

History of Croquet throughout the World

There are a few differing theories as to where and when the game of croquet began.

One theory is that the ancestral game was introduced to Britain from France during the reign of Charles II of England, and was played under the name of paille-maille or pall mall, derived from the Latin words for "ball and mallet". There is some historical evidence that "croquet-like" games were popular in England as early as 1611.

A second theory is that the rules of the modern game of croquet arrived from Ireland during the 1850s. Records show that a similar game called "crookey" was played in 1834. It was in 1835 that it was first spelled as "croquet." There is also some belief that croquet was a derivative of ground billiards which was popular in Western Europe dating back to the 14th century.

Croquet became highly popular as a social pastime in England during the 1860s with regulations printed out and distributed to other countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States.

However, by the late 1870s, croquet was eclipsed by another fashionable game, tennis, and many of the newly created croquet clubs converted some or all of their lawns into tennis courts. Interestingly, Wimbledon's All England Club was originally founded in 1868 at the height of the croquet craze as the All England Croquet Club and held its first croquet competition in 1870. In 1875 one lawn was set aside as a tennis court and in 1877 the first tennis Gentlemen's Singles Championships was held and the club changed its name to the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club. In 1882, croquet was dropped from the name, as tennis had become the main activity of the Club. But in 1899 it was restored to the club's name for sentimental reasons, and became The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club.

Another version of croquet, Golf Croquet, was introduced in Egypt in the 1920s through British colonialism. It was spread in rest-houses and private properties belonging to prominent British officials and was then introduced to schools clubs in the 1930s. The sport continued to spread and the Egyptian Croquet Federation was established in 1967.

In the United States, manufacturers popularized a version of the sport that could be played on rough turf with lightweight, inexpensive equipment. The game of Backyard Croquet has maintained its popularity in America for more than a hundred years as the ideal complement of garden parties, family gatherings, and social events.

A much-publicized challenge match between the Westhampton Mallet Club on Long Island and London's Hurlingham Club in 1960 is credited with sparking the resurgence of 6-wicket croquet in America, requiring heavier equipment, good lawns, and a more intense sporting attitude. This version of the game, though widely played in England and most Commonwealth countries, was rarely seen by Americans until the late 1970's.

The United States Croquet Association was organized by Jack Osborn in 1977 with a nucleus of six east coast clubs. Osborn hammered out a codified set of rules for a uniquely American variety of 6-wicket croquet, "American Rules 6-wicket," and tirelessly promoted formation of

local clubs and tournaments throughout the country. Today, as many as 10,000 men and women play croquet on more than 600 lawns in the U.S. and Canada.

The standards of American play have risen to near the level of the traditional masters of the game in the British Commonwealth countries of Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

The World Croquet Federation is the international organizing body for the sport of croquet and was established in 1986. Each country in the WCF has a national association that controls the sport in their own countries. The WCF recognizes many versions of the sport (listed below) however, only the World Championships in Association Croquet (AC) and Golf Croquet (GC) are overseen by the WCF.

Versions of croquet include:

- Association Croquet
- Golf Croquet
- Short Croquet
- Two-ball Croquet
- U.S. Six-wicket Croquet
- U.S. Nine-wicket Croquet (a.k.a. Backyard croquet)
- Garden Croquet
- Extreme Croquet
- Ancient Croquet

Croquet Links:

World Croquet Federation: <http://www.worldcroquet.org.uk>
Includes world ranking information

United States Croquet Association (USCA): www.croquetamerica.com