

# Colonial Games

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What do soldiers, trappers, patrons of taverns, social groups in homes, and children of all ages have in common? They play. About twenty years ago, Ryan Cuba was inspired by fellow military re-enactor Tad Miller to incorporate games of the era into his living history presentations.

As a re-enactor, Ryan focuses on the French and Indian War. He also volunteers at Fort Frederick State Park in Big Pool, Maryland, and he has traveled to many other gatherings that celebrate colonial history, from Fort Niagara to Fort Ligonier, from Michigan to West Virginia. Ryan often uses games to engage visitors at these events. Two children of other re-enactors, Elisa Rogers and Morgan Taylor, spent their growing up years providing much appreciated assistance by demonstrating the games in period costumes.

Many games have ancient roots, and they come from all corners of the globe, but Ryan makes sure that the ones he introduces were common in the Colonial era from the 1750s to about 1770.



**At John Stewart's Tavern in Short Gap, West Virginia, Ryan Cuba, French and Indian War re-enactor, demonstrates some of the games that were common in the Colonial era from the 1750s to about 1770.**

Initially, Ryan built on Miller's research to learn about dice, cards, and other pastimes of soldiers. The military frowned on games that involved gambling, but soldiers then as

now were innovative. They made crude dice from musket balls, for instance. Then Ryan expanded his scope to include games played by others, at taverns and in homes.

He lists a variety of leisure activities: billiards, cribbage, chess, draughts (checkers), backgammon, dominoes, dice, faro (a lot like roulette), cards (there were no numbers in the corners in the 1700s), battledore/shuttlecock (badminton), quoits (a precursor to horseshoes), skittles/ninepins (bowling), horse racing, ice skating, cock fighting, wrestling, boxing, cudgeling, hoop and stick rolling, and many others. Children played with marbles, dolls, tea sets, jaw harps, tops, cup and ball sets, bilbo catchers (ornate wooden handles ending in a platform and spindle with a string attached to a ring), and puzzles. They also played games such as blind man's bluff.

Some entrepreneurs printed board games on sheets of paper that were easy for people to take with them — and also needed to be replaced from time to time. One such game, Goose, was played on 64 squares, with four playing pieces. Turns were controlled by dice throws. Landing on certain squares might entail a stay in jail, loss of a turn, the requirement to take a drink, and so on. Is anyone else thinking about Monopoly? A version of Goose for children, with no gambling or drinking, was also printed.

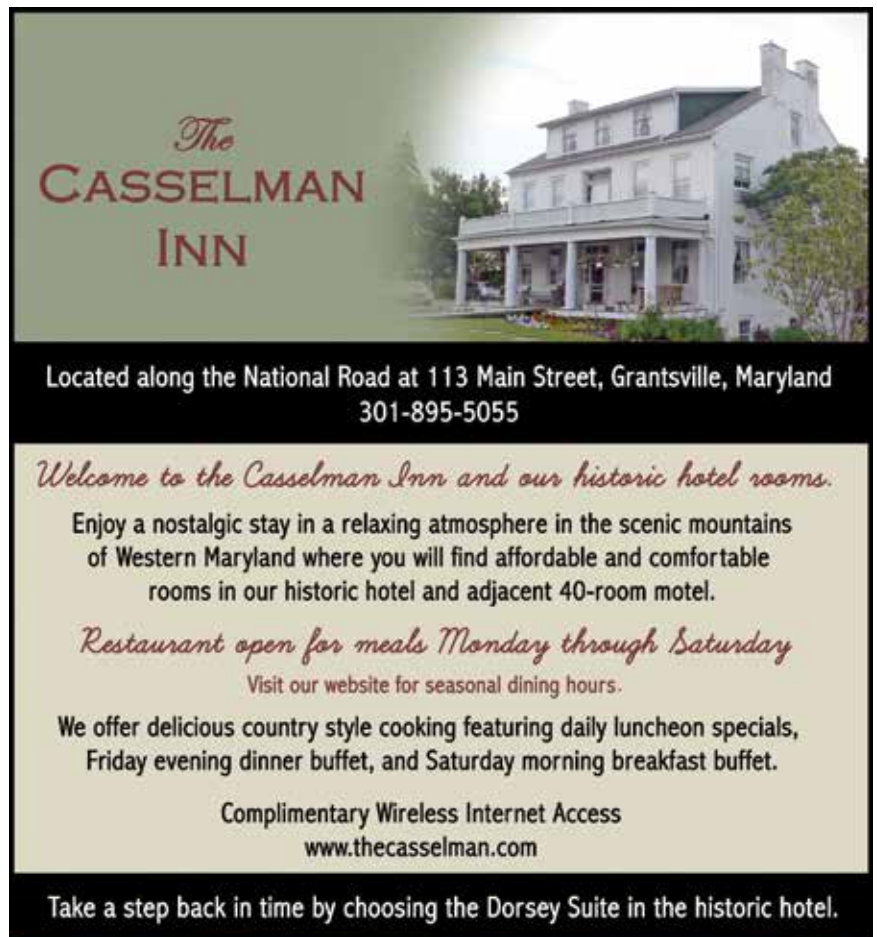
For those who are interested, Ryan heartily recommends visiting the Allegany Museum in Cumberland; Fort Frederick for Garrison weekends, the Market Fair (late April), or Colonial Children's Day (June 3); and the many Heritage Day festivals in the area. Look for Ryan. He'll be the guy in Colonial costume, possibly playing games.



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