

1509 N. Milwaukee Ave
Chicago Ill. 60622

O By Chuck Fager

One of the longest and most complete cover-ups in modern American history is finally coming unravelled. I'm not talking about filling in the 18-minute gap on Richard Nixon's famous Watergate tape, nor of establishing the identity of Deep Throat.

No, this cover-up was longer than Watergate, more successful than Watergate, and has left its mark on two generations of Americans. I'm talking about the cover-up of the true origin of Monopoly.

That's right, Monopoly. The number one best-selling American board game of all time; the foundation of the long-running prosperity of Parker Brothers; the game practically all of us grew up with.

According to Parker Brothers, Monopoly was the "brainchild" of one Charles Darrow, who thought it up in his Philadelphia kitchen while he was unemployed during the Great Depression and then made millions from its unprecedented success. Most of us have read this account as an introduction to the game rules, in any one of scores of magazine articles on the game, or in Maxine Brady's "definitive" 1974 tome, *The Monopoly Book*.

But the story is a lie. Darrow did *not* invent Monopoly; he stole it, and lied to Parker Brothers about being its creator. When the company discovered the lie, the game had already become a best-seller and was pulling Parker Brothers back from the edge of Depression-induced bankruptcy. But rather than risk losing control of its hottest property, the company joined Darrow in a campaign to bury the game's true origins.

For almost 40 years, this campaign succeeded brilliantly. But now the truth is seeping out, thanks to the research and struggle of Ralph Anspach, professor of economics at San Francisco State University. Ten years ago Anspach invented a game called Anti-Monopoly, in which players competed to see who could most effectively bust up imaginary corporate monoliths. Parker Brothers didn't cotton to either the game or Anspach's name for it and sued to stop him from selling it. But Anspach countersued, charging that the name Monopoly predated Parker Brothers' game, and was thus in the public domain. While doing research for his suit, Anspach discovered the true story of Monopoly.

Monopoly was first called The Landlord's Game. Its inventor was a Maryland woman named Lizzie Magie. She was granted U.S. Patent Number 2,215,394 for it on

Jan. 5, 1904, 30 years before Charles Darrow supposedly thought it up. Magie was a believer in the anti-capitalist economics of Henry George, who taught that speculation in land values was at the root of modern society's social and financial problems. Her game was aimed at exposing these evils.

The sketch of the gameboard filed with the Patent office shows striking similarities to the present game. The Landlord's Game included four corner spaces, especially the Jail and "Go to Jail" in opposite positions; four railroads, one in the mid-

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dle of each row; a waterworks and electric company in the same places; and ascending rents and property values around the board.

The parallels are obvious. But there are differences too: the properties have no names; there is no Chance or Community Chest; the name is not the same.

But even so, Charles Darrow doesn't merit much credit for the game's evolution. Lizzie Magie made some copies of her game and dozens of people, mostly Quakers in the mid-Atlantic states, played, enjoyed and modified the game in the following years. What Lizzie Magie created thus became essentially a folk product, in which many people played a role. When Magie's small supply of boards was used up, people began drawing their own on linen or oilcloth, giving names to the streets, using thimbles and buttons for markers and altering the rules as they played.

One key group of players gathered in 1929 around Ruth Hoskins, a teacher at the Atlantic City (N.J.) Friends School. Hoskins had learned the game in Indiana from her brother, who learned it at college. By then, it had already been renamed Monopoly. Hoskins taught it to her acquaintances, mostly couples from Atlantic City and Philadelphia. These players decided to give the properties familiar local names, such as Boardwalk, Vermont, Oriental and Marven Gardens. (It was later misspelled as as Marvin Gardens by the person who taught Charles Darrow how

to play.) They also added the Community Chest, the \$200 bonus for passing GO, and the "Get Out of Jail Free" cards.

None of these people were interested in trying to sell the game, even though almost everyone who learned to play it became fascinated with it. "We weren't business people," Ruth Hoskins said primly 40 years later. "We were schoolteachers. It was a good game the way it was." Another early player, remembering the anti-capitalist origins of the game, said it was a point of honor among early devotees not to think of commercializing it.

But if they didn't want to sell it, Ruth Hoskins and her friends did enjoy sharing Monopoly. Ralph Anspach's research has established that about a year later members of Hoskins' circle taught the game to a young man living in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Charles Darrow, one of his tutors remembered with considerable understatement, "showed a great deal of interest in it." He did indeed, but he also lacked scruples about trying to profit from the game. In late 1934 he sold it to Parker Brothers as his own invention... the rest is history, or at least mythology.

Once Parker Brothers discovered Darrow's deception, they bought up all the early Monopoly sets they could find and paid Lizzie Magie, now Mrs. Elizabeth Phillips, \$500 for the rights to her Landlord's Game. Then they began their immensely successful campaign of propaganda for the official line that Charles Darrow was the inventor of Monopoly. They did this most of all to protect their right to exclusive control of the game, for if it could be established that Monopoly had been made and played

before they produced it, the game would be in the public domain, beyond their exclusive control.

This cover-up was so successful that Anspach found only one article that penetrated it. In the Jan. 27, 1936 *Washington Star*, there is an unsigned article about Lizzie Magie Phillips, then a gray-haired matron living in Arlington, Va., and her games. The article, besides identifying her as the originator of Monopoly, features a photo of her holding the boards from two of her earlier editions of the game, one of which clearly has the word Monopoly on it in large letters. She was still a follower of Henry George, the article noted, and did not regret losing the fortune from the game that Parker Brothers and Darrow were reaping. Except for this short article, the official version of the game's history has gone unquestioned by

dozens of reporters and writers who have published articles and comments on the game over the years. This includes coverage in the most prestigious periodicals in the publishing industry, including *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times* and others.

But this hidden history has now, thanks to the work of Anspach, been recovered and made public. In late August, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco accepted Anspach's evidence and ruled that Parker Brothers has no right to exclusive control of the term Monopoly. Thus the professor can sell his Anti-Monopoly whether the company likes it or not. Parker Brothers and its corporate parent, the General Mills-Fun Group, has said it will carry its case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

There is more in this court ruling than just vindication for

Ralph Anspach and his "brain-child." There is also a picture of reality; what Anspach's research shows is that while Charles Darrow did not "invent" Monopoly, neither did any other one person. Lizzie Magie Phillips started it. But the game evolved from the playing and tinkering of hundreds of other people over three decades. Maybe that is how the game came to evoke the commercial spirit of our culture so well; it is not only in the public domain, it may even be said to embody our public domain.

But I still say Boardwalk and Park Place are worth more than any other two monopolies and all four railroads put together. ■

Chuck Fager writes regularly for several weekly publications, including the Boston Phoenix and Washington, D.C.'s City Paper. He has played Monopoly for many years.