

Poker Patience

by Tony Hall, September 2018

The game Poker Patience, according to an early 20th century author working under the name “Jackpot”,¹ was “introduced so recently as the autumn of 1908”. I can find no earlier references in the literature to question this assertion, although there are increasingly brief summaries of the game in Patience Games books in the 1950s and 60s. Jackpot offers no explanation as to the origins of the game but confidently states that by the time of writing (1909/10?) this game “has become a first favourite among card players... When played by a single individual, it forms one of the best of Patience games, while, played by several, it posses the unique feature that all the players’ hands are exactly alike though the variety of ways in which each may be arranged is practically endless”.

As originally described, the game is played with a well-shuffled pack of cards from which the cards are taken one by one and placed somewhere on a five by five grid. The first card is placed in the centre. Once a card has been placed it cannot be moved. Each subsequent card has to be placed touching a card that has already been played. The aim of the game is to create as many scoring lines, horizontally and vertically, as possible, based on poker hands. When 25 cards have been placed, the board is scored as follows: 1 point for a pair, 3 for 2 pairs, 5 for a Flush, 6 for 3 of a kind, 10 for a full house (2 and 3) 12 for a straight, 16 for 4 of a kind, and 30 for a straight flush^{2,3}.

Through my research and collecting of poker-patience artefacts I have been trying to make sense of what little information there appears to be about this game which had its heyday somewhere between 1909, say, and 1925.

I have acquired three similar sets produced in the “Court Series”. Two in red and green card sleeves respectively, and one with a more expensive light brown suede cover.



¹ Introduction to the rules of the game published by The International Card Co.

² Jackpot counts 10 for a full hand (full house in current parlance)

³ When more than one player is playing, each needs a separate pack and as each card is played by player one, they find the same card and place it on their grid in any way they see fit.

All three have similar contents namely a folding board to which can be attached five rows and columns of cards, a pack of gold-edged miniature Little Duke patience cards, and an instructions booklet by Charles Vidal Diehl, pictured here in their relative sizes.



The Court Series is designated as published by Messrs. Edward Mortimer, Halifax and London. The booklet advertises folding poker patience boards and scoring blocks as well as “Whist and Bridge scoring pads and games”. The back advertises different styles of Fauntleroy and Little Duke patience cards all originating in the USA. I can find nothing more about this particular firm and/or its links with others. And this is where the story becomes somewhat intriguing.

According to the records provided by M.H.Goodall⁴, Goodall & Son published its first edition of “Poker Patience and Progressive Poker Patience” in 1908.



Note that the author is Charles Vidal Diehl, he of the Court Series booklet. Even more striking is that the text of the earliest editions of this booklet and that from all three of my examples from the Court Series above are identical, word for word. I can only speculate as to how this came about. Mr. Diehl appears to be one

⁴ M.H.Goodall, Goodall Card Game Booklets 1868 - 1922

of only two people writing about this game in the early years⁵; I can find no other until the 1940s by which time the game was well established. I suspect that the initial promotion came from Goodall & Son and the Crown Series was produced (presumably with Goodall and Diehl's agreement) by another company interested in producing the folding boards as a means of playing the game at home or when travelling. But I am guessing and I would be interested to hear the views of others who may know more.

However, if there was some kind of link between Goodall and Court, why did the latter use and promote Little Duke cards rather than the Goodall equivalents, Elfin?

In one of my copies of the Goodall booklet, Mr. Diehl adds a new Preface to the Revised edition, dated July 1912. The text remains the same except for the addition of two and a half sides of variations of the basic game "which have become popular in some places. In connection with this I would direct special attention to the Continental form of Poker Patience which appears to have developed in Austria and spread into Germany." He goes on to speculate that many players of the game will be "likely to adopt this variation in future". The author clearly did not anticipate the unlikelihood of British players adopting a German form of the game in the years after 1912!⁶

Moving on, my collection includes this delightful little box labelled Poker Patience containing four gilt-edged packs of Little Duke cards in their original boxes, sadly, while the purpose of the box is clear, it contains no instruction booklet to help pin down the source.



There is further intrigue and uncertainty about two further Poker Patience boxes in my collection, both appearing to come from the same source, namely The International Card Co., 2 Bury Street, London. Frustratingly, to start with, I can find no reference elsewhere to this particular company.

The first of these two box sets contains two packs of medium-sized patience cards in cardboard sleeves and a booklet of instructions all marked with the company's name.

⁵ The other being the unidentified author "Jackpot"...unless Mr. Diehl and Jackpot are one and the same.

⁶ I have patience books published in the following years where the publishers have blacked out German names and references rather than reset the type.



The booklet is (sadly) undated and written by the aforementioned “Jackpot” but its reference to the use of the joker in variations of the game suggest it is somewhat later than the Diehl text. Intriguingly, the cards contained in the boxes labelled The International card Co. are by Goodall (1897 – 1921) and appear to be in the Linette range. Was this company a Goodall subsidiary? I have found nothing to suggest that but others may know more. Did this company incorporate Goodall cards by agreement? Who knows.

My last exhibit is a much larger and grander version of the one above.

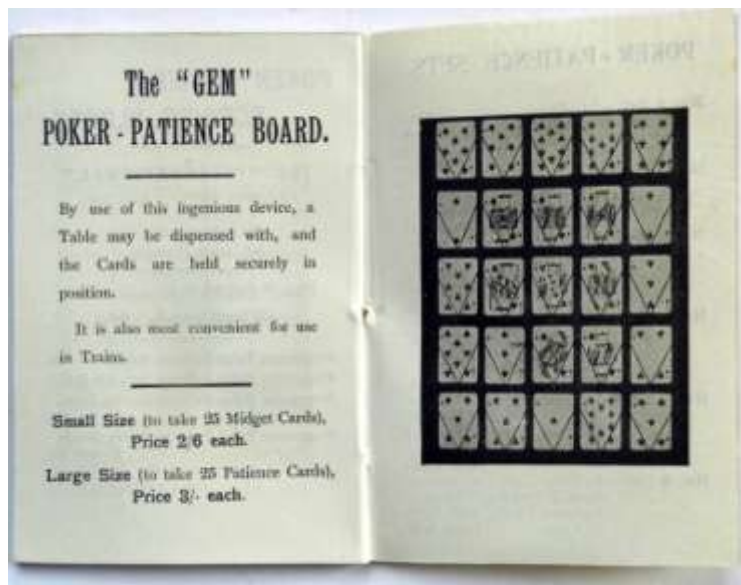


It comprises a dark green box with a brass catch and drop down front, large enough to house four packs of medium-sized patience cards, a tray underneath containing two Poker-patience scoring pads and an instructions booklet.

There are a number of links between these last two items. The boxes are made from very similar materials, including the silk ribbons to aid the removal of the cards which

are identical. The instructions booklets are from the same source, although the products advertised inside, of which more anon, suggest they were not produced at the same time. And the cards are Goodall and Son, 1897-1921, also from the Linette range!

In the back of this later booklet there is a page of advertisements for a variety of Poker Patience sets which may help to set in context the sets described above. First, both booklets advertise a series of game aids entitled "Gem" including the "Gem duplicate whist board". The later booklet clearly advertises a Poker patience board which is entirely different on style and method to that used in the Court Series. So a direct link between this company's products and the Court Series can be ruled out.



However, on another page a range of Poker Patience sets are now being advertised.



Several of the sets are described as made from “paste grain leather” which well describes the material from which my last three boxes were all made. They have a grainy leather look but are clearly made from lesser materials pasted on to a card base. Set no.1 is described as containing “4 packs of miniature cards and a book of rules”. Could this be my example pictured above? Sadly, it does not identify the source or make of the miniature cards and my set is missing its rules.

Set no. 6, also in paste grain leather, “contains 2 packs of ‘Linette’ Patience Cards and Book of Rules”. Possibly my penultimate example.

Set no. 3 “contains 4 packs of ‘Linette’ Patience cards, Book of Rules and scoring block.” Could this be my final example?

I look forward to finding the rather more exotic and up-market set number 5 in Moroccan leather and will expect to pay rather more than the original price of 14/6!

Any and all additions, corrections or subtractions from the above would be most welcome as I continue to try to ferret out information on this small corner of card playing history.