

# BACKGAMMON AND CARDS

"THEY WERE A GREAT GROUP," recalled Bindy Banker with undisguised nostalgia. "They always played in the East Lounge, starting around five o'clock. There would be Tommy Suffern Tailer, Ogden Phipps, Teddy Bassett, Jack Heminway, Dickie Mortimer, Porter Ijams, Bill Meyer, Claude Beer, Hunter Goodrich, and, of course, Barclay Cooke, one of the best players in the world. He didn't drink, he was all business, but he was a polite and charming guy. Bassett had the eyes of a shark. I occasionally played with the group, but you didn't come out of there with your skin very often."

In his Club history, George Rushmore noted that backgammon was an ancient game going back to Roman times. Others believe it is even older and was played by the Sumerians in 3000 BC. It was highly popular in the Club before and after the Second World War, when, according to Rushmore, the Club "enjoyed a leadership in the game" in New York. An annual championship tournament began in 1925, and was won for four years in succession by W. Whitewright Watson, who is credited with inventing the doubling cube, which ushered in the modern game. In 1931, the Backgammon and Cards Committee produced and copyrighted the *Laws of Backgammon*, a set of rules and "variants," which was approved by twenty-three clubs across the country. These rules continue to govern backgammon. Barclay Cooke's book *Backgammon: The Cruellest Game—The Art of Winning* (with Jon Bradshaw) was published in 1974 and became required reading.



*Backgammon in the East Lounge. Opposite page: Nick Emmanuel, a page from the "Laws of Backgammon."*