

"The History of Shuffleboard"

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American Shuffleboard Co.

Phil-American Shuffleboard Co. and The Board Talk

**Shuffleboard in the Great Hall at Littlecotes
Wiltshire, England, 1740**

Back in 15th Century England, folks played a game of sliding a "great" (a large British coin of the day worth about four pence) down a table. The game was called shove groat and/or slide groat. Later, a silver penny was used and the name of the game became shove-penny and/or shovel-penny. The game was played by the young and old, and was a favorite pastime in the great country houses of Staffordshire, Winchester and Wiltshire. While our Founding Fathers were busy putting together the makings of this great country, there were big shuffleboard matches being conducted throughout the colonies. Shuffleboard was popular among the English soldiers as well as the colonists.

In his play, "The Crucible," concerning the historic witch trials of Salem, Mass., Arthur Miller wrote: "In 1692, there was a good supply of ne'er-do-wells who dallied at the shuffleboard in Bridget Bishop's Tavern." That item provides a written record of the entrance of the game into the New World. The fame of the game spread, and soon it came upon the public scene in more ways than one. In 1848, in New Hanover, Pennsylvania, a case of "The State vs. John Bishop" to decide the question, "Is shuffle-board a game of chance or a game of skill?" came up for trial. The judge ruled thus: "Though the defendant kept a public gaming table, as charged, and though diverse persons played thereat and bet spirituous liquors on the game, the game was not a game of chance, but was altogether a game of skill. " The game shed its crude beginnings when American cabinetmakers such as

Hepplewhite and Duncan Phyfe turned out some of their finest inlaid cabinet work on shuffleboard game tables for the wealthy homes of New York City. By 1897, table shuffleboard rated as much space in the metropolitan newspapers in the New York City area as prizefighting and baseball. Highly publicized tournaments played by such colorful characters as "Big Ed" Morris, Dave Wiley, Alex Scott, Ed Gardland, and George Lavender drew hordes of fans. The fans faithfully followed the players to tournaments in New York City; Newark, Paterson, Hoboken, Jersey City and Bloomfield, New Jersey, and even into Philadelphia. The fans included important figures of the business, theatrical, and political worlds. Shuffleboard made its way across the country. In 1904, Gentleman Jim Corbett, an avid player, had a tavern owner named Croll install a table in his Alameda, California, pub. "Doc" Croll, his son, claimed it was the first shuffleboard in that part of the country. World War II opened the "Swinging Forties" and shuffleboard really came into its own. The intrinsic appeal of the game -- skill, diversity, competitiveness, availability to young and old, strong and disabled, the serious game, the fun game, offered the kind of release needed in those turbulent years. Hollywood climbed on the shuffleboard

bandwagon and took it up, at first, as a source of good publicity. Then when the pin-up girls and bandleaders and actors discovered they really liked the game, shuffleboards found their way into the studios and homes of the stars. People like Betty Grable, Harry James, Merv Griffin, Alan Ladd, all had their own shuffleboards. Shuffleboard grew to its greatest height in the 1950s. Most major shuffleboard manufacturers sponsored nationwide shuffleboard tournaments. These were the biggest tournaments ever held; one had 576 teams participating. Fierce competition among major manufacturers and suppliers, lack of uniform rules and organization, the inability to gain sponsorship of the sport, and general internal strife in all facets of shuffleboard, led to a demise of the game in the '60s and '70s. Some feared it was damaged beyond "repair," but others invested their time, efforts and talents to breath life into the sport that they loved. That dedication paid off; by the mid-'80s, shuffleboard experienced a revival, a revival that has extended and strengthened in the '90s. While organization, cooperation and communication have been key elements in the revival of shuffleboard, probably the most important factor has been an almost universal realization in The World of Shuffleboard that new young shooters will be the continued lifeline of the sport. Across the nation, established shooters have made it their top priority to help novice players develop their talents and nurture their enthusiasm for league and tournament play. As long as that remains a priority, shuffleboard will continue to grow. One major accomplishment in this decade was the establishment of a National Shuffleboard Hall of Fame in 1995. This achievement was due in large part to the efforts of six volunteers who serve on the NOSH Board of Directors: Glen Davidson, Oklahoma, president; Hal Perry, California, vice president; Louise Freer, Pennsylvania, secretary; Bob Hunt, California, treasurer and chief financial officer; Larry Creakbaum, Indiana, director; and Jim Foran, Washington, director. Helping them realize this long-sought dream have been individual shufflers, associations, and fans who have made financial and/or memorabilia contributions. To date, five people have been inducted into the National Hall of Fame: Boh Miles of Oregon, Mickey Mickens of New Jersey, Earl Kelly of Texas, PeeWee Ramos of California (all deceased), and Sol Lipkin of the American Shuffleboard Company (now American International Shuffleboard Corp.). Several others are currently going through the nomination process. It is the NSHF's goal to recognize excellence for all deserving participants in The World of Shuffleboard and to finance a "home" for preserving the history of shuffleboard so that generations to follow will have a knowledge of and appreciation for that history. --Information provided by the American Shuffleboard Company, the Phil-American Shuffleboard Company, and The Board Talk.