

SHUFFLEBOARD

We have doubles shuffleboard every Saturday morning at 10:00 AM. All skills levels welcome to come and enjoy an hour of fun with your Cypress Creek Village friends and neighbors

The History of Shuffleboard

Began in the pubs and palaces of England. During the 15th Century, the aristocracy and the peasants would slide English coins, originally groats, down tabletops. The object of the game was to get the coin to stop as close to the edge as possible. Plenty of drinks and money were wagered on these games of “shove board.”

Any Good Game Gets Banned

In its formative years the game went through several names and a few modifications. The groat was replaced with a silver penny and the game was called shove penny or shove-ha’penny. Royalty and other upper class citizens had beautiful tables made for the game. A more elaborate system of scoring was developed. Markings on the table determined the points that were awarded to coins that came to rest in certain areas.

The English had a habit of outlawing any game that distracted military men from training. So it was with shovel board. (We’re not sure exactly when the modern name shuffleboard came into use.) In the 1500s Henry VIII banned the sliding of the weight so that soldiers could concentrate on archery and peasants wouldn’t be distracted from work. Like most of these sporting bans, it was largely ineffective.

Even without Henry’s help, the game began to lose popularity in England. By the 1600s it was found in more taverns than parlors. The British upper classes were moving on to billiards.

Across the Pond

Shuffleboard immigrated to the United States with the English settlers. The game was mentioned (in a not so favorable light) in the 1692 play “The Crucible.” By 1848, the morality of the game was being argued in the courtroom. In a Pennsylvania case, a judge ruled that shuffleboard was a game of skill, not a game of chance. This was good news for the tavern owner who had been charged with running a public gaming table, and for all those who enjoyed the game.

During the second half of the 19th century, shuffleboard was popular up and down the Eastern seaboard. In New York, wealthy families were buying custom game tables from furniture makers like Duncan Phyfe. Shuffleboard merited ink on the sports pages and fans followed their favorite players to tournaments in New York and New Jersey. In 1904, shuffleboard moved to the other coast when a table was installed in a California pub.

Prohibition put a damper on the game during the 1920s. When taverns were shut down, so were many shuffleboard tables. During the Great Depression, many restaurants and even taverns replaced dining tables with shuffleboard tables to attract customers. People didn’t have the money to eat out, but they would come down to the bar or café for a game of shuffleboard. Many shuffleboard leagues formed during the Depression years.

Shuffleboard made another surge in popularity during World War II. Troops passed through East coast seaports by the hundreds of thousands. These men played shuffleboard in the taverns and USO clubs. After the war, they took the game home with them to all parts of the country.

From Tabletop to the Deck

In the 1840s, shuffleboard made the leap from tavern tables to cruise liner decks. The Peninsular and Oriental Line challenged its recreation directors to come up with games that passengers could enjoy while onboard the ship. An innovative P & O employee developed a shuffleboard court. Coins were replaced with disks and long sticks were used to slide these weights. Scoring was determined by markings on the court.

The first on-shore shuffleboard courts were built at a Daytona Beach, Florida resort in 1913. This sparked the outdoor shuffleboard fad. Courts sprang up at resorts and retirement villages across the country. The most elaborate courts were built by the St. Petersburg, Florida, Shuffleboard Club. The club had 5,000 members who played on 110 courts. Spectators could watch the action from covered grandstands. Today, the club has 65 courts.

St. Petersburg became the center of the shuffleboard world. In 1924, the St. Petersburg Club established the rules that would become the standards of the game. The St. Petersburg Club was also the impetus behind the formation of the National Shuffleboard Association in 1929. Just two years later in 1931, the first national tournament was held. The first national shuffleboard tournament for women took place in 1932.

Shuffleboard courts spread across the country during the 1930s and 40s. The Works Projects Administration (WPA) built several shuffleboard courts on playgrounds.

The Heyday

The 1950s proved to be the heyday of shuffleboard. More than 100 companies were manufacturing shuffleboard equipment, and many of those companies sponsored tournaments for either tabletop or court shuffleboard. One tournament attracted 576 teams from all parts of the country.

The game began to decline in popularity during the 1960s. Part of the decline was the result of disputes between shuffleboard leagues. Another problem was the age of the players. Shuffleboard had never developed a strong youth program. Yet another part of the decline was the development of other forms of entertainment, particularly television and later video and computer games.

Shuffleboard continues to have a group of avid followers who have kept the sport alive. In 1979 the International Shuffleboard Association was founded in guess where? St. Petersburg, Florida. Six countries—the US, England, Canada, Australia, Brazil and Japan have national associations.

Shuffleboard has divided into two camps: the tabletop players and the court players. Both camps have their own leagues and organizations and both established halls of fame in the 1990s.