

**Monopoly Is Her Game:** The story has long been told that in the 1930s an unemployed Charles Darrow dreamed up a game called Monopoly, sold it to Parker Brothers, the New England board game maker, became a millionaire, and that his inventiveness saved him and Parker Brothers, from the brink of destruction. This story as it has long been told, isn't true.

Data uncovered quite accidentally in 1973 confirms Monopoly's origins began in 1903 (not nineteen three 0) with a bold, progressive woman who largely has been lost to history, and in some cases deliberately written out of it.

As a young woman in the late 1800s, Elizabeth Magie (1866-1948) lived her life unlike most women of the time. She was totally independent, owned her home and several acres of property, was head of her household, and supported herself through her work as a stenographer. She spent her leisure time writing poetry and short stories, performing comedic routines onstage, and by choice, did not marry until she was in her forties.

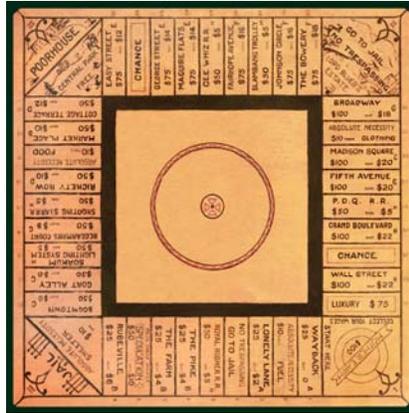
Magie also held strong political beliefs with a passion for social and economic justice. It was her newspaper publisher and abolitionist father James Magie who had introduced her to the writings of Henry George, the famous American politician, economist, and proponent of the "single tax" on land.

Magie had learned volumes from studying George's tax economics and took it upon herself to teach others what she learned. She did teach formal classes, but she wanted to reach more people than her class size could accommodate. Her passion to spread her beliefs more broadly led her to develop a new unconventional manner of teaching. She decided to create a board game learning experience.

At the time, board games were popular in middle-class homes. Magie determined a board game could be not just a family activity, but also a means of outreach to a wider community audience. It would be a creative experience that would be interactive and available to all; virtually it was, the social media of the time. It was a way to demonstrate the manner in which Henry George's system of economics would work in real life.

Magie named her learning game "The Landlord's Game" and in it set in place three, never-to-be forgotten words - GO TO JAIL!

Inspired by and based on George's idea of shifting the tax burden to wealthy landowners, she designed the game as a protest against the big monopolists of her time, i.e., Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. She explained that the game was to be a "practical demonstration of the present system of land-grabbing with all its usual outcomes and consequences." Magie filed a legal claim in 1903, and was granted a patent on January 5th, 1904 (No. 748,626). She was in her thirties and represented the less than 1 percent of all patent applicants at the time who were women.



In 1906, Magie moved from her birthplace in Macomb, Illinois, to Chicago where, with a number of other followers of Henry George, she established the Economic Game Company of New York. She approached Parker Brothers to publish her Landlord's game in 1909, but Parker Brothers rejected her proposal.

She married Albert Phillips in 1910 and they moved to the Washington DC area. There, in 1924 under her married name of Elizabeth Magie Phillips, she patented a revised edition of The Landlord's Game (No. 1,509,312). This revised edition appeared publically in 1932 and included named streets and other changes in the appearance of the board.

Scott Nearing, a member of the economics department at the University of Pennsylvania 1906-15, had used The Landlord's Game in his courses. Purportedly it also was played by students at Princeton, at Haverford College, at Wharton School of Finance and Economy, at Harvard and at Columbia University.

As the students and single taxers played the game, they began altering the rules. The main change was that instead of merely paying rent when landing on a property block, the players could hold an auction to buy it. They also made their own game boards so that they could replace the properties designated by Magie with properties in their own cities and states. This made playing more realistic.

As the students created their own boards, they changed the title "The Landlord's Game" to "Auction Monopoly" and then just "Monopoly." By the late 1920s, the version of the game being played by college students and others had evolved and was now generally referred to as "Monopoly."

A young student at Williams College in Reading, PA, produced a commercial version under the name "Finance," but the game essentially was Monopoly. A woman named Ruth Hoskins who learned the game moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey and supposedly created the version that included the Atlantic City street names.

Two of Hoskins friends, Eugene and Ruth Raiford, learned the game from Hoskins and they introduced it to Charles Todd. Todd who lived in Pennsylvania introduced the game to Charles and Ester Darrow. It was entirely new to them and Darrow asked Todd to write down the rules and regulations. Todd did and gave them to Darrow.

Darrow was the first to capitalize on Magie's game when Parker Brothers began distributing it under rights they purchased from Darrow who had secured a copyright in 1933. Subsequently, in 1935 Darrow was granted a U.S. Patent regardless that the game's origins and Magie's previous and current patents seemed not to be well vetted by the Patent Office clerks.

Magie held her own patent to 1935 when she met with a Parker Brothers representative who asked her if she would accept changes in her game. She replied "No. This is to teach the Henry George theory of single taxation, and I will not have my game changed in any way whatsoever." Under condition that Parker Brothers would continue to publish *The Landlord's Game* as well as *Monopoly*, she sold her patent to Parker Brothers for \$500.

Sales of *Monopoly* mushroomed after she sold her patent to Parker Brothers. Darrow became wealthy and Parker Brothers became a major company on the profits of *Monopoly* while they marginalized sales of the *Landlord's Game* and covertly concealed Magie.

In January 1936, to prove that Darrow was not the inventor of the monopoly game, Magie did two interviews displaying copies of her original board with *The Washington Post* and *The Evening Star*. Magie was asked how she felt about getting only \$500 for her patent and no royalties ever. She replied that it was all right with her "if she never made a dime so long as the Henry George single tax idea was spread to the people of the country." Four years later, now in her declining years, she still was urging surviving Single Taxers to action as noted in her essay, "A Word to the Wise," that appeared in the September-October 1940 issue of *Land and Freedom*.

In 1973, twenty-five years after she died as a virtual unknown contributor to history, Magie's identity as *Monopoly's* true inventor was uncovered by accident.



Professor Ralph Anspach on the economics faculty of San Francisco State University designed a new game he called "Anti-Monopoly." When Anspach's game began to compete with *Monopoly* on store shelves, General Mills (successor to Parker Brothers) filed a lawsuit against Professor Anspach for patent infringement. A decade-long legal battle ensued during which the lower court actually ordered thousands of copies of *Anti-Monopoly* destroyed. In researching his case, he uncovered Magie's patents and *Monopoly's* folk-game roots. He became consumed with telling the truth of what he calls "the *Monopoly* lie."

Professor Anspach presented the historical evidence revealing that Darrow essentially had taken the game virtually without change in the design or rules from the existing version submitted to him by Charles Todd. Counting lawyer's, printer's and Patent Office fees in developing it," *The Evening Star* said, "the game has cost Magie more than she made from it."

When Magie passed away in 1948, she was a widow without children living in relative obscurity. Neither her headstone nor her obituary mentions her role in the creation of Monopoly, which is her game.

Sources: *The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury, and the Scandal Behind the World's Favorite Board Game*, Mary Pilon; <https://invention.si.edu/woman-inventor-behind-monopoly>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/business/behind-monopoly-an-inventor-who-didnt-pass-go.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/business/behind-monopoly-an-inventor-who-didnt-pass-go.html?_r=0); [http://www.henrygeorge.org/dodson\\_on\\_monopoly.htm](http://www.henrygeorge.org/dodson_on_monopoly.htm); The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY <http://www.museumofplay.org/about>.