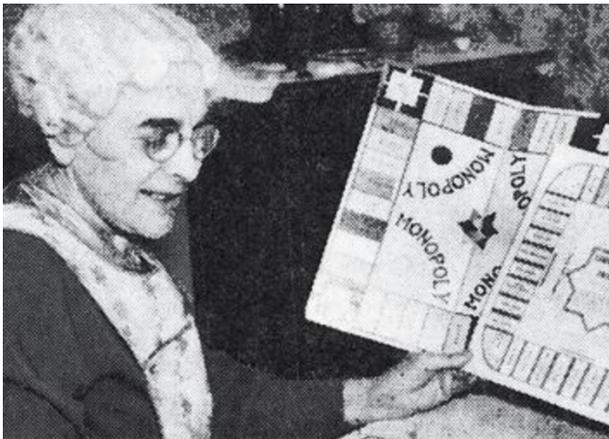




Women Make History:

Stories we should have learned in school



“We are not machines. Girls have minds, desires, hopes, and ambition.”

Elizabeth Magie
*Inventor of Monopoly,
Engineer & Social Activist*

Catalyst for Change: Elizabeth Magie

Game designer, inventor, feminist, and economic activist, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Magie created the game later known as [Monopoly](#). Whether writing short stories and poems, working as a newspaper reporter, or performing as a comedian and stage actress, Magie used social engagement and entertainment as a tool to bring about political and economic change.

Magie was born in 1866 in a small town in Illinois to progressive parents. Her father, a newspaper publisher, abolitionist, and economic reformer, encouraged his daughter's creative pursuits. One of his gifts to her – a copy of the book, *Progress and Poverty*, by [Henry George](#) – made a lasting impression. She became a [life-long activist](#) inspired by George's economic and social theory that individuals should own what they make or create, but that land should belong to the public. Like George, Magie advocated for a single tax on land eliminating all other government taxes. Magie believed this would close the economic gap between wealthy landowners and the working poor.

As a young woman, Magie moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked as a stenographer and typist. Unable to support herself on a salary of less than \$10 dollars per week, Magie decided to draw attention to her plight and those of single women across the country. She purchased a newspaper ad in which she offered to auction herself off to a husband. The stunt was social theatre designed to spotlight the inequities between the races and between women and men. It worked. The ad captured national attention from reporters and gossip columnists while increasing her name recognition and social

currency.

While working as a typist in 1892, Magie invented a mechanism that enabled a sheet of paper to run more easily through typewriter rollers. At the age of 26 and during a time when women held less than one percent of all patents, Magie received her first patent.

In 1904, Magie received her second patent, this time for her invention of [The Landlord's Game](#), the forerunner to Monopoly. The game had [two sets of rules](#) depending on how participants wanted to play. The first set of rules had the goal of owning industries and creating monopolies by forcing others out of business. The second set of rules had the aim of creating collective prosperity by collaborating with opponents.

In a 1902 [interview](#) for the Georgist magazine, *The Single Tax Review*, Magie said of Landlord: "It is a practical demonstration of the present system of land-grabbing with all its usual outcomes and consequences. It might well have been called the 'Game of Life,' as it contains all the elements of success and failure in the real world, and the object is the same as the human race in general seems[s] to have, i.e., the accumulation of wealth."

In 1906 Magie moved to Chicago where she co-founded the [Economic Game Company](#) to publish *The Landlord's Game*, but the company lacked the resources to mass produce it. She later designed a humorous card game called [Mock Trial](#) that was published by Parker Brothers in 1910.



By the early 1920s, Landlord was popular among college students, some of whom made their own copies and variations. Magie's original patent on Landlord expired in 1921. In an effort to reassert control, she reapplied for her patent in 1924. Eight years later, Magie released a second edition of the game.

In 1933, three decades after Magie had invented it, Parker Brothers [published](#) a version they called Monopoly and credited Charles Darrow, not Magie, as its inventor. Darrow later became known as the first American millionaire who made his fortune by creating board games. In a *Washington Evening Star* [interview](#) in January 1936, Magie said that she had made only \$500 from her invention and received none of the credit.

Magie continued to develop other games, including Bargain Day and [King's Men](#) plus a third version of Landlord in 1939. In [Bargain Day](#), shoppers compete with each other in a department store. Parker Brothers published two of these, but continued to give Darrow the credit for *Monopoly*.

Magie died at the age of 81 in 1948. Finally, in 1974 she received recognition for inventing Monopoly. Another game inventor, [Ralph Anspach](#), [discovered](#) Magie's patents while fighting his own legal battle with Parker Brothers over his [Anti-Monopoly](#) game.

Magie's contributions to American game culture included popularizing a circular board for games, rather than using the traditional linear form. She felt that a circular shape facilitated more social interaction among competitors, a novel idea at the time.

Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Ask a friend: Has another person ever taken credit for your ideas? If so, how did you respond?

Ask Yourself: Have you ever accepted credit for something you didn't do? What did you do to make it right or what should you do?



Sharon Spaulding is an historian and researcher who specializes in the life and times of Mary Ware Dennett (1872-1947). The curator of Dennett's family archives, Spaulding is at work on a book about Dennett. In 2020, [Time magazine](#) included Dennett as one of the most important women in American history.

Spaulding received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her work. Her journalism has appeared in [Smithsonian](#), [New Hampshire Magazine](#), [BOLD](#), and others. She lives near Salt Lake City with her husband and two dogs.

Sharon is available to speak on the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. Contact her at: Sharon@SharonSpaulding.com.

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