

School-Day Games

Playground and schoolroom games of early Iowa were numerous, and many of them are still popular. Unlike the play-party games which have to a very large extent been replaced by other forms of social entertainment, the games of the playground and schoolroom have persisted; and many of them are as popular with the boys and girls of to-day as they were when played by their fathers and mothers or their grandfathers and grandmothers. These games were played without singing; and those suitable for indoor playing frequently found a place in the evening's fun at a play-party, particularly among the younger members of the group.

Most of these games had fixed rules, a formal mode of procedure, and a climax to be achieved. This climax usually consisted of a victory of skill, speed, or strength. Often a game in one part of the State was called by one name and by another in a different section; and the playing rules of the same game might vary in different localities. For example, the well-known game of "Run Sheep Run", in which a band of hidden players seek their goal under the guidance of signals shouted by a leader, was known as "Go Sheepy Go" in certain parts of Iowa, while the guide signals might be colors in one locality, names of animals in another, or names of per-

sons in a third. Another example was the ball game known as "Work Up" in southwestern Iowa and as "Rotation" in the northeastern part of the State; and still another was the familiar circle game of "Ruth and Jacob", as it was known in some places, and "Jacob and Rachel" in others.

Many of these games underwent a process of evolution with the passing of years. Baseball, for example, emerged from the more simple games of "Town Ball", "One Old Cat", and "Two Old Cat". "Rotation" or "Work Up" was a type of baseball game suitable when there were not enough players for two teams.

The playground and schoolroom games of early Iowa furnished wholesome sport and amusement. They were played before school began in the morning, at the morning and afternoon recess periods, and during the noon hour. In the towns and villages of early Iowa these games were played whenever groups of boys and girls came together. Some were more popular at one time of the year than another, like "Run Sheep Run" which was a favorite on fall evenings when bonfires of leaves served as a rallying point.

In almost every community kissing games were popular unless the girls condemned the practice. "Post Office" where the letter was a kiss seems to have been a well-known game throughout the State.

An entire number of THE PALIMPSEST might be devoted to the playground and schoolroom games of

yesterday, but exigencies of space require the selection of only a few of those which were popular in Iowa. The following list, therefore, contains merely a part of the many games which boys and girls of yesterday as well as those of to-day have enjoyed.

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Going to Jerusalem

“Going to Jerusalem” was a lively, scrambling game which was often played when the more formal ones had become tiresome.

A row of chairs, alternately facing opposite directions, is placed in the center of the room. There is one less chair than there are players. The line marches around the chairs to a musical accompaniment, and the moment the music stops every one scrambles for a seat. The unsuccessful player has to leave the game, taking one of the chairs with him. This continues until there are only two players encircling one chair, and the one who secures it wins. The accompanist may add interest to the game by varying the tempo of the music and by ceasing to play when least expected.

New York

“New York” was a game which required nimble wits as well as nimble feet. In some localities it was called “New Orleans”, but the method of playing was the same.

Any number of players choose sides, and one division goes apart from the other for a secret conference. It then advances in a line to a spot about twenty feet from the other side, and the following conversation takes place:

“Here we come!”

“Where from?”

“New York.”

“What’s your trade?”

“Lemonade.”

“Show us some.”

The side thus challenged proceeds to pantomime some action, such as washing, scrubbing, playing ball, or any other movement that fancy dictates. The other side tries to guess what it is, and as soon as one person yells out the right answer all the actors turn and flee toward a goal of safety. If any of them are caught they must go on the other side, which then takes its turn in presenting a pantomime. The division wins which finally captures all the players.

Wink'em

“Wink'em” was principally a parlor game for evening parties of young folks.

It is played by forming a double circle, with the people on the inside sitting in chairs and those on the outside standing behind them. There is one odd player behind an empty chair. This person winks at some one in the ring, who at once tries to slip out of

his chair and over to the empty place. If he is successful the player left with the empty chair has to wink. It is the guards' business to touch their partners before they slip from the chairs, thus keeping them from moving. The guards must keep their hands at their sides until they see a player wink.

Spin the Platter

“Spin the Platter” is a parlor or schoolroom game and may be played by ten or more persons. All of the players are seated in a circle, except one, who stands in the center and twirls a plate, tray, or some other round object. When he starts spinning the “platter” he calls a number or name and the player so designated springs forward and tries to catch the platter before it ceases to spin. If he is successful he returns to his place in the circle but if he is not successful he takes the place of the spinner and pays a forfeit. The forfeits are all returned at the end of the game.

Tin-Tin

“Tin-tin” was an indoor game which furnished amusement on many a rainy afternoon. Its fun lay in the fact that one player was continually being embarrassed before the others.

The principal character in this game is the tin-smith, who moves about the room stopping before each player in turn and rapping on the floor with a

cane or broom. The following dialogue then occurs between the tin-smith and the player.

“Tin, tin!”

“Come in.”

“Will you buy any tin to-day?”

“Yes, I want ten cents worth.” (Or any amount)

“Neither laugh nor smile but take the name I give you.”

The tin-smith then secretly gives the buyer the name of some much liked or disliked person of the opposite sex, and moves on to the next player where the same process is repeated. After every one has been given a name he comes back to the first of the group and asks various embarrassing questions which may be answered only by the name assigned. If the person either laughs or smiles he must give a forfeit, a bit of jewelry, a handkerchief, or the like. After every one has paid this toll the tin-smith blindfolds one person and holds a forfeit over his head, saying:

Heavy, heavy hangs over thy head.

What shall the owner do to redeem it?

The judge asks: “Fine or superfine?”

If the owner is a boy the answer is “Fine”, and if a girl, “Superfine”. The judge then imposes some ridiculous task which the person must do in order to redeem his property. This is continued until all the forfeits are in the hands of their respective owners.

Cat in the Corner

“Cat in the Corner”, or “Pussy Wants a Corner”, is played by four persons standing in front of trees, or chairs if the game is played inside, which are about equidistant and if possible forming a square. A fifth player, the cat, stands in the center and tries to occupy a “corner” when the players exchange places. The person who is thus left without a “corner” must act as the next cat.

Ruth and Jacob

“Ruth and Jacob” or “Jacob and Rachel” was a very old game which, in more recent times, deleted of its Biblical names, has sometimes been called “Blind Man’s Buff”.

A blindfolded person stands in the center of a circle of players. The ring moves around him until he claps his hands three times, when it has to stop. The blind man points his finger at some one, and if that person is of the opposite sex she steps into the circle; if not, the circle moves again and the pointing is done over. When the player comes inside the ring the blind man calls out “Ruth!” and she answers “Jacob!” He then tries to catch her, being guided by her voice and movements. She of course tries by noiseless stepping and dodging to make the snaring difficult. When he succeeds in the capture he feels her face and clothing and then guesses who she is. If incorrect he must catch another Ruth. If correct, the two change places.

Three Deep

In "Three Deep" the players form a double circle, each couple standing two or three feet apart facing inward. Two players run around the outside, the one trying to catch the other. To escape being tagged the first runner may dodge in front of a pair in the circle whereupon, that file having been made "three deep", the outer player must run until he is forced to seek refuge in front of another couple or is tagged. Each couple has to be on the alert, else the runner will jump in front of them and the outer player be tagged before he has a chance to run. If the tagger succeeds in touching a runner before he gets inside, the running is reversed and the former chaser is instantly liable to be tagged. It is of course not permissible to cut the circle.

Hide and Go Seek

This was probably one of the most universal games. Though it was principally an out-door diversion, many a home has been considerably upset by a lively afternoon of "Hide and Go Seek" in the house.

The one who is "It" stands at the goal and covers his eyes while the rest of the players hide. He counts one hundred by ones, or maybe by fives, and when he has finished he calls out,

Bushel of wheat, bushel of rye,
Who's not ready holler I!

If any one responds he must cover his eyes again and count to one hundred by tens. This time he says:

Bushel of wheat, bushel of clover,
Who's not ready, can't hide over!
Here — I — come!

He then goes out to hunt the players, and if he spies one of them there is a race to the goal. If "It" arrives first he pats the goal three times, calling out, "One, two, three for Mary!" or whoever it is, and if the player wins the race he says "One, two, three for me!" The one who is caught first is "It" for the next game.

Run Sheep Run!

"Run Sheep Run" was a good game for a dusky autumn evening when the players became shadows flitting toward the goal. It was really a complicated form of "Hide and Seek", with parties rather than individuals doing the hiding and seeking.

A captain is chosen for each side, who in turn chooses the players until all have been evenly divided. One division becomes a searching party which remains at the goal, and the other a hiding party. The latter goes out with its captain who directs the various individuals where to hide, all having previously agreed upon a series of signals to be called.

When every one is hidden the hiding captain then

goes back to the searchers who at once start on the hunt. They are under the control of their captain, who may divide his party and send it in as many directions as he sees fit. The hiding captain stays with his opponents and calls out signals to his hidden men which enables them to get nearer the goal without being detected. When all the players are well placed to make the goal the captain calls out, "Run, sheep, run!" The whole party then makes a dash. The captain of the searchers immediately gives the same signal, and the game is won by the party of which one player reaches the goal first. If any of the searching party catches sight of one of the hiders before all run for the goal he tells his captain, who shouts "Run, sheep, run!"

The signals agreed upon by the hiding party may be such as:

"Red", meaning "Danger."

"Green", meaning "Go around the house to the left."

"Blue", meaning "Go around the house to the right."

"Purple", meaning "Stand still."

"Yellow", meaning "Keep going in the same direction and get nearer to the goal."

Blackman

"Blackman" or "Pom Pom Pullaway" was a favorite playground game. Any number of persons line up on opposite sides of the playground or a

street, with one person in the middle as "It" or the "fox". The players try to run from side to side without being caught. If they are tapped on the back three times they must stay in the middle. The principal difference between "Blackman", or "Black Tom" as it is sometimes called, and "Pom Pom Pullaway" is that in the former all of the players cross together on the signal "Blackman, Blackman, Blackman" by "It", while the formula in the latter is:

John Smith, Pom Pom Pullaway!

Come away, or I'll fetch you away!

whereupon the designated player must try to cross alone. In "Blackman" if any one starts across before the third word of the signal or if "It" substitutes "Redman" or "Yellowman" he is deemed to have been caught and must join the "foxes". When there are more "Its" than players on the base lines a player must be wary indeed to get across unscathed.

Ante Over

Before the days of our big modern schools, children often spent recess playing "Ante Over" the schoolhouse. A barn or "smoke house" was utilized outside of school hours. The game was a combination of ball and tag, requiring skill and alertness.

The players choose two captains; the captains choose their players, alternately, until all the contestants are selected; and then each captain and his

team go to opposite sides of the building. One captain throws the ball over the barn and yells "ante over". This captain and his team are then on the alert either to make a dash around the barn and gain the other side without being caught by an opponent or to catch the ball when it is tossed back. If one of the members of the opposing team should catch the ball when it is thrown over, his team runs around either or both ends of the building to tag the first team before they can change sides. As they flee the one with the ball tags as many of them as possible with the ball. If no one catches the ball, it must be tossed back with the warning of "ante over". This is continued until one team has tagged and added to its own number all the members of the opposite team. To add suspense to the game, the team that receives the ball can hold it before either throwing it back or charging on the enemy.

Fox and Geese

The game of "Fox and Geese" is essentially a tag game and is usually played out of doors in the snow but may be played anywhere that a large diagram can be marked on the ground. If played in the snow the paths may be trampled with the feet, if played in the schoolroom the diagram may be drawn with chalk.

A large circle from fifteen to thirty feet in diameter is drawn on the ground and is crossed with intersecting lines like the spokes of a wheel. The

more players there are, the larger should be the circle and the greater the number of spokes. One player is chosen to be "It" or the "fox" and the other players are the geese. The fox stands in the center of the wheel and the geese are scattered around the rim.

The object of the game is for the fox to chase the geese and tag one of them. The players may only run on the prescribed trails, that is, on the lines of the diagram. The center of the circle is a temporary haven of safety for one goose at a time. A goose is not supposed to enter the center if it is already occupied, but if a player is hard pressed he may take refuge there and the other occupant is thereupon forced out and becomes a legitimate prey for the fox. A goose, upon being caught, becomes the fox and the chase continues until all the "geese" have had a turn at being "It".

Prisoner's Base

"Prisoner's Base" is played under many different forms, from the most simple for boys and girls who are beginning to care for games of team organization to the more complicated form for adults. This game is a very old one and is supposed to have descended from the days of border warfare. It is said that during the reign of Edward the Third, "Prisoner's Base" was prohibited in the avenues of the palace at Westminster during the sessions of Parlia-

ment because it interrupted the members and others while passing to and fro.

The game of "Prisoner's Base" here described is the simplest of its many forms and is usually played on the playground but is well adapted for ice skating. The playing area is divided into two equal parts with a small pen marked off for a prison or base at the opposite end of each division. From five to fifteen players guard each side and the object of the game is to make prisoners of all of the opposing team. The players venture into the territory of the enemy and if caught are put into prison where they must remain until tagged by one of their own side who is free. Ordinarily a player on alien ground is subject to being tagged only by an opponent who has left his own base later. Both prisoner and rescuer may be tagged and brought back to prison before reaching their own territory. When one side has made prisoners of all of the opposing side the game is won.

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