

CHECKERS ON THE BRAIN – 1869 by Leslie Korenko

The first mention of Checkers occurred in 1869. The games took place at The Lodge, “At the present Lodge room, no rent has to be paid, wood bills and lights furnished gratis, saying nothing of tobacco and other things too numerous to mention” This led to complaints about the ongoing games of checkers and the impact on sales at the store, and the nuisance it generated. One lady wrote: “Already the checker board has been partially banished. And having occasion to visit the Lodge room the past week, I was gratified to see that not more than ¾ 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.

“The Lodge has checkers on the brain, though customers can be waited on between 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 sensations yarns.”



Checkers were played at the Lodge, from left to right: Standing: Charles Martin and Charles Erne. Sitting: Erastus [Ras] Huntington, Charles Carpenter, J. Woodford, Oscar Dean and Titus Hamilton.

“Among the recourses of amusement this winter [December 1873], we notice that Erastus has procured a new checker board at the Store. We understand some of the old habitants are having the pants half soled in order to stand the wear and tear of the nail kegs and salt barrels as they watch the fascinating game.”

Checkers is not usually an overly exciting game, but in this case, the checker players were certainly put at risk. “A very mean trick was tolerated there this day, by their firing their

supuratum and salivary excrecence at the red hot stove, which would glance off and strike the pantaloons 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.”

Another risky game was played. “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 dead 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.”

“Monday was a day of vexations and disappointments... It being washing day, started for the Lodge at an unusually early hour to play checkers, but was disappointed to see a full attendance and more so in finding Mike [Hughes] and Oscar [Dean] at the Board. After suggesting several brilliant moves, none of which were adopted, filled the stove full of coal and then suggested a move to Mike (who was next to the stove) that was adopted but not until the buttons on the back of his coat began to get red hot. After waiting a hour or two in vane hopes of getting a chance to play just one game, concluded to go and see the Director of the Dramatic Society and try to get a ‘Complimentary’ to the command performance... At noon, returned to the Lodge and found Mike still at the board. On asking him if he was not going home for dinner, he replied; guess it would be worthwhile as his wife was working.”

IF TOO LONG JUST DELETE THIS NEXT PARAGRAPH

Jacob Rush occasionally took up the pen to compose a poem and the checker players did not escape. The poem begins: 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....

www.KelleysIslandStory.com