

**1869 – CHECKERS ON THE BRAIN** - The first mention of checkers appeared in 1869. The game board was set up at The Lodge (the Store on the Corner). This is the one iconic photo of how intense these games were.

*From left to right: Standing: Charles Martin and Charles Erne. Sitting: Erastus Huntington, Charles Carpenter, J. Woodford, Oscar Dean and Titus Hamilton.*



“The Lodge has got checkers on the brain, though customers can be waited on between the games. It is reported that one game was actually broken up at the most interesting point by the late fire, but this needs confirmation, as it is taxing the credibility of the public too much to expect any reliance to be placed in such improbable sensational yarns.”

*So important was the game, Jacob Rush immortalized it in verse!*

#### **CHECKERS ON THE BRAIN**

Oh no, it is not with checkers that I while away the day.  
It is only to the Lodge I go, to see the others play  
    They come from all directions; North, South, East and West.  
    All are represented from the families of the best.  
Then two sit down to play this most familiar game,  
With a crowd of lookers on who have checkers on the brain.  
    Mike now remarks if you go there you surely will get licked,  
    When his voice is heard; why Mike you must be sick.  
Then John says, Mike will put you out, he will,  
And Titus gives a quarter if Mike only will keep still.  
    In the outer circle of this interested ring.  
    Speaks up the Jewish peddler, ‘I tinks I see some ting.’  
From behind a mammoth meerschaum mounted on a box so nice,  
With most assuring manner comes this well meant advice.  
    Dry up you black Jew Dutchman, or we will put you out,  
    And send you back to Germany to feed on Sauerkraut.  
Then comes the Boss of checkers, why that will never do,  
If Mike goes here and Oscar there, you see that he’ll take two.  
    Then comes Ras. who says to me, it’s all [so] very clear,  
    If Oscar will but half play, Mike will ‘walk off on his ear.’  
As for all the Kelleys, I cannot name them ore,  
But if anyone is missing, you’ll find him at the store.  
    Here now comes another who at checkers thinks he’s some,  
    You’ll know him by the careful way he carries his right thumb.  
    (by Jacob Rush)

*Since the men would most-likely be found at The Lodge on any day during the winter, this institution came under fire in a series of debates at the Saturday night Lyceum. Was the Lodge*

a nuisance, morally, socially etc? or was it a pace in this island community, where people could meet, talk and interchange ideas? There were some witty arguments on both sides.

Finally, Betsy Jinks, a regular contributor using an apparent pen name, offered this opinion. If her comments were to be believed, changes did occur at The Lodge as a result of the spirited discussions. "I do not know when I have been more pleased than when listening to the very able article in last week's Islander concerning matters pertaining to the Lodge. In the language of another, 'The truth came in solid chunks and every word weighed a pound' and it may be a satisfaction to him to know that it is not often when a reform is broached, that favorable results can be seen in as short a time as in this case.

Already the Checker Board has been partly banished. And having occasion to visit the Lodge room the past week, I was gratified to see that not more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the space on the counters were occupied as seats and beds for the weary Lodgers. And, incredible as it may appear, one member has been seen at home splitting wood to cook his dinner, and reports say another was seen going to the lake for a bucket of water. But whether he ever got farther than the Lodge with his bucket is not known.

I believe that all the Good Wives will join me in thanking the gentleman for what he has [done] and I hope the favorable results will amply compensate him. No great reform was ever effected without agitation."

February 1873 – *Intense games of checkers continued for years.* "We visited the store this afternoon where a couple of gentlemen were busily engaged in the game of checkers. We watched them attentively for half an hour (more or less) but during the whole time neither made a move and we came to the conclusion that checkers was not a very lively game to look at."

December 1873 – *The checker games were not without an element of danger to the players.* "Henry went over to Sandusky today. His absence puts a heavy responsibility on Erastus and he was too busy to enforce much regularity among the tobacco chewers. A very mean trick was tolerated there this day, by their firing their supuratum and salivary excrement at the red hot stove, which would glance off and strike the pantaloon legs of the checker players, which not only took the starch out of their pantaloons, but created a smell that would knock the buttons off from a livery stable door. An unusual number of school children were knocked down at the store today by being struck in the head with tobacco quids."

*And at the end of the year we find that* "in the store while Mike (Hughes), Jake, Uri (Ward), A. K. (Addison Kelley), Ras (Erastus Huntington), J. E. W. (Jessie E. Woodford), A. S. K. (Alfred S. Kelley), Lester (Carpenter), Jim, Titus and J. K. (Julius Kelley) are giving the checker board no rest at all."

March 1876 - *Hi-jinks continued.* "This afternoon, all in the twinkling of an eye, there was a scene at the store arising from the potato throwing nuisance. Oscar Dean and Charley Quinn were the 'head toads' in the fracas. Titus and Alonzo lent a helping hand for the sake of peace, but were battered more or less, especially the brave Lon! It is high time that throwing potatoes, etc. at the checker players, putting eggs, etc. in others pockets, and many other rough and rowdyish tricks that are indulged in at the Lodge come to a head halt. The Capt. of the *Chief Justice Waite* for instance, was hit with a potato the first time he ever entered E. Huntington's store."

The Beautiful Lodge of Kelley's Island – in verse:

Beautiful Lodge of Kelley's Island - Sweet with the perfumes of tobacco.

Dear are your loafers to me, when they don't throw old potatoes!

Over your counters they are thrown, down by your checker-board tumble;

Now on the top of your head, down comes potatoes without number.

Beautiful Lodge of Kelley's Isle, crowded to your utmost capacity,

Can't see your way for the smoke, and faint from the 'stinch of tobacco.'

Register steaming with saliva, vile from the mouths of the loafers.

Sure its enough to drive one wild, to witness such scenes from their childhood!

Where are our leading young men? Sure they are not in this vile den!

They could not waste precious time learning to smoke and to soger!  
No, they are at home reading history, or else in Mama's best parlor,  
Learning to 'bow' or to 'slide' or educating their feet for the Lanciers.

Beautiful Lodge of Kelley's Isle! Thronging with school children plenty.  
Some want a good quid of gum, others a 5¢ Havana.  
Pail of Lake Erie on porch, Schoolmam and children awaiting,

May 1884 - *Checkers continued to intrigue the members of the Lodge.* "A lively time our Kelley's Island checker-players have had the past few days. Mr. Robert Freer, the great checker-player of Cleveland, has made it quite interesting for the checker-players of Kelley's Island, now and then giving them a game to just keep up their spirits. Mr. Huntington played about 23 games and got one and made one draw. Mr. Freer says the bet checker-player we have is Mr. Addison Kelley."

*Erastus Huntington reached such a degree of expertise that he wrote a regular checker column for the Sandusky Register, presenting a diagram of difficult situations that the readers could attempt to solve.*