



Rhode Island History: The Newport Casino

OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the Newport Casino, home to the International Tennis Hall of Fame, and its connection to Newport history. The activities in this plan can be paired with other units on Rhode Island and/or Newport history.

Based on knowledge that Newport thrived in the Gilded Age of the United States, students will connect this time to the establishment of the Newport Casino, its lean years, and eventually the establishment of the International Tennis Hall of Fame.



OBJECTIVES

- Form an understanding of the Gilded Age and how it led to the establishment of the Newport Casino.
- Familiarize students with Newport and/or Rhode Island history
- Complete a short research project that answers the questions related to the Newport Casino

Lesson Time Suggested: One Class Period

Common Core Learning Standards

Literacy in History/Social Studies,
Science, and Technical Subjects

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY

5th Grade:

RI.5.1, RI.5.2, RI.5.3, RI.5.4,
RI.5.5, RI.5.7, RI.5.8, RI.5.9,
W.5.7, W.5.8, W.5.9

6th-8th Grade:

RI.6-8.1, RI.6-8.3 RI.6-8.4, RI.6-8.5,
RI.6-8.7, RI.6-8.8, RI.6-8.9
W.6.7, W.6.8, W.6.9



PREP AND MATERIALS

- Knowledge Rating Chart
- Bios of James Gordon Bennett and James Van Alen
- [Gilded Age summary](#)
- [Sports Halls of Fame summary](#)
- Tennis and the Newport Casino
- Tell Me the Details chart



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Present students with a **Knowledge Rating Chart** to assess their knowledge of two people, one theme, and one concept (James Gordon Bennett, James Van Alen, the Gilded Age, and Halls of Fame).
2. Students will explore the James Gordon Bennett and James Van Alen biographies and pages on the Gilded Age and Halls of Fame for background knowledge.
3. Students will also read excerpts from *Tennis and the Newport Casino* to learn more about Bennett, Van Alen, and the building.
4. Students will be presented with a short research project to complete. In groups, they will choose either Bennett and the Gilded Age or Van Alen and Halls of Fame. Using the **Tell Me the Details** chart, they will write what they have learned about each concept.
5. Students will present their information creatively by making a full-page advertisement for either the Newport Casino or the Tennis Hall of Fame.



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**James Gordon Bennett Jr.**

(1841-1918)

Per legend, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., a summer resident of Newport and heir to the New York Herald fortune, was a member of the prestigious Newport Reading Room, a gentlemen's-only club. Bennett reputedly bet his polo partner, Captain Henry Augustus Candy, to ride his polo horse onto the front porch of the exclusive gentlemen's only club, the Newport Reading Room. Candy took the dare one step further and rode straight through the clubrooms, disturbing members. After Candy's guest membership was revoked, Bennett purchased the land across the street from his home, Stone Villa, and sought to build his own social club, which became the Newport Casino.

A sports enthusiast, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., founded the Westchester Polo Club in 1876, the Gordon Bennett Cup for international yachting in 1872, and the Gordon Bennett Cup for automobile races in 1900.



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**James Van Alen**

(1902-1991)

Hall of Fame Class: 1965

A lifelong Newporter, James (Jimmy) Van Alen was a court tennis champion and innovator of the game of tennis. In the 1950s Van Alen saw that the Newport Casino was falling into disrepair and knew that the former home to the U.S. National Championships needed a new purpose. After a visit to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY, Van Alen and his wife Candace thought that they had the perfect solution: turn the Newport Casino into a National Lawn Tennis Hall of Fame. Once the Hall of Fame was established, Van Alen was able to test out some of his tennis innovations at the various tournaments held on the grounds. One such innovation is the Van Alen Streamlined Scoring System (VASSS), which was the precursor to the modern-day tiebreak in tennis. Van Alen also loved writing poetry, and wrote a postscript to *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (also known as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*), and always hosted a reading for local children during the holiday season at the Newport Casino.



James Gordon Bennett, Jr., 1900-1918
George Benjamin Luks (1867-1933), Oil on canvas
ITHF Acquisition, 2012.17.1

Birth of Tennis Gallery: Newport Casino Diorama



Drawing of Pancho Gonzales and Jimmy Van Alen, July 10, 1965

Paule Loring (1899-1968), Gift of Mr. Paule Loring, 65.3

Gonzales never shied away from giving his opinions, and Van Alen was equally as colorful. This moment of Gonzales arguing with Van Alen at a tournament here at the Newport Casino was captured in this cartoon which ran in the Providence Journal/Bulletin.

The Popular Game: Tennis and Tours, Pro Tour Case

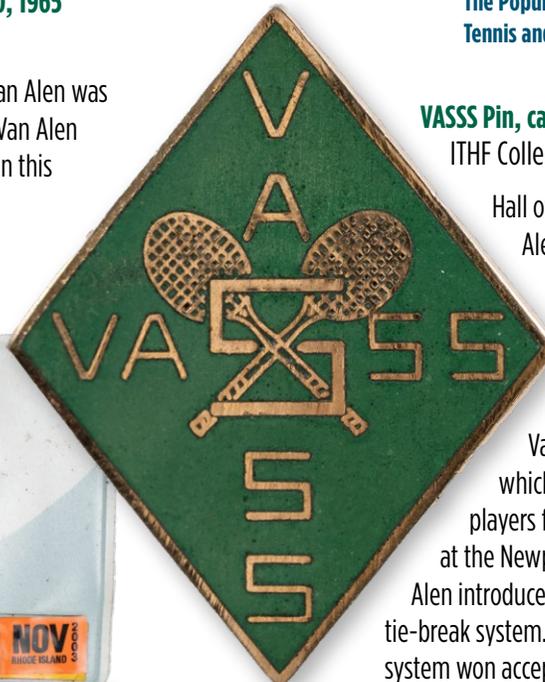


Sudden Death Hand Sign, ca. 1970

ITHF Collection, 1994 94.8.3e

VASSS used a sudden-death tie breaker (best-of-nine-points) to end prolonged sets and matches. This sign was used by officials to indicate when this event was underway.

The Popular Game: Tennis and Tours, Pro Tour Case



VASSS Pin, ca. 1965

ITHF Collection, 90.81.2

Hall of Fame Founder Jimmy Van Alen developed the Van Alen Streamlined Scoring System (VASSS) around 1960, leading to the modern-day tie-break.

Van Alen introduced VASSS, which he tested with professional players first in Washington, DC, then at the Newport Casino. Eventually, Van Alen introduced a 9-point "sudden death" tie-break system. Over time, a 12-point system won acceptance from fans and competitors, becoming the method of competition scoring. Television viewers insisted on shorter matches, making the tie-break mandatory, and the game has since prospered from high drama and suspense.

The Popular Game: Tennis and Tours, Pro Tour Case



VASSS License Plate, 1996

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Gift of the Estate of Candace Van Alen, 2003.15.50

Newport native Jimmy Van Alen was proud of his contributions to tennis and the International Tennis Hall of Fame & Museum. Following his death in 1991, his widow Candy Van Alen continued to use his vanity plate until her death in 2003.

The Popular Game: Tennis and Tours, Pro Tour Case



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Allie Ritzenberg, Jimmy Van Alen, Lew Hoad, and Jack Kramer (L-R) at the tournament where the tiebreaker was first used, ca. 1960.
ITHF Collection

Van Alen first tested out VASSS with Jack Kramer's Pro Tour at the Uline Arena in Washington, DC.

The Popular Game: Tennis and Tours, Pro Tour Case

Mortimer Cup for Men's Doubles, 1957

Smith & Smith (American)
Gift of the Estate of Candace Van Alen,
2003.2003.15.39

The Mortimer Cup is presented to the champion of the Racquet & Tennis Club of New York City's doubles tournament. This trophy was presented to Jimmy Van Alen and Alastair B. Martin for their win in 1957.

Area 7: Origins Gallery, Large case

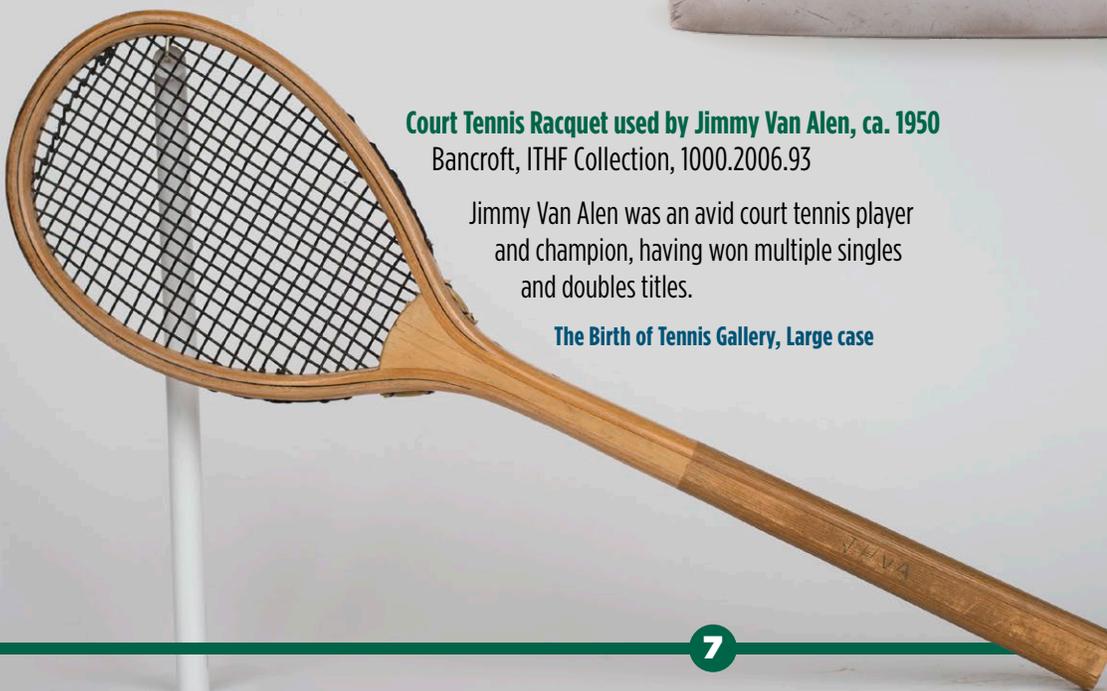


Court Tennis Racquet used by Jimmy Van Alen, ca. 1950

Bancroft, ITHF Collection, 1000.2006.93

Jimmy Van Alen was an avid court tennis player and champion, having won multiple singles and doubles titles.

The Birth of Tennis Gallery, Large case



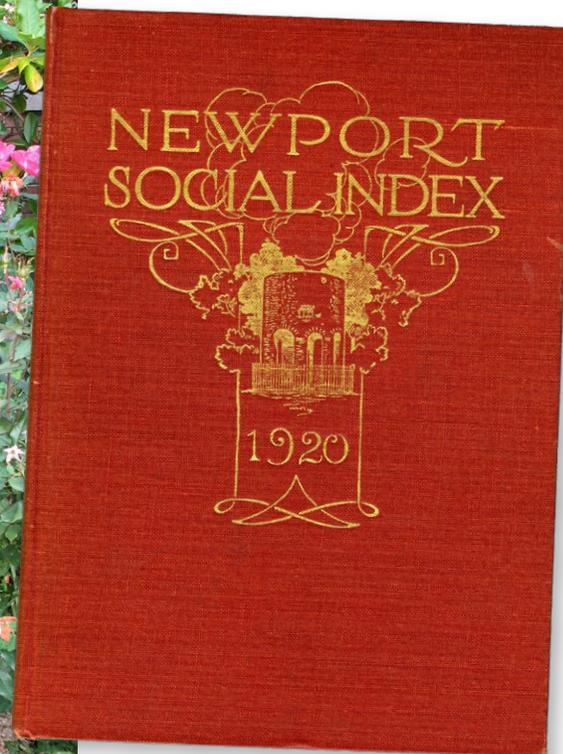


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Jimmy Van Alen, 1993
Felix de Weldon (1907-2003)
Bronze
ITHF Collection, 93.66.1

This sculpture of Jimmy Van Alen is located outside on the grounds of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. De Weldon, born in Vienna, Austria, was a long-time resident of Newport and is most famous for his sculpture titled the United States Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima Memorial) at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC.

Outside near Horseshoe Court



**Newport Social Index
for the 1920 Season**

Newport Social Index Association
Gift of James H. Van Alen,
PUB.1920.10

The Newport Social Index was published yearly until 1948. It was a directory that identified the affluent class of Newport and its vicinity with a complete listing of the names of residents formally introduced into society, along with their summer and winter addresses, phone numbers, and club affiliations. This directory also provided a complete list of Newport Clubs as well as the Army and Naval Officers attached to the various stations in the area.

**Birth of Tennis Gallery: Newport
Casino Invitation Case**



The Van Alen Cup, 2001 - Present
Tiffany & Co.

Presented to the singles winner of the Hall of Fame Tennis Championships—held on the legendary grass courts at the International Tennis Hall of Fame—this perpetual trophy symbolizes the legacy of Jimmy and Candy Van Alen and their generous support of the Hall of Fame over the years.

Area 7: Credentials Gallery, Van Alen Case