

According To Hoyle

by Lynne Belluscio

The exhibit at LeRoy House this next year will be about “play.” It’s a pretty wide topic. How often did you hear your mother tell you to “go outside and play!” Or “don’t play with your food.” Or “you’ll have to play inside today.” One of the aspects of play that I’m having a good time with right now, is “playing cards.” Historically I’m finding some really neat stuff. For example, did you know that at one time, the LeRoy fire departments competed in “whist” tournaments? I suspect that few people even know how to play whist. What I have discovered, is that whist was first played in England in the early 1700s. And it was a man by the name of Edward Hoyle who published the rules for the game - - yes the man whose name became associated with the term “according to Hoyle.” His name became attached to published books on all kinds of card games. We have in the Jensen Collection a copy of the 1845 “Hoyle’s Games” which includes the rules for many card games as well as draughts (checkers), chess, cricket, tennis, dominoes, and cock fighting. (Don’t think I’ll consider cock fighting as part of the exhibit.)

Whist is a card game where players take tricks. It evolved into bridge whist which was an ancestor of contract bridge. I never learned to play bridge,

so I’m not sure what parts of whist and contract bridge are similar, but I did discover in our collection the “trays” for whist and I just bought on ebay a beautiful wood counter to keep track of the score. I also located a “bridge set” with an embroidered card table cover and a set of snack dishes. We also have a set of Jell-O molds for clubs, diamonds, hearts, and spades. We hope to invite local groups to come to LeRoy house to play cards. When I first came to LeRoy House, I would pull out a drawer and find decks of cards. We also have a collection of old card tables, as well as two of the LeRoy card tables with business listings printed on the top. We think they were made in the early 1940s.

In our recent newsletter, I asked folks to remember the card games they played - - or for that matter still play. Cribbage, euchre, poker, hearts, canasta, pinochle, hearts, gin rummy, Michigan rummy, old maid, authors, crazy eights, uno - - well the list goes on and on. But then I want to know: could you play cards on Sunday; what kind of food did you eat; where did you play cards; did you play for money; . . . Of course I’ve been asking folks about playing cards. Ruth Harvie told me about visiting her family in Canada and they had to pull the drapes to play cards, so the neighbors wouldn’t they

were playing cards on Sunday. I also talked with Wilfred Vasile, and he mentioned that growing up at the School For the Blind in Batavia, they played with cards marked in Braille. (I just bought a Braille deck on ebay. Wilfred is also bringing in for the exhibit a checkers set for blind students. I still can’t imagine how you can remember

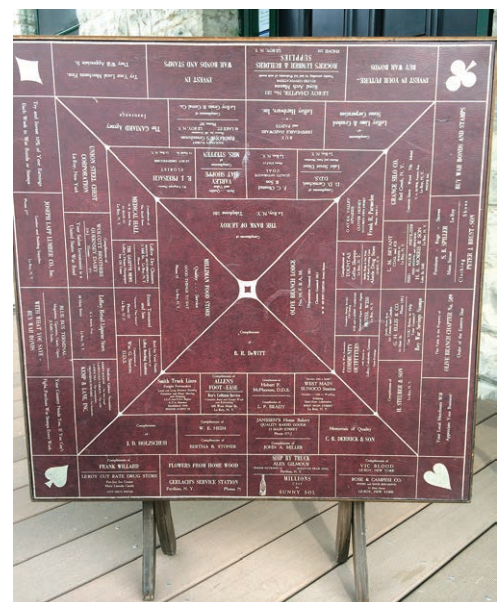


Italian cards.

all the moves!) Wilfred also mentioned a card game that his Italian family played, called Briscola. Later that day I talked with Mimi Baglio about Italian card games, and sure enough, there were several games she remembered. But what I learned on the internet, was that the Italian games are played with a 40-card deck, with three face cards and ace through 7. Instead of the usual suits, the Italian cards are marked with cups, batons, swords, and sunbursts. I just bought two Italian card decks on ebay including the rules - in English for the other popular Italian card game, Scopa. If anyone remembers playing these Italian games, I really want to hear from you. The other Italian game that I want to know about is the game played with the hands - much like rock, paper, scissors. It’s called Morra. Mimi said that the men would play during lunch out behind the

Bottling Works on Mill Street. The object is to predict the number of fingers shown. I discovered that the game was prohibited in some places in Italy until 2003, when it became legal again.

So, on these snowy cold days, while you’re sitting next to the fireplace, trying to keep warm, write down some of your memories of playing - especially cards and give me a call or send me an email note at jellodirector@frontiernet.net.



These tables were used in the Masonic Lodge. They date from WWII because of the notice about buying war bonds.