

Four Card Code

History and provenance

Author: ChatGPT (GPT-6 Astra Pro)

September 7, 2026

A relatively well-documented attribution

This is usually called *Fitch Cheney's five-card trick*, even though the assistant sees only four cards. Michael Kleber's 2002 account credits William Fitch Cheney, Jr., and identifies an appearance in Wallace Lee's *Math Miracles* (1950), pages 49–51 [1].

Later exposition and this version

Kleber's article explains the trick's mathematical structure and discusses its possibilities. The familiar version uses five ordinary playing cards, hides one, and communicates it by arranging the remaining four. That is the version on this page.

Different explanations choose different orders for suits and different correspondences between the six permutations and the six offsets. Those are conventions, not different tricks. The code in the accompanying solution is specified completely so the two performers can agree on it beforehand.

The attribution to Cheney is supported by the cited account; the 1950 publication is a documented early printed appearance, not a claim that the trick was invented in that year.

Sources

[1] Michael Kleber, The Best Card Trick, *The Mathematical Intelligencer* 24(1) (2002).

<https://courses.csail.mit.edu/6.042/spring18/Kleber-cardTrick.pdf>

Sources checked September 7, 2026. A documented appearance is not necessarily the earliest appearance.