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UMI
BILLIARDS AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1660-1860

by

Kenneth Cohen

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture.

Spring 2002

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BILLIARDS AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1660-1860

by

Kenneth Cohen

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Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Planning
According to an old adage in academia, art historians are frustrated artists and literary critics are failed novelists. I am not a very good billiards player, and I do not doubt that I wrote this history of the game to placate my sense of inadequacy. Of course, I like to think there are other reasons for this project. No academic historian has devoted a study to billiards and sport historians have called for scholars to fill the gap. Billiards also represents one of the few leisure activities in Early America for which we have a material record. Footballs, fishing rods, and cricket equipment from the period have not survived, but a number of museums have billiard tables, maces, cues, and balls in their collections. For a Winterthur student interested in sport and leisure, billiards' historiographic significance and material remains made the game an attractive thesis topic.

But not enough material or documentary evidence survives from any single locus to entirely picture play in one place. This thesis' broad geographic and chronological boundaries partly results from the scattered nature of the evidence, but the topic also presented an opportunity to write the kind of history for which I have argued in classes over the last four years. I have drawn upon a variety of sources: published material, diaries and journals, letters, insurance records, tax records, census records, and material culture. I have gathered this evidence from New Orleans, Natchez, Charleston, Richmond, Williamsburg, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. My analysis equally
inspects changes and constants over time. Blending "types" of sources, writing synthetic
narrative, and avoiding a teleologic emphasis on change all fit the methodological
approach to writing history I have longed to try.

As these components suggest, this thesis describes more than a chronology of
inventions and champions. Billiard enthusiasts already have uncovered that history.
Instead, I have drawn upon existing works and the primary sources listed earlier to
discuss the meaning of playing billiards in Early America. My focus centers on the
relationship between the evolution of the game and the culture in which it evolved.

* * *

No scholar works alone. At the very least, he or she stands on the shoulders of the
scholars who came before them. But the geographic diffusion of sources on Early
American billiards left me unusually reliant on the local knowledge, hospitality, and
cooperation of museum and billiard professionals across the country. Mimi Miller of
Historic Natchez not only procured access to private homes but graciously housed me
during my visit. Susanne Olson at Gore Place stained good clothes measuring the billiard
table there. Joe Newell, Brunswick's official historian and reproducer of historic models,
sent several packets of information and I even received one or two. An engineer and real
estate agent by trade, Greg Bayman nonetheless copied by hand the rare billiard table
account book at the Indiana Historical Society. My classmate Rob Rudd found as many
references to billiards by accident as I did on purpose. Thanks also go to J. Paul Ericson;
Phil Zea and Mark Wenger, Colonial Williamsburg; Martha Rowe, Museum of Early
Southern Decorative Arts; Mark Anderson and Linda Eaton, Winterthur; Gerard
Belliveau, New York Racquet and Tennis Club; Dave Atkinson and Mr. James Biddle.
Andalusia; Phil Porter, Mackinac State Park; Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman; Susanne Crow, Indiana Historical Society; Sarah Neener, Virginia Historical Society; Siva Blake, Historic New Orleans Collection; Douglas Kent and the staff of Hyde Hall; and the staffs of Castle Tucker and Johnson Hall State Historic Site.

Writing a thesis while applying to Ph.D. programs is a recipe for stress. Gretchen Buggeln quelled fears, inspired confidence, and advised revisions – often in the same meeting. My gratitude to this Superwoman of advisors exceeds words. Dozens of friends and family members also lent their encouragement and support. I especially thank my parents for their patient attention and interest. Robin Sarratt advised me to apply and come to Winterthur in the first place. She served as travel agent, research assistant, editor, and sounding board on this project. Every day, she is so much more.

My grandfather introduced me to billiards. I grew up watching my uncles and him play on the table in his basement. I only wish I could have been there more often. This project is for him.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experience of playing billiards in America from the Colonial Era until the Civil War. Making use of diaries, correspondence, public records, published texts, and material evidence, the project argues that the manner in which billiards was played and discussed in America until the Civil War calls into question prevailing ideas about social and cultural division, the impact of reformers upon these divisions, and the evolution of "modern" sport. At the same time, investigation of billiard playing supports conceptions posited by political and economic historians of a central cultural tension between virtue and interest in Early America.

As a result of applying sport history to the general historical narrative instead of applying the narrative to sport history, behaviors appear which contradict the dominant conception of social stratification over time in America. Billiard players came from all ranks of society and played in socially heterogeneous environments. While elite players played at home or in private clubs, evidence also suggests they frequented taverns and public billiard halls throughout the period under consideration. Sharps, criminals, and "unrespectable" folk dressed in their finest and entered "respectable" billiard halls. Social integration during leisure time signifies the choice to mix and proffers the possibility that social and cultural stratification were neither as complete as historians have depicted nor represented a widespread desire to withdraw in the face of immigration and anonymity in the burgeoning urban milieu.

By taking evidence from the realm of leisure and sport and applying it to the general historical narrative, this thesis hopes to inspire a brand of sport history more concerned with contributing to broader historical understanding than understanding of the evolution of leisure or sport. At the same time, the relative lack of change within the structure of billiards argues against the Weberian dichotomy of "pre-modern" and "modern" sport which forms the basis of evaluation for many sport historians.
John Bruluman was desperate. He had little money and the recent exposure of his counterfeiting promised to prevent accumulation of credit or credence in 1760 Philadelphia, where word-of-mouth and personal connections opened the doors to prosperity. A jeweler by trade, Bruluman cast aside the craft in favor of a commission in the Royal American Regiment of the British Army. Whether social aspirations or economic circumstances motivated the career change, discovery of the native Philadelphian's counterfeiting scuttled any productive relationships within the officer corps or the civilian network which helped him acquire his commission.

By August, the bereft Bruluman had decided to commit suicide. But Bruluman did not possess the nerve to kill himself, so he concocted a scheme to have someone else kill him. Bruluman knew conviction for murder brought a death sentence. He resolved to murder someone and have the state execute him.

Yet this plan still required Bruluman to kill someone, and the erstwhile military man seems to have had an aversion to murdering others as well as himself. On 27 August, he balked on two premeditated attacks before he headed to the Center House Tavern. Located on the edge of the commons where City Hall stands today, the Center House stood a mile beyond the western limits of 1760 Philadelphia. Near but not in the
city, Philadelphia gaming laws did not extend to the commons. As a result, the "ill red house" had a thirty-year reputation for disorderly conduct and gaming. Gentlemen often began drinking at the London Coffeehouse or the Indian King and then trekked out to the Center House for gaming alongside an assemblage of "no distinction." Certainly distinction evaded Bruluman in the summer of 1760.

Nobody knows how long after Bruluman's arrival he began to watch the match at the billiard table. Perhaps intoxication eroded Bruluman's inhibitions. Reports noted he "seemed very pleasant and agreeable" in spite of his unemployment and unfulfilled plan. The contest Bruluman witnessed featured at least one gentleman, Robert Scull. Scull's father had served as the Surveyor General of Pennsylvania and held membership in Benjamin Franklin's Junto. Bruluman attended the match for "a considerable Time" when, without warning and just as Scull addressed a shot, Bruluman presented a gun and said "Gentlemen, I will shew you a fine stroke." Scull reportedly reacted as though Bruluman jested. But a moment later John Bruluman shot Robert Scull "through the body." Immediately after the shot, Bruluman allegedly walked up to the wounded man and said, "Sir, I had no malice nor ill will against you – for I never saw you before, but I was determined to kill somebody that I might be hanged and you happened to be the man; and as you are a very likely young man, I am sorry for your misfortune." Scull died three days after the shooting. The colony executed John Bruluman six weeks later.¹

* * *

The son of an Irish immigrant, Michael Phelan parlayed his successful billiard play into ownership of a billiard hall and a partnership in billiard table design and
production. Then in September 1858, Phelan unexpectedly lost an inter-city exhibition to fellow New Yorker and Irishman Dudley Kavanagh. Now Kavanagh posed a threat to Phelan's dominance of the New York billiard industry.

To maintain the reputation on which he built his business interests, Phelan needed to beat a noteworthy player. He published a challenge to play any man who matched his own $5,000 front. The $10,000 stake doubled the prize of any previous advertised match, promised publicity, and limited Phelan's opponent to top-tier professionals backed by wealthy supporters. John Seereiter of Detroit took the challenge at the end of January 1859, but Phelan's predicament after his loss to Kavanagh demanded an event beyond a mere high-stakes match.

First, Phelan created a sense of real antagonism between himself and Seereiter. In his weekly column in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Phelan complained that Seereiter violated the protocol of sporting challenges by setting the contest rules without consulting him. Phelan chided Seereiter and his backers for their "arbitrary" impropriety, then performed an about-face and granted all of Seereiter's demands in order to appear magnanimous. His column reminded readers "it should not be forgotten that Mr. Phelan, in his wish to make a match, has conceded much." At the same time Phelan cultivated an image of himself as a disinterested champion, he continued to promote the rivalry he thought would attract attention. "We hope the match will be carried out and played in a kindly and chivalrous spirit," he wrote [emphasis added].

In case the drama of personal animosity did not intrigue sportsmen, Phelan next made himself the underdog. Phelan understood the match would neither increase his
stock as a player nor incite enough interest if gamblers favored him heavily to win the match. So a month before the contest date Phelan reported he "was suffering from an aggravated attack of rheumatism in the back and shoulders, which necessitated the care of a physician, and confined him to bed for two weeks." He advised friends not to wager too much on him as "the rheumatic fiend may altogether neutralize both science and skill."

Having created drama and suspense, Phelan then opened the show to the public. Match organizers rented Firemen's Hall in Detroit. The Hall's interior catered to refined tastes with chandeliers and gas burners descending from a "handsomely ornamented" twenty-eight foot high ceiling. Under this canopy stood one of Phelan's own tables, surrounded by a sloped platform which rose to a height of four feet at the back of the room. Five hundred armchairs were arranged on the platform. Tickets priced at about twice the cost of admission to a top-flight horse race ensured a respectable crowd. The setting thus capped Phelan's efforts to create an event which effused respectability while he simultaneously strove to maintain his place atop the cut-throat billiard world.

The match provided culminating theatre. Playing to 2,000 points, Phelan fell behind early but took a 300-point lead by 10:40 P.M., over three-and-one-half hours after the match began. Seereiter rallied to within two points at 1:30 in the morning before Phelan pulled away and won by 96 points at 5:30 A.M. after over ten hours of play. Contemporary estimates suggested about a half million dollars exchanged hands over the event, and Phelan walked away with $15,000 including bets won against spectators.
After the match, Phlean announced his "unquestionable" position as "the Representative Man of billiards in America." Subsequent columns reported the laurels heaped upon him by his backers, people who undoubtedly profited from Phelan's win. Phelan felt his victory secured his place in the industry. He played only sporadically over the course of the following decade and he never sought a rematch with Kavanagh.²

* * * *

This project uses the game of billiards as a tool for cultural study. Games and sports both reflect and affect culture. As a reflection, play activities draw from a larger cultural repertoire. Historians can use these reflections to analyze the larger culture. But every play scenario operates under distinct conditions which do not necessarily adhere to conventions of everyday life. Rules in this "play realm" establish the laws of the game and prescribe social interaction in the play space. So although games represent values amalgamated from different arenas of cultural production, play activities also have their own rules which order experience and collaborate with other arenas of cultural production to create values. This productive function defines the way games affect culture. Study of a game's affects on culture portends less for examinations of cultural values than for revealing the ways the traits of the play realm contribute to life in the everyday world.³

In the century between the two opening vignettes, the game of billiards changed relatively little. Rules went substantially unaltered. Billiard tables kept the same dimensions. More players used cues and the most common game involved an extra ball,
but Robert Scull could have walked into Fireman's Hall and understood the game without asking a question.

Its lack of structural change makes billiards especially fertile for analysis as a reflection of culture. While billiards retained its basic format, soccer evolved from a street melee into a sport of teams with set numbers played on a field with fixed boundaries. Baseball developed from a combination of cricket and numerous informal ball games. Horse racing went from a head-to-head quarter-mile straightaway sprint to the sweepstakes on an oval course. Only one major card game, whist, avoided restructuring and maintained its popularity. Cultural analyses from the perspective of any of these games must consider adjustments to the rules and equipment of that game in addition to larger social, political, and cultural shifts. But like a building whose framework goes unchanged while its interior witnesses relentless reconfiguration, billiards' structural stoicism makes the game a clearer window onto cultural themes, values of players, and meanings of play environments.

Sport historians have focused on the reflective capabilities of sport. They have not inspected sport for its contributions to culture and society. As a result, sport history occupies an isolated historiographic place concerned with arguments over whether and how play activities reflect theories posited by historians in other sub-fields. The progression from "pre-modern" to "modern" sport and the effects of urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and social stratification on sport have dominated discussion for the last twenty years.
Historians in other sub-fields are partly responsible for the introspective nature of sport history. For too long many historians have ignored the world of leisure by excusing the subject as frivolous. Cultural theorists, anthropologists, and psychologists all note leisure's central place in any society or culture. The time has come to recognize leisure's full historical potential to test existing theories and pose new arguments about society and culture at-large. I use billiards as a vehicle to propose ideas about American society and culture as well as to examine the sport's reflection of American society and culture.

Michael Phelan balanced his self-presentation between egocentric claims to superiority and gentlemanly disdain for having to prove himself in the first place. His column claimed "he has ever been opposed to public matches, and has been driven, in a measure, into every one in which he has ever been engaged. Success scarcely compensates for all the annoyance, trouble, and misrepresentation to which one is exposed, from the moment the first rumor of a contest is faintly whispered to the last and winning cue stroke." Yet while Phelan iterated his disinterest, his published challenge initiated the contest and he vigorously promoted the event to maintain his preeminent place in the sport. Genteel refinement and naked ambition clash in Phelan's behavior and reflect a larger cultural tension.

The cultural tension apparent in Phelan's behavior extends back to the eighteenth century. Historians have long recognized this tension though they have chosen a variety of terms to describe it. "Luxury", "greed", and "competition" relate to ambitious "interest." These terms find opposition in words such as "refinement", "restraint", "domesticity", and "virtue." Early Americans knew the implications of these terms but
did not uniformly apply them. Choosing one term over another to describe a person's actions related entirely to the agenda of the speaker. Both striking laborers and their entrepreneurial bosses laid claim to virtue while lambasting the other group as selfishly interested. James Madison and Adam Smith conflated the two strains, suggesting interest was virtuous. Other keywords of the era applied to both sets of values. "Individualism" encompassed a level of self-interested action but individual perfection was a virtuous goal. Americans never agreed on which terms applied to whom, but the ceaseless passion of the debate records the centrality of this tension in American culture.  

Billiards enjoyed wide popularity because it appealed to both ends of the tension. Erudition, skill, and strategy connected the sport to virtuous refinement and restraint through tropes of "useful" recreation and disciplined practice. Diametric competition, prevalent gambling, and expensive equipment connoted interested greed and luxury. Commentaries on billiards by reformers and enthusiasts track the persistence of the interest-virtue dynamic and advocate that the tension remained as unresolved at the start of the Civil War as in the middle of the eighteenth century.

In public venues, billiards' broad patronage mingled. Elites and criminals inhabited the Center House Tavern. They even may have played together in a range of public houses from the urbane Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg to ordinaries with few other amenities (Figure 1).  

Players of diverse backgrounds met in diverse public environments from the colonial era until the Civil War. Michael Phelan was a jeweller by trade, just like John Bruluman. Phelan's backers had profiles similar to Robert Scull.
The unabated social heterogeneity of billiard play in Early America questions prevailing ideas about the evolution and nature of social and cultural division. Historians have pointed to the stratification of American society and culture between 1760 and 1860, and have argued that a reform ideology championing virtue provided a moral framework for this emergent hierarchy. The social integration and interestedness of billiards endangered the reform ideology’s social order based on virtue. Contact with luxury or less virtuous people threatened to spread the contagion of interest. But the evidence of billiard play argues reform ideology exerted a less influential force in American culture than some historians have suggested.

Historians have followed reformers in applying the term "respectable" to adherents of reform ideology. This work envisions competing definitions of respectability but I have applied the word "respectable" as a reference to people and spaces traditionally considered party to the reform ideology. My use of the term brings into relief the "unrespectable" behavior of reform ideology's presumed legions.

I also have used traditional terms for economic rank like "elite", "middling", and "low." Although billiard play resists the conception that social or economic status encapsulated identity, financial disparity existed. Like my use of the term "respectable," references to economic ranks show how individuals heretofore configured as exclusively "elite", "middling", or "low" willingly and relatively easily slipped into and out of the identity attributed to their rank when in public billiard spaces.

Class did not order the experience of playing billiards, but neither did the same set of social rules govern all matches. Similar regulations categorized play realms into sub-
cultures. Each sub-culture had distinct rules for play as result of a distinct definition of "respectability." Just as different recipes for the same dish call for varying amounts of the same ingredients, sub-cultures contrasted in the way they applied interest and virtue to arrive at a definition for respectability. The "Refined" sub-culture headed by reformers demanded more restrained behavior than the "Business" or "Bachelor" sub-cultures. Forged from marketplace interaction, "Business" sub-culture respectability permitted more ambition than its refined counterpart but still urged virtuously honest transactions and restraint in comportment. The Bachelor sub-culture ignored virtue in favor of interest; respectability resulted from physical or fiscal victory (Figure 2).13

Every home, club, and public leisure space suited a single one of these sub-cultures based on the space's integrity of construction, ornament, and associated standards of behavior and dress. Appropriate appearance and behavior granted access to and communicated membership in a sub-culture. Despite the various codes of behavior inscribed in various types of billiard halls, many players demonstrated the ability to migrate between environments. If players participated in multiple sub-cultures, wealth, occupation, and ethnicity did not bind identity. Presence in a space communicated an identity subject to change when a person entered a new space and properly associated with different kinds of objects.14

An understanding of the game's structure and the billiard industry in America underlies an examination of the game's cultural meanings. In Chapter One I trace the limited evolution of billiards' rules and equipment. Within the context of structural change over time, I introduce key characters and roughly limn the game's place in
society. Change over time also speaks to issues of modernization important in sport historiography. Chapter Two elaborates on the game's structure and social context to address questions about who played, why they played, and what billiard play meant. It opens with a deeper consideration of the tension between interest and virtue, and illustrates how stereotypes in published texts on billiards reflect this tension. The next section contrasts the game's purported stereotypes with evidence about who actually played billiards. Here I confront issues of status and the traits of sub-cultures. Both stereotypes and sub-cultures attribute great importance to the environment of the game, so the final section of Chapter Two analyzes spaces of play. The Conclusion ties together deductions from both parts to argue this study's larger implications for our view of Early American society and culture.
NOTES

1 For reports of the murder, see Pennsylvania Gazette, 4 Sept. 1760; Pennsylvania
  Murders and Executions in Philadelphia, 1682-1866 (Philadelphia: Temple University
  Time: Being a Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Incidents of the City and Its
  Inhabitants, and of the Earliest Settlements of the Inland Part of Pennsylvania
  (Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart Co., 1927) p. 560; Genealogical Notes Relating to the Family

2 For Kavanagh's victory, see The Spirit of the Times, 25 Sept. 1858, p. 392. For pre-
  match publicizing, see Leslie's, 5 Feb. 1859, pp. 154-155; Leslie's, 19 Feb. 1859, p. 187;
  Leslie's, 26 Feb 1859, pp. 203-204; Leslie's, 5 Mar. 1859, p. 219; Leslie's, 19 Mar. 1859,
  p. 251; Leslie's, 26 Mar. 1859, p. 267; The Spirit of the Times, 12 Feb. 1859; Spirit, 19
  Feb. 1859; No commentaries note Phelan as the universal favorite, but many state odds
  on him in New York. For coverage of the match, see Leslie's, 23 Apr. 1859, p. 325;
  1859. For post-match posturing, see Leslie's, 4 June 1859, p. 14. Also see Melvin L.
  Adelman, A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics. 1820-1870

3 Kendall Blanchard, The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction (Westport, CT: Bergin
  and Garvey, 1995) pp. 51-55; Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-
  Element in Culture (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1950) pp. 1-18; Roger Caillois, Man,
  Play and Fantasy," in Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman, Ritual Play, and
  pp. 67-73.

4 For soccer, see Tony Mason, Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915
  (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, Ltd., 1980) pp. 9-15. For baseball, see Benjamin G.
  Rader, Baseball: A History of America's Game (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press,
  1992) pp. 1-10. For horse racing, see T.H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural
  Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia" William and Mary Quarterly
  (Apr. 1977: 239-257). For cards, see Herbert Asbury, Sucker's Progress: An Informal
  History of Gambling in America from the Colonies to Canfield (New York: Dodd, Mead,
  and Co., 1938).


7 *Leslie's*, 23 Apr. 1859, p. 325. Yet *The Spirit of the Times* noted on Feb. 19 that Phelan had told Seereiter he would play in public or private.


For examples of texts connecting middle class identity to reform guidelines, see Blumin, *Middle Class*, pp. 193-195; Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 212-240; Haltunnen, *Confidence Men*; Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) pp. x, 192. Neither of these last two texts explicitly claim middle class culture owed its characteristics to the reform movement. Haltunnen exclusively used prescriptive literature, yet her subtitle, "A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870," alludes to middle class acceptance of reformers' prescriptions. Walters states "the majority of reformers" came from the middle class and that reformers asserted "generally-held" values. Such suggestiveness has strongly influenced sport historians, who have assumed the middling sort did not participate widely in sport until the 1840s. For examples of this assumption in sport history, see Steven A. Riess, "The Rise of Respectable Sporting Culture" in S.W. Pope, ed., *The New American Sport History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997) pp. 173-179; Gom, *Manly Art*, pp. 129-147; Jones, "Class Expression."

13 This theoretical organization of culture owes much to Michel Foucault's definition of discourse as a set of cultural "statements" united by common theoretical underpinnings, strategic application, and enunciative contexts. Within a discourse, contradicting perspectives establish competing ideologic "truths" which help groups make sense of the world. Agreement on the boundaries of discourses requires even conflicting groups to share some degree of cultural background. I have pictured sub-cultures differentiated by ideology, but all three sub-cultures' ideologies addressed an overarching discourse of "respectability." This scheme does not limit sub-cultures to drawing exclusively from

14 Suggesting objects established truths of social standing while people moved between these settings also fits Foucault's definitions of discursive formations. Foucault claims these formations constitute, not reflect, objects, and that discourses exist as discontinuous, chance-ridden, and "material" ensembles of events. Foucault, *Aesthetics*, pp. 302-312; Michel Foucault. “Orders of Discourse” *Social Science Information* (April 1971: 7-30) p. 26.
In *The Rise and Progress of the Game of Billiards* (1860), Michael Phelan pictured his career as the integral phase in the history of the game. According to his book, nobody did as much to “elevate the game.” Phelan engineered a sense of progress through his references to elevation and improvement. “Progress” meant a better game in 1860 than ever before, and a better game left fewer reasons not to play. Since Phelan owned billiard halls, manufactured tables, and played in high-stakes professional matches, more play meant more money for himself.¹

The one-time jeweler carefully crafted his ideology of progress by ignoring the many ways in which billiards remained the same. Billiard manuals and reports on the game produced between 1660 and 1860 show a striking continuity over time. Yes, billiards in 1860 had a different basic form and offered more entrepreneurial opportunities than the game did in 1660. But the fundamental era of change occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century, not the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and many aspects of the game persisted over the entire two-hundred-year period.
Origins

For centuries, people of many cultures have struck balls with sticks, molding this basic activity into a panoply of games and sports with formal rules. The long history and sheer ubiquity of stick-and-ball games shrouds the exact origins of billiards. The earliest reference to a "billiard" table appears in a 1471 inventory of Charles VII's royal palace at Angers, but nothing precludes the possibility that such tables existed previously or in other places under a different name. A 1480 French woodcut depicts two peasants outside knocking balls around objects very similar to those on later billiard tables, suggesting various ranks of people played the game in diverse settings (Figures 3 and 4).

However the table game originated, it had attained popularity in England by the time of the Restoration. As Tories repealed proscriptive Puritan legislation, publishers issued a number of manuals instructing readers on the rules, techniques, strategies, and etiquette for games popular in polite society. These manuals often included sections on billiards, evincing the game's spread amongst those who considered themselves genteel.

Both Charles Cotton's *The Compleat Gamester* (1674) and Robert Howlett's *The School of Recreation* (1684) note billiards' presence in Restoration England. Cotton could name "Few Towns of note therein which hath not a publick Billiard-Table, neither are they wanting in many Noble and private Families in the Country." The manuals describe a game played on a cloth-covered table with varying numbers of pockets and flax- or cotton-stuffed cushions around the perimeter. No set dimensions governed the table's size, although Howlett said the surface should be "somewhat longer than it is broad; Both length and width being left to your discretion." Neither book offered
information on table construction despite remarks from both authors that "there are very few found true [level]." Primers encouraged players to strike balls before commencing play, otherwise "a very Bungler sometimes, by being well-acquainted with the Turnings and Windings of a false Table, may beat a good Gamester."^4

A gamester pushed his or her ball with a mace, a turned rod of lightweight wood about five feet long with a rectangular "shoe" of lignum vitae or brasilwood attached at one end (Figure 5). Better shots resulted from keeping the shoe bottom flush against the tabletop during the entire stroke. If the mace lifted it contacted the ball unevenly. Rods entered the tops of shoes at an angle so players could apply downward pressure onto the shoe during the stroke. Players grasped the end of the rod "between [their] thumb and forefingers" and swiftly jerked the mace forward from the shoulder and elbow. A thin layer of ivory often protected the flat face of the wooden shoe which met the ivory ball. This defensive layer also created firmer contact, as ivory absorbs shock less than wood. While firm contact made balls move faster and straighter, repeated punishment caused shoes to come loose from the rod. Manuals urged players to check their mace before starting a game.^5

Ivory balls added to the game’s roster of unpredictable equipment. While able to endure the stress of regular collisions without breaking, any given piece of ivory has a uniform density only if the center of the piece comes from the center of an elephant tusk. Yet centering each ball in the middle of a tusk limits the number of products that can come from a single tusk. Even in expensive, perfectly centered balls, constant impacts over time create areas of unequal density inside the ball. Variations in density meant that

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most billiard balls had some degree of bias. Manuals therefore recommended players test out balls as well as maces and tables before they played.6

Only two people competed in a seventeenth-century billiard match. The first person to reach an agreed-upon number of points won. Players accrued points by negotiating their balls through an ivory hoop called a "port" and then making their balls touch -- but not knock over -- an ivory pin called a "King" (Figure 4). One can see why royalists approved. The King and Port stood an equal distance from the edge on opposite ends of the table. Players received one point for touching the King only after they had passed the port. They also earned a point by knocking down the King with their opponent's ball or by pocketing their opponent's ball, known as making a "hazard." Play began from the King's end, and balls had to "pass the port" through the opening facing the King. Passing from the opposite direction was called "Fornication" and manuals encouraged players to "make your adversary a Fornicator" by pushing the other players' balls through the wrong opening or back through the port after foes had passed it.

Fornicators had to pass the port correctly twice before heading for the King.7

Restoration manuals describe a perverse game that demanded delicate execution in spite of deficient equipment. Balls had to lightly contact the King, players daintily gripped the mace, neither sleeves nor skin could touch the table, and players had to keep at least one foot on the ground during shots. Breaking any of these rules was termed a "forfeiture" and cost a player one point. "As this is a cleanly pastime", Cotton wrote with tongue-in-cheek, "so there are Laws or Orders made against lolling slovenly Players, that by their Forfeitures they may be reduced to regularity and decency."8
These strictures conform to ideas of gentility, so the game described in Restoration handbooks may represent only one form of billiards in the seventeenth century. Judging from the 1480 French woodcut, basic equipment like the Port and King probably had universal application. On the other hand, rules of etiquette requiring one foot on the floor, no sleeves on the table, and no smoking while playing may have had limited employment. Scoring could have differed, and the game would have functioned identically with less costly equipment such as wooden balls, ports, and kings and a naked tabletop.9

The only hint of non-genteel play in the early manuals comes in Cotton's warning about sharps. By the seventeenth century, professional gamblers called "sharps" already had emerged as an archetype that haunted taverns and gaming dens. Cotton felt "this Pastime is not so much used of late as formerly, by reason of those spunging Caterpillars which swarm where any Billiard-Tables are set up." These sharps "dream of nothing but Hazards" and "continually pass from one Prison to another till their lives are ended." Synonymous with our "sharks" and hustlers, these rakes of the sporting world deceived unsuspecting gentlemen. Cotton says sharps had a harder time at billiards because "it is impossible to cheat at, unlike cards." The author meant sharps could not rig a billiard game like a deck of cards. But billiard sharps' advantage lay in superior skill and knowledge of the equipment. So Cotton adds a final caveat, cautioning "that you not suffer yourself to be over-matcht."10
Billiards probably first appeared in the British American colonies in Virginia around the turn of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{11} Before 1700, observers frequently describe Virginians bowling in their leisure time but no record of billiards appears. Tobacco planter William Byrd II owned the first documented table by 1709. His introduction to the game most likely came while at school in England, much like the instruction in cricket received by scions of the eighteenth-century American gentry as a corollary to their English educations.\textsuperscript{12} A ranking member of the Virginia landholding elite with a reputation for rancorous behavior, Byrd inherited from his father sizeable tracts of land and a significant role in colonial politics. When Byrd assumed control of the family fortune in 1705, he invested much of it in conspicuous display. He planned the most fashionable estate in the colony at Westover, about halfway between Williamsburg and the James River falls. If Westover announced Byrd's wealth to passers-by, the billiard table made a similar assertion inside the house.\textsuperscript{13}

Billiard tables ranked as the most expensive type of furniture available to colonial Americans. The very cheapest second-hand tables cost between £12 and £15, and Byrd's son replaced Westover's original table with one he bought from a Williamsburg tavern for £35 in 1751. The finest imported tables cost about £50 not including transportation fees. Although any board on legs with holes cut in it could function as a table, Byrd's penchant for communicative consumption strongly suggests he owned a proper billiard table. The beds of such tables featured an intricate arrangement of wooden panels inside frames. The grain on adjacent panels alternated directions to minimize warping. Craftsmen
planed one side of the frames to make them flush with the panels and render the surface as flat as possible (Figures 6 and 7). Constructing the paneled bed and undercarriage that supported it took 12 days. Then an upholsterer added approximately nine yards of flannel or superfine wool to cover the bed and cushions stuffed with list, cotton, or flax. This upholstery cost about twice the price of the woodwork. In addition to materials and labor, another reason for the high cost stemmed from Virginia's general lack of craftsmen. Most planters imported their finer furniture from England, the Caribbean, and other American colonies. Considering no billiard table appeared in Williamsburg until after Byrd owned one. Byrd probably imported his table at a cost between £30 and £40.

Byrd recorded his billiard play in his diary, a rare source which allows investigation of playing habits. Extant segments of the diaries from 1709 to 1712 and 1739 to 1741 show a seasonal cycle in billiard play. Byrd played more games in January and February than any other months. Humid Virginia summers witnessed a dearth of billiard play. The table experienced sporadic use during the spring and fall. Byrd played 24 times in April and May of 1709, an average of three days per week. The following year, he records only four games in those two months. Byrd's diary also describes no billiard matches at night. The precise time of day he played varies without regard to the season between the "morning", "before dinner", "after dinner", and the "afternoon." Byrd invariably chose cards for evening play.

However, eighteenth-century billiard players could play at night. European paintings from the second quarter of the eighteenth century show contrivances for lighting nighttime play (Figure 8). Such intricate lighting fixtures probably were...
uncommon in private billiard rooms, though Virginia inventories and *Maryland Gazette* advertisements list "a Set of Candlesticks and wires" alongside tavern tables. Cotton and Howlett both recommend games to three points after sunset instead of to five or seven points "by day" because of the cost of candles. Also for that reason, some American taverns charged more for games played at night. This discrepancy over play at night between Byrd's diary and other sources hints toward the danger of projecting Byrd's tendencies onto all Virginians or even his genteel peers.¹⁸

William Byrd occasionally played billiards with his wife, but the presence of guests at Westover often initiated periods of daily play. His usual opponents came from the local elite with whom he socialized. Randolphps, Harrisons, Wormeleys, and Carys dominate the names listed. Rarely, Byrd engaged itinerant ship captains and dignitaries or condescended to play with a dancing master, a "hatter", or a person on the edge of the Virginia elite like John Bolling. Guests did not always play billiards. Byrd was a well-rounded eighteenth-century gamester and felt comfortable on the bowling green, the cricket field, and at the card table. The diary hardly mentions billiard play at all in 1711. Byrd's political posts required frequent trips to Williamsburg but the diaries only describe Byrd playing billiards in town twice. William Byrd II played billiards almost exclusively in his home where he controlled who he played.¹⁹

Private and public tables began to show up in and around Williamsburg during the 1720s. The House of Burgesses authorized the purchase of furnishings and fittings for a billiard room in the Governor's Palace in 1720, and shortly thereafter inventories reported tables in "billyard houses" on three tavern lots at the east end of Duke of Gloucester

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Street near the Capitol. At least one tavern must have had a table before these, since
Byrd refers to a match in a Williamsburg tavern in 1711. As the colony grew over the
next forty years, the tavern trade flourished in Williamsburg and a range of profitable
public houses acquired tables.20

Eighteenth-century taverns afforded play to semi-private clubs and the general
public. Regulated prices for food and drink coupled with a low per-game fee during the
day permitted a wide typology of players access to the upscale taverns which owned
tables (Figure 1). At least by the 1760s, sharps lurked among the characters in American
taverns. Rutherford Goodwin noted "those who lived by their Wits" among the "throngs"
that descended upon Williamsburg during court and Burgesses sessions. Landon Carter
lamented his grandson's contact with "Mr. Sharper, John Crain." Henry Laurens wrote to
the father of one of his apprentices in February 1769, telling him his son "had been
unlucky at play; and desired me to advance him £100 sterling to extricate him from some
difficulties." Laurens referred to the boy's creditors as "Sharpers" who had "surrounded
your Son and followed him like his Shadow."21

So far analysis has focused on billiards in Virginia, but by the second quarter of
the eighteenth century billiard matches occurred outside the Old Dominion. Colonies
originally comprised of religious dissenters such as Massachusetts and Pennsylvania
outlawed public play in the seventeenth century for its connections to gambling. Though
legislation against specific sports and games lightened as these colonies developed a
more heterogeneous population in the early eighteenth century, Massachusetts,
Connecticut, and New York still banned billiards from public venues in 1776. Even after
some colonial assemblies legalized the game, local governments did not. Billiard tables remained illegal in Philadelphia throughout the colonial era.\textsuperscript{22} Of course, legal status did not necessarily restrict play. Records from a court in Western Massachusetts between 1639 and 1702 list only three prosecutions for gaming. And in mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia, the lack of "sufficient Laws now in Force" motivated "some sundry Inhabitants" to petition the Colonial Council for "more effectual suppressing of all Gaming at Cards and Dice in Public Houses, and also Billiard-tables (now grown very numerous)."\textsuperscript{23}

While Southern colonies did not prohibit specific games or gambling in the early eighteenth century, they denied claims to gambling debts incurred on credit and limited recoverable specie debts to £10 or less. Virginia enumerated the activities covered by these laws in 1740. Billiards' late addition to this list in 1748 suggests a fleeting presence or relatively small wagers on billiards in Virginia until that date.\textsuperscript{24}

In large part, Southern gaming laws copied acts passed in Britain. Contemporary social theory in Britain blamed a rash of riots and protests on instability caused by the high volume of money transferred in wagers among the lower sorts and between lower sorts and people of higher rank. American legislatures publicized anti-gambling laws as efforts to deter poorer gamblers from squandering away their small reserves, but the acts also prevented large sums from moving out of the elite.\textsuperscript{25} Few wealthy gamesters failed to claim winnings from their peers. The "gambler's code" demanded gentlemen pay gaming losses to fellow gentlemen or risk impugnment of their reputation. William Byrd III lost over £10,000 on one wager.\textsuperscript{26}
In places where the game had legal sanction and a sizeable following, newspaper advertisements announced the sale of equipment and availability of repair services. According to these sources, billiards had appeared in Charleston by 1731, and in the 1750s Marylander John Anderson may have become one of the continent’s first cabinetmakers to produce more than one or two tables. References to the game in Georgia and North Carolina papers do not appear until the Revolutionary Era. Absence from the periodical record suggests less concentrated participation but it does not preclude playing in these colonies. Diaries and travel journals have recorded the presence of billiard tables in remote places. Sir William Johnson had a Philadelphia-made table in Johnson Hall on the Mohawk frontier. The officers’ cabin at the British Great Lakes outpost of Michilimackinac, and the thirty-family French frontier town of Cote Sans Dessein on the Missouri River both had tables.

At the same time billiards spread across North America, the structure of the game underwent significant alteration in Europe. First in France and then in England by the 1730s, the Port and King disappeared in favor of a game with more variables. The French game “carambole” featured a red ball in addition to the two white balls each played by one contestant. Players could either hazard balls or play “caroms” in which their balls struck the other two balls on the table. Contestants earned points based on which ball they pocketed and the order in which they caromed. Maximum points went for combining hazards with a carom on the same shot. The English game functioned similarly except it included no extra ball. As a result, the English game had lower scoring. One other major dissimilarity lay in the French rule ordering players to continue
their turns until they failed to score. The English game maintained the old order of
alternating turns regardless of scoring. Minor disparities separated multiple sub-versions
of each game. Some forms allowed players to score by hazarding their own ball while
others forbade either this "losing hazard" or the "winning hazard" scored by pocketing
your opponent's ball.\textsuperscript{29}

The absence of immobile targets raised the complexity of billiard shots. Players
had to find a way to contact two balls or pocket one, whereas in the old game they could
always try to pass the port or touch the king if they had no shot at their opponent's ball.
Caroming and setting up the table so a player could run multiple scoring shots in one turn
required ball manipulation the mace could not provide. With its large flat contact face,
the mace could not impart spin to a ball. In response, French players turned to the cue
sometime in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The cue had existed in the
seventeenth century as the reverse end of the mace. Players had used this "butt end" to
strike the ball when it rested against the cushion and prevented a proper mace stroke.
With the rise of carambole, the cue became the primary striking implement. Its small
square tip allowed players to put a slight spin on the ball.\textsuperscript{30}

The English adopted the cue reluctantly over the second half of the eighteenth
century.\textsuperscript{31} Yet the mid-century English game shared much with French carambole, and it
seems the English picked and chose from French innovations as French manuals
informed them of the latest developments. English authors penned no new material until
the final quarter of the century. In America, the Port and King lingered after they had
disappeared overseas. Advertisements for them appear as late as 1745. At the same time, "Qs" were sold in Charleston in 1731 and in Annapolis in 1758.32

Structural changes introduced to billiards in the first half of the eighteenth century represent the most substantial alterations the game has ever endured. All current games developed from carambole and the elimination of static table elements. The new games required more skill -- especially considering the lack of improvement in table surface, cushions, and balls -- and a subtle understanding of physics. Allowing players to continue their turn until they failed to score, the French game also heightened the possibility of radical reversals of fortune. A player could trail by a large margin but make a run of points in one turn to come from behind and win the game. Besides changes in structure, adoption of the cue fundamentally modified the play experience by changing the striking posture. A hand "bridge" braced the cue near the ball and forced strikers to bend at the waist and touch the table. Constrictive eighteenth-century dress coats forced players using cues to play in their vests or shirts. These eighteenth-century changes created a more informal and democratic game in terms of physical comportment and structure.

In America, billiard tables initially appeared in the South during the first half of the eighteenth century. By the Revolutionary crisis, the game had spread across the continent and developed the same basic traits as European billiards: distinct private and public play environments, public play spaces that mixed economic ranks, and a fear of the sharp. But in America alone did dissenters have enough power to create a serious
debate over whether billiards harmed or exemplified appropriate character, in some cases ushering the passage of legislation to restrict play.

Proliferation and Restriction

English players’ silent mediation of French innovations ended in the last quarter of the eighteenth century with a deluge of original texts. Volumes of fresh published material indicate the game’s popularity amongst the middling and upper sorts who could afford these books, the cheapest of which cost about four shillings. Yet billiards’ popularity may have steadily grown in the decades before the print boom and culminated in the new manuals, so the publishing frenzy does not necessarily date a surge in billiard play.

John Dew’s 1779 Treatise on Billiards became the canonical text for the first wave of English authors. Dew blended material from recent French and earlier English authors, adding instructions for the English game and odds tables. The inclusion of odds tables ranks as Dew’s most significant original contribution. Howlett acknowledges the allure of gambling on billiard matches but Dew goes a step further. He provides odds for games in which stronger players conceded points to weaker players and figures the chances for players to win when they fall behind or lead at various stages in a match. Dew also outlines the role of the marker, a neutral scorekeeper and referee employed by a public house to ensure fairness and limit tempers aroused by the game. The marker polled spectators when players disagreed over a forfeiture or rule. After throwing out votes from spectators with bets on the line, the marker tallied the votes and the majority
decision held. The position developed over the eighteenth century, and the cover of the *Treatise* advertised Dew’s experience as a marker for “upwards of Thirty Years.”

The introduction of the marker indicates a desire for arbitration. Supposing disagreements over rule interpretation were not new in the late eighteenth century, the relationship between players in public houses must have changed to make players unwilling to peacefully settle arguments on their own. Perhaps a lack of standard rules for the new games incited more arguments. Maybe play between strangers became more frequent. Wager amounts may have risen, or the widening popularity of the game might have increased the prestige at stake. Whatever the cause, the demand for unbiased officiating signals less trust between participants in public matches.

Subsequent manuals copied Dew’s treatment of both the marker and odds tables, and by 1790 “Mr. Dew’s Treatise” provided the billiard material for the prolific *Hoyle* series. Hoyle volumes came out every two or three years and described the most recent rules for a slew of fashionable activities from card games like whist and quadrille to tennis, cricket, and billiards. Yet disparities exist among the rules listed in different editions of the *Hoyle* series. The Hoyle published in 1790 repeats Dew’s orders to grant a player two points for putting an opponent’s ball off the table and deduct two points for making his own ball jump the cushion. But the 1796 Hoyle claims any ball off the table costs the shooter points, and the 1800 Hoyle announces that players receive no points or penalties for a ball over the edge. In 1805, the first Hoyle published in America directed players to count shots that scored points before balls went off the table. Handbooks also disagreed about how to handle confusion of the two white balls. Differentiated only by a
small black spot on one ball, players apparently took turns with their opponents' balls quite often. Some primers tell players to switch back to their original balls after the next hazard while others order them to finish the game with their new balls. These discrepancies do not represent a progression of standardized rules. Not enough time passed between each book to allow universal implementation of the new rulings. Multiple sets of rules coexisted.

Although split over some rules, manuals prescribed uniform regulations for dealing with equipment imperfections. Table joinery loosened over years of play and many tables developed the tendency to shift back and forth on their three-foot high legs. This disposition prompted generic rules which penalized accidental or intentional shaking of the table and revoked hazards scored when balls "go to the brink of a hole, and after there, resting for a few seconds, should drop into it." Uneven tables and biased balls influenced technique into the 1860s. Experts instructed players to swing their entire arm from the shoulder and strike the ball forcefully "with a sudden, impulsive jerk" because "a slow ball will find out the imperfections of the surface." 38

As these examples show, equipment and technique evolved very little after the 1730s. The ascension of the cue in Britain and America at the end of the eighteenth century homogenized technique internationally, and the invention of the beveled leather cue tip around 1800 enabled players to apply greater degrees of spin than they could with the square wooden ends of older cues. But the cue had existed in Britain and America for seventy years. Early nineteenth-century tables had the same defects as their seventeenth-century predecessors. Despite quibbles over scoring and switched balls, late eighteenth-
century and early nineteenth-century manuals repeat the principal rules of the French and English games devised decades earlier.\textsuperscript{39} The invention of multiple sub-forms accounted for the most notable change in billiards during this era.\textsuperscript{40} The new publications outlined over a dozen variations on the basic carambole and English games. "Caroline" featured five balls and thus more scoring opportunities. Manuals recommended games of caroline go to 42 points in comparison to 24 for carambole and sixteen for the English game. One of many "cramp games" played by someone superior against a weaker opponent, "Bricole" required the superior player to hit at least one bank on every shot. "Pool" opened the game to more than two players at one time and received its name from the sweepstakes taken by the winner. Fortification billiards and Spanish pool were holdovers from the era of stationary equipment like the port and king.\textsuperscript{41} Americans developed their own modification of carambole. Called "revolution" or "four-ball", this game represents the first American contribution to the international discourse on billiards. The earliest American writers lifted almost their entire copy from British manuals. Brief descriptions of four-ball comprise the only original text.\textsuperscript{42} Except for scoring, four-ball followed the rules to carambole as described in British texts. Since four-ball added one ball to carambole, it provided more scoring possibilities than carambole but less than caroline. Hoyle suggested games to 31. Like carambole, four-ball's complicated scoring system awarded points for hazards and caroms based on the color of the pocketed ball and the order in which the cue ball contacted the object balls. A maximum thirteen points came from caroming and sinking all three object balls.\textsuperscript{43}
If carambole maintained excitement by never putting the match out of reach, four-ball normalized violent swings on the tally board. The 1823 *Hoyle's Games Improved* published in New York claimed four-ball was "very properly styled the Revolution game, it being subject to as many different vicissitudes as that monster of changes is susceptible of." First mentioned in the 1805 American *Hoyle*, the moniker "Revolution" may refer to more than just the game's penchant for long runs. Four-ball emerged during or immediately after the Revolution, perhaps as a statement of nationalism whose structure alluded to the French alliance and whose topsy-turvy nature reminded the British of their defeat both nominally and symbolically. Real revolution in France and resilient cultural ties to Britain prevented a full-scale francophilism that would have had American publishers copying French manuals instead of British ones. Instead, Americans plagiarized British texts while they announced their separateness by playing a basically French game.

The changes of fortune which made carambole and four-ball so interesting also made them perfect set-up games for sharps. With their superior skill and table knowledge, a sharp could trail for the duration of a match and then string together a long run at the end to win. Rule books from both England and America recognized this fact and warned every reader to "be extremely cautious how he becomes the antagonist of anyone (though in appearance and manners the most engaging and respectable)." Period images portray a broad sampling of people in the taverns and public houses of increasingly crowded English and American cities (Figures 1 and 9). Individuals knew their opponents less and less frequently, and the billiard primers' caveats propose that
people could not determine others' identities as easily as satirical cartoons suggested. Guides echoed Cotton's lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters." Guides echoed Cotton’s lament from a century before, complaining that "scarcely any Billiard Room" remained free from undetectable "professed gamesters.

A second type of manual appeared in the early nineteenth century. Inspired by the Enlightenment search for "Nature's Laws," writers of these texts looked to science as a tool for "reducing" the game of billiards "to a system." E. White's *Treatise on the Game of Billiards* gave mathematical terms to the places on the ball where the cue imparted degrees of spin (Figure 10). "Full Ball" meant striking the dead center. "Quarter Ball Left" referred to a spot left of the center by a distance equal to one-fourth of the radius. Spin increased as the cue made contact farther away from full ball. Diagrams illustrated when to use which degree of spin. Authors also discussed the value of "progressive" and "attritive" energy, known in the vernacular as topspin and backspin. They theorized about angles of incidence and reflection, tested Dew's odds table, and wrote articles on the "rational mechanics" of billiard ball movement.

The intellectualization of the game and the invention of a decidedly un-English version of billiards did not improve the activity's image in post-Revolutionary America. Associations with gambling, luxury, and the vices of the sharp made billiards anathema in an era when states worked to "strip all vestiges of" the legal code's "earlier monarchical aspects and bring it into conformity with republican principles," as Thomas Jefferson later explained. Some state governments tried to control luxury by taxing goods they deemed more luxurious than refined. Kentucky levied a $100 luxury tax on billiard tables in 1804. Virginia’s 1781 luxury tax charged £50 for owning a billiard
Other states banned public gaming altogether in an effort to limit personal
c ompetition and destitution caused by gambling. Virginia switched from taxing billiard
tables to outlawing them in 1798. Even privately owned tables were “liable to be seized
and publicly burnt or destroyed.” Pennsylvania and Massachusetts passed similar laws
the same year. Massachusetts and North Carolina still disallowed public tables in 1830.48

Just as weak enforcement emasculated the laws set by Dissenting colonies in the
seventeenth century, executive failures riddled post-Revolutionary legislation. The
Marquis de Chastellux noted in 1782 that Bostonians would not gamble in mixed
company though "the men among themselves" were “fond of high play.” Isaac Weld
discovered men gambled in taverns as well as private homes. Stopping at Richmond in
1796, the English traveler "had scarcely alighted from my horse at the tavern, when the
landlord came to ask what game I was most partial to, as in such a room there was a faro
table, in another a hazzard table, in a third a billiard table, to any of which he was ready
to conduct me. Not the smallest secrecy is employed in keeping these tables.”49

Although laws did not eradicate the game, high taxes and prohibitions retarded
the American billiard industry. At the turn of the century, England boasted two
specialized large-scale billiard table makers. Without the demand or the noble clientele
of their English counterparts, no American cabinetmaker could support a shop solely
making billiard tables. Infrequent orders also left American craftsmen inexperienced in
table construction. American-made tables either aped English models or looked like a
large version of the local fashionable dining table. As a result, the finest tables in the
Early Republic came from England as long as wars or embargoes did not strain trade.50

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The procedure for building a billiard table bed remained exactly the same throughout the eighteenth century and into the 1840s. Manuals such as Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* illustrate a twelve-foot by six-foot playing surface made from a 72-panel bed constructed in three equal four-foot by six-foot pieces. Colonial Williamsburg’s oak bed table made in England around 1738 exemplifies these standards (Figures 7 and 11). Although playing surface dimensions and the paneled bed concept circulated well enough to find employment in the two earliest remaining American-made tables, neither of these tables subscribe to the supposedly universal measurements of specific parts (Figures 12 and 13). An 1807 Boston-made table at Gore Place in Waltham, Massachusetts has 60 mahogany panels of various dimensions from eight to eight and one-fourth inches wide and from ten and one-half to ten and three-fourths inches long. An 1801 Maryland table at Winterthur features 45 large panels of white pine, each ten and one-half inches by nine and three-fourths inches, surrounded by rails and stiles of irregular dimension ranging in length from two-feet, one-inch to eight and seven-eighths inches. Deviation among American makers shows their relative inexperience and alludes to infrequent orders.

Residual construction methods extended beyond the table bed. Artisans inserted pockets on all three tables in a similar way. Steel or iron pockets frames had wings which slid into mortises cut into the sides of the tables. Bolts secured the wings to the frame either horizontally through the skirt or vertically down through the top of the wings. Tables with visible pocket wings remained standard through the end of the century (Figure 14).
Changes in table design affected construction of the undercarriage, not the bed. Design shifts in billiard tables followed the general stylistic evolution seen throughout the decorative arts. By the late eighteenth century, the Neoclassical style had banished elements of overconstruction such as the extra legs and stretchers seen in tables from previous stylistic eras. Early nineteenth-century Western taste instead held an affinity for delicate Roman and Greek forms. But veneered and attenuated billiard tables still had to support the heavy paneled bed. Craftsmen met aesthetic and functional demands by replacing extra legs and stretchers with intense support systems hidden from view (Figures 15 and 16). A huge three-inch thick, seven and seven-eighths-inches wide crossbeam supports the Winterthur table's bed. A pair of two and one-quarter-inch thick, seven-inch wide crossbeams undergird the Gore table's bed, and thick corner blocks brace the legs. By contrast, the legs on the earlier Williamsburg undercarriage directly bore more of the bed weight so that table's crossbeams had smaller dimensions (Figures 7 and 17).52

Between the Revolution and the Jacksonian Era, the proliferation of billiard manuals suggests the game enjoyed a large following among people who aspired to the genteel play described by the manuals. The handbooks reveal a wider choice of games and the birth of a consciously "American" sporting identity. But while a national cognizance emerged, many aspects of the game went unaltered from past periods. Equipment and basic rules in 1830 hardly differed from the equipment and rules in 1730. Despite cosmetic differences, bed construction methods had not changed. Technical imperfections in the tables and balls continued just as seventeenth-century handbooks had

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described them. Sharps and markers represented seedy characters affiliated with the
game since the earliest public tables. These indecorous players and the game's
association with gambling remained causes for proscriptive legislation.

**Toward "American" Billiards**

Billiard halls first appeared in England in the late eighteenth century, but they did
not become commonplace in America until the 1820s. Unlike taverns which offered a
variety of entertainments, billiard halls were public houses completely devoted to
billiards and the alcohol served while playing. Establishments varied in the number of
tables they offered, ranging from one to more than twenty. In the 1820s, New York had
twelve billiard halls. Over sixty operated on Manhattan thirty years later.\(^5\)

Two developments explain the multiplication of billiard halls in antebellum
American cities. In the nineteenth century, price regulations receded and taverns
increasingly targeted a particular economic rank. Billiard halls assumed the tavern’s old
role as a site of leisure-time cross-class interaction. Second, the target of gaming
legislation shifted from specific games seen as vehicles for gambling to proscribing the
act of gambling in public. The change led to the legalization of public billiard tables after
decades of proscription by Dissenting and then republican laws.\(^5\)

Billiard halls sparked the birth of native table and accoutrement production in the
second quarter of the nineteenth century. Besides perhaps John Anderson in mid-
eighteenth century Annapolis, New Yorker D. Penn and his successors D. D. Winant and
Abraham Bassford were the first American cabinetmakers to produce numerous tables.\(^5\)
Demand for tables increased outside of New York City too. German Immigrant John Moses Brunswick opened America's first billiard-specific manufactory in Cincinnati in 1845. His operation quickly turned a profit and in 1848 he built a second plant in Chicago. A St. Louis branch started in 1859. Winant, Michael Phelan, Daniel Collender, and Dudley Kavanagh emerged as Brunswick's main competitors in the 1850s. Individually, none of these New York-based producers could compete with Brunswick's proximity to the burgeoning Midwestern cities. Within ten years, Phelan and Collender merged with Cincinnatian Julius Balke to enlarge their financial and geographic base. But even united, the competitors could not match Brunswick's sprawling product line. By the 1870s, Brunswick had absorbed or driven out of business all serious competitors to nationwide retail.56

When Bassford and Brunswick started, their designs came straight from English sources. Not until Bassford in the late 1840s and Brunswick and Phelan in the 1850s did American manufacturers take out patents for billiard equipment.57 Phelan took a leading role in technological innovation with the debut of his "combination cushion" in 1855. English manufacturers had replaced list cushion stuffing with india rubber ten years earlier. India rubber rebounded balls with greater speed but the material did not regain its shape after balls impacted it. Phelan's cushion featured a layer of rubber with two different densities. Balls contacted a strip of lower density rubber whose elasticity kept rebounds fast. A strip of higher density rubber behind the front strip resisted indentation. Phelan also lowered the height of his cushion to permit easier play when the ball rested against it. By 1860, American table-makers had diversified in an effort to enlarge their

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market. They augmented production of standard six-foot by twelve-foot tables with smaller five-foot by ten-foot tables, and soon added four-and one-half-foot by nine-foot examples to their inventories. American factories also made slate and marble beds pioneered in Britain (Figure 18). These new materials promised less warped playing surfaces.58

The proliferation of billiard halls during the antebellum years attracted investors willing to speculate in factory production. In turn, many billiard manufacturers operated or invested in the period’s multiplying billiard halls. During the 1820s and 1830s, Bassford advertised his wares by putting his tables in a billiard hall he opened.59 Phelan and Kavanagh later followed suit. But while the number of billiard halls grew, the omnipresence of sharps in public halls of all kinds led to the formation of private clubs. Not only the elite formed these associations. All sorts of respectable players joined clubs that kept membership exclusive to bar sharps and foster a sense of familiarity among members who lived in cities brimming with anonymity.60

Despite harboring sharps, some billiard halls improved their reputations. Editors of standard city directories refused to list brothels, gambling houses, and other criminal dens, either because these types of businesses were illegal or because they tainted the respectability of the directory. But at the end of the 1840s, billiard halls began to shed their negative connotations enough to appear in standard city directories. By 1859, New York City had over sixty billiard halls and one of the leading city directories listed “billiards” as the occupation of forty-eight individuals.61
Respectable halls spawned respectable professional billiards players. Professional players came from the ranks of markers and sharps who acquired a hall's patronage. Similar to a clique's selection of a boxing champion, a hall's owner and sometimes its regular clientele backed a favorite professional. Wealthy backers arranged inter-city and even international matches for their champions. Well-to-do crowds raised stakes and offered top-tier professionals a tidy income over $2500 a year. Women's attendance at these top-tier professional matches indicates the game's advancing repute, and coverage of marquee match-ups in respectable newspapers like the New York Times further illustrates an improved image (Figure 19).

The leading figure in American billiards after 1850, Michael Phelan spearheaded the push for billiards' respectability through the creation of an American billiard literature. He penned the first original American treatise on the game in 1850. In it he reiterated four-ball's place as the pre-eminent "American Game." Any other game in an American hall was "very unusual," he wrote. Phelan also offered slight "American" adjustments to English rules and terminology based on common practice in his halls. He claimed Americans played to higher scores, used lighter cues, and even played strategies based on a national character which lay ideally between the "daring" French and the "cautious" English.

Yet while Phelan and other writers celebrated American four-ball and technologic progress as the means to "elevate the game," the basic rules again persisted and new inventions impeded play just as the old equipment had. Antebellum writers outline many of the same regulations listed by Dew and Cotton. Players were not to speak or interrupt...
each other's turns. If balls fell into a pocket before the cue ball reached them, the player had to retake his shot. Players still confused the white balls, and writers continued to disagree over how to score balls off the table. Stance and technique remained as described when the cue first came into use. Marble and slate beds eliminated warping but not unevenness. Playing cards found wedged between the framing and marble bed of an 1840s Boston table at Castle Tucker in Maine demonstrate the challenge of successfully leveling that material. Gas lights applied to a rotatable fixture eliminated shadows on the table but heated the slate and ivory balls enough to make both play unevenly. Condensation puddled under the baize on warm slate beds and slowed or stopped balls. Many players complained that the faster speeds and sharper reflections of india rubber and combination cushions threw off calculations they had spent a lifetime mastering. Finally, none of the new technologies completely displaced older ones. Phelan still offered wooden beds in 1860, and recommended maces for women, children, and bank shots.

In 1860, billiards had the best reputation it had ever enjoyed in America, a development seen in the growing panorama of respectable billiard play. Tables appeared in elite private clubs. Selected public billiard halls and professionals possessed a level of respectability previously unknown. The game even saw a massive push to improve long-standing imperfections in its equipment. Yet innovations only altered the causes -- not the presence -- of imperfect surfaces, balls, and lighting. And while American four-ball not only became the American game but Americans' favorite game, the basic rules by which people played it and most other billiard games retained a century-old continuity.
Billiards and "Modern" Sport

As shown, billiards experienced adjustments to its structure and equipment between 1660 and 1860. The eighteenth-century game's shift away from static elements triggered the rise of the cue. Today, the form of billiards reflects both these developments. But a sense of continuity outweighs these changes. Many rules and strategies in Cotton's and Howlett's tomes appear in only slightly altered form in works by Phelan and Kentfield almost two hundred years later. Compare Cotton's advice on the "great art in lying abscond, that is to lie at bo-peep with your Adversary, either subtilely to gain a pass or a hazard" to Phelan's reminder that long-term success sometimes requires a player to "forgo all present gain to himself." A Phelan text from 1872 pictures the same hand bridge as E. White and Mingaud did in 1818 and 1836. Manuals disagreed over the same rules again and again. Inventions in bed materials, cushions, and lighting failed to solve equipment imperfections. In 1860 women and children still primarily used maces and Phelan recommended men use them for bank shots.

The steadfast quality of the game's social environments strengthens assertions about limited change. Cotton warned his readers about sharpers and almost every manual written afterward mentions these hustlers. Nineteenth-century private clubs maintained more tables in rooms that accommodated more people, but the exclusion they imposed mimicked the exclusion at private billiard tables in colonial mansions. The game in public houses and billiard halls mixed economic and social ranks from the colonial era through the nineteenth century. Until the late antebellum years, the game contended with...
legal restrictions. Even after the repeal of anti-billiard legislation, moralistic zealots never stopped striving to purge society of the unindustrious gambling with which billiards had shared affiliation since at least the Restoration.

The constancy of the structure, environments, and effects of technology on billiards argues against many sports historians’ claims of an evolution from “pre-modern” to “modern” sport. This teleologic Weberian perspective proposes more equal participation over class and gender lines, standardization of rules, and the secularization and rationalization of play as a result of broad social and economic changes largely instigated by the industrial revolution between 1750 and 1850. The more complicated scoring procedures of four-ball and caroline and the development of professional billiards as a spectator sport supports some tenets of this model, such as a higher level of quantification and increased bureaucratic organization.70

But billiards denies this progression in many ways. Ungenteel sharps accompanied “Noblemen’s or private Gentlemen’s families” in public houses during the Restoration and the antebellum years. William Byrd’s wife and Charles Francis Adams’ female friends played on domestic tables, and women uniformly absented tables in public halls throughout the two-hundred-year period of this survey. These patterns reflect very little change on the equality front.71 Rationalization infers training and practice, but Cotton referred to billiards in his famous phrase “there is no better way than practice to make you perfect.”72 No standardized scoring rules materialized during the period even though fundamental regulations went untouched after 1730. Billiards meets some qualifications for “modern” sport in the seventeenth century, yet the game does not meet
other requirements until the end of the nineteenth century. Given its continuity in a period of alleged change, billiards either exists as an anomaly or throws doubt onto a theory of evolution from "pre-modern" to "modern" sport.

While billiards did not progress toward a "modern" form, it did progress into an "American" game. The rise of four-ball as the national game comments on Americans' search for national identity, reflects the nation's blending of European cultures, and personifies faith in the comeback. By 1860, original texts, technological innovations, and a native sporting goods industry made billiards in America distinct from billiards in other countries. "American" billiards shared characteristics common to the game in many other countries, including broad social appeal, a fight between enthusiasts and moralists over the game's effect on character, and disparities between public and private play. But the manner in which these traits affected play differed from other locations due to Americans' preferred game and the particularities of America's development. The experience of playing billiards in Early America resulted from interplay between the American game's structural traits and its social contexts.
NOTES


5 Another reason why rods were vertically oriented instead of horizontal was that high cushions on seventeenth-century tables would have blocked a stroke from a mace with a rod parallel to the tabletop. Howlett, *School of Recreation*, p. 194; Cotton, *Compleat Gamester*, p. 26.


7 Read symbolically, the rules of Restoration billiards penalize regicide more heavily than homosexuality. These priorities reverse those of the Puritan Commonwealth. Cotton, *Compleat Gamester*, pp. 26-27; Howlett, *School of Recreation*, p. 196.


11 Tables in Spanish America most likely predated ones in British or French possessions, although no evidence supports the long-standing rumor that St. Augustine had the first table in what became the United States. This study's focus on billiards in the United States precludes wider investigation of the game in colonial Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean.


13 For biographical information on Byrd, see the Introduction of William Byrd, The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712, Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds. (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1941). Recent dendrochronology studies of the main block at Westover cast doubt on whether William Byrd II built any of the existing structure. Samples date the wood to 1750, six years after William II died and his son William III inherited the property. William II certainly erected the gate and planned a great estate. William J. Callahan, Jr., Edward R. Cook, and Camille Wells, Untitled Study, (University of Virginia School of Architecture, March 2001.)


For Byrd's play with his wife, see Byrd, *Secret Diary*, pp. 139, 174, 240. For daily play coinciding with visits, see Byrd, *Secret Diary*, especially pp. 143-146, 282-361. For condescending play, see Byrd, *Secret Diary*, pp. 75, 83; Byrd, *Another Secret Diary*, p. 83.


For gambling legislation, see "An Act for Preventing Excessive and Deceitful Gaming" (1727) in William Walter Hening, Statutes At-Large, Being a Collection of the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619 (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1809-1820) vol. 4, pp. 214-218; vol. 5, pp. 102-3, 229-231; vol. 6, pp. 76-8. Under the law, losers of £10 or more had three months to sue for their money back. In 1740, the Burgesses extended the coverage to horse racing and cock fighting, deemed "sports" not "games" which were covered in the initial law. A 1744 amendment enumerated billiards, backgammon, and bowling as activities outside the purview of the law. The minimum for recoverable losses also dropped to 40 shillings. A broader scope materialized after 1748, when gambling in "any other sport or pastime" came under this title; For the British precedent, see Brenner, Gambling and Speculation, pp. 59-61; Development of Law, pp. 15-17. Northern Colonies adopted stricter laws than the Queen Anne Statutes, but South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia had laws similar to Virginia's by 1764. Maryland never formally adopted the Queen Anne Statutes, but evidence suggests they may have been enforced. Development of Law, pp. 238-247.


For Byrd's wager, see Struna, People of Prowess, p. 221. For the gambler's code, see Dennis Brailsford, A Taste for Diversions: Sport in Georgian England (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1999) pp. 168-171; Struna, People of Prowess, p. 158.

For Anderson, see Maryland Gazette, 11 July 1754, 19 June 1755, 13 January 1757. For Charleston, see South Carolina Gazette, 5 February 1731; For North Carolina, see Fayetteville Gazette, 2 October 1792; For Georgia, see Gazette of the State of Georgia, 11 September 1783.


French manuals still describe the port and king in 1718. English texts appearing in the early nineteenth century cite earlier French books by a M. Persicots and a M. Espolard as


31 One manual connected English players’ slow transition to the cue to their affinity for “trailing.” “The mace is preferred for its particular advantage, which some professed players have artfully introduced, under the name of trailing, that is, following the ball with the mace to such a convenient distance from the other ball as to make it an easy hazard.” James Beaufort, *Hoyle’s Games Improved* (London: H. Mozley, 1788) p. 189. Trailing (called “raking” in the seventeenth century) was listed as a forfeiture by Howlett. It reduced the difficulty of the game and neutralized equipment imperfections by giving players more control over the ball for a longer period of time. Howlett, *School of Recreation*, p. 195.

32 For Port and King advertisement, see *Virginia Gazette*, 23 January 1745; For cue sale, see *South Carolina Gazette*, 5 February 1731.

33 Dennis Brailsford notes a general increase in sporting literature between 1770 and 1820, a “creative period” during which many leisure activities were altered or invented. Brailsford, *A Taste for Diversions: Sport in Georgian England* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1999) pp. 8-11. The cheapest handbooks often were the smallest. "Pocket" Hoyles measured five and one-half inches by two and three-fourths inches. For an example of size and cost, see Charles Jones, *Hoyle’s Games Improved* (London: M. Ritchie, 1800).


39 For example, compare Donald Walker *Games and Sports: An Appendix* (London: Joseph Thomas, 1840) to Dew, *Treatise*. In general, handbooks gave the rules for carambole or the English game and then listed any additional or different rules under each alternative form of the game.

40 A French handbook recognizes the expansion of games with "minimal differences" as the most significant aspect of billiards at the turn of the nineteenth century. "The variations fall in the number of balls, points, etc., and other local conventions, which does not impede a good French player from standing up to a good Russian or English player." M.A. Amar Durivier and L.F. Jauffret, *La Gymnastique de la Jeunesse* (Paris: A.G. Debray, 1803) p. 153.


42 "Original" text, meaning conceptual and syntactic ingenuity, rarely appears even in English manuals. A few canonical works like Cotton, Dew, and E. White's *Practical Treatise on Billiards* provided most of the material for other books, but even these authors borrowed heavily from each other. Each author might rephrase their sources, and this often created the discrepancies noted earlier, but the text was not "original." Their plagiarism shows Americans had access to and followed British manuals throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.


44 *Hoyle's Improved*, p. 274.


49 Marquis de Chastellux, Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782, Howard C. Rice, Jr., ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963) p. 507; Isaac Weld, Travels Through the States of North America (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968) vol. 1, p. 191. Though billiards was not illegal when Weld visited Virginia, the state already had outlawed card and dice tables and limited legal wagers to under twenty dollars. Virginia Tax Records question the enforcement of luxury taxes. No billiard table taxes were paid between 1787 and 1797 in Charles City, Hanover, Mecklenberg, or Wythe Counties. Other rural counties had no more than three licenses paid over the period. Either the game did not penetrate the rural areas or the luxury tax was not uniformly collected. Virginia Property Tax Records, 1785-1797. LV.

50 Thurston: Timeless Quality Since 1799 (London: E.A. Clare and Son Ltd., 1989); Thurston and Co. Catalog (London: E.J. Francis, 1840); Mr. Joe Newell has researched nineteenth century American billiard tables for over thirty years and is the only craftsman Brunswick allows to reproduce their old designs. Personal interview with Joe Newell, Official Brunswick Reproductions and Restorations, 3 October 2001.

The Williamsburg table has eight cross braces five-eighths inches thick and three and five-eighths inches wide.


55 The *Maryland Gazette* listed several advertisements for tables made and offered for sale by Anderson, so he may have acquired a reputation for making billiard tables. *Maryland Gazette*, 11 July 1754, 19 June 1755, 13 January 1757. For Penn, Winant, and Bassford, see New York Directories: *Doggett's* (New York: 1843); *Rude's* (New York: 1852).


57 Brunswick lost all their nineteenth-century records in a series of floods and fires in the 1970s, so none of their original designs remain. Company officials direct questions about early designs to Mr. Joe Newell. Personal Interview with Joe Newell, Official Brunswick Reproductions and Restorations, 3 October 2001. For further evidence of American reliance on foreign designs, see United States Patent Records Class 473 and Class D21/782-784. The first American patent issued for anything related to a billiard table was Bassford's 1848 application of a rubber cushion filled with air. USPO Record 5293.


For salaries of professional billiardists, see Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, p. 229. For women’s attendance, see Figure 19. *Leslie’s*, 14 Mar. 1859.


For gas lights, see Edward Russell Mardon, *Billiards: Game, 500 Up* (Brighton: W. Leppard, 1844) p. 111; For complaints about the new cushions, see T. Marsden, *Billiard Tables Past and Present* (Liverpool, UK: A. Russell, 1883), and Phelan’s direct counter to such complaints in *Rise and Progress*, pp. 5-7. Players also discovered unvulcanized rubber froze in cold weather. Manufacturers invented metal gutters for players to fill with warm water and place beside the cushions prior to play in order to soften them. Vulcanization helped alleviate this problem after 1845. *Hendricks, History of Billiards*, pp.32-33; *Thurston Catalog* (1840), p. 2.


For examples of the evolutionary perspective, see Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978);

72 Cotton, *Compleat Gamester*, p. 29.

73 Celluloid balls began to replace ivory balls after 1878. Electricity ended the condensation problem on slate beds. Both these developments exemplify the kind of "progress" supporters of the evolutionary perspective look for to classify a game as "modern." References to practice in the seventeenth century and unchanged basic rules suggest earlier classification as "modern."
Chapter 2:
BILLIARDS AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Ideologies and Stereotypes

Reformers and enthusiasts projected opposing images of billiards which influenced the experience of play by stigmatizing players, spaces, and games. Enthusiasts applauded the game's structural connections to genteel behavior. Reformers highlighted the proclivity of billiards environments to encourage gambling and attract disreputable characters. These two groups did not directly contradict each other. Each justified their perception of billiard play with evidence from distinct elements of the billiard-playing experience. Enthusiasts emphasized the game's structure. Reformers pointed to the environment of play.

The debate over billiards centered on whether the game promoted virtue or interest. People argued about the application of these terms because "virtue" designated respectability and "interest" inferred unrespectability. Strict adherents to reform ideology considered unrespectable any activity with interested qualities. Billiard enthusiasts felt they could categorize a game as respectable as long as the activity had virtuous qualities, even if those qualities coexisted with interested ones. Given the centrality of the discourse of respectability in the debate over billiards, a brief survey of its evolution in America will serve to introduce the themes of the debate.
Respectability was born as Restoration civility. In contrast to the Puritans whose Commonwealth they overthrew, enlightened gentlemen implored improvement of the worldly experience. Cultivated skill, behavior, and movement symbolized efforts to civilize life, and their display granted admission to enlightened society. Increasingly pervasive rules of Restoration and eighteenth-century civility saw games as a chance to display this cultivation. Doctrines of civility disdained leisure practices devoid of such opportunities.¹

Reformed Protestants questioned the tenets of civility. Prioritizing the next life over this one, they valued industry as proof of salvation. Games produced nothing tangible and thus signified an idleness characteristic of the damned. Reformed Protestant leaders discouraged most games and sports. They sanctioned only "productive" recreation such as calisthenics and fishing. If Dissenters had distaste for games, they reviled gambling. The quick accumulation of wealth possible through gambling threatened to invert social hierarchies based on industry.²

Republican ideology tempered civility during the Revolutionary Era. Republican thought granted that a modicum of civility refined people's natural self-interest into an awareness of the common good, though it stipulated overcultivation devolved into foppish pursuit of luxury. Since luxury lured people to act selfishly and self-government required selfless virtue, republicans abhorred luxury and the overcultivation which led to it.³ Social rules intended to tame self-interest. These rules suggested public space belonged to a male domain while a woman's world centered on the home. Presumed innate temperaments of men and women predicated this split. A domestic sphere infused
with women's inherent sensitivity and virtue mitigated a natural competitiveness in men better suited to the public world of business. Uncoupled with domestic women, men's greed would run amok, brute power would replace virtue, and civilization would return to its pre-Enlightenment ways.\textsuperscript{4}

Nineteenth-century evangelical asceticism assimilated republican harangues on luxury and Dissenters' condemnation of idleness. Evangelicals bathed this borrowed mixture in a millennialism which inspired them to aim for individual perfection. These evangelical ideals inspired antebellum secular reformers. Together with evangelists, reformers pointed to alcoholism and gambling as examples of how Americans had betrayed their republican promise and degenerated into self-centered, corrupt pleasure seekers.\textsuperscript{5}

Manifold attacks from republican and evangelical ideologies bifurcated the rubric of civility into opposing labels of luxury and refinement (Figure 2). On one extreme stood radical reformers and evangelists who repudiated consumption and many forms of play. Mandevillians who believed pursuit of luxury a righteous endeavor occupied the other end of the spectrum. "Refinement" blended a modicum of civility with adherence to reform ideology. Except for extremists, most people who espoused reform ideology thought a measured dose of civility raised a person above self-awareness and thus promoted virtue. To reformers and their followers, refinement meant respectability.\textsuperscript{6}

Everyone agreed billiards met the standards of civility. The seventeenth-century game demanded practiced skill, forethought, and required genteel posture and handling of equipment. Eighteenth-century alterations added a component of abstract mathematics.
for bank shots and angles. The question was whether billiards represented luxurious or refined civility. Erudition and skill evinced refinement since acquiring these traits demanded disciplined study absent in hedonistic luxury. For the same reason, comportment indicated refinement if not over-performed. But as the most expensive article of furniture available and a vehicle for gambling, billiard tables lent airs of luxury and greed to the game. Its components granted billiards a kind of double-status, repudiated for its competitiveness and gambling yet constructive to refinement.⁷

Criticism of billiards evolved in concert with general ideological shifts in the opposition to civility in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, and luxury in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Benjamin Franklin advised readers of his 1748 Advice to a Young Tradesman that "The Sound of your Hammer at Five in the morning or Nine at Night, heard by a Creditor, makes him easy Six Months longer. But if he sees you at a Billiard Table or hears your Voice in a Tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his Money the Next Day." An example of the Reformed Protestant critique, Franklin's advice equates billiard play with contemptible idleness.⁸

Republicanism replaced the Dissenters’ emphasis on individual vice with a primary concern for public order. An anonymous letter to the New Haven Gazette in 1787 complained that "a public table is kept in open defiance of the laws of the state, and the total subversion of order and happiness." Philadelphia’s Weekly Magazine echoed the Gazette’s sentiments and called upon “a sense of the duty incumbent upon” tavern keepers “as citizens, to discountenance and restrain such evil practices” as gambling on
billiard matches. These diatribes urged selfless concern for public welfare, the chief objective of republicans.⁹

Evangelicals' stress on individualism shifted the focus of attacks on billiards from public disorder back to personal failure. Young men drew the harshest criticism. As wage labor replaced eighteenth-century systems of training based on apprenticeship, hordes of single young men lodged in boarding houses. Unsupervised, unmarried men with disposable incomes worried proponents of the concept of separate spheres. Without mothers or wives to instill virtue in them, reformers feared they would descend into an inescapable realm of coarseness and competition. Frank St. Clair's *Six Days in the Metropolis* confirmed the worst, claiming "the majority" of players in Boston billiard rooms "were young men, between the twenties and twenty-fives; and some were in their teens, but they were merely lookers-on."¹⁰

Of middling rank or perhaps children of wealthy merchants, clerks and students personified faltered virtue and so piqued reform authors more than any other group of young men. *Harper's Weekly* told the story of Little Filkins who studied "the rules of the carom" in lieu of his duties at the local bank (Figure 20). *The Friends' Review* reported a clerk from "a highly respectable mercantile house" lost his employer's money at "K.'s billiard room, at a game, the seductive influence of which he was unable to resist."¹¹ A snippet in the *Southern Sentinel* from Plaquemine, Louisiana exemplifies respectable society's attempt to curb the decadence of these young men. "You young man, on the way to the ball alley or billiard-room with a cigar in your mouth and with an appetite for mint-julip, stop a moment." The single-paragraph story accosted and yet recognized the
potential of its subject. "Are you not in a dangerous way? Will those places, or your habits, lead you to respectability or usefulness in society? Your example, if it be such as will lead you to virtue will draw others after you, or if it leads to vice and error will sign and the more readily lure others in the way of evil." If laborers or immigrants did not meet standards for virtue, they had ready excuses of intrinsic character flaws or poor examples set by their betters. But youths from respectable families who failed to separate themselves from the competitive world threatened to undo the republic with their lack of discipline and consuming self-interest. "Ye gamesters! receive instruction," wrote Caroline Matilda Warren in one of the first of many didactic sentimental novels directed at young people. "Learn that the love of gaming may even eradicate the love of virtue from the human breast." 

Reformers also agonized over the model of behavior exhibited by mature men in private clubs. George Foster warned that clubs, "although assuming to be private, are but too public in the influence they exert over the minds and habits of the young, by placing dissipation and gambling in their most seductive and 'respectable' aspects, and making high-spirited men ambitious to be ruined." Novels and short stories depicted naive rich young men easily fleeced by "club-men" every bit as conniving as the sharps in public halls. "Gambling is a phrase never applied by men of the world to the private amusements of gentlemen," one wayward cosmopolitan reassured his later victim. Foster lifted the veil off such semantics. "The literal translation of a 'club' is 'gaming house'," he wrote.
Stages of criticism overlapped. "The Reformer" in the 1789 *Massachusetts Magazine* shows the perseverance of the Dissenters' philosophy of leisure and at the same time foreshadows later fears of undomesticated young men in asking, "are Taverns, Billiard Tables, and different games, generally deserted, or new ones daily set up, where incautious youth enter the lists with hoary duplicity? Is the moment as it flies dedicated to ennobling pursuits, or lost in the whirl of dissipation?" Nineteenth-century movements enlisted older critiques to bolster their indictments. George Foster's 1850 *New York in Slices* combines reform criticism faulting those who set bad examples with the older concern issued by eighteenth-century legislatures that gambling caused disorder by making poor people destitute.

The successful merchant or banker whose income is ten or twenty thousand dollars a year, is not necessarily compromised by losing a few hundreds at faro or brag, or by expending now and then an extra thousand upon a fashionable mistress. While the poor clerk, fired with the ambition of not being outshone by his associates, and proud of being admitted to their society, finds his paltry salary soon expended, and rushes headlong into debt and dishonor -- ending too often in crime and a prison.

Billiards' association with gambling prompted its categorization as inappropriate leisure, but intemperance provided a significant secondary reason. Literature advising restraint often pictures drinking as the entree to gambling. Evaporated inhibitions made risk more palatable. *New-York by Gas Light* describes sharps planning their triumphs through "several well-timed glasses of brandy."

Though clearly subjected to raillery, billiards never endured the unsparing rebukes given to certain card games and dice. "A very worthy clergyman" delivered a scathing diatribe on tavern vice in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1751. The piece expressed
many of the same concerns Puritan leaders cited a century earlier. The Anglican minister called ordinaries "the Receptacle, and Rendezvous of the very Dreggs of the People" where "not only Time and Money are, vainly and unprofitably, squandered away, but (what is yet worse) where prohibited and unlawful Games, Sports, and Pastimes are followed, and practiced, almost without any Intermission." A list of amoral activities ensued: cards, dice, horse racing, cockfighting, cheating, cursing, fighting, and lying. But no billiards. Foster's depictions of the antebellum New York underworld exclude billiards from the "Five Points Negro cellar" and other "gambling shops of lower grades." Sensational fiction also left billiards out of the "gambling hells," "faro-hells," and dice rooms where "right down gambling" took place.

Commentators considered faro and dice the basest forms of entertainment. These games relied exclusively on luck and presented sharps with an array of chances to cheat. Fast-paced, luck-based contests that accommodated lots of players at once, offered unpredictable changes of fortune, called for minimal outlay and yet rewarded winners with big sums epitomized games pictured in the lowest gambling establishments. On the other hand, whist was the favorite card game of the eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century elite. Whist demanded skill and forethought, took hours to play, and pitted two players or two pairs against each other. Like games of whist, professional and private four-ball billiard matches could go to 500 points and last five hours. Wherever the game took place and regardless of the presence of wagers, the caroms, bank shots, and strategies of billiards required an abstract thought, patience, and skill absent in the games of pure chance which received the most severe condemnation.
As a result of the game's respectably erudite structure, criticism of billiards censured the environment not the game itself. Reform texts singled out archetypes like refractory clerks and genteel sharps. Anecdotal admonitions pictured these characters in dangerously luxurious clubs or seedy game rooms. There was no middle ground.

Reform authors did not want to impute respectability to the game by placing it in a respectable middle class setting. Either billiard establishments featured "a rich Brussels carpet" over which "the ceiling was painted in the best style of a celebrated artist and a splendid chandelier suspended therefrom over each of the tables,"\textsuperscript{21} or writers colored a "meanly furnished" place where

The stained and dirty floor was strewn with fragments of segars, playbills, and nut shells; the walls blackened with smoke seemed to have witnessed the orgies of many a midnight revel. A few candles, destined to illumine the distant recesses of the room, hung neglected against the walls -- bowing their long wicks, and marking their stations by streams of tallow, which had been suffered to accumulate through many a long winter night. The ceiling was hung with cobwebs, curiously intermingled with dense clouds of tobacco smoke, and tinged with the straggling rays of light which occasionally shot from the sickly tapers.\textsuperscript{22}

The game's rules and equipment escaped disparagement despite the emergence of forms particularly suited to passionate swings and gambling like four-ball and pool. Even when widespread adoption of the cue popularized a less refined posture and more plebian interaction with equipment, the structure of billiards went unassailed. To some, these developments may have dissociated the game from courtly luxury and rendered it a more refined pastime.

While billiards escaped the kind of structural condemnation given to faro and dice, certain forms of the game ranked higher than others in the esteem of respectable
commentators. As with cards, higher demands on abstract thought and skill placed a
game at the apex. More uncontrollable variables put a game lower in the hierarchy. The
1823 American Hoyle specifically warns that pool "is very imperfect" and suspect to
exploitation by sharps. Pool accommodated up to fifteen players at once, numbers not
usually found in a private billiard room. Each player received a ball. Sinking a ball three
times eliminated the ball's owner. The player possessing the last ball won. Based
entirely on hazards, the more abstract carom had no place in this game. Pool took its
name from the pot of money at stake. Each player wagered a small amount yet the
number of players yielded a large prize. More players, small risk, and the lure of big
rewards all characterize games spurned by respectable society and portrayed as favored
by lower sorts. Pool avoided connotations with gambling hells because it still relied on
skill over luck. This argument does not suggest classes played different games. Sharps
came from unrespectable society to haunt four-ball halls and pool scoreboards appeared
in catalogs targeting wealthy homeowners. Irrespective of the wealth or social clout of
players, negative stigmas attached to games featuring a quick pace, high reward for little
risk, and less abstract thought. After mid-century, "pool halls" described a lower sort of
public billiard space.

Literature supporting billiards acknowledged the game's shady environments by
not refuting the reform writers' indictments. Instead, enthusiasts focused on the game's
wholesome structure. In 1787, the American Museum argued billiards taught players
valuable lessons. Practice led to "improvement," the game's erudition aided "refinement
of human nature", and wide scale improvement and refinement culminated in the
"happiness of society." Titled "On the Virtues of a Billiard Table," this essay also pandered to republican rhetoric in its assertion that "merit is the only, the true criterion of eminence" in the billiard room. Periodicals that published defenses of billiards usually had an elite readership, but the game's most persistent endorsements came from manuals catering to both middling and wealthy audiences. Manuals laud billiards' demands on "judgement and execution" and tout the game's healthy effects. Michael Phelan said players walked two to three miles over the course of a match. Edwin Kentfield cited a roster of doctors who agreed the constant walking and repeated swinging of the cue was "preferable to every other species of in-door exercise." By praising the game's role in developing a sound mind and body, manual writers tried to fit billiards within reform definitions of productive recreation.

Some reform authors approved of billiards. Guides to moral recreation blended the reform critique of billiard environments with the enthusiasts' emphasis on the game's structural advantages. These works promoted billiards' structure as beneficial for its "practical" facility of "creating in young persons a politeness and gentleness of manner", but stayed within the realm of respectability by recommending play only "for innocent amusement in the domestic circle."

The total number of reform texts drastically outnumbered those in support of the game even if the qualified approval of recreation guides count on the enthusiasts' tally. Didactic newspapers and novels spewed from publishing houses specializing in reform literature beginning in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Concerned about their livelihoods in the face of their opponents' work, professional players, hall owners,
and manufacturers collaborated to increase the production of manuals. These texts appealed to the middle class and elite not to open up a new market, but to perpetuate an existing market. To achieve this goal, the new handbooks adopted a fresh tactic. They directly rebutted accusations of an unrespectable environment. Phelan promised the sharp was "now happily almost extinct in these latitudes," claimed the game offered "sufficient mental excitement and ambition to render the extrinsic interest of a gambling bet superfluous," and pleaded that "if the true domesticating influence of billiards were understood, every wife would be most anxious to provide her husband with a table." He urged women to play by citing the game's patronage by Mary, Queen of Scots and Cleopatra, and declared "those, who are addicted to the use of intoxicating drinks, or an inordinate passion for tobacco, cannot become good Billiard players." The most prominent player in the country, Phelan started a billiards magazine and wrote a column in the middle-class Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. Both items publicized the respectable crowds at billiard exhibitions and professional matches. Other professional players contributed to the cause by donating prize winnings to charity.

One might assume the reform critique had impinged billiard playing and incited the sudden tactical changes in the billiard industry's late antebellum texts. But reform authors would expend energy to turn players away from billiards only if people were playing. Both the steady publication of criticism and the simultaneously growing number of billiard halls in the antebellum years hint that reform literature posed a threat more perceived than real. Reform authors' pictures of sumptuous environments and interested over-competitive gamblers besmirched the game as the domain of the unvirtuous, but
these stigmas neither outweighed the game’s refinement nor prevented respectable people from playing.34

Players

Extreme portrayals helped crusading authors make their point, but account books, directories, tax records, diaries, and images show a much more diverse patronage than the polarized stereotypes pictured in reformers’ and enthusiasts’ materials. Billiards faced a dichotomous representation because its personification of both virtue and interest made the game malleable in meaning. Ideological malleability also explains why billiard playing appealed across economic ranks and sub-cultures.

Newspapers noted billiards as a popular pastime among lower sorts such as criminals and African-Americans. When John Bruluman murdered Robert Scull, the Pennsylvania Gazette referred to the episode’s billiard playing context. Readers knew Philadelphia had outlawed the game. The Virginia Gazette described another counterfeiter, Edward Rumney, as "aged about 40 years, of a middle size, full-faced, black Complexion, smooth Tongue, and free of Speech, much addicted to Billiards and Gaming." The Provincial Freeman advertised African-American boarding houses with billiard tables. Evangelical papers from the black community addressed billiards as a common vice, and the New York Directory for 1859 listed Robert George’s "col’d" billiard hall.35 Journals corroborate evidence of play among the unrespectable. A free black living in antebellum Natchez, William Johnson played billiards in Natchez and on frequent trips to New Orleans. Thomas Anburey tells the story of "a low fellow" who
gouged out a French doctor's eye over a disputed billiard match in a Richmond tavern during the Revolution.  

Fitting Anburey's account, Latrobe's watercolor, a drawing by Henry William Bunbury, and an etching by C. Williams show members of the lower sort engaged in play with persons of higher rank (Figures 1, 21, 22).  

Latrobe's 1797 illustration shows a four-handed match in a Richmond tavern. The image evokes a cross-strata game involving a member of the gentry, a laborer, and a person of middling rank. A young man wearing trousers and a vest treads around the table in bare feet next to a dark-suited, well-dressed gentleman whose back faces the viewer. On the other side of the table stands a man donning boots and a collared coat with large buttons, a level of dress below the fashionable gentleman and above the barefoot laborer. The watercolor comes from Latrobe's sketchbook of events and places he witnessed while touring the South. Unlike the other two images, Latrobe's depiction of billiards probably reflects an actual occurrence. Bunbury's 1781 satire proposes that players with clout can learn something from their social inferiors. A sober military officer tries to play a ball resting against the cushion with a mace. As the officer lines up his shot, two fops try to contain their laughter at his use of the passe instrument. The cue gained popularity due to its easier application on shots like this one. Even the officer's unfashionable, dumb-looking opponent reaches out to tap him on the shoulder as if to offer the cue he holds. Williams' 1806 etching has the reverse moral, preaching that those without money should not waste it on modish pretenses or risk what little they have on a bet. In this image, a young man wearing a fashionable coat, trousers, and hat has lost a match but cannot pay his losses.
His boorish manners betray his attempt to join higher social circles when he lifts his coat and bends over to receive physical punishment in lieu of monetary payment, a proposal which astonishes and dismays his respectable company.

Eighteenth-century images and descriptions also place middling persons in attendance at tavern billiard tables. The dress of the booted man across the table from the dark-suited gentleman in Latrobe’s work strongly evokes a person middling rank. Henry Laurens slandered the billiard table-boasting hangout of Charleston’s artisanal Sons of Liberty when he denounced its gaming, deplored its “full-time jockey on staff”, and decried its owner Benjamin Backhouse as “Bacchus.” Franklin’s rejoinder in Advice to a Young Tradesman addressed men who worked with a “hammer”.

Public play among the middling sort continued in the nineteenth century. Clerks and businessmen constituted the foundation of an emerging middle class, and Abraham Bassford’s regular patrons were stockbrokers. While Assistant Clerk of the House of Representatives in the 1830s, Benjamin Brown French enjoyed billiards as a lunch-hour pastime. The game became a mainstay in the surge of hotels and exchanges which facilitated commerce and cemented the business fraternity. In the play spaces of this “business” sub-culture, itinerant salesmen and merchants met locals or other travelers. These players used their presence in a respectable billiard hall and their shared attraction to the game to develop the trust necessary to work together. Yet, as in the world of trade, cut-throat competition suffused play in the business sub-culture. Breeding trust and rife with the pursuit of gain, the business sub-culture tried to conflate interest and virtue. Henry Bradshaw Fearon documented the Janus-like combination of competition and
restraint. He wrote that the billiard table at his Louisville Hotel "is generally well occupied" although "all are in bed by ten."⁴¹

Of course, moneyed businessmen provided sharps with a choice selection of "pigeons" ripe for plucking. Subscription rooms offered businessmen a fraternal setting similar to the respectable halls but without the sharps. Like the ornate clubs of the rich, subscription rooms raised entrance barriers to create a fraternal sense of trust among members in a burgeoning urban milieu. Subscription rooms just catered to more modest budgets. J. Jaeter advertised his subscription room in Philadelphia with a broadside that specifically addressed middle class players. The lithograph refines an earlier picture of a London billiard room, reducing an observer's double-breasted jacket to a single-breasted example and picturing a plainer room (Figures 23 and 24).⁴² A man wearing his overcoat in the back suggests a common single-space subscription room in contrast to the multi-room or even multi-floor private club. Fewer and less decorated spaces meant lower costs for members.

These descriptions and images, along with the growing number of respectable billiard halls in the 1850s, indicate the game's popularity among the mid-century middling sort. But attempts to boost domestic table sales among middle class families failed. Billiard tables remained too expensive for most middle class families despite factory production. No price lists remain from table makers in America before 1831, but the cheapest factory-produced tables in Britain sold for £63 or roughly $300 in 1840.⁴³ Price accounted for only half of the problem. Manuals recommended at least a twenty-two-foot by sixteen-foot room for a twelve-foot by six-foot table, and the bare minimum
to allow movement around the table and room for drawback on the stroke required a
space nineteen-feet by thirteen-feet. In most middle class urban homes before the Civil
War, only the second-floor front parlor offered this kind of space. Tables still congested
and divided these rooms. Unlike other leisure-oriented furniture forms, owners could not
move a billiard table to the center of a room and then remove it after play. The lightest
tables weighed 900 pounds. Such an immobile, imposing object hampered the easy
sociability the parlor existed to foster. Space and cost meant nineteenth-century domestic
tables belonged exclusively to the wealthy who could afford to build a formal parlor and
a billiard room.44

Wealthy players enjoyed the game in both private and public locations in the
eighteenth century. A pair of entries "By Billiards" in George Washington's travel
accounts for the summer of 1763 point to tavern play along his journey. In upscale
coffeehouses, taverns, and inns, genteel clubs incorporated their sites' recreational
facilities into meetings. Prospective members joined a particular club based on their
friends and ideas as well as the food and leisure activities offered by the club's tavern of
choice. Washington's accounts overflow with expenses incurred "To Club, at cards", and
Williamsburg innkeeper James Southall frequently noted sums owed by John Page, Jr.
"To Club at Billds."45

Nineteenth-century clubs did not evolve from eighteenth-century clubs. The
tavern-based club dissolved into a more amorphous, though still homosocial, public
community after the Revolution. The nineteenth-century club with its own facility arose
in reaction to socially heterogeneous leisure spaces such as billiard halls.46 Membership
dues kept out the lower sorts and created an air of refined exclusion. Some associations put a ceiling on wagers or outlawed gambling entirely, but the gamblers' code of honor protected consenting genteel gamesters from exposure and guaranteed payment of debts.  

Nineteenth-century elites also played billiards in public. The feared sharps and professionals who drove respectable men to organize clubs also tempted them to play in billiard halls. As one sporting magazine noted, "few men will arrive at any degree of proficiency without, at times, playing on public tables, and consequently mixing with characters the most questionable." In 1808 Christian Schulz visited New Orleans and discovered "the amusements of the gentlemen are very much confined to billiards abroad, and cards at home." Schulz noted the extreme accessibility of the billiard halls which kept "all the doors and windows open" so that even on Sunday mornings strollers heard "the stroke of the cue and mace resounding from one end of the city to the other." On the frontier, Indiana Territory Governor William Henry Harrison played at Graeter's Tavern down the street from his home in Vincennes. Elite men mingled with each other and sharps at public billiard halls in nineteenth-century spa towns like Scholey's Mountain, Saratoga, and White Sulphur Springs.  

A significant number of upper-class devotees who recorded their billiard play seem to have played less after marriage or middle-age. Most conspicuous among these men was John Quincy Adams' son Charles Francis Adams, who documented billiard play almost daily throughout his youth. Billiards vanishes from Adams' diary in 1828. He started his courtship of Abigail Brown Brooks in January 1827 and married her in 1829.
From the time he entered into a relationship with Abby, Adams' leisure activities shifted markedly from billiards and travel to dinner parties and theater. Washington's opponent in a 1797 match noted the President had not played since the Revolutionary War, when the General spent months away from his wife and home in the company of men.

Christopher Gore bought his table in 1806 at age 48. Correspondence states Gore's apprentices and students played at the table, but no evidence portrays Gore playing.49

The prominence of billiards in elite bachelor life points to the sport's place in a homosocial sub-culture historians have termed the "bachelor fraternity." Loose from masters, parents, and wives, the middling clerks and wealthy students railed by moralists socialized democratically with shop boys and journeymen in saloons, billiard halls, and gambling houses. Together, this motley male crew forged a sub-culture that disregarded the virtuous components of respectability in competing ideologies. The bachelor sub-culture inoculated its participants with appreciation for victory, physical prowess, and conspicuous consumption. Unwed, the bachelors shared a culture of unrestrained competition.50 They believed what their fictional protégé Frank Marston sang:

O, talk not to me of the joys of a life
Controlled by the whims of a pretty young wife,
Whoever is ready with "my love" and "my dear",
From the first day of spring to the close of the year;
For my heart is merry, unshackled and free,
And a bachelor's life is the life for me.51

Upper class scions also joined the bachelor fraternity. The bachelor sub-culture tempted them with a freedom and type of performance absent in decorous assemblies of the refined sub-culture. The refined sub-culture ordered elite youths' domestic and educational environments and encouraged virtuous restraint. It applauded wit and
intellectualism for enhancing conviviality and improving life, but it berated displays of physical prowess as evidence of the savagery and struggle it wished to supersede. Superior muscular strength became an acknowledged trait of the baser lower sort whose poverty submerged them in the competitive, interest-ridden world, and whose manual labor led to more developed physiques. 52

Despite refined civility's prioritization of mental over physical ability, the ancient association of strength with essential maleness never entirely faded. Among the bachelors, elite youths redressed their frustrated sense of physical inferiority by temporarily affiliating themselves with a sub-culture which promoted physical competition. Billiards' combination of physical and mental performance provided the perfect stage for transmuted class performance. Respectable young men may have sensed the game's mental component gave them an edge while their comrades-for-the-moment saw a chance to exacerbate the inferiority complex. Beating a wealthy gentleman at billiards granted a poorer bachelor grounds to claim superior intellect in addition to superior physicality. 53

Reformers' complaints about the corruption of America's leading youth demeaned the cross-status nature of the fraternity. Didactic novelists repeatedly told the story of a sober heir seduced into risking and losing his fortune on billiard matches. Jealous friends or shrewd sharps ruled by greed play the villains in these parables. 54 But the melodramas paint everything in black and white. Either the youth maintains his upstanding character, or corruption excites him to completely withdraw from proper society and domestic life. George Foster's guide to "Under-Ground" New York more accurately portrays "the
gambling houses of various ranks and grades" as one of "several points of contact" between "honest people" and the "underground universe." It was "difficult to draw the line between rogues and honest men" when honest men acted like rogues one minute and honest men the next. Isaac Mickle similarly portrayed his billiard-playing compatriots as "a junto of young men more respectable for their birth than their lives -- a bevy who move at once in the highest and lowest circles of society." Even image-conscious Charles Francis Adams played billiards in the Boston dive known as Savin Hill. Even image-conscious Charles Francis Adams played billiards in the Boston dive known as Savin Hill.55 Like Mickle’s friends, elites dipped into the bachelor sub-culture and returned to the respectable world later.

While moral reformers looked down upon what twentieth-century commentators term "slumming," nineteenth-century elites seem to have written off their sons’condescension to youthful exuberance. Few prevented it. Elders even may have viewed the bachelor fraternity as an improvement. At least most young men of nineteenth-century high society settled down after marriage. Eighteenth-century taverns and clubs were the predecessors to the bachelor fraternity, and they appealed to men of all ages. Like the bachelor sub-culture, taverns and clubs functioned as homosocial environments where men engaged in activities disdained by Dissenting or republican ideologies. Patrons and members partook of these activities without losing their access to more refined realms.56

Professional players came from the bachelor fraternity. They generally entered at a young age as service personnel employed by public halls and rooms. Patrons played against employees on slow days or whenever the fancy struck. One of Abraham
Bassford's boys "never saw a billiard cue until he came there, but he had a natural gift for playing, and was constantly practicing whenever there was an empty table." According to a recollection published in the *New York Times*,

an old lawyer came in one day, and not finding a friend whom he expected to make up a game with him, said, 'Here, boy, come and knock the balls around for me a while. I want some exercise.' And he got it. The boy warmed him half a dozen games and he went away mad. The story got about, and a lot of the old habitues of the place tackled that terrible boy. He warmed them all. Then they got ashamed of being beaten by a boy that couldn't much more than reach up on the table to play and who always looked as if he'd like to grin when they came in. So they stayed away and finally Bassford had to send off the boy to get his old customers back.

When his entire family and most of metropolitan Boston went into the city to see Lafayette on a hot August day in 1828, Charles Francis Adams headed for the Neponset Hotel where he "could only get the boy to play with me for any time." Adams proclaimed himself "a better proficient" based on his performance against the boy, but the story of his next match with the young billiard room attendant the following day reeks of a hustle. "I was not successful as usual." Adams remarked, "and being considerably nettled, I do not know how long I should have stayed had not the boy been obliged to go." 

Many of these young stewards progressed into markers, the referees and scorekeepers of matches in billiard halls. Michael Phelan probably worked as a marker in his father's billiard hall. Although markers upheld decorum while sharps subverted it, depictions of markers and sharps reveal both occupations' common heritage in the unrespectable bachelor sub-culture. In Robert Dighton's 1783 print of billiards in a public house, the marker stands at the back of the room with his hand on the counter.
Disheveled in appearance with unkempt hair and an oversized frock, the impish marker fits descriptions of the "vulgar" sharp. His gaze connects him to a man who epitomizes a sharp's "designing" nature. More fashionable than the dirty marker, the designing sharp carries a cane, has his hand in a purse, and sports a mischievous smirk in anticipation of the upcoming shot. Cleanliness and guile separate the two professionals, and the image seems to say that the gambler represents a more cunning version of the marker.

Like young attendants, markers played on their employers’ tables. As a marker improved, he segued into either respectable professional play or sharping. Both respectable professionals and sharps usually had the backing of a hall. Distinction lay in the open support elites and proprietors gave to professionals. Hall owners provided sharps food and drink in return for the liquor and table time purchased by unsuspecting players the sharps hooked. Proprietors allowed professionals to conduct lessons on their tables and introduced pros to their patrons. This exposure gave professionals the opportunity to cultivate backers. Upscale halls and their regular clienteles could furnish substantial financial support, raising the reputation of a professional and the stakes of his matches. Organizers of the 1859 Phelan-Seereiter match spent over $4,500 to offset travel and venue costs for the event. In return, the prestige gained from housing a champion billiardist brought a hall more players. A losing streak turned a professional to sharping or sent him looking for a day job.

Surrounded by respectable fans, pandering to respectable backers, and expected to behave respectably, professional billiardists may have misread their matches as events of
the refined sub-culture and aspired to inclusion in exclusive social circles. Phelan’s proclamations about the propriety of the game read like an application for respectability. In declaring billiards’ intellectualism, healthfulness, and domesticity, Phelan pronounced he and his work met the standards set by reform ideology. But professional matches were not refined events. Like clubs, they straddled the line between the business and refined sub-cultures. A certain level of respectability and exclusivity filtered into such events, but gambling and competition saturated both environments.

Refined civility discarded professional players as frivolous leeches who produced nothing intrinsically useful to society. At best professional gamesters earned a living without labor. At worst they became criminals or a burden to the community. Howlett reminded seventeenth-century readers that although players could derive benefits from the games he outlined, “I would not have them made a Trade, instead of a Divertisement.” The admonition held true two hundred years later in Herbert Spencer’s truism: “To play a good game of billiards is a sign of a well-rounded education, but to play too good a game of billiards is a sign of a misspent youth.” Michael Phelan parlayed his backers into investors in his halls and factory, which in turn laid the groundwork for Phelan’s own claims to respectability. But no matter how much money Phelan made from his respectable business concerns, and no matter how respectable professional billiards became as a spectator event, professional play identified him to the elite and placed him outside the bounds of respectability.

Of course, respectable people backed professional players. They also invested in billiard halls and factories. Joseph Holt Ingraham describes how New Orleans gambling
houses raised money through the sale of shares "and many respectable men, I am
informed, become stockholders." The wealthiest billiard hall owner in antebellum New
Orleans was Colonel A.W. Merriam, whose military title connotes some level of standing
the community. Frank St. Clair pictures a Boston billiard room owner who "owns the
most beautiful specimen of horse flesh in this city; is an officer in our crack corps of
cavalry, and a good fellow generally." 65

Businessmen could participate in these ventures and keep their respectability
partly because they limited their involvement to the business realm where greed coexisted
with respectability. Whereas professional billiardists may have tried to claim refinement
while working their job, businessmen knew the basis for asserting refinement resided
away from the workplace. Respectability derived from a person's behavior in domestic
spaces. Another justification financing the nineteenth-century leisure industry stems
from reformers' vigorous promotion of respectable recreation in antebellum America. By
bringing billiards into the business sub-culture where it drew upon a more respectable
environment, investors and backers pronounced themselves providers of proprietous
leisure. Respectable businessmen involved in the billiard industry maintained a diverse
portfolio of business interests outside the leisure world to avert the stigma of
unrespectability which branded professionals and resulted from earning a living through a
recreational activity. Antebellum businessmen thus rationalized their investment in,
leadership of, and profit from billiard halls and professional matches while they excluded
professional players and underworld entrepreneurs from their refined social circles. 66
Sharps' infamous reputation for dressing respectably to mask their thieving intentions put them beyond the pale of even business sub-culture respectability. In St. Clair's *Six Days in the Metropolis*, The green Caleb Quiz asks "Who is that fellow with sandy whiskers and heavy watch chain?" His cosmopolitan host replies "O, that is one of the attaches of the room." "Is that all," Caleb responds, "I thought he was some distinguished individual." The host directs Caleb away from the site "remarking to Quiz that appearances are sometimes deceptive." But in contrast to eighteenth-century manuals, those who frequented nineteenth-century billiard halls more often than Farmer Quiz reported dependable distinctions between the speciously respectable sharp and the respectable businessman. Jonathan Greene, a former sharp himself, wrote "This class of men pay great attention to their dress; which, when not gaudy, is at least rich and fashionable." Edgar Allen Poe describes an "easily recognisable" gambler "with velvet waistcoat, fancy neckerchief, gilt chains, and filagree buttons." Poe's characterization fits Phelan's alert that a sharp "is always either over-dressed or seedy." The "professed gambler" in Harry Hazel's *The Belle of Boston* "was genteely dressed, and wore around his neck a massive gold chain; a diamond ring upon his finger, and upon his ruffled bosom a large brooch with a diamond centre of great lustre, encircled by sparkling emeralds." Isabella Lucy Bird noted the "remarkably shiny" dress of "cheaters" on a Lake Champlain tour boat. Pretentiously dressed gamblers compare favorably to the "Bowery blackleg" and the famed image of Liz and Mose, icons of the Bowery's grandiloquent overstatement of Broadway fashion.
Given their reported penchant for theatrical overdress, sharps did not do a very
good job concealing themselves. Perhaps they never meant to blend in entirely. Their
clothes resembled respectable dress enough to fool exactly the kind of inexperienced
sucker that would lose money at the table. At the same time, the sharp's costume mocked
respectability in two ways. First, sharps aped respectability to practice a taboo profession
entirely based on leisure and gambling. Second, the egregious dress told players sharps
would not part with bachelor sub-culture values while still meeting dress standards
imposed by billiard halls of the business sub-culture. Sharps could afford outlandish
clothes and jewelry only after repeated wins. Their adornment physically represented
victory, and victories inspired a bravado reflective of the sharps' conscious determination
to avoid and taunt what they saw as hypocritical and judgmental standards.69

Whether contested by sharps, professionals, or businessmen, only men played
billiards in public. The doctrine of separate spheres declared the competition and
unseemly characters in non-domestic sites a threat to women's delicate and passionate
virtue. Of course, the absence of respectable women does not mean all women avoided
billiard halls. The lead character in one of Harry Hazel's sentimental novels masquerades
as a man and wins money in a billiard hall. "And she is not the only one of the
abandoned who understand the art of billiard-playing quite as well as the sterner sex," the
author comments. As with theatre-going and unchaperoned promenades, no laws
prevented women "on the town" from entering billiard halls by themselves or with
escorts of various social grades.70
In domestic spaces, women had played billiards in America for as long as men. William Byrd frequently played "with my wife" and on several occasions "the women played at billiards" apart from male involvement. New Hampshire Governor Frances Wentworth's wife played in the mid-eighteenth century. Maragret Izard Manigault heard poetry read in the "ladies billiard room" at Ballston Springs in 1814. Joseph Bonaparte's daughter Zenaide trounced medical student James Holmes at the future King's estate outside Philadelphia in 1822. Yet although women had played for over a century, Phelan's strident appeals to wives, the necessity for Hazel's character to dress as a man, and a dearth of documentary evidence propose they did not participate en masse in the nineteenth century. \textit{Godey's Ladies Book} never printed a story with American women in a domestic billiard room.\footnote{Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.}

Billiard players in Early America came from a broad sampling of society and met at several points, including the public billiard hall, the bachelor fraternity, and the professional match. The social heterogeneity of these spaces and groups permitted easy movement among identities. Twenty-something heirs slipped away into billiard halls and disposed with the pretensions of their daily routine. Underlings mocked and stole from their social betters, or solicited them for help toward gaining a measure of respectability. Businessmen vented their competitive nature outside the boundaries of the work world while their bachelor charges did the same in their own fraternal cliques. That respectable and wealthy players ventured into public to play billiards knowing that sharps awaited them demonstrates that not all Americans experienced deep anxiety over the anonymity of their growing cities. Rather, billiard players reveled in the new freedoms this
development portended. Only prudish reformers and austere elites feared anonymity. Viewed from the perspective of billiards, these groups comprised a minority.

Spaces

Billiards symbolized genteel edification or filthy vice based largely on the environment surrounding play. Yet disparate environments appealed to a panoply of players who competed within and across social ranks. These conclusions grant the site of play a central role in determining the experience of playing billiards. The importance of the game’s environment makes investigation of the geography, construction, and social function of billiard spaces critical to understanding the cultural meaning of billiards in Early America.

Cost and size made billiard tables in private homes a privilege of the wealthy throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But even the wealthy rarely put billiard tables in urban townhouses before the Civil War. Examples of oak-paneled billiard rooms in palatial residences on Fifth Avenue appeared only in the 1850s. Instead, private billiard tables belonged to the country house idiom. Americans’ placement of billiard tables in rural mansions followed a British trend, though the British tendency originated from the same urban domestic space constraints confronted by Americans.\textsuperscript{73}

In eighteenth-century American country houses, gentlemen did not assign billiard tables to rooms specifically designed for the game. William Byrd III most likely had his table in the library of Westover’s East Wing.\textsuperscript{74} Sir William Johnson’s table stood in the second-floor hall built three years before he acquired a billiard table (Figure 25). A 27-
foot by 14-foot eight-inch platform at the top of the main staircase, the hall left seven and one-half feet around each end and four feet four inches on each side of a centrally placed billiard table. Such dimensions underline the likelihood that Johnson did not construct the hall with a table in mind. Four feet four inches meant a tight squeeze along the side walls, especially if people moved in and out of the four upstairs chambers during a match. The room featured wainscoting, a simple cornice, and molding around each window. But Johnson elected to apply neither wallpaper nor paint in this semi-public space despite the presence of these decorative elements in other rooms. The interior finish advertised Johnson’s wealth and English cultural heritage without overstating his means.

The billiard table provided the overstatement in Johnson’s hall. The most expensive furniture form available, even a plain table communicated affluence. A fine table like the one ordered by Edward Lloyd IV from John Shaw in 1799 shouted a panegyric to civility through its voguish aesthetic motifs. Compared to Christopher Gore’s contemporary table, Lloyd’s table displays not only finer craftsmanship but bellflowers, curvilinear stringing, and inlaid urns (Figures 12 and 13). Even the bolt covers on the Lloyd table feature a molded design absent in the plain Gore example. Purchased for $150, the Lloyd table ranked as one of the single most expensive pieces of Early American furniture.

The manner in which billiards fit into a home depended on the role of the game as a pastime or a passion in the life of the homeowner. Gore Place’s interiors reveal the priorities of Christopher Gore’s wife, who took personal responsibility for the home’s
final appearance. Christopher Gore’s billiard table sat in an enclosed hyphen (Figure 26). The eighteen-foot square room had relatively cheap wallpaper, no cornice, a plain baseboard, a simple molded chair rail, and a fireplace. Three large windows graced each side of the room. Moreover, more spectacular spaces such as the oval drawing room, parlor, and marble-floored entrance contained costly furniture and lay just through the entrances to the billiard room. Location and degree of finish communicate the billiard room’s role as an entertainment space of secondary importance.

Edward Lloyd determined the interiors of Wye House and he did not make his billiard room a secondary space or a place for domesticated entertainment. Lloyd’s table went into the second story of a stuccoed brick greenhouse (Figure 27). Whitewashed walls with a simple baseboard, cornice, and molded chair rail adorned the thirty-foot nine-inch by eighteen-foot seven-inch space (Figure 28). Seven small, square windows lit the room. Devoid of color and significant ornament, Lloyd created a bland space which directed attention to his mahogany and satinwood billiard table. The greenhouse’s interior did not function as an elegant entertainment space so much as a shrine to Lloyd’s habitual gaming.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, country house billiard tables began to appear in rooms specifically constructed to hold them. The shift resulted from the expansion of country homes and subsequent specialization of space. Both Wye House and Gore Place illustrate common locations for billiard tables in country homes during the first half of the nineteenth century. Outbuildings, wings, and clerestories account for eleven of twelve early and mid-nineteenth-century private billiard rooms referenced in this study (Figure 86, page 86).
These three locations all share displacement from the main block of the house. Outbuildings dominate in the South. Billiard rooms north of Philadelphia remained attached to the main block, though pushed to the its periphery.

The choice to locate billiard rooms outside the main block stems from the role of respectable homes as the bastions of the refined sub-culture. To prevent contamination by interest, the refined sub-culture mandated the separation of unvirtuous activity from refined spaces within the home. The removal of kitchens to wings and outbuildings exemplifies this trend. The strong smells, heat, and labor of the kitchen offended the sensibilities of refined people. For similar reasons, many southern plantations and estates placed offices outside the home or at least away from parlors. Neither labor nor business was to mix with the relaxed sociability of domestic refinement. The same argument explains the billiard room's separation. Around a billiard table, competition and vainglory superceded conversation and virtue. Manuals repeatedly remind readers to keep opinions to themselves and remain quiet during shots. The silence led Donald Walker to classify billiards among the "less social" games.

But elites still entertained guests in billiard rooms, and all entertainment spaces in respectable homes demanded some level of refined behavior. Categorization of billiard rooms as more respectable than service spaces yet less refined than parlors or dining rooms resulted in house plans that sequestered billiard rooms from service spaces as well as spaces designed for the performance of domestic refinement. The billiard room at Hyde Hall near Cooperstown, New York operates as an internal outbuilding (Figure 30). It sits atop the house and access comes via the main stairway. Visitors passed through
the entrance hall directly up the stairs. On each floor, doors cut off sight lines from the
staircase and stair hall so guests could not see the service wing to their left or chambers to
their right. At Gore Place the hyphen stretches out from the entrance hall and doors
conceal a service stair between the billiard room and the library at the far end of the wing.
Outside Natchez, Longwood's billiard room sits in the basement. Direct exterior
accessibility through an open-air porch clearly distinguishes the room from the more
controlled social spaces on the first floor (Figure 31). Billiard house outbuildings
similarly placed billiard rooms away from more domestic spaces and yet made them
easily accessible. The placement of domestic billiard rooms suggests they operated as
spaces for the entertainment of some people whose status demanded reception beyond the
hall but who had not yet cultivated the familiarity requisite for an invitation to the parlor.

     Hosts played with close friends in addition to entertaining uncommon visitors.
Charles Francis Adams played night after night at the White House with his cousin
Johnson Hellen, whose company "produced no check upon my pleasures." Christopher
Gore reported that his charge Frederick King "amuses" himself with his schoolmates at
Gore's table. Such descriptions do not represent cut-throat competition. The potential for
such competitiveness instigated billiard rooms' relegation to the purlieu of domestic
space, but the domesticity which enveloped billiard rooms penetrated these spaces
enough for players to invoke its refined sociability. As with professional billiards, the
proximity of women altered the nature and reputation of the domestic game.84

Perhaps because the domestic game relied on women's influence for
respectability, nineteenth-century domestic billiard rooms generally appeared in an

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ungendered space. Association with the bachelor and business sub-cultures has branded billiards a male game despite a long tradition of domestic female play. Only two of the fourteen private billiard rooms display a spatial relationship connotative of male exclusivity. At Longwood, the basement billiard room connects to a smoking room and hall on the opposite side of the floor from a schoolroom and playroom (Figure 31).

Nearby Elms Court has a billiard room at the end of the first floor of an added wing. Access to the room comes solely through the adjoining office at the head of the addition. These rare examples of billiard rooms in predominantly male space stand out amongst clerestories and outbuildings which had no clear gender attachment. Documentation of female play declines in the nineteenth century, but a lack of commentary does not preclude participation. Reports and tracts link men's play with gambling yet no records mention women playing for money at home. With the vice of gambling absent and the competitive nature of play tempered by the domestic sphere, women's virtue would have faced a less menacing version of billiards in the home.85

The locations of private billiard rooms frequently communicated male power though they did not operate as male space. Builders situated billiard rooms in places where players could view the homeowner's demesne. From the second story billiard room in the Wye House greenhouse, players looking through the front windows saw the pediment and porch of the symmetrical Georgian mansion through a tree-lined corridor. The scene mirrored the approach to the front of the house (Figure 32). Out the back windows of the greenhouse, the view extended over fields, wharves, and slave dwellings. The prospect highlighted the Lloyds' control and possessions. Clerestory billiard rooms

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at Stanton Hall and Hyde Hall offer similar panoramas of the surrounding countryside (Figure 33). Even William Johnson's second-floor hall overlooked Indian storehouse, the center of activity for many visitors to his estate (Figure 34). First-floor billiard rooms also seem to have taken vistas into account. Andalusia's billiard room faced a garden. The billiard house, the mansion, and the Grotto on the other side of the garden formed an isosceles triangle with the mansion at the apex and the Delaware River forming the hypotenuse. The Elms in Natchez had a billiard hall in a front yard outbuilding. From the structure's windowed walls players viewed up the inclined front yard toward the looming mansion. In all these examples, billiard rooms seemingly placed on the fringe of the house served a purpose besides relocating competition. Billiard rooms intended to impress the viewer with the power of the homeowner support the idea that the elite used these spaces for formal entertainment as well as interested competition and informal play.

Exclusive clubs offered the other scene for private play. Clubs catered to middling and wealthy men and inhabited spaces from a single subscription room to a multi-story building. Elite clubs included dining and reading rooms to stimulate a range of respectable social activity. Clubs created an environment which bridged competition and refined mores in a manner slightly different from billiard rooms in elite homes. Disconnected from the domestic sphere, gambling and competition went unchecked in clubs. The urban gendered space of private clubs represents a transitional stage between private billiard rooms and respectable public billiard spaces, between the refined and business sub-cultures. The absence of images or extant private billiard club rooms from before 1860 prohibits conclusions about the flow and finish of club spaces.
Taverns and billiard halls carried male connotations unlike billiard rooms in private mansions and distinct from clubs. Public billiard spaces never matched the level of trust established by entrance barriers or domestic infiltration of private game rooms. Wit and greed ruled. As a result, protection of women’s innate virtue required their abstention from public tables. Men who did not enjoy the thrill of gambling or contact with lower sorts also avoided tavern billiard rooms and billiard halls. Those who attended encountered a fiercely competitive environment.87

In the first half of the eighteenth-century, billiard tables sat in larger taverns. Of the Williamsburg area’s four earliest public houses with tables, none of the proprietors had an estate less than £350. All four billiard table-owning establishments offered porcelain services and silver tableware. Though only larger taverns seem to have had billiard tables, a tavern’s size and value had no bearing on the quality of the table it owned. Ishmael Moody’s six-building tavern complex had a market price of £824 but appraisers valued his billiard table at just £15 when he died in 1748. Two years earlier, John Burdett’s table was worth £12 and John Butterworth’s was appraised at £25. These two men ran taverns half as valuable as Moody’s and priced within £30 of each other.88

Virginia tax records suggest the range of taverns with billiard tables expanded in the years immediately following the Revolution. In Alexandria between 1787 and 1797, seven tavern keepers paid the luxury tax on billiard tables. Asa Hill owned one horse, no slaves, and a billiard table. William Farrell did not own any other taxable property besides his billiard table. On the other hand, John Wise owned the city’s most famous tavern, had a table, and was the second largest slaveholder in the city in 1787. The same
diffusion existed in Norfolk and Richmond. The game's expansion into smaller taverns after the Revolution cannot result from cheaper tables. Production methods and prices did not change. But the period of billiards' growth coincides with the popular absorption of republican rhetoric. As a game that spoke to the newly articulated and prevalent tension between interest and virtue, billiards may have become more appealing to more tavern-goers.

Tables stood in diverse establishments but they were not ubiquitous in late eighteenth-century Virginia. Taverns barely meeting costs never had the money to buy a table or erect the space for it. Rural districts reported no more than three tables in any year. Norfolk had the highest percentage of taverns with a billiard table, peaking at sixty percent in 1796. Only two years showed tables in fifty percent or more of Norfolk ordinaries. Owners who leased taverns with billiard tables advertised that these properties were “much resorted to by Gentlemen, on Account of the Billiard Table.”

But in the keen competition of the urban tavern trade, public houses with a table had no discernible edge. Seventy-five percent of tavern keepers with billiard tables in Alexandria, Norfolk, and Richmond had their tables for just one or two years. Twenty percent of those who paid the billiard table tax disappeared from the property tax record the following year. Billiard tables did not guarantee profit because they contributed indirectly to financial gain. Sales of food and drink accounted for a tavern's success or failure. Billiard tables only served as a means to prolong patrons' stays. Games cost little in the hopes that players would drink much.
Not surprisingly given their indirect influence on profits, tavern billiard rooms shared the same peripheral location as those in private homes. A billiard room in the main block either took space away from tables or the semi-private gatherings of clubs and assemblies. Clubs and assemblies brought more people through the door than a billiard table, and dining tables directly generated revenue. At the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, the billiard room occupies the end of a wing reached through the rear of the main tavern structure. Elsewhere in the South, separate "billiard houses" stood apart from the main block. Newspaper advertisements suggest billiard rooms remained attached to the main structure in the North, but undescriptive documentation and a lack of evidence impairs precise determination of the orientation of rooms. 

Few eighteenth-century tavern billiard rooms survive intact, so the reconstructed Raleigh Tavern at Colonial Williamsburg provides an important glimpse of eighteenth-century billiards in a high-end tavern. The twenty-six-foot by twenty-three-foot room leaves eight-and-one-half feet on the sides and seven feet at each end. These measurements fit the standard length for billiard rooms in both taverns and private homes while surpassing the standard width by five feet. Extra width helped accommodate more bodies though the room housed only one table. Eighteenth-century prints of tavern billiards uniformly picture a single table in an outdated style (Figures 1, 21, 22, 35). Players waiting for a game were captive consumers of food and drink. Prints showing aging tables and the cheap appraisals of tables owned by successful, long-time tavern keepers point to publicans' hesitancy to replace their tables, a tendency which enhanced
table irregularities. Records hint that the same tables circulated among numerous taverns.96

Incomplete knowledge about tavern interiors leaves unanswered questions about whether tavern billiard rooms functioned as spaces of a particular sub-culture, but the presence of tables among owners of varied means suggests the game assimilated into varied tavern environments. Interiors in the Raleigh Tavern and John Wise's Tavern probably communicated a respectability that the taverns of Asa Hill and William Farrell did not. From this comparison, respectability might seem like the cultural equivalent of economic status. Respectability cost money. But unrespectable people went into fashionable taverns and gentlemen condescended into lesser public houses.97

Many of the characteristics of eighteenth-century tavern billiards accurately describe nineteenth-century billiard halls. The billiard hall emerged out of a desire to maintain a place for cross-rank interaction. Taverns had begun to exclude patrons as food and drink price regulations receded in the late eighteenth century.98 Like their tavern keeper forebears, billiard hall proprietors represented a broad scope of economic standing. By 1860, Philadelphian Christian Bird had accumulated over $4,000 in real estate in the city and owned personalty in excess of $10,000. Over the same decade, James Hewes parlayed his billiard and bowling saloon into a hotel which garnered substantial earnings the fifty-six-year-old used to support his wife, five children, and an Irish immigrant maid. None of the other nine billiard professionals listed in Philadelphia directories between 1850 and 1860 came close to these figures. Hiram Campbell ranked next best with no land and $200 in personalty.99 Like Philadelphia and Richmond, New
Orleans records depict disparate establishments with billiard tables, ranging from M.M. Miller's two-story billiard hall to J. Jabert's single room. Nineteenth-century New Orleans billiard hall operators also saw a gulf in earnings between a few large halls and many lesser ones. Miller had $2000 in personal property. Jabert does not even appear as a head of household in the Censuses of 1850 or 1860. Entrepreneurs on the scale of Bird and Miller account for less than twenty percent of the known billiard hall owners in mid-century Philadelphia and New Orleans.¹⁰⁰

Some billiard halls were glorified tippling houses and dram shops, serving drinks but no food. Others only differed from taverns in their placement of billiard tables in central spaces. Since they derived from several types of public houses, nineteenth-century billiard halls sprang up in varied spaces. A few displayed opulence equal to any private club. Miller's hall contained fourteen tables valued at $300 to $400 each, three clocks, 52 "cane-seat armchairs", and three $100 French-plate mirrors. One step smaller than Miller's multi-story hall, the "billiard saloon and reading room" operating in 1846 on the northeast corner of Sixth and Chestnut in Philadelphia took up the second floor of a five-story brick building. Visitors grasped a turned mahogany rail and climbed a flight of Carolina pine stairs to reach the room. The stair hall door opened to a cavernous 71-foot by 44-foot room capable of holding eight to ten tables. "Plain pilasters" ran between the room's 27 windows. Six iron columns stretched from the floor to the eleven-foot ceiling, where a stucco cornice bridged the topside and the wall. Two blocks west, Richard Nelms' 1851 billiard room registers the next notch down in interior finish. Occupying one half of a four-story brick building's third floor, no more than four tables could fit into
the 38-foot by 22-foot space (Figure 36). Eight-foot high "washboard" walls enclosed the room. "Grecian mouldings" surrounded six small windows. Dives like Savin Hill outside Boston accounted for the crudest billiard hall interiors. Charles Francis Adams complained the Savin Hill room "was a perfect oven being built of thin wood without plastering, the sun came directly through and made it quite unpleasant."101

The interior at Savin Hill resembled that of a bowling alley. Commentators had long associated bowling with billiards, although by the 1840s bowling had become "an amusement of a much more generally popular character than billiards." Like billiard halls, bowling alleys employed "tenpin boys" and became dens for the bachelor fraternity.102 James McCehen's alley and bathhouse on Cedar near Front Street in Philadelphia had bare lathe and plastered walls with no moldings, baseboard, or cornice. The floors were of local yellow pine as opposed to the Carolina pine seen in the 1846 billiard saloon at Sixth and Chestnut, and McCehen's eight-foot ceiling compares with Nelms' third-rate, third-floor billiard hall.103

Halls with higher degrees of finish compared favorably to esteemed hotels, the cornerstones of the business sub-culture. John J. Ridgway's American Hotel stood across the street from Independence Hall and one block east of the upscale billiard hall at Sixth and Chestnut. The vestibule of the hotel had the same Carolina pine floors and "plain pilasters" as the nearby billiard hall, and the entry contained a comparable stucco cornice. The hotel went beyond the second-floor billiard hall in its elaborate architrave frieze with cast-iron ornaments and molded caps and bases for the pilasters, but the two spaces
shared striking similarities that associated their interiors with other reputable public spaces. These examples suggest interior finish classified billiard halls. Spaces of similar finish operated under the auspices of the same sub-culture. Interiors of respectable billiard halls alluded to classical virtue through classical architecture. Virtuous architecture countered the interested gaming going on in the space, just as a hotel’s classical interior countered the interested business transacted inside. Balancing interest and virtue align respectable billiard halls and hotels with the ideology of the business sub-culture.

Interiors established superficial entrance barriers to sub-cultures based on appearance and behavior. Surrounded by pilasters or French-plate mirrors, improper attire or crude manners broke the respectable shell around gaming in business sub-culture play spaces. Failure to meet the rules of the host sub-culture marked the violator as an outsider, either a subversive or an inept aspirant. As ornament diminished, so did standards. Passionate cursing and violence were more acceptable at Savin Hill than at Miller’s. It cost money to build, run, or meet the standards of respectable billiard halls. But just as in eighteenth-century taverns, expense had little effect on the range of players who frequented a hall. Sharps and posers learned behavior from observation and owned suits which passed muster. Wealthy players, especially young ones, did not avoid halls with base interior finish and less respectably groomed players.

Cross-rank play made billiard halls a threat to the social order. In a billiard match, wealth and connections did not favor one player over another. This level playing
field made cross-rank play a battleground for asserting superiority. Elites tried to prove their position and sharps tried to best their supposed betters. Public billiard rooms' potentially subversive competition consigned them to the fringes of commercial buildings just as homeowners pushed them outside the main block. Relegation of most billiard halls to second-floor, third-floor, and basement spaces certainly related to proprietors' inabilitys to meet higher rents. Yet the few halls with the resources to pay for ground-floor space also started with enough capital to construct an interior that cloaked dangerous competition in the decor, dress, and manners of respectable sociability.

The St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans personifies the billiard hall's ambiguity within commercial structures. The hotel made money either directly from the table fees, or indirectly from a license fee paid by the room manager. It profited further from liquor sold in the bar room and taken to the nearby billiard room. By providing businessmen leisure on site, hotel owners hoped they would dine on site and add more money to the hotel coffers. Yet the St. Charles was the finest hotel in New Orleans and one of the most highly regarded in antebellum America. Cross-strata competition in the public billiard room threatened to attach undesirable connotations to the hotel at large. Caught between profit motives and desire for a virtuous reputation, builders tucked the billiard room away in the back corner of the basement (Figure 37). A roundabout path down a back staircase and through the basement laundry hall was the only route by which a guest could reach the billiard room without leaving the hotel. An entrance off the street lent an easier explanation for the heterogeneous patronage.
In addition to dissociation within buildings, billiard halls shared a common location within the larger urban context. Antebellum American cities boasted vice districts in which seedy gambling spots clustered together. Lesser billiard halls may have populated these sections. Respectable public halls also seem to have congregated in one area. No less than five public billiard rooms stood on Chestnut Street between Sixth and Eighth Streets in Philadelphia during the 1850s. New Orleans billiard rooms crowded around the St. Charles Hotel in the American Quarter and the St. Louis Exchange in the French Quarter. Dancing masters, fencing masters, and reading rooms occupied the same zones. Sensational antebellum guidebooks accurately portray this tendency. Caleb Quiz and his worldly guide visited six respectable billiard halls on one block in Frank St. Clair's depiction of Boston.

Billiard spaces reflect the dynamic tensions between interest and virtue, competition and domesticity, and luxury and refinement experienced by Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In houses, commercial buildings, and urban geography, billiards was separated from spaces of refinement to avoid tainting them with competition. But billiard rooms held a liminal, not isolated, place. Domesticity and classical conceptions of virtue filtered piecemeal into private billiard rooms. The fine interiors of high-end public halls crafted a veneer of restraint. Only the exact combination of interest and virtue, the precise definition of respectability, varied among billiard-playing experiences.
NOTES


7 For erudition and skill as refinement, see Bushman, *Refinement*, pp. 191, 286-287; Shields, *Civil Tongues*, pp. 158-160. For comportment as refinement, see Bushman, *Refinement*, pp. 63-66, 292-296.


12 *Southern Sentinel*, 14 Feb. 1852.


18 *Virginia Gazette*, 11 Apr. 1751.


This description comes from a James Hall short story set in Pittsburgh. It appeared in the *Western Souvenir* and the anthology *The Soldier's Bride and Other Tales*. It is reprinted here from Edwin R. Miles, "President Adams' Billiard Table" *New England Quarterly* (March 1972) pp. 15-29.


Part of the explanation for pool's post-war reputation stems from the Gilded Age pre-eminence of pocketless tables and games based entirely on caroms among respectable players. Even four-ball did not demand forethought and angle play to same degree as the carom game.


For other periodicals supporting billiards and targeting an upper and upper-middling audience, see *The Spirit of the Times, American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* and Pierce Egan's series of sporting anthologies. Subscriptions to sporting periodicals ranged from three dollars to five dollars.


Manuals do not target an audience undecided in its opinion of a game. Handbooks only appeal to a buyer if they already have an interest. Either billiardists chose a rather ineffective forum to persuade the general public, or they knew the people they wanted to reach read manuals and already had an interest in the game.


The last two images were produced in England but English prints had wide circulation in America through the mid-nineteenth century and I use the foreign images to depict a cross-rank play established by descriptions of play in America. E. McSherry Fowble, *Two Centuries of Prints in America: A Selective Catalog of the Winterthur Museum*.

38 Thanks to Linda Eaton, Curator of Textiles at Winterthur Museum, for her help in determining the dress and interpreting the characters in the Latrobe image. Personal Interview, 12 Mar. 2001.


42 Thurston Catalog; The rough equation from sterling to dollars comes from the $4.86 exchange rate cited in Lawrence H. Officer, "Dollar-Sterling Mint Parity and Exchange Rates, 1791-1834" Journal of Economic History (Sept. 1983) p. 591. The sum may even have been higher in 1840 after the Panic of 1837. A lower middle class townhouse in antebellum New York rented for $300 a year. Blumin, Middle Class, pp. 149-151.
For the recommended space, see Phelan, *Billiards*, p. 35. Philadelphia townhouses of the middling sort had a best front room averaging twenty feet by fifteen feet. Donna Rilling, *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism: Builders in Philadelphia, 1790-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) p. 81; Blumin, *Middle Class*, p. 153. Early advertisements listed the weights of tables. Joe Newell, *Official Brunswick Historian and Restorer*, has a collection of these single-sheet ads which may have appeared in city directories. The 900-pound figure came from averaging the lightest tables (all were five-by-ten wooden beds) in the following ads: W.H. Griffith and Company, 1851; Leonard and Benjamin, 1854; Balke and Holzhaub, 1857, 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861; J.M. Brunswick and Brother, 1857; Phelan and Collender, 1866.


A twenty-year period separates the demise of the tavern-based eighteenth-century club and the arrival of the private nineteenth-century club with its own facilities. Also biting repartee and subversive or "freeing" frankness did not characterize elite clubs in the nineteenth century. For the differences, see Shields, *Civil Tongues*, pp. 175-208, 326-328; Reiss, *City Games*, pp. 14-18.

For gambling limits, see *Constitution and Membership Book of the Philadelphia Literary and Billiard Association*. HSP.


For Gore, see the Collection of Correspondence at Gore Place, Waltham, MA.


Charles Austin, Frank Marston (Boston: Gleason's Publishing Hall, 1842) p. 17.


For examples of this plot, see Harry Hazel, The Belle of Boston: or, the Rival Students of Cambridge (Boston: F. Gleason, 1841); Hazel, Hasserac; Warren, Gamesters.


American historians have not addressed antebellum slumming. For English attempts to control the associations of young middle class men, but not young elites, see Mike J. Huggins "More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England" Journal of Social History (Autumn 2000: 585-600) p. 586. For similarities between eighteenth-century taverns and clubs and the nineteenth-century bachelor fraternity, see Shields, Civil Tongues, pp. 62-65, 175-189. Peter Thompson,


For Phelan as a marker, see Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, pp. 271-272. Descriptions of sharps as "vulgar" and "designing" appear in Beaufort, *Hoyle* (1788), p. 189. For another example of a marker in noticeably lesser attire, see Figure 24.


St. Clair, *Six Days*, p. 43.

69 Here again, I borrow from Eric Lott's suggestion that African-Americans performing blackface minstrelsy were demonstrating their prowess and making fun of white impersonations of blacks. Lott, "Seeming Blackface."

70 Hazel, *Hasserac*, p. 64; Cohen, *Jewett*, pp. 77-78.


74 The East Wing of Westover burned in the Civil War, so exact room dimensions and finish are unclear today. The space used by Byrd's father, the diary keeper, also remains unknown. Recent dendrochronology has suggested Byrd III built the Westover mansion. Little information survives about the previous house on site. William J. Callahan, Jr., Edward R. Cook, and Camille Wells, University of Virginia School of Architecture, Unpublished study, March 2001.


Halttunen, Confidence Men, pp. 58-60, 111-113; Bushman, Refinement, pp. 251-256.

Bushman, Refinement, pp. 251-263.

Adams, Diaries, 2:78-79; Christopher Gore to Rufus King, 4 Dec. 1817, Rufus King Papers, New York Historical Society (copy in Collection of Correspondence at Gore Place, Waltham, MA); See also Byrd, Secret Diary, pp. 41, 45, 69, 161, 275. Byrd's amusements in the billiard room extended beyond billiard matches.

For gender neutral objects in private billiard rooms, see the inventory for Frederick Stanton, 29 June 1859. Adams County Inventories and Appraisments, Book 7, Page 468. For absence of gambling in women's matches, see Byrd, Secret Diary, pp. 15, 113, 139; Holmes, Dr. Bullie, pp. 22-26; Adams, Diaries, 2: 6-9. The best contrast to the assumption of billiard rooms as male domains is Margaret Izard Managault's reference to the "ladies billiard room" at Ballston Springs in 1814. More research is necessary to determine location and placement of this room. Manigault, Diary, p. 18.
For taverns as sites of contest, see Thompson, *Rum Punch*, pp. 77, 97-104. Even friends who played politely in a domestic space became observedly more antagonistic in public matches. For an example, see Adams, *Diaries*, 1:231 compared to 1:264.


Virginia Property Tax Records, Alexandria City, Richmond City, Norfolk City, 1785-1797. LV. John Wise owned Gadsby's Tavern.

The absence of tables in rural records may indicate fewer billiard tables or selective enforcement of the tax. Virginia Property Tax Records, Albemarle County, Accomack County, Alexandria City, Bedford County, Charles City County, Hanover County, King and Queen County, Norfolk City, Richmond City, Westmoreland County, Wythe County, 1785-1797. LV.

For examples of ads making billiard tables sound like significant contributors to a tavern’s success, see *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 Nov. 1736; *South Carolina Gazette*, 28 Dec. 1734; *Pennsylvania Gazette* 12 Apr. 1750; *Virginia Gazette*, 4 Aug. 1774.

Virginia Property Tax Records. Alexandria, Richmond City, and Norfolk City, 1785-1797. LV. Alexandria had seven individuals with tavern and billiard table licenses in this decade. Richmond and Norfolk had seventeen. Gaps in the records limited calculations. Alexandria’s records for the years between 1791 and 1794 are missing. Richmond has no records for 1790.

Christian Graeter charged eight cents per game at his tavern in Vincennes, Indiana. An account book from an earlier tavern shows prices of twelve pence during the day and twenty-two and one-half pence at night. Graeter Account Book, 1809, IHS; Louise C. Belden, "Billiards in America before 1830" *Antiques* (January 1965: 99-103) p. 99. For income derivation, see Brailsford, *Diversions*, pp. 108-113; Thompson, *Rum Punch*, pp. 50-64.
For the South, see Maryland Gazette, 27 Mar. 1760; Virginia Gazette 9 July 1772; Fayetteville (NC) Gazette 2 Oct. 1792. For the North, see Pennsylvania Gazette, 24 Jan. 1760; Pennsylvania Gazette 12 Apr. 1750; Pennsylvania Gazette, 4 Nov. 1736.

Averages for public rooms were compiled from rare ads giving dimensions of the room. Pennsylvania Gazette, 24 Jan. 1760; Maryland Gazette, 27 Mar. 1760; Virginia Gazette, 9 July 1772. For private rooms, see Image 27.

Virginia tax records show a similar number of tables in a city on a year-to-year basis even though the names of owners change. Virginia Property Tax Records, Alexandria, Richmond City, and Norfolk City, 1785-1797. LV. For more examples of the second-hand market, see "Narrative of George Fisher" William and Mary Quarterly, series 1 (October 1908:100-139) p. 134; Maryland Gazette, 7 Dec. 1758; South Carolina Gazette, 1 June 1734; South Carolina Gazette, 28 Dec. 1734.


Thompson, Rum Punch, pp. 18, 185. For first billiard halls, see Weiss, Pastimes, pp. 128-129.

Bird was Philadelphia's Phelan. He played in, and may have hosted, the 1858 exhibition in which Kavanagh beat Phelan. The Spirit of the Times, 25 Sept. 1858, p. 392. Campbell may have made his money in a different career. Occupational titles are notoriously vague in mid-nineteenth-century censuses, but Campbell listed himself as a "bartender" in the 1860 Census after no title appeared next to his name in 1850. "Billiards and bowling" appears next to his name in an 1850 city directory. For Bird, Hewes, Campbell, and the other eight traceable billiard professionals, see 1850 Census Records, Philadelphia, HSP; 1860 Census Records, Philadelphia, HSP; McElroy's Philadelphia Directory, 1847, 1849, 1850, 1851, 1854, 1859, Winterthur; Cohen's Philadelphia Directory, 1860, Winterthur.


Franklin Fire Insurance Company, Book 32, Policy #18153, 13 May 1853. HSP.

Franklin Fire Insurance Company, Policy #4731, 16 Oct. 1843. HSP.

This argument attaches an intended purpose to interiors which Karen Halttunen has claimed for dress and behavior. The application of the argument differs here in two respects. First, I have supposed adherence to rules indicated participation in a sub-culture, not membership in a class. Sub-cultures attracted participants from various classes. Second, I have explored intentions beyond those of reform ideology. Halttunen, *Confidence Men*.

For the vice districts, see Foster, *Celio*, p. 16; Cohen, *Jewett*, pp. 78-79.

Conclusions:

The game of billiards reflects the larger cultural landscape of Early America. The structure, perceptions, participants, and environments of billiards magnify cultural traits such as the omnipresent tension between virtue and interest, and the power of competing sub-cultures to order behavior and appearance. Through exploration of the complete play experience, cross-rank interaction and competitiveness also emerge as significant characteristics of play which affected life in Early America.

Billiards offered players an interested and competitive experience tempered by refined erudition and sequestered space. Appealing to both sides of the interest-virtue tension, billiards let Americans have their cake and eat it too. Contemporary commentators recognized the game's duality. Enthusiasts did not refute billiards' interest-ridden public environments. Reform authors acknowledged the game's respectable structure. But in retrospect, neither the game's structure nor its environments evenly balanced virtue and interest.

The rules of billiards engaged players in diametric competition reflective of a society engaged in a capitalist economy. Most billiard games featured only two players. Pool accommodated up to fifteen contestants, yet even the rules for pool reduced the game to a one-versus-one format by requiring players to aim for the ball belonging to the preceding player.¹ If the rules had permitted shooters to target any ball, more players

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would have affected each person's play and the sense of competition would have been
diluted among all the participants. Making each player shoot at the same opponent's ball
narrowed the number of players each contestant directly affected and turned the game
into a series of binary competitions.

Billiards' shift away from static table elements in the first half of the eighteenth
century also indicates the prioritization of interest and competition over virtue and refined
sociability. Elimination of the port and king foreshadowed the rise of the cue. Cues
sacrificed genteel posture for more effective play, suggesting a shift of emphasis from
cultivated appearance and restraint to skilled performance and winning. Adoption of the
cue announced that the ends justified the means, a rationale antithetical to selfless and
restrained virtue.

Even respectable billiard halls, though they purported to enforce a standard of
virtue, did not successfully temper interest. The business sub-culture that ordered
respectable public billiard spaces tried to impart virtue through its interiors and the rules
they imposed. But the business sub-culture demanded only enough virtue to foment trust
among businessmen so they could work together in the pursuit of profit. As sharps
pointed out through their behavior and dress, participants in this sub-culture only needed
to appear virtuous and instill a minimum trust. The business sub-culture's dictums and
interiors urged an easily exploited superficial virtue.

Nor could people compel sincere virtue with any greater success. In clubs and
homes, billiards sat on the fringe of the refined sub-culture. Compared to parlors, hosts
needed less familiarity with guests to permit them access to private billiard spaces. But
these rooms still imposed more strictures of reform ideology than the finest billiard halls. And yet, just as in billiard halls, people performed disingenuous virtue to gain access to private billiard rooms where they then acted out of interest. After losing fifty shillings to Thomas Bolling at dice, William Byrd played billiards with his guest "very coldly because he is a sharper."² A nineteenth-century print reveals the insincere behavior which predominated in clubs originally formed as havens from insincerity. "Lose your money with an affected SANG FROID to denote you have plenty more," the caption advises. Only when alone can a player take the chance of "removing the mask and giving your passion vent" (Figure 38).

In retrospect, the interested qualities of billiards appear to outweigh the virtuous aspects of the game. But contemporary commentators did not recognize all of these ways the rules and environments of billiards favored interest over virtue. No reform author opined that the game's structure promoted interest or extreme competition. Reform novelists and sharps exposed the superficial virtue of public halls, but nobody said virtue was a sham. In fact, polished billiard halls' mere evocation of virtue still motivated enthusiasts and reformers alike to rank them above gambling hells whose ornamentation and games suggested no virtue at all. George Foster instructs readers that halls equipped with "the best tables in New York" are "the places where the visitor is safe from disgusting associations." He cites Abraham Bassford's hall as an example even though Bassford employed sharps. Bassford's reputation came from his quality equipment and stylish interior. By extension, Foster assumed his clientele was more respectable than the patrons of a hall with lesser furnishings.³
Billiards reflects the primacy of interest in American culture, but such a retrospective conclusion has no bearing on contemporary experience. Most Early Americans perceived the tension between appearing virtuous and seeming interested as a tenuous balancing act. Yet most Americans also knew that act had more to do with communicated identity than internal character. The respectability Foster imputed to people in respectable spaces illustrates the general connection between a person's identity and the space they occupied. Rather than cultivating an absolute identity based on any one sub-culture's ideology, players communicated respectability as defined by whatever environment they happened to inhabit at the moment. Only subversives consciously refused to meet standards.

Three distinct sub-cultures ordered environments of billiard play. The uniqueness of each of these sub-cultures was rooted in its definition of respectability, a definition based on the blend of virtue and interest in the sub-culture's ideology. Outward signs of virtue and interest denoted the host sub-culture as well as participation or subversion of it. Spaces like the Wye House billiard room and gaudy sharps' dress indicated interest. The Gore Place billiard room and dress in accord with Godey's fashion plates signified virtue.

The roles of sub-cultures and the interest-virtue tension surface as a result of analyzing billiards' reflection of the larger Early American culture. But analysis of subcultures and the interest-virtue tension reveal the social heterogeneity and competitiveness of billiard play, two components of the game which suggest play's affects on Early American culture. Placed in context with prevailing conceptions of
American culture, these two affective meanings highlight how the perspective of play yields new insights into the larger culture.

In his broad study of Early American culture, *The Refinement of America*, Richard Bushman claims that "divisions in society did not imply a division in culture."

Examination of billiard-playing supports Bushman's statement, but not for the reason he names. Bushman explains the lack of cultural division by saying most Americans pursued the same goal of refinement. I have argued there were no cultural divisions because many Americans participated in the myriad cultural offerings available to them.

The ability to assume varied personae and pursue varied respectabilities held attraction in a schizophrenic culture which juggled potentially opposing values like interest and virtue. Only a minority of extremists, reformers on one end and sharps on the other, held to absolute virtue or absolute interest as the only definitions of respectability to which they ever acceded. In American culture, billiards functioned as a vehicle for the assumption of multiple identities.

Billiards facilitated Americans' desires for flexible identities for two reasons, both related to billiards' status as a game. First, the location of billiard spaces within the play realm presented a safe place for indulgence in multiple identities. The play realm functions as a kind of dome outside of which the social activity of the realm may go unnoticed. A sharp might beat a gentleman, but the sharp's claims of superiority failed to extend outside the billiard hall because different rules determined superiority beyond the venue of play. Able to maintain superior respectability in other spaces, elites and respectable men engaged in the value system and level playing field of the billiard hall.
The agonistic qualities of billiards account for the other reason the game expedited movement among sub-cultures. As a contest devoid of luck and challenging both physical and mental skills, the motive to claim superiority lured players across sub-cultural boundaries. Peter Thompson and Dell Upton recently have noted the competitive atmosphere of public space in Early America, but both have remarked on Americans’ efforts to reduce such contention. "Taverngoers were not masochists," Thompson writes. But Thompson assumes Americans thought competition was masochistic. On the contrary, I have argued Americans relished contest. American politics, economics, and culture embraced it. Look no further than the competing combinations of interest and virtue for an example. Regardless of the level of virtue imbued by environment or structure, people only played billiards if they enjoyed some degree of competition.

Billiards fostered malleable identities and reveals an enjoyment of competition. These meanings affected American culture and suggest even larger conclusions. First, if people defied cultural categorization, objects and spaces denoted affiliations. Clothes distinguished the respectable player from the sharp though their motives might be comparable. Stylish interiors dictated respectable attire and manners. Access qualified respectable interiors as either refined or business sub-culture spaces. People adopted the identity communicated by the objects and spaces with which they interacted.

Second, the gambling common in billiard play suggests the competitive traits of billiards might transcend the play realm. Gambling bridged the everyday and play worlds by transferring real property based on the outcome of events in the play realm. Losing a fortune through gambling made a respectable man unable to maintain possession of
objects or spaces that allowed him access to the refined sub-culture. Players gambled in
despite the activity's potential danger because risk raised the level excitement and
rendered the play experience more real.8 If players wanted to make their competition
experiences more real, the interaction and traits of play realm competition could have
also occurred in the real world.

These broad conclusions extend the findings of this investigation into billiard play
beyond play spaces and beg further consideration of the framework of sub-cultures as a
master interpretive scheme ordering experience inside and outside the play realm. The
exclusiveness of refined sub-culture spaces, the financial outlay required to create a
business sub-culture space, and the baseness of bachelors' haunts might seem to make the
sub-culture framework merely a semantic rephrasing of the existing interpretive
framework of economic class. But the class hierarchy fits neither spaces nor participants
in the sub-culture model. Expense communicated a heightened degree of affiliation with
a sub-culture, but wealth had limited bearing on involvement in a sub-culture.

The refined sub-culture is perhaps the most difficult of the systems to wrench
from the class framework. Displacing unrefined activities and furnishing a refined space
required money. But refined spaces did not belong only to elites. Reformers lambasted
many elites' over-refinement with the same fervor as they execrated the unrefined poor.
The essential qualities of a refined space, control over access and adherence to reform
ideology, exacted a toll far higher in ideological commitment than cash or credit. People
could exclude anyone from their refined spaces. The treatment of professionals aspiring
to respectability shows an economic class bias, but elites could have found themselves
excluded from the refined spaces belonging to married professionals. Elites and the middle class had no monopoly on refinement.

The sub-culture framework has potential for facilitating comprehension of a fluid society, but many questions remain. How did non-play spaces of each sub-culture function? Where was the line between virtue and refinement in each? What were the parameters of each sub-culture's spaces? How did self-identity conflict and/or conflate with communicated identity? What other sub-cultures existed?

All these questions lie outside the scope of this study. They also lie outside the traditional scope of sport and leisure history. This thesis recommends historians devote more attention to cross-rank interaction inside and outside the play realm, as well as consider the possible impact of this interaction on our view of the past. In order to suggest answers, historians will have to look into other leisure activities, homes, wharves, ships, streets, shops, and factories; we will have to comb wills and inventories, tax records and census data, diaries and prescriptive literature. But the proposition of an interpretive framework for the past originating in sport and leisure shows the applicability of the subject to the larger historical narrative. If this project motivates others to address play, sport, and leisure in a broader context, I will consider it a success.
NOTES


3 George G. Foster, *New York By Gas-Light* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850) p. 20; For Bassford's employment of sharps, see "Billiards Then and Now" *New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1878, 5:5


FIGURE 1

Definitions of Respectability. Each sub-culture blended interest and virtue differently to arrive at a definition for respectability. The major sub-cultures described in this project appear above in quotation marks. Each bullet belongs to one sub-culture and describes the blend of interest and virtue in that sub-culture's definition of respectability.
FIGURE 3

Louis XIV Playing Billiards. Antoine Trouvain, Engraving, 1694. Louis XIV’s aim suggests he will try to put his opponent behind the port while leaving himself a clear shot through. Finer dress and a more elegant setting differentiated indoor table billiards from related outdoor versions such as in Figure 3. Thurston: Timeless Quality Since 1799 (London: E.A. Clare and Son, Ltd., 1989).
Mace. 1760-1780. Photo courtesy Winterthur Museum.
Wye House Billiard Table, Exposed Bed. Attributed to John Shaw, Baltimore, 1799-1801. This view shows the planed surface of frames and panels. Upholsterers placed the baize on top of this surface. Pins fastened the rails to the bed frame. Photo courtesy Winterthur Museum.
FIGURE 7

Underside of English Billiard Table. ca. 1738. Photo by author, courtesy Colonial Williamsburg.
“Billiards.” Robert Dighton, Etching, 1783. Courtesy of the Print Collection, Lewis-Walpole Library, Yale University.
FIGURE 10

Gore Place Billiard Table. Boston, 1807. Photo by author, courtesy Gore Place.
Wye House Billiard Table. Photo courtesy Winterther Museum.
FIGURE 14

Side pocket. 1902 Brunswick Billiard Table at George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC. Photo courtesy Biltmore Estate.

Side pocket. Gore Place Billiard Table, ca. 1807. Notice the similar wings anchoring both pockets to the rail. Photo by author, courtesy Gore Place.
Underside of Wye House Billiard Table. Note the large central cross-beam and large panels compared to the English table in Figure 7. Photo courtesy Winterthur Museum.
Underside of Gore Place Billiard Table. Large corner blocks support the bed at the legs. The English table at Colonial Williamsburg has neither the corner blocks nor the large cross-beams seen here and in Figure 15. Photo by author, courtesy Gore Place.
Support Structure of English Billiard Table. Note stretchers and legs absent in Figures 12 and 13. Photo by author, courtesy Colonial Williamsburg.
FIGURE 18

Underside of Castle Tucker Billiard Table. Boston, ca. 1848. The wooden runner to the left holds the marble bed off the skirt of the table. At several points on the table, playing cards have been wedged between the runners and the marble to level the surface. Photo by author, courtesy SPNEA.
"The Great Billiard Match." Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 23 Apr. 1859.
“Little Filkins’s Billiards.” Filkins’ inveterate billiard playing and smoking have left him ragged. Also note his ostentatious plaid suit. Harper’s Weekly, 14 Jan. 1860.
FIGURE 21

“Debts of Honor.” C. Williams, Etching, 1806. Courtesy of the Print Collection, Lewis-Walpole Library, Yale University.
Figure 23

"Jaeter's Subscription Room." G. Childs, Lithograph, 1830-1840. Patronized by middle class men, subscription rooms were furnished less expensively and members expected less modish attire than in elite clubs or luxurious public billiard halls. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

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“J. Thurston, Manufacturer.” In comparison with Figure 23, the larger room, the billiard settee, the stove, and the highly fashionable clothing of players in this image allude to some of the differences between levels of billiard spaces. The rules on the wall and the marker keeping score make it likely that this picture actually portrays a public room. Also notice the marker’s less fashionable, loose-fitting coat in comparison the gentlemen in the room. Frontispiece to Mingaud, *The Noble Game of Billiards*, J. Thurston, ed. (London: John Thurston, 1836). The image most likely dates to the late 1810s.
FIGURE 25

Second Floor Hall at Johnson Hall, Johnstown, NY. Photo by author, courtesy Johnson Hall State Historic Site.
Enclosed Hyphen at Gore Place, Waltham, MA. The billiard room occupies the first three bays closest to the main block on the right. A service stair took up the final bay and the library stands at the end of the wing. Photo by author, courtesy Gore Place.
FIGURE 27

Greenhouse at Wye House, Wye, MD. The billiard room occupied the second floor of the main structure. Photo by author, courtesy Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman.
Billiard Room at Wye House. The hatch door in the floor is a recent addition. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, access to the room came via set of external stairs along the rear wall of the structure. Photo by author, courtesy Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman.
FIGURE 29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>House Date</th>
<th>Billiard Room Date</th>
<th>Billiard Room Location</th>
<th>Billiard Room Size</th>
<th>Wall Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wye House</td>
<td>Wye, MD</td>
<td>1745</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>30'10&quot;x18'6&quot;</td>
<td>Whitewashed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson Hall</td>
<td>Johnstown, NY</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>Second Floor Hall</td>
<td>27'x14'8&quot;</td>
<td>Wainscoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>1820-1835</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>23'2&quot;x16'4&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elms</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>22'x18&quot;</td>
<td>Papered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gore Place</td>
<td>Waltham, MA</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Wing</td>
<td>18'7&quot;x18'9&quot;</td>
<td>Papered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auburn</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>40'x27'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andalusia</td>
<td>Andalusia, PA</td>
<td>1815/1835</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>24'x24'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Hall</td>
<td>Lake Otsego, NY</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>unfinished</td>
<td>Clerkestory</td>
<td>18'x24'</td>
<td>Unfinished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elms Court</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Wing</td>
<td>26'4&quot;x18'8&quot;</td>
<td>Wainscoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry Hill</td>
<td>So. Boston, VA</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>1865-1870</td>
<td>Outbuilding</td>
<td>24'x18'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanton Hall</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Clerkestory</td>
<td>24'x16'</td>
<td>Whitewashed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle Tucker</td>
<td>Wiscasset, ME</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>Altered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood</td>
<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Basement</td>
<td>34'x24'</td>
<td>Whitewashed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*may have been two rooms

Extant Private Billiard Rooms in America, 1700-1860.
Floor Plan of Hyde Hall, Otsego, NY. Courtesy Hyde Hall.
Floor Plan of Basement of Longwood, Natchez, MS. "Area" indicates a portico accessible from outside. Courtesy Historic Natchez.
FIGURE 32

View out front of Wye House Billiard Room. Photo by author, courtesy Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman.
View out front of Hyde Hall Billiard Room. Photo by author, courtesy Hyde Hall.

Hyde Hall. The billiard room looks out over the portico.
FIGURE 34

View out front of Second Floor Hall at Johnson Hall. The old Colonial Highway followed the line of trees to the left. Photo by author, courtesy Johnson Hall State Historic Site.
"Life in a Billiard Room." George Cruikshank, Aquatint, 1822.
Richard Nelms' 1851 Billiard Hall Photographed in 1908. Nelms' hall took up the rear half of the third floor of this building. Notice how Nelms' half of the structure has smaller windows and that the size of the windows decreases with height. Franklin Fire Insurance Company Book 116, Policy #14955, 22 Dec. 1851. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
Figure 37

Floor Plan of Basement of St. Charles Hotel, 1837. Drawn by Robin Sarratt from original in Historic New Orleans Collection.
“Indifference.” D.T. Edgerton, Aquatint, 1823. Notice the fashionable table in comparison with tavern tables in Figures 1, 21, 22, and 35.
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