



EPISODE 2 2004 - BOARD GAMES, ARDEN, DELAWARE.

Elyse Luray: Our first story will rewrite the history of the world's best-selling board game. The year is 1933. America is held in the grip of the Great Depression. During these hard economic times, a man from Philadelphia named Charles B. Darrow creates a board game called "Monopoly". It becomes an overnight success. People love it. By 1935, Monopoly is the best selling board game in America. Today, 200 million copies in 26 languages worldwide all trace their roots back to Darrow's original creation. Or so the popular story of Monopoly goes... But in the town of Arden, Delaware, we've heard about an old board game that could turn that story on its head. The game is owned by a man called Ron Jarrel. And while it looks a lot like Monopoly, Ron claims his board was made 30 years earlier.

Ron Jarrell: We had this old game board. We'd call it "Landlord". My grandfather did carpentry work. And he made this board from a design that a lady friend in here in Arden drew on a piece of cloth, and this was about in the end of nineteen-three, or early part of nineteen-four. We know this board is very similar to Monopoly, but it was invented way before Monopoly was.

Elyse: Could Monopoly have begun here in Arden, with Ron's simple board game?

Elyse: Hello!

Ron: Hello, I'm Ron.

Elyse: Elyse Luray. In my days as an appraiser at Christy's auction house, I valued many old board games, so I'm curious to see Ron's.

Ron: This is the board right here.

Elyse: Wow, look at that! Mm, it's fabulous... Well, it definitely looks like a game from the early 1900's. You can tell because of the board and it's handmade. And look at some of these names: "Soakum Lighting System", "Rickety Row"... It's really unusual. But, you know, I've appraised a lot of early monopoly-boards, but I've never seen anything quite like this- it's really unique. Can you tell me a little bit about it?

Ron: We know that it was made in the early 1900's, and it has something to do with Henry George.

Elyse: Tell me a little bit more about Henry George.

Ron: He believed that high rent was the cause of poverty and that a single taxation on the land would solve the problem.

Elyse: It's funny to me that a man that was anti-capitalist would inspire a game that's really about capitalism! Yet this game really looks like Monopoly. So I... think I have a lot of work to do! Ron's board is too fragile to travel, so I'm going to take some pictures. Now Ron's mention of the economist Henry George is interesting. Today he's largely forgotten. But in the late 1800's, he was one of the most famous men in America. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, George campaigned against corruption - and the concentration of wealth among a small group of industrialists. Among his radical remedies was a single federal tax - not on income -- but on land. The government rejected George's ideas. But after he died, his followers built a number of "Georgist" communities, including Arden, to keep his ideas alive. Even today, Arden's residents only pay tax on their property. But this sounds a world away from Monopoly. So first, I want to find out more about the game's history. I know Monopoly's inventor Charles B. Darrow lived in Philadelphia, so the Philadelphia Free Library is the place to investigate how this game began.

I'm checking the official Monopoly website, and here it is:

"It was 1934... when Charles B. Darrow of Germantown, Pennsylvania, showed what he called the Monopoly game to the executives at Parker Brothers."

Elyse: Let's see if I can find an earlier source. Here's another book, a history of Monopoly written in 1975. It supports Parker Brother's official story that Darrow was responsible for Monopoly. But adds that in the early 1930's, he was an unemployed heating engineer looking for a job. And then there's this article from the mid-1930's, which adds another angle:

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Elyse: "It says here that Charles Darrow in 1931 decided to invent a game to lighten the cheerless evenings at home", which makes sense, he's unemployed, it's the Great Depression. It also says Darrow tried to sell Monopoly to Parker Brothers, but they turned him down. So he hired a printer, made copies, and sold the game himself.

Elyse: "...it became extremely successful and very popular. And then Parker Brothers eventually went on to buy the game, giving Mr. Darrow a commission on each game that was sold. It's a rags to riches story! Darrow is down on his luck, sees an opportunity, and takes a chance. But, if all this is true, then Ron's board couldn't have inspired Monopoly. So what's going on? I need to find out just how similar Ron's Landlord's Game and Monopoly really are. To do that, I've come to New York City, where the Forbes Gallery has a virtual monopoly on old Monopoly boards. The gallery bought some of these games for tens of thousands of dollars, including some made by Darrow himself.

Elyse: Now this is amazing. This is Charles Darrow's original and first set of Monopoly. Now you notice it's round, and the story has it that it was made for his kitchen table for him to play with his friends and family. It's made of oil cloth- a lot of the early Monopoly boards were made of oil cloth- and it's handmade- just by looking at it you can tell that all the pieces, the painting on it, everything is hand done. This doesn't look much like Ron's board!

Elyse: This is another example of Charles Darrow's original Monopoly board. Now this time it's square, and I'm going to compare this to Ron's board. The first thing I look at are the four corners. Monopoly has "Go" on the lower right hand side and here we have "Mother Earth".

On the lower left hand side we have Jail on the Landlord's Game, and jail on the Monopoly game.

And very similarly, up to the upper left hand side we have "Free Parking" on Monopoly, and the Landlord's Game says "Central Park Free". And both have "Go to Jail" on the upper right hand side. The second thing I'm noticing is that the railroads- we all love the railroads- and in the real Monopoly board they're in the middle of each board, and in this Landlord's Game, they're also right in the middle of the board as well. So Monopoly and Ron's Landlord's game are remarkably similar. There must be a link between them... but what is it? Back in the archives I'm looking for a connection, and I think I might have found something. It's in the December 1935 issue of Fortune Magazine, in a column called "Off the Record".

Elyse: "New as the game is, it already has a legend attached to it...that it was invented by the economist Henry George! Just as Ron suggested. But there's more, "But its inventor, Charles B. Darrow of Philadelphia, never heard of Henry George." So there's a conflict. Charles Darrow claimed to have created the game in 1931, but this article suggests the inventor was Henry George! I want to check out Monopoly's patent. And going through the patent numbers on some old boards I've found something interesting. Boards made before 1949 have two patent numbers. So I'm looking these up on the Patent Office website.

Elyse: Well, as expected, one of these numbers is Charles Darrow's Monopoly- December 31st, 1935. Let's see what the second patent comes up with... Wow! The Landlord's Game! And it looks very much like Ron's! But the patent on this is September 23rd, 1924, and Ron thinks that his game was made around 1903, 1904. So I'm going to go see if I can find some earlier patents. To get the number for a patent this old, I need to call a patent library for some help. Do you have a directory of names of inventors from 1904 or 1905? (writing) ...748626. What do you know, the "Landlord's Game", patented January 5th, 1904. And whose name's on it? Not Charles Darrow or Henry George, someone named Lizzie Magie. Now we have another creator! So who is she? We know from her patent that Lizzie Magie lived in Washington D.C, so I'm searching her hometown newspapers to try to find out something about her. Here she is!

Elyse: Listen to this: "Very likely your grandma and your grandpa played Monopoly. Why not? It isn't new. Truth to tell, Lizzie Magie took out a patent in 1904, and the game was called the Landlord Game. And what's even better is there's a picture of her, and in the picture she's holding in one hand, the Landlord game, and what appears to be a handmade Monopoly game. So 30 years before Darrow went to Parker Brothers, Lizzie Magie had created the Landlord's game. By putting her patent number on the first Monopoly boards Parker Brothers acknowledged her role in creating their game. Listen to this.

Elyse: "A large firm which manufactures games bought out her patent for \$500". So, basically, Parker Brothers bought her out. It looks like Lizzie Magie's Landlord's Game did inspire Monopoly. But I still haven't found the connection with

Henry George. This article might have the answer. It says that: "As a follower of the principles of the famous "single taxer" of the nineteenth century, Lizzie Magie still holds the Henry George School of Social Science in her home." So Lizzie Magie was a Georgist! But if Lizzie Magie was a critic of capitalism, why did she invent a game celebrating it? I'm hoping to find an answer at the Henry George birthplace and museum in Philadelphia. This museum highlights George's social activism and the tremendous impact of his radical ideas. Museum Curator Dan Sullivan believes that with her Landlord's Game, Lizzie Magie found the perfect medium to spread George's message.

Dan Sullivan: George always continued to have followers that stayed true to his ideas and as they developed ways to keep the message alive, they had to find things that people would pay attention to- and people liked to play games back then.

Elyse: According to Dan, Lizzie Magie's game played like Monopoly, but had a second round that taught just how unfair monopolies can be. Dan sees Georgist ideas painted all over Ron's board.

Dan: Ah, "Slambang trolley", Henry George was against trolley monopolies. As you go around here there's railroads all over it, because the railroads were the number one monopoly, Henry George fought railroads even before he got involved with the question of land monopoly. Um, where it says "Go to Jail", It's "Go to Jail, No Trespassing", because it's Lord Blueblood's estate. All through this, there's the notion that real estate is the mother of monopolies.

Elyse: Either you got rich, or you went bankrupt!

Dan: Which really is the message of the game, that there is something wrong with playing life that way.

Elyse: But how did a game promoting social equality become cutthroat, capitalistic Monopoly? To find out, I've come to Portland, Oregon to visit top board game expert, Tom Forsyth.

Thomas Forsyth: Yeah! I've brought along a game that I wanted to show you here.

Elyse: Ahhh!!

Tom: Take a look at this. This is Lizzie Magie's self-published Landlord's Game.

Elyse: It's in such good condition...

Thomas: Now, this game was designed to be played by Lizzie's original rules. But many people were bored by the Georgist part of the game -it was too slow. So they started to change it- they changed the rules, they changed the board, they made it more exciting... more like modern Monopoly!

Elyse: According to Thomas, it was probably one of these adaptations that Charles Darrow came across in the 1930's, by which time the game's Georgist connection had been largely forgotten. Yet Thomas has never seen an early board making the direct link between the Landlord's Game and Monopoly. As he compares Lizzie Magie's game, Ron's board, and Monopoly, he sees something remarkable. In Monopoly, properties are grouped in twos and threes by color. In Lizzie Magie's game they're separate. But what about Ron's board?

Thomas: Look at this, these capital letters on this board: A - A, B - B - B, C's. Take a look at this in comparison to Monopoly. What do you see here?

Elyse: The grouping of property! It's just like the colors!

Thomas: This is the Landlord's Game, this board is Monopoly, it's both! It's the "missing link" between the two. It's what we've been looking for. And it's really an incredible find!

Elyse: So the Landlord's Game evolved into Monopoly by people like Ron's grandfather making their own versions. According to Thomas, that isn't the only thing that's special about Ron's board.



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Elyse: I can't wait to tell him everything I've discovered.

Ron: ... that is good.

Elyse: And the great thing about your game is, we believe it's the earliest known hand-done Landlord's Game in existence!

Ron: Good! (laughs nervously)

Elyse: We believe that this particular board has key elements in it that link the Landlord's Game and the Monopoly Game together, making it an extremely important board.

Ron: We've saved it for a long time.

Elyse: Now, I know it's a family heirloom, but would you be interested in me telling you what I think it would be worth?

Ron: Definitely, I'd appreciate it.

Elyse: I'm pretty confident to say that, at auction, I think this board, your board, would bring between 30 and 40 thousand dollars.

Ron: Thirty to forty thousand?! (Elyse nods) I don't guess we'll give it away then. We'll keep it. It feels pretty good knowing that it came from Arden.

Elyse: Ron, thank you so much for sharing this extraordinary game board with us.

Ron: It's my pleasure.

Elyse: And to thank you for having such a fun investigation I have a present for you. This is a copy of Lizzie Magie's first patent and this is a copy of Charles Darrow's first patent.

Ron: Nice! I love this. This is really nice. Thank you very much.

Elyse: So your game kind of fits in the middle here.

Ron: And she's the one that drew the thing.

Elyse: And this is the one that got all the money.

Ron: And I'm the one left with the picture. (laughter)

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