

It's a Strike!

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

The earliest known forms date back to ancient Egypt with wall drawings in a royal tomb dated to 5200BC. In 1455 in London, it began to have all-weather participants under a roofed-over area. It has been written about, appeared in paintings, advertised and enjoyed through the years by people of all ages. It probably is safe to say that almost everyone has tried the game of bowling.

As popularity in the United States began to grow, there were several ads as early as 1820 referring to 'ten pin alleys' usually run as a side attraction to a main business. One of the very first in the state was at New York's Knickerbocker Hotel which, in the 1830s, housed a bowling alley with three lanes using clay instead of wood, and by 1848, New York City was considered a center of bowling, accelerated by the German immigration to the U. S. as they held a love for the game. By 1875, the National Bowling Association was founded by 27 local clubs in New York City to standardize rules for ten-pin bowling, setting the ball size and the distance between the foul line and the pins. Because they couldn't agree on other rules, the association was replaced in 1895 by the American Bowling Congress. In the 1880s, Brunswick Corporation of Chicago, maker of billiard

tables, found a new market by making bowling balls, pins and wooden lanes to sell to taverns who wished to join in the latest craze.

Was the seasonal resort of Richfield Springs to leave their guests wanting for this new activity? Certainly not! One of the first mentions of this activity was in 1883 when it was reported that a new bowling alley was being erected at the New American. The trend continued with the new owner as reported in 1889 when the now Hotel Earlington had the distinction of having the only bowling alley among the summer hotels at Richfield.

While women were barred from participating in such activities in some cities as late as 1940 with some reports of their being tarred, feathered and run out of town, this was not the case here. With the usual writing style of the day, the following gave quite the description of a tournament at the Earlington in 1889:

"Mrs. Stuart, Mrs. Davies, Mrs. Thomson, Mrs. J. B. Hillyer, Miss Wallace, Miss Thomson, Miss Roome, Baroness Vietinghoff, Miss Carnrick, Miss Brown, Mrs. E. M. Earle, Mrs. Starr, Mrs. Seranto were contestants in the bowling tournament on Friday morning. The alley presented a brilliantly attractive appearance when the meet was called

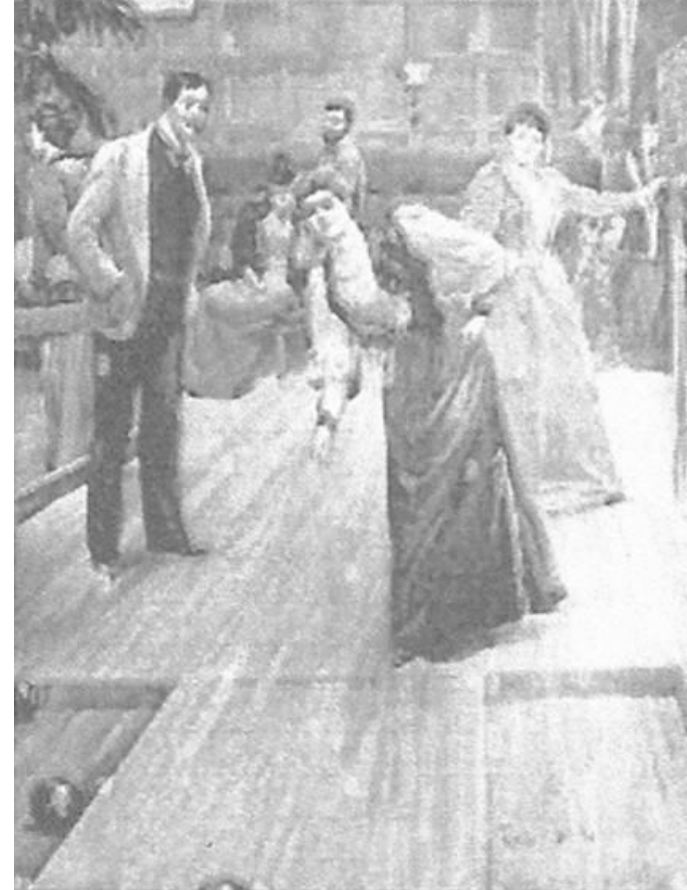
at 11 a.m. and the narrow stair leading into it became a place of meeting for the young. Messrs. Forrest, Earle, Taylor, Schovill, Beard, Griffiths, Granger and others were there for inspiration. Some splendid throwing was done by all but the prize was won by the Baroness Vietinghoff who made a score of 222. Miss Brown made 211, Miss Carnick 183. The prize was a profile portrait of a beautiful mythical creature named Cynthia.

The costumes worn by the ladies were a charming variation from the ballroom attire. The most popular article was the plaited China silk belted blouse which Miss Roome wore with a lace trimmed skirt and small brimmed hat, sharply raised on one side and the prettiest boots one could wish to see. Miss Brown wore a red waist and a pink striped skirt. Miss Carnicks' was the most dressy. A perfect fitting flannel marked by pink lines and trimmed in narrow black velvet, a broad band of the same framing the neck. The suit was finished by a deep yellow leghorn. Mrs. J. R. Franklin's electric blue sateen and close black turban were a pleasure to see. Mrs. Stone wore a charming blazer and blouse with tennis skirt and sailor hat with half veil. The Baroness wore a red blouse waist and cream skirt. Bowling is a grand opportunity to

exhibit shoes. Some girls accent the throw by a little kick, some a short low whistle, many by 'O Pshaw!' The audience is generous in applause of good things well done."

A novel and exciting entertainment was announced shortly thereafter as an evening tournament where bowling was held by electric ight, the contest being open to both gentlemen and ladies. Miss Mabel Earle scored 255, the highest number; Miss Newcombe next with 233 and Miss Carnick was reported to have a score of 104. Miss Earle put up her prize of a beautiful cut-glass vinaigrette to be raffled off. Mr. Ronald Stuart was the winner. A silver paper cutter and bookmark combined was second prize for the ladies; the bobby prize, a pair of silver buckles. A silver court-plaster case was the gentlemen's first prize; a small nickel clock in traveling case, second; and a good canoe scarf pain, third. Mr. Bacon received first; Mr. Brackett, second and Mr. Feutchtwanger, third.

In 1895, the modern standardized rules for ten-pin bowling were established by what was later to become the United States Bowling Congress. The scoring system changed from a maximum 200 points for 20 balls to a maximum 300 points for 12 balls and set the maximum ball weight at sixteen pounds and pin



distance at twelve inches. The changes and refinements continued. With prohibition in the U. S. from 1920-1933, bowling alleys were disassociated from saloons, turning the game into a family event which encouraged women bowlers.

The trend for bowling continued. In 1907 John Green reported that his new first-class bowling alleys at the Hotel Brunswick were in place and ready to use. In 1946, the former bath house in Spring Park was leased to the Hugick-Purcell Shepard Post, American Legion for a period of five years. Part of the facilities established there was a bowling alley. The year 1957 saw the new enterprise called Richfield Lanes, proprietors Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Jastremski, opening with an invitation to all to join a league team. Student bowling was offered during the afternoons. This

establishment is still going strong under new management with six lanes available for you to test your skill.

There have been tremendous changes in the sport throughout the years with international as well as local tournaments; coverage in newspapers and sports magazines; the first Telecast in 1947. One of the major advancements was the automatic pinsetter patented by Gottfried Schmidt and first put into use in 1952. 'Pin boys' were no longer in danger of standing at the end of the alley dodging balls and careening pins.

From the New American to the White House, the trend continued with over 11,000 alleys currently reported in the U. S. This sport has proven itself to be an affordable one for people of all ages that offers recreation, healthful benefits, socialization and - don't forget fun!