

Children's Folklore

The Children's Area is a magnet. Sprinkle children through the Festival on a scorching day and they'll gravitate here and it will be hard to pull them away. In our shady place, the Hill and Sand area provides the three essential elements of earth, sand and water, to transform the landscape with castles and forts, quarries and caves, as dreams emerge from the blank sand canvas. In the dirt-floored Marble Ring, parents can teach their children, and children can bring their parents up to date on the ways of aggies, steelies, puries and cats eyes. The Game Ring has a tree club-house and materials for building on additions; games of all sorts are played here too—tug of war, jump rope, squirt gun fights, four square, hop scotch, football.

In the Crafts Tents in our area, the articles useful in play are constructed; we make doll houses and dolls, origami cootie catchers, soap box derby cars, wooden sailboats. The Folk Swap Tent is for the exchange of secret languages and riddles, counting out rhymes and ghost stories. Here, too, we make costumes and puppets for the Stage, where children from local schools and clubs share their performance traditions—clapping games, circuses, stunts and parades. Sometimes grownups teach the traditional games and play-parties that they remember so lovingly from their own childhoods. The best times that we have are those when the most Festival visitors join in, so come and play with us.

Jump rope Rhymes

If you stretched a jump rope from Maine to California—somebody said once—all the children along that rope would be jumping to these rhymes:

Down by the ocean
Down by the sea
Johnny broke a bottle and
Blamed it on me.



I told ma
Ma told pa
Johnny got a licking and
Ha ha ha.

How many lickings did he get?
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 -

(near Maine)
Blue bells
Cockle shells
Eeevy ivy o-ver.

(near California)
Blue bells
Taco shells
Eevy ivy o-ver.

Mother, mother
I am ill
Send for the doctor
Over the hill.

In comes the doctor
In comes the nurse
In comes the lady with the alligator purse . . .

Measles, said the doctor
Mumps, said the nurse
Pneumonia said the lady with the alligator purse.

Out goes the doctor
Out goes the nurse
Out goes the lady with the alligator purse.

My mother'n your mother
Live across the way
Sixteen-nineteen
South Broadway
And every night they have a fight and
This is what they say
Akka bakka soda cracker
Akka bakka boo
Akka bakka soda cracker
Out goes you.

Not last night
But the night before
Twenty-four robbers came
Knocking at my door

I went out to
Let them in
They hit me on the head with a
Rolling pin.

How many hits did I get?
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 -

Fudge, fudge
Tell the judge
Mama's got a newborn
Baby.
Wrap in up in tissue paper
Throw it down the elevator
First floor—miss
Second floor—miss
Third floor
Kick it out the door
Mama's got no newborn
Baby.

City Games

by Fred Ferretti

The day of the empty lot, of the city block unencumbered by parked cars, of the stoop, is over. In the cities there is virtually no empty space and what there is of it is given over to asphalt-paved parking lots and to public parks with carefully delineated fields and playing areas. The automobiles, the delivery trucks, the buses and the taxis pack the streets. What had been empty space is now divided into lots each with its tract house and its lawn. Unbuilt-upon land has been turned into ball fields where organized teams play, into golf courses and tennis courts and fenced-in paddle ball and handball courts. Stoops have been reduced to one step up.

One might expect that with this constriction of open space games peculiar to the streets of such urban centers as New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, games whose forms, rules and rhymes are part of America's urban tradition, would become constricted as well, would perhaps die of disuse. But this has not happened. City games, street games, children's games, dictated largely by the environment in which they were created live on, basically unchanged, though altered slightly by new geography and social alterations.

In cities there are no baseball fields and so baseball becomes stickball, with a sawed-off mop handle replacing the bat, with a high-bouncing pink rubber ball—which I called a "Spaldeen" as a youngster—replacing the baseball, with manhole covers becoming pitching mounds and home plates, and with sewers, auto bumpers and fire hydrants becoming

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Photos are by Jerry Barvin, from "The Great American Book of Sidewalk, Stoop, Dirt, Curb, and Alley Games" by Fred Ferretti, published by Workman Publishing Company, New York.

bases. Or it becomes stoop ball, wherein the spaldeen is thrown against the point of one of the stoop's steps and each bounce is counted as one base for the "batter."

On city streets games such as Skelly, also called Skelsy, are contrived. This is sort of a billiards game, in which a bottle cap, filled with melted wax, is shot with the fingertip at a succession of boxes within a square court—from one to two to three, and so on, up to 13. Skelly courts were in my time drawn with chalk in the street, or for the more affluent, painted on the tar with white lead. Skelly is not a suburban game. Nor is Box Ball, which must be played within the confines of two or more concrete sidewalk squares, with players slapping the spaldeen on a bounce back and forth in a rudimentary form of tennis. Nor is street hockey, played on roller skates with a role of black electricians' tape used for a puck and with hockey sticks made out of wood handles nailed and taped to boomerang-shaped pieces of wood.

One needs a wall, preferably large and without windows—like the walls around the corner from corner candy stores—to play Russia, because the ball must travel some 27, 28, 29, 30 . . .

distance up against the wall, then arch outward and downward sufficiently long enough to permit the player to execute the difficult hand and feet movements required before catching the rebound.

Some games are both city and urban and are unchanged by their location—Pottsy, also called Hopscotch, Jacks, Jump Rope, (particularly Double Dutch with its intricate rhymes,) baseball card flipping, Mumblety-Peg—others change in form as they move from city to country. Touch football, city style, has as its gridiron boundaries a pair of curbs and as its goals, telephone wires strung across the street. Basketball, city style, is usually played on concrete courts, often with steel waste baskets—their bottoms ripped out—as hoops, with makeshift backboards made up of discarded wood strips. Basketball in the suburbs is more often than not played on regulation-sized wooden courts. Handball in the city is played in many ways and on many courts and often does not exist away from urban areas, except in athletic clubs.

But only in the city can one find Johnny On A Pony, Ringelevio, or Kick the Can. And it seemed that the best horse Chinese Handball—any wall will do.

chestnuts, the ones that hardened the best and became the best "killers" for games of Buckeye came from city trees. Marbles in the city were largely gambling games using concrete curbs, cigar boxes, sidewalks and alleys, but away from the city marbles was likely to be Ringer or Old Bowler—Abraham Lincoln's favorite marbles game—because in the suburbs there is more dirt.

When I was growing up there was no such distinction as city or country. The basic unit of existence was the block. A block might exist in the city or the suburbs but it was one's personal world.

Except for school the boundaries of my youth and my activities were defined by one block in the city of New York. The middle of the block our touch football field because there were no trees to interfere with forward passes. At my end of the street was the basketball court and the stickball field with first base a telephone pole second a manhole cover and third a fire hydrant. Red Rover was played at the end of the block where thick trees allowed for no games that required throwing a ball, and Boy Scout knife-into-the-dirt games could be played anywhere because everybody's sidewalk

was separated from the street by those strips of packed-down dirt that was ideal for such things. It was marbles and stickball in Spring and punchball and handball and slap ball in Summer along with jacks and jumprope; football in the fall and Buckeyes and sleds in the winter.

There is a tendency to believe in our nostalgia that those games don't exist anymore. We are so taken with those overly explicit pastimes sold to us and our children on television that even as we buy them we rue the purchases and long for games that were played with imagination, with rules that changed at whim, with equipment that was makeshift. But they are around. Go into any neighborhood in any American City and you'll see girls jumping rope and playing jacks, boys flipping and swapping baseball cards, children chasing and tagging and hiding from each other, balls being hot with mop handles or with palms and fists, field goals being booted over telephone wires. Stoops still exist in cities and so do curbs and gutters and sidewalks. The kids haven't changed much either and they play now what I remember playing as a boy. The only changes have been in us.

Abe Lincoln's marble game.

