

Today, April 1<sup>st</sup>, marks the 214<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Jean-Jacques Croquet, inventor of the game that bears his name though how the game evolved to its present form and the tragic demise of Jean-Jacques are not widely known. Croquet was looking for a pastime for his 11 children from odds and ends around the farm in rural France. He heard tell of the game of golf from a distant cousin who had been exiled to Scotland but the specifics were lost in the heavily accented postcard. Croquet inadvertently fashioned his game with cubes of wood in place of balls. Unable to dig large holes that would be practical for the wooden blocks and would not also trip up the participants, Croquet bent marshmallow sticks into the semi-circle targets that we now see today. Undaunted by the lack of interest from his children, who were frustrated at the difficulty of directing squared objects that moved so unpredictably, he took the game to the big city and trumpeted le "Joue de Jean-Jacques" as the greatest game in the land. Unfortunately Croquet shortened the title for his game to the acronym "JJJ", unaware that the JJJ were a secret society of elitist men who opposed what they considered to be inferior cheese finding its way onto the store shelves of city shops and whose vicious acts of terrorism included dressing as grandmothers and releasing hungry mice while waiting in line at fromageries which sold cheeses that they opposed. The JJJ would inconspicuously drop mice at their feet and then kick them in the direction of the cheese. The hungry mice would then do the rest, inflicting the damage. It was said that a fromagerie could be ruined with a single kick of a mouse. The JJJ were incensed at having their acronym appropriated by someone selling stinky blocks and literally chased Jean-Jacques back to his farm where he died suddenly and mysteriously upon his arrival, according to his wife Florence and her Uncle Roger (who had been tending to various needs of the farm and family while Jean-Jacques was otherwise occupied). The story may have ended then and there but for several enlightened acts from Florence and her loving Uncle Roger. First, they replaced the cubes with round objects that were much easier to propel in the direction the player intended. Second, they renamed the game Croquet in memory of Jean-Jacques. And third they sent several sets of the game back to the big French city with members of the JJJ, who had been spending way too much time kicking their mouse as it was and were quite happy to play outside for a change. The game became a huge success as it continues to be today in the backyards of millions the world over. The tragic irony of the success of the game was that it came after the death of its inventor who had run in fear from the JJJ back to the safety of his wife and home. When asked all those years ago of why she thought her husband had not been successful while he was alive, Florence responded sadly with a local phrase which today would be loosely translated to mean "because he had no balls."