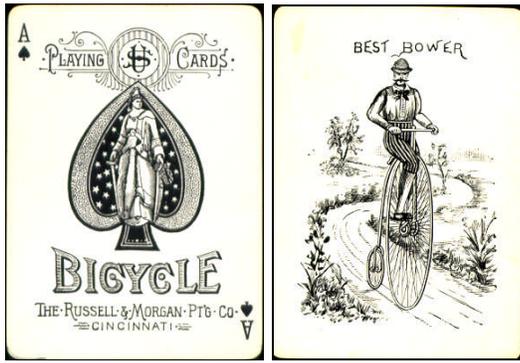
The Lawrence & Cohen illuminated deck, NY10, was issued in 1863. It was a beautiful deck and a fine example of craftsmanship but it stood in stark contrast to the horror of the Battle of Gettysburg that was fought that year with the loss of American lives from both the North and the South totaling in the tens of thousands in just one day.



In 1864, Louis Pasteur invented what came to be known as the “pasteurization” process that he first applied to the treatment of wine, not milk. In that same year Dougherty produced his Excelsior cards, AD4. His beautiful illuminated deck, AD3 was issued in 1865, the same year that saw the laying of the transatlantic cable, the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the passage of the 13th amendment abolishing slavery and the publication of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Alice, as I am sure we all recall, was quite involved with a deck of cards. For those who are fans of Alice, I highly recommend *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published in 1989 by Ariel Books/Alfred A. Knopf, New York. It is beautifully illustrated by S. Michelle Wiggins and includes illustrations of a very creative deck of cards. Copyright prohibits my picturing them here but the artist was kind enough to inform me that the deck is actually marked and challenged me to find the marks. So far, I have not but she told me I was “close”.



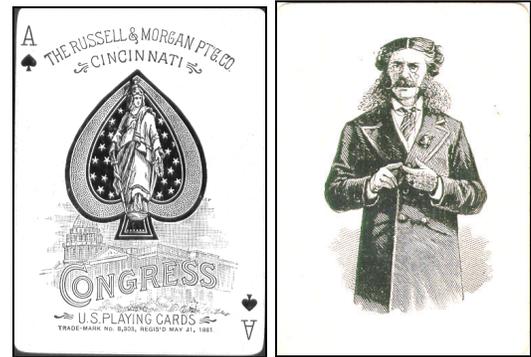
Paper Fabrique Company produced its *Great Mogul* deck, L3, in 1867. That was the year in which Johann Strauss composed the beautiful *Blue Danube Waltz* and in which the United States purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million. It was also the year in which a certain Pierre Michaux began manufacturing bicycles, a little item from which USPC, starting in 1885, certainly got a lot of mileage with its *Bicycle* brand and that is still going strong today. I'm surprised that they never dedicated a deck to him.



The *Squeezers* brand continued in production for quite some time including 1879, the year in which Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb and which no doubt improved the conditions for playing evening card games.

The *Congress* brand of cards was introduced by USPC in 1881, a year in which the US population exceeded 50 million, James Garfield was inaugurated and Clara Barton founded the Red Cross.

In 1871, *Lawrence & Cohen* was newly merged into the *New York Consolidated Card Company* and its NY13 deck reflects the gradual process of adapting to the new name. The Ace of Spades still carries the L&C name but the Best Bower only mentions Consolidated Card Co. N.Y. In October of that year, the Great Chicago Fire took place destroying most of the city's buildings and killing 300 people.



Some of the earliest American decks included Jokers that pictured a Chinese, often in a derogatory fashion and sometimes even titled "Heathen Chinese". In addition to the usual prejudice to which new immigrants to the U.S.A. were often subjected, it would appear that the Chinese represented a threat to the labor force because in 1882, Congress banned Chinese immigration for ten years! Early Steamboat decks also featured Jokers that depicted Negroes in one way or another and the *National Playing Card Company* issued its *Steamboat* # 9 deck in the same year.

Moving on to 1876, we find that the *American Playing Card Co.* of New York produced a very nice deck, L10 and also *Broadway Steamboats* #288, L11, while *The New York Consolidated Card Company* produced its *Patented Squeezers* brand, NY47, all in the same year that Alexander Graham bell invented the telephone and the National Baseball League was founded. It was also the year in which Wild Bill Hickok was assassinated while playing in a poker game. When the fatal bullet struck, Bill was holding a hand consisting of two Aces and two Eights. Such a poker hand has to this day come to be known as the "Dead Man's Hand".



Dougherty issued his final version of the triplicate brand, AD13, in 1883. It introduced the beginnings of the corner numerical index and was the year that saw the opening of the famous Brooklyn Bridge, a master piece of engineering that still stands in full vigor today. The Manhattan end of the bridge landed just a few short blocks from Dougherty's factory at 68 Center Street.



By 1888 USPC had many brands in the market and *Tourists #155* was still running. In that year, Jack the Ripper murdered six women in London and that, I am sure, did not help its tourist trade.



The famous *Tally-Ho* brand was issued by Dougherty in 1885 and, as just mentioned, the *Bicycle 808* brand was also introduced that year by USPC, a company that liked to relate some of its brand names to branches of the government such as *Congress*, *Capitol*, *Cabinet*, *Treasury* and even *Army and Navy*. Fittingly, the Washington Monument was completed in 1885 and although surprisingly, USPC did not come out with a "Monument" brand, it did feature the monument on the back of its *Washington, The Nation's Capital Souvenir Playing Cards* (S65) issued c1909.

The production of playing cards by numerous makers was quite prolific in the late nineteenth century and significant events kept pace. To save space, I will now compress those events against a background of playing card production.



1889. USPC introduced *Skat #2*; *Skat #4* and *Texan 45*. Gustave Eiffel, of Statue of Liberty fame, built his famous Eiffel Tower in Paris.



1886 saw the ongoing production of several new brands introduced by the *National Playing Card Company* including *Owls*, *Arrows* and *Aladdin*. It also saw the introduction by *Russell & Morgan Printing Co.* of the *Tourist #155* brand. In that same year the American Federation of Labor (AFof L) was founded and the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in New York Harbor. The structural engineer of the statue was Gustave Eiffel who we will hear more of below.



1895. USPC introduces *Trophy Whist #39*. National Card Company issues a second edition of its *Bijou* brand and Bay State Card Company issues its *Thistle* and *Whist Club #37* brands. C. Gillette invents the safety razor; H.G.Wells publishes *The Time Machine* and Tchaikovsky composes *Swan*

Lake for the ballet. The year also saw the birth of J. Edgar Hoover and Babe Ruth.



1903 appears to have been a year that was rather tranquil. World War 1 was over a decade away and the Great Depression even further afar. Perhaps the Success and Strollers brands of the Kalamazoo Paper Box and Card Company reflected the calm of the times. This year saw the founding of the Ford Motor Company, the first baseball World Series and the first powered flight by the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk, in North Carolina.

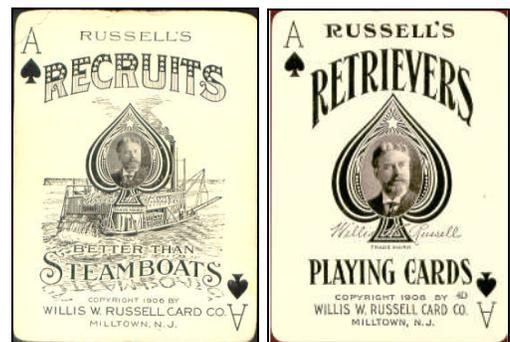


1896. The rare New Era No.46 is issued by USPC. The Klondike Gold Rush began and Puccini composed the opera, La Boheme.



In 1905 the Willis W. Russell Card Company was founded and the playing card market was treated to a very fine but brief production of its brands of cards. One such brand was Recruits that featured "long distance" pips that were designed to help players in distinguishing the different suits in the game of Bridge. While Bridge experts were developing systems for solving the complex problems posed by the game, Albert Einstein published his Special Theory of Relativity in an effort to solve the mysteries of the universe. Russell's Retrievers brand was produced in 1908. Henry Ford produced the Model T car and the rival company, General Motors, was formed.

Although the Standard Playing Card Manufacturing Company issued an Air-Ship brand of cards that the Hochman Encyclopedia lists as having been issued c1900, it is possible that it was issued as early as 1898 to capitalize on the advent of the Zeppelin airship built by Count Von Zeppelin in that year. 1898 was also the year in which Marie Curie discovered radium, H.G.Wells published his War of the Worlds and the Spanish-American War was fought from April to December. That war was commemorated by the Gray Lithographing Co. issuing a special Anheuser-Busch deck (W15) and the end of the war was commemorated by the issuance of a similar deck for Anheuser-Bush by USPC (W16).



I think that I have covered enough history to give you a sense of my interest in its correlation with the production of American playing cards. No doubt you may find many other instances of the kind. It's a fascinating exercise and can give the cards in your collection a real sense of context.

Editor's Note; A great journey through early playing card years in American - thanks for the trip, Rod.