



# The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board & Table Games

By Margaret Hofer

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## The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board & Table Games By Margaret Hofer

As families are rediscovering the joys and virtues of staying and entertaining at home, board games have surged in popularity indeed, sales doubled in the last year alone. This mirrors a trend in the late nineteenth century the heyday of American boards and table games when, fueled by the introduction of games coincided with a growing need for middle-class social entertainment.

Then, like now, the games that best captured players' imaginations mimicked, and sometimes poked fun at, the culture that produced them. Organized around themes such as courtship, commerce, travel, sports, and city life, *The Games We Played* brings together over one hundred eye-catching examples of America's rare and popular board games, such as *The Game of Playing Department Store*, which encourage players to accumulate the greatest quantity of goods while spending their money as economically as possible, and *Bulls and Bears: The Great Wall St. Game*, in which players try their hand as speculators, bankers, and brokers, yelling each other down as if in a trading pit.

This playful visual survey of its thematic essays will cause board and table game aficionados to share in the revelry of togetherness.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

You won't find Monopoly or Scrabble here, but rather The Popular Game of Broadway and Soldier Ten Pins. But some of the other names will be familiar in this vividly illustrated collection of late 19th-century and early 20th-century games in the collection of the New-York Historical Society: Milton Bradley (producer of, among others, Anagrams and Other Letter Games) and Parker Brothers (who produced What's His Name, a quiz game about famous men). This fascinating look at games past is not all play: Jackson, president of the Historical Society and a historian at Columbia, posits that games reflect the social concerns of their times, and illuminating captions offer bite-size lessons in social history.

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From [Booklist](#)

Commemorating an exhibition that closed in January 2003, this big, square book revivifies a forgotten corner of American popular culture. On nearly every page, it displays the board, box cover, and other accoutrements of one or more nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century board games, exemplified by some of the best-kept specimens of the old amusements, their brilliant colors barely jaundiced with age. Hofer's sparse text imparts that board and table games enjoyed their American heyday from the 1840s to the 1920s, though, of course, the type persists, as the continued popularity of *Monopoly*, invented as late as 1935, indicates. Indeed, some of the oldest games survive, perhaps in adapted form, to this day--for instance, *Fish Pond* lives on as a little children's activity at fund-raiser carnivals. Hofer presents the games in such broad and narrow topical chapters as "Parlor Amusements" (a big category) and "War Games" (almost all based on the Spanish-American War), and usually relays just enough, and never too much, information in the captions for one of the most charming sets of illustrations imaginable. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"...rich with scientific, historic and geographic information....oddly poignant." -- *The New York Times*, May 4, 2003

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