

# GAMES <sup>sf</sup>

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There were games we played at school and in the neighborhood, some of which were centuries old. With few exceptions they required only the ingenuity and enthusiasm of children, and any needed object could be found nearby. They were played on the grounds of Washington School at recess and in the neighborhood yards where mothers, busy with their household chores, listened to the voices of their children and watched out the kitchen window occasionally.

The popular game of hopscotch needed only a stone and a marked area, on the sidewalk with chalk or on the ground with a stick. A child could play alone or with other children. Another game, drop the handkerchief, required only a piece of cloth and the energy and laughter of small children. For boys the little glass marbles held the greatest fascination. Played on the ground within a circle made by a stick, they continued for hours, and trading agates, the beautiful marbles of variegated colors, was part of the strategy and great fun.

The age-old game of London Bridge with its enchanting lines, London Bridge is falling down—falling down—London Bridge is falling down—falling down—my fair lady, never failed to induce giggles, laughter, and shouting as it ended in a tug-of-war.

It was not unusual for girls to play in one section of the school grounds and boys in another. Their games were relatively rough and required a larger number of players. With great admiration, little girls often stood on the side lines and watched. Wolf Over the River was a fast-moving, rough-and-tumble game in which the boys were divided into two groups. Playing in a small area, one group tackled the other one until all members belonged to the same team. In the ever popular crack the whip, boys formed a line and holding hands, ran while the anchor man remained in the same position, thereby forcing the other boys to turn around. Those on the opposite end got a fast ride but ended upon the ground. Winslow Homer, a nineteenth century artist, painted a charming and authentic picture "Snap the Whip," with nine barefoot boys posed in various stages of holding hands, running, and falling to the ground. In the background their little red schoolhouse stands like a sentinel in a remote field of grass and clover.

Of all the games boys played during those early years none gave them so much pleasure as that age-old sport of ice skating. The reasons were obvious. It was daring and the opportunity occurred only a few times in the winter; and their parents' admonitions spurred them on, "Keep away from the ice. Stay near the edge. Test the ice first." There were no lakes in the area, streams were miles away, and only farmers' ponds were likely places to skate. However, there was a small one that straddled the property line of the east boundary of the school grounds. When the days and nights re-

mained extremely cold over periods of time, then ice appeared on the pond. Wind, sun, snow, rain, and sleet all affected the surface of the ice and therefore the speed of the skaters. Though girls sometimes participated, it was a sport primarily for boys. They ran a short distance from the edge and "sailed" across the pond, touching the opposite edge then running around the bank to repeat the process. As they continued their faces and hands turned red then blue against the cold wind. Ice skates were never used, and Bill remembers wearing out a relatively new pair of shoes in a few days. Our father, a mild-mannered man scolded him for his extravagance. It should be added here that shoes under normal wear never lasted very long. Made of inferior material, they were soon covered with scuffs on the toes and large worn places on the soles.

For all the students the May Day celebration in the late spring gave the most pleasure. The playground was large enough to accommodate all kinds of sports and contests—burlap sack races for both boys and girls, and passing the bean bag. Our mother had made the four inch square bag with navy beans from the kitchen shelf and pieces of figured calico. The chief feature of the celebration, however, was "dancing" around the Maypole, a custom going back to medieval days in England. About ten or twelve girls and boys gathered around a tall pole to which white and red or blue streamers had been attached to the top. With the ribbons in our hands, we moved in and out, making the colorful pattern from top to bottom. As we looked at the Maypole—the girls wearing dresses their mothers had made for the occasion and the boys standing straight and tall in their new suits—we thought it was truly beautiful, a fitting climax for the afternoon.