Persistent research has failed to unearth any great amount of information regarding the shell games early history. It is known, however that this game was shown early in the eighteenth century at county fairs and race courses throughout England with the goal of fleecing the unknowing. At that time it was merely known as "The Thimble Rig". Quite an appropriate name, since thimbles were used instead of walnut shells. Earliest history available leads us to believe that the game, with either thimbles or shells, was introduced into America from England during the early colonial period. At any rate we know we have had it with us beyond the memory of anyone living today.

The earliest mention of "Thimble Rig" we have been able to locate in Hone's Every Day Book, published in 1825. It is there defined as a swindling game with three thimbles and a pea. Later in a small handbook written by J.H. Green, The Reformed Gambler, and published in 1889, it is referred to as playing "Thimbles". Mr. Green erroneously credits the invention of the game to one Dr. Bennet, an elderly Sportsman who plied his trade on the Mississippi River Steamboats. In Quinn's Gambling Exposed, published in 1891, we find the first reference to the shell game mentioning that either walnut shells or half potatoes, scooped out could be used. Over the following years, beer bottle caps, hollowed corks, and just about anything available at the time was being used...

Today if one walks down any major street in any major big city, chances are, you will see someone "working" the shell game. Make no mistake, it is still around the county and rural fairs, racetracks, bars, and wherever people gather hoping to make a few bucks. The props being small are easily carried in the pocket making this ideal for impromptu performances under almost any circumstance. Here at Magic Makers Inc., we wanted to bring you the best quality outfit possible. Your shells have been molded from real New England large walnuts. We also send you the proper pea molded of green rubber after much experimenting with so many different types of rubber. We are proud to bring you this deluxe quality outfit and only ask that you give it the practice it deserves before performing it.

**THE MOVES**: The moves are really quite simple and few. But make no mistake; they do require practice to perfect. You want to practice the moves until they are almost second nature and are so smooth that no one can detect that you did anything but what you intend them to see.

**The BASIC MOVE:**
The basic move is used to steal the pea and also in reverse to load the pea. This is important; the move must look the same stealing or loading. Place the pea under the shell with the point of the shell facing the spectator. Your right thumb is positioned in back of the shell on the left side. The ball of the right index finger touches the right side of the shell, opposite the thumb. The right middle finger is lying down in back of the shell so that the ball of the finger touches the first joint of the thumb. See Fig. 1 Push the shell forward about an inch pressing down very gently. The pea will ride back and out of the shell at the point where the middle finger and thumb meet, See Fig. 2 & Fig. 3.
You can pinch the pea in this position and move the hand to any other shell without it being seen. See Fig. 4.

ALWAYS MOVE THE SHELLS IN THIS FINGER POSITION EVEN WHEN THERE IS NO PEA HIDDEN UNDERNEATH!

To load a pea under the shell, you simply reverse the direction. With the pea hidden in the fingers, simply move any shell back an inch against the pea and it quietly goes under the shell. When done correctly, even the trained eye of most magicians cannot follow the move. Practice this loading and unloading until you are confident with it.

THE BLUFF MOVE
Here is a sucker move, which "Bluffs" the spectator into thinking he saw something. It is always done with an empty shell. The shell is moved in the above manner, but the right index finger tilts the shell slightly to the left as the middle fingertip moves under the raised shell and back into position again. They will swear on a stack of bibles that you put the pea under the shell. The move is done in the process of moving the shell. See fig. 5

THE SWIVEL MOVE: This move, first popularized by John Scarne, was used to show the shell empty even though it is hiding in the pea. The shell is held in the basic position. Move the shell forward so the pea can move out into position. Move slightly forward allowing the pea to ride further back resting under the middle and fourth fingers. Now, turn the hand palm up in a clockwise rotation, in other words the index finger and thumb lift the shell off the table turning it mouth up and the other three fingers remain flat against the close-up pad hiding the pea. See Fig. 6, 7, & 8.

To reload the pea, just reverse the move. When using the swivel move, show an empty shell to be empty using the same actions so that all the shells are shown the same way.

If you want to really master this game then seek out Magic Makers 3 Shell Game DVD called “Street Monte” – It is by far the best in the world. When performing the Shell Game, always try to use a close up pad. The soft surface makes the loading and unloading much easier than trying to work on a smooth surface. While there are people who use a plank of wood, or even a piece of cardboard to play their craft, remember that you are doing this as entertainment, not a hustle to clean someone of their hard earned cash.

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THE ROUTINE: "Step right up and watch the game of the century, it involves three shells and a tiny pea. This is actually known as the three shell game, but all the same, I’m going to show you how to play the game. In this little box I have three walnut shells and a tiny pea. I’ll place the three shells in a row and the pea in front like so. I’ll cover the pea with the center shell, now hey diddle diddle, the pea is in the middle, five will get you ten, and ten will get you twenty, if you can just tell me where the little pea is."

Place the shells in a row about 3 inches apart and the pea in front of the center shell. Holding the shells as in the basic move, cover the pea with the center shell and move it forward but do not allow the pea to escape. Move the other two shells forward the same way. Allow the spectator to select a shell; naturally he will pick the center, so you show it is there.

"You sir are a positive man, positive that I would not cheat you for the world, for money yes, but the world no, after all, who needs the world? Hey diddle diddle it’s under the shell in the middle. Congratulations sir that is how you play the game. By the way do you happen to have some money on you? Just joking, I’m not here to take your money, but instead to show you this interesting little game of Hanky poo with two shells for me and one for you."

Cover the pea and move the shell using the basic move to steal the pea as you push the shell forward, then move the other two shells one by one so they line up in a row while loading the pea under the right side shell. Now move the center shell and the one on the left switching their positions and then explain.

"Sometimes when this little game is played, the operator will try to trick you by switching the shells, and he usually shouts out something to distract you like, Wow, did you see that dead bird, (said while looking up, the spectator will look up as well) In reality he played the old switcheroo on you. Now sir, a man of your intelligence cannot be fooled, so I ask you where is the pea?"

Lift the shell to the left showing no pea, then lift the far right shell showing the pea is over there. Now using the bluff move pretend to remove the pea from the right shell, then move the center shell up next to it, then the left shell using the bluff move again to appear as if you loaded the pea under it.

"Sir once again the operator will try to distract you, but keep one eye on the shells, and one eye on me. I’ll keep one eye on the shells, one eye on you, and one eye on the blonde in the front row. Now without moving a thing I’m going to make the pea go. I would like you to place your finger on the shell that you believe to house the pea. Nope, not that one, it’s not in the center either, but back here on the right where it just begun."

Show the pea is on the right hand side. Now visibly take the pea and slip it under any shell the spectator picks and then slowly moves the shells around a bit switching positions. Allow him to pick a shell and using the swivel move, show the shell empty, then place it back down over the pea, have him pick another shell and do the same swivel move showing that one empty as well. Now you lift the last shell up slightly from the back and take a peek saying....

"Nope, it’s not under here either, what you don’t trust me? Well then you just turn it over for yourself and have a peek." Once he turns over the shell on the left, you turn over the shell in the center, showing it empty and then the shell on the right revealing the pea is back where it started as you say the following.... "You can rest assured that when the money is down, the pea is nowhere to be found. In fact it is never under the shell that you suspect. I’m really not supposed to be telling you this! Promise you won’t tell? Some people think I cheat a little bit, But I actually cheat all the time!" Remember to practice the moves till they are second nature, and use this little routine as a stepping-stone to build your own presentation. "Good luck and remember where the best magic products come from... Magic Makers, Inc."

–Rob Stiff