

Pigs In Clover

by Lynne Belluscio

This weekend, on Sunday, May 4th at 3 pm we will be opening a new exhibit at LeRoy House. I've called it "Let's Play" and I have put exhibits all over the house, from the basement to the second floor. After a short annual business meeting, I'll have a chance to talk a little about the exhibit and point out some of the "gems" that I discovered in our collections. That includes a first edition of one of the earliest American board games, "The Checkered Game of Life" and a little marble maze called "Pigs in Clover." It's amazing that someone didn't throw it out. It's not in very good shape, but now that I've done some research on it, I'm glad that the Historical Society has it. I'm not even sure who donated it.

The game isn't very big – about five inches round. The cover is very dirty and at sometime, I should take it to a paper conservator and have it cleaned. Thousands of these little games were sold. It was invented in 1889 by Charles Crandall an

American inventor and toymaker. He was only 12 when he started to invent toys. Four years later, when his father died in 1849, Crandall took over his fathers wood working factory in Covington, Pennsylvania.

In 1866, he moved the factory to Montrose, Pennsylvania and went into business making croquet balls. When his children were recovering from scarlet fever, he created some special wooden building pieces with finger-lap ends. They were very popular and he manufactured more under the name of Crandall's Building Blocks. We have two sets in the collection. One is on exhibit.

It is interesting to note, that Crandall showed them to P.T. Barnam who was so impressed with the novel blocks, that he put them on display in his museum for several weeks. The blocks were an instant hit and thousands of sets sold.

In 1885, financed by industrialist Moses Lyman, Crandall moved to Waverly, New York and started the Waverly Toy Works. His son, Fred managed the factory in Montrose which burned in 1886 and was rebuilt in Elkland, Pennsylvania.

Early in 1889, Crandall invented a new game. It was a simple ball-in-a-maze puzzle which Crandall named "Pigs in Clover." The pigs were marbles that had to be rolled through a round maze to reach "home" in the center. It became an



A cartoon from an 1889 newspaper.

instant hit and swept the county. *The Waverly Free Press* reported that "The Toy Works are turning out eight thousand of 'Pigs in Clover' a day and are twenty days behind in orders." It was reported that a philanthropist in Kingston ordered enough puzzles for every inmate in the Ulster County jail and the almshouses of the city and county.

The game reportedly was played in England in the Court of St. James. Mark Twain mentioned it in his book, "The American Claimant." But the most amusing part of the story of "Pigs in Clover" occurred in the United States Senate. It was reported in the *New York Tribune* that New York Senator William M. Everts bought the game from a street vendor and took the puzzle home. He had such a great time playing it that he took it with him to the Senate the next day.

Senator George Graham Vest saw it on Everts' desk and borrowed it. He showed it to Senators James Pugh, James Eustis, Edward Walthall and John

Kenna. They all wanted one so they sent out a page to buy more. *The Tribune* reported that the Senators engaged in a "pig driving contest" and about thirty minutes later, Senator Vest announced that he had succeeded in driving all of his pigs into the pen.

A few days later a political cartoon appeared in the *New York World's* March 17, 1889 issue. It lampooned President Benjamin Harrison's advisors and cabinet members. The caption read, "Will Mr. Harrison be able to get all these hungry pigs in the official pen?" The pen in the center of the puzzle looked like the White House. The marbles had faces on them and resembled politicians.

Looking at the little puzzle in my hand, it amazes me that it sparked such a political story. I would have never guessed but the Internet makes a lot of information available. Today we marvel at the new hand-held games that kids play with. It's nothing new. *Pigs in Clover* was a hand-held game - and it didn't need to be recharged!!



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