

several private houses (mixed reactions); a Transit Authority administration building in the Bronx ("How this magnificent neo-Italian Renaissance, almost Tuscan building survived is a mystery to me," said Mr. Barwick); and Gage & Tollner's restaurant, in Brooklyn ("It would be ludicrous to preserve the modest Anglo-Italianate façade and let that magnificent mirrored interior slip away," said Mr. Barwick).

Toward the end of the meeting, Mrs. Aid suggested that the commission was not moving fast enough on priority items in her district. "There are two buildings in great danger," she said, "The Central Savings Bank at Broadway and Seventy-third, and the Dorilton Apartments, at 171 West Seventy-first. We urge you to follow our list of priorities."

The final item on the calendar turned out to be a strategic retreat on the part of the Frick Collection, a self-sufficient institution, which was bitterly criticized when it demolished the adjacent Widener house last summer. Everett Fahy, the Frick's youthful director, told the commission that the Frick had abandoned plans to build an extension on three vacant lots to the east—a tract of land that includes the crumbling foundations of the Widener house. "We have decided to install a permanent architectural garden in this space and a narrow one-story wing extending from the wall of the Frick Collection," he said.

"Will the new wing diminish the size of the garden?" asked Barbaralee Diamonstein, a pretty, blond commissioner.

"The proposed wing would decrease the size of the terrace but not the size of the garden," Mr. Fahy replied, carefully.

"The Frick has mysteriously changed plans another time," said Mr. Barwick, who followed Mr. Fahy to the rostrum. "But we must consider the

whole of East Seventieth Street from Madison to Fifth Avenue. Stylistically, it goes from French to Italian classical to hopelessly eclectic. And yet it's one of the most successful block fronts in the city. The Municipal Art Society strongly suggests that the entire block should be preserved as a landmark."

Backgammon

ON a Saturday afternoon, we speedily lost three consecutive games of backgammon to the world's champion player, Tim Holland. Mr. Holland looks like James Bond—he is in his early forties, dapperly dressed, six feet three. He told us that until fourteen years ago he had excelled at every game *except* backgammon, a game he had never encountered until he happened upon some players at a fashionable Miami Beach country club. Since that day, Mr. Holland has won more backgammon tournaments than anyone else in living memory, and has been

teaching the game to groups of up to six students to the tune of three thousand dollars for four two-hour lessons. "With six students, it comes to eight hours of individual teaching for five hundred dollars, or sixty-two dollars and fifty cents an hour," he said modestly. A former golfer—he spent his twenties doing the celebrity golf circuit in Florida—Mr. Holland once played backgammon for sixty-eight hours without a break, and he likes to stress the athletic nature of his favorite game.

Sitting across from us, in his Manhattan apartment, at a large silver-edged table, on which he won the World's Championship of Backgammon in Las Vegas three times running, Mr. Holland told us that he was the author of a recently published book, "Beginning Backgammon"—the first book designed expressly for the novice player—and the inventor of a new self-teaching aid called Autobackgammon. He went on to explain why the game had achieved such phenomenal popularity in the past few years, eclipsing bridge, gin rummy, poker, and canasta in many circles.

"Backgammon combines the features of every popular game we've known for decades," Mr. Holland said. "It blends the pure luck of craps and roulette, a lot of tactical skill, and a large element of personal judgment. The social aspect of it is beautiful—you don't need to go to a club or set up a foursome. You can compete *en famille*, alone against your wife, or with an almost unlimited number of children or friends. Then, it's so clean and candid: cheating is just about impossible; no one is hiding any cards; there's no bluff, as in poker. It's also very democratic and good for the ego, because, with occasional luck, beginners can beat the most advanced players. And, of course, it's the most pacific game I know of; it's totally devoid of any element of human aggression. You're never



angry at your opponent, as in rummy, or at your partner, as in bridge. Whatever anger you feel is directed at the dice, at some abstraction of Lady Luck."

A brief perusal of backgammon history had taught us that the game was invented a few thousand years before the Christian era; that it was extremely popular in the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations (the Emperor Claudius even wrote a book about it); and that the Romans imported it into England, where it achieved particular popularity. It was known as "tables" in England until well into the seventeenth century, when the name "backgammon," or "back game," from the Middle English "*gamen*," began to prevail. It was in eighteenth-century England that backgammon rules were refined into an approximation of today's game—except for the use of the doubling cube, which was added only in the nineteen-twenties.

Tim Holland elaborated for us on some recent aspects of backgammon history. "What we are witnessing is the popularization of one of the world's most aristocratic and élitist games," he said. "In the Middle Ages, backgammon was supposed to be strictly confined to the ranks of the nobility—at the time of Richard the Lion-Hearted, for instance, only knights were allowed to play. And right up until the mid-nineteen-sixties the only backgammon tournaments were held on the club level—in very Wasp, exclusive clubs at that. The first major open competition was organized in 1966, at the Cleremont Club in London—the International Championship of Backgammon. I won that in 1966, 1972, and 1973. The first major tournament held in America was set up in 1967, by a Chicago industrialist, Charles Wacker—an enthusiast who had decided he wanted to democratize the game. It was called the World's Championship of Backgammon, and it was held in Las Vegas, at the Sands Hotel. I also won that tournament three times—in 1967, 1968, and 1970. It wasn't held in 1969."

Mr. Holland, who has accumulated some sixty thousand dollars a year in tournament money over the past few years, reverently held up a two-foot-high silver trophy he won at Las Vegas, which he said was purportedly a former yachting cup of Kaiser Wilhelm II's.

We asked him what he saw as the sociological reasons for the new backgammon craze.

"I've been trying to figure that one out myself," Mr. Holland said. "I think it's in part the influence of women's magazines. Backgammon had always been such a ritzy, jet-set, beautiful-people activity, and throughout the sixties there was a trend to popularize and identify with the beautiful-people experience. It's like movie heroes' drinking Scotch instead of rye. Also, there may be a women's-lib factor involved. Up to the nineteen-sixties, backgammon had been exclusively a *man's* club game, whereas this year over fifty per cent of the tournament players are women—it's another one of those men's activities that the women seem to enjoy taking over."

We ventured to suggest that the pacific, unaggressive nature of the game might be well suited to the placid character of the nineteen-seventies—another reaction against the agitated temper of the sixties.

"That's very probable, and not at all farfetched," Mr. Holland said.

Having sat down to play with the Bobby Fischer of backgammon, we threw a six with our die, and Mr. Holland threw a three. We were immediately made aware that, as wasn't the case with the game we learned at our father's knee, tournament rules do not allow any refusal of the first dice. So we were forced to play this rather unpromising opening throw. Mr. Holland then threw a six and a one, and closed his bar point—one of the finest opening moves of backgammon. Then we threw another wretched six and a three, leaving several "blots," or single men, vulnerable to being hit by our opponent. After several more rolls, when his position had become almost insurmountable, Mr. Holland turned the doubling cube up to two, and admonished us to decline his double.

"One of the most important and sensitive aspects of the game is learning to refuse doubles," said Mr. Holland, who had managed to win a hundred and eighty dollars the first time he ever played backgammon by consistently refusing every double in a chouette. "Most people tend to take doubles too easily. It's like Vietnam—they think that refusing is admitting failure or defeat. That's why backgammon is the greatest possible thing for the American psyche—it forces us to play a game in which you just *have* to lose very often."

As we disposed our men on the boards for a second game, Mr. Holland's sumptuous silver-edged table re-

mined us that the 1974 World's Championship was being played in Las Vegas the second week of this new year. We asked the champion if he was planning to participate in it.

"Gosh, no," he said. "I'm tired. I'm going to sit this one out. And, besides, I'm having the time of my life writing a second book, this time for more advanced players."

In our final game, we threw a six and a one twice in a row—always too much of a good thing.

Dead Ringer

AL: *What do you know about poisons?*

Himan Brown, experienced radio director-producer, was at work in Studio G (for Arthur Godfrey) the other day putting together an episode for "The C.B.S. Radio Mystery Theatre." "The C.B.S. Radio Mystery Theatre" is the first new drama program to be produced for radio since the demise of "The N.B.C. Radio Theatre" (also produced by Brown), in 1959. It will be heard every night of the week all year long, and will run fifty-two minutes a night. One hundred and ninety-five original shows (brand-new scripts, brand-new everything) and one hundred and seventy reruns of these shows will, as it looks now, punctuate every single day of the coming year with Significant Pauses, Menacing Snarls, Husky Laughs, and other essential dramatic baggage. "The C.B.S. Radio Mystery Theatre" will be heard on WOR in New York, which shows you how the foundations of popular culture have been undermined (by passivity and relativism) since 1959. "The N.B.C. Radio Theatre," you can damn well bet, was on N.B.C.

When we visited Mr. Brown, he was sitting at a plastic-topped table with the cast of a drama called "Dead Ringer." He was reading the script of "Dead Ringer" with his actors and giving them cuts. No notes—just cuts. On Mr. Brown's right sat Joan Lovejoy, who was playing Gloria Winters; Larry Haines (Al Grissom); and Leon Janney (Leo Winters). On the other side of the table were Bob Dryden (Dr. Carmody) and Paul Hecht (Grafton).

"Would you make a cut on page twenty-two, please," Mr. Brown said. "Cut 'So let's pack it in' and pick up for me on twenty-three with 'We've got to stop talking about murder.' Then, on page thirty-one, cut 'Are you crazy? This is no time for kissing.'"

