

Pool Rooms
Birger Koski and James Farrell

Birger has asked me to delete or make any additions to this essay entitled "Pool Rooms". He has written this paper so well and has put so many hours of research in to it, that I do not plan to make any changes and will read it verbatim. However, at its conclusion, I will make a few additions and I must also come to the defense of some of my friends who were pool room proprietors.

The word poolroom has had a certain unsavory connotation even to the present time in the minds of the homebody, because of the picture it conjures up. An old picture of unkept makes, spittoons, sawdust on the floor for the spittoon missers, leering faces watching the passers-by, especially the woman folk, a hang-out for criminals, the whole gamut of an unhealthy world, springs into mind at the mention of the word. It seems however, that there are unnecessary evils in all aspects of life, in the same way as there are necessary good in order for a society to exist and persevere. It just depends on whose eyes are looking at what. Consider the little cosmopolitan town of Maynard after the turn of the century. From a comparatively sleepy little village of 3100 souls in 1895 it became a town of 5700 ten years later. The American Woolen Company, taking over the management of the defunct Assabet Mfg. Company in 1899 created a tremendous need for labor. The Woolen Company had its agents in various European countries during this period, it also had large posters distributed thru out the mill urging the present work force to write to their old country friends extolling the virtues of coming to America and a New World. Up to this time the population consisted mostly of English, Irish, and Scotch persuasion. And they came - mostly single men and women. They came from Finland, Poland, Russia, Italy, Lithuania, and a scattering from other countries. Twenty one different nationalities were listed by the town clerk. They set up their lodges, clubs, bands etc. got married, did the things that people have done from time immemorial. Some also became habitués of pool rooms that some enterprising countrymen opened. This was their home until some wily wench of their own nationality wrenched them away to the domestic tranquility of marital bliss from which they occasionally escaped momentarily--back home to the pool rooms. Pool, of course, was indulged in by nearly all the male populace, not only in Maynard but else where. All societies had their pool tables when room allowed and when they became affluent enough. Pool matches were played by the better players and friendly games were played by others. It was indeed, an indoor sport whereby many happy hours were wiled away. Thru the years, pool rooms were located in various parts of the town. According to the Gutteridge History, the first pool table was located in the basement of Union Hall, built in 1857. Later came the combination barber shop and pool room. Wm. Casey was the proprietor of such a place in the old Riverside Co-op building, also Michael Crowley who owned a similar establishment in the up-stairs of Darlings block (presnet site of the Eagles Building). Years later, George O'Brien had a pool room at the Paper Mill Corner, later taken over by Joseph Allen; opposite Main Street on River was another; on the site of Music Hall was still another; on River Street a Polish manager held forth, while at the corner of river and Walnut, a Finnish manager was in charge.

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The Lynch pool and bowling alley catered to the pool sharks.--Crossing the Assabet River on Main Street was a combination barber shop and pool room. It is claimed on good authority that during the years of no/liscense the pool rooms were veritable oases to the thirsty ones and also, after Prohibition came, it was common knowledge that a thirst could be quenched with no particular difficulty. Jakey was a common drink peddled at these places. This was a Jamaica Ginger root concoction mixed with some soft drink. Old times who had their thirst appeased claim even now this mixture made an excellent drink. Sometimes unscrupulous owners used clear shellac causing paralysis of the legs, known as Jakey Legs. Police cracked down every so often but the history of Prohibition would indicate that the situation could not be controlled. This could be considered a civil disobedience movement that finally swept Prohibition into the dustbin of history. The Civil Rights movement of today is aparallel situation. Poolrooms news was sparse, but we have a few dates to mention--June 11, 1909, Mike Tamloff, Proprietor of the Walnut St. Pool Room is sick; May 8, 1914, A pool strike is on in M Maynard. About 100 Pool players have gone on strike on account of the raise in the price of pool. The price is now five cents per cue, it was formally two cues for five cents. Owners will be requested to revert to old prices; May 15, the pool strikers have won out, three owners have conceded to the strikers. Nov. 3, Hanks Killenen has been appointed manager of the Riverside pool room on Main St. which opened for the Winter season on Monday. All items from the Maynard News. Conclusion.

*Dr. Bellom
on Main St
under Glen
Philosophy
way out
Riverside
Shop*

Now at the start I told you I would have a few remarks and additions to make relative to Birger's excellent effort. First, I want to make an apology to Birger. He arrived at my house Tuesday afternoon at almost the exact moment that the Gemini heroes were scheduled to splash in the Atlantic. I tried to give him my undivided attention, but it was just impossible with such an historical event taking place. In re-reading Birger's description of the pool rooms, the details seemed rather sordid. It is true that there were two places, run by foreigners that answered that discription of the however, there were other pool rooms, managed by the Sheridan Brothers, the Duggan Brothers, George Lynch, Edward MaManus, John Connors and others. They were all reputable citizens and they would not tolerate one drop of liquor on their premises and please be charitable to those that played the game. There was not much choice of entertainment in those days, and most of the young men preferred pool to the bar room. Naturally some very good players developed in those days, among some of the better players were my dear friend Spec White, Jimmie Claflin, deputy police chief of Boston, Tony Hilferty, Curly Downey, Phil Bowers, Kid Whalen, Doc Currier, and others. The history of pool is strange and remarkable. The game originated in Egypt, thence it traveled to China, and finally landed on the continent, and became very popular with royalty. The game is centuries old, probably the oldest. After a rather shady period, yes, we must admit that pool rooms in the larger cities did house many criminals and riff-raff, today its not bowling alleys, instead bowling lanes. Pool rooms are now Emporiums.

In the not too distant past, boys under eighteen years of age were not permitted to enter a pool room or bowling ally. Today children of all ages from nine to eighteen have their own leagues and contests. Pool emporiums are springing up ~~ther-~~ thru-out the country and children are taught by experts how to play these two most scientific games. Billiards and pool have ~~z~~ at long last come into their own. Je suid finis, which means I have finished."

By Birger Koski and Jim Farrell
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