

In The Neighborhood

by Lynne Belluscio

Last week I told you that you would get a pop quiz this week, but I think you would all pass the test about local history. However, I was a little disheartened because no one called or emailed about the mistake in the article. I did hear from Newbold LeRoy who lives in New Hampshire and is a descendent of Herman and Jacob LeRoy. He reads the articles on line and although he didn't specifically mention that he is aware that folks in town mispronounce the family name, I'm sure he knows I'm trying my best to let people know about Luh Roy.

In the meantime, I've been collecting stories

about neighborhood games. Jim Arrington was in last week, and I asked him about the kids up on North Street where he lived. He said that they liked playing "kick the can." He also mentioned that they would play after it got dark under the street light. I have to be honest, I never played kick the can, but I suspect there just weren't enough kids in my neighborhood.

I posted an inquiry on one of the museum lists that I keep track of and in came a lot of stories about kick the can. If you've never played kick the can, and I suspect very few kids today know how to play – you start with a small area that is "home" in which is placed a can. Some folks mentioned that they played it with a stick instead of a can.

The game is a little like hide and seek. Someone is "it." And they have to find all the other kids who are hiding. When they see someone, they call them out and they have to tag them out before the runner gets to the can and kicks it away. If the runner is caught they are in "jail." If the runner gets to the can before being caught, they kick the can as far as they can to send the seeker out to retrieve it, while everyone

can hide again. If anyone is in jail, and the can is kicked, they can go free. The game is best played in back yards where there are lots of hiding places.

Someone sent me a link to a youtube site about a Rod Sterling "Twilight Zone" television show, where a man living in a retirement home, convinced all the folks, that they could find the secret to the fountain of youth if they all "escaped" and played kick the can. You can Google it and watch it. I also learned about "Sardines" which is another version of hide and seek, where the people hiding try to find each other and hide all together without being tagged out. I was told, that the hardest part was after several folks were gathered in one place, it was hard to stop giggling and be quiet.

I emailed Marguerite Green, who lived in Limerock and she said that they played kick the can, but what she remembered was "Annie Annie Over" – Throw the Ball Over." They played this game by throwing a rubber ball over the Limerock school. There would be kids lined up on one side of the school and another group lined up on the other side. The team would yell "Annie Annie Over" – Throw the ball

over." And the team with the ball would try to throw the ball over the top of the school. If the ball went over, they yelled "pigtail" and then the kid with the ball would race around the school and try to hit a kid on the other team with the ball.

You never knew which corner of the school the kid would come around. Sometimes they would fake it, and not yell "pigtail" and yell "Annie Annie Over" even though they had the ball. Kids that were hit with the ball had to join the other team. A friend of mine emailed and said it got to be a rough game when they threw hard apples over the school, instead of rubber balls. Getting hit with a hard apple left scars.

He also told me about "Buck Buck" which was a game of endurance. Five or six kids would bend over and form a line. The other team, would one by one hurl themselves on top of the line, to see if they could break it. Bill Cosby recounts playing Buck Buck in his neighborhood in Philadelphia. They were challenged by a team from another neighborhood and it looked as if the other team would win, until "Fat Albert" threw himself on the other team.

What fascinates me is that all over, in little towns, on farms, and in cities, kids played these games and frequently they had the same names and similar rules. They weren't organized games like baseball or football, yet they were passed along from one generation to another, one town to another. And they have disappeared from the experiences of today's kids.

Some sources will attribute the decline of kids playing to the television and today, of course to digital games. Others will cite the change in community safety or the mobility of people in and out of neighborhoods. It's hard to let your kids go out when you don't know your neighbors or you have to check a police report to see who's living in your neighborhood. Times have changed and so have the way we play.

Oh, and if you've read this far and want to know what mistake was in last week's article – I listed the Triangle Tract marker as being on South Street instead of Summit Street. Wrong neighborhood.

