

## Co-op Wars Board Game

**T**HIS HOMEMADE board game was owned by Kris Olsen of Minneapolis (1946–1998), a prominent figure in the food cooperative movement in Minnesota during the 1970s. Food co-ops had operated in Minnesota before, notably Finish co-ops on the Iron Range in the 1920s. By 1970, the youth counterculture of the 1960s had generated a movement to escape mainstream supermarket chains and buy natural, organic food at wholesale costs. Co-ops arose as worker- and

consumer-owned, neighborhood-based stores where members worked voluntarily, though nonmembers could shop as well. The idea was so popular that by 1975 Minnesota had more than 20 food co-ops, supplied by the People's Warehouse located in the West Bank neighborhood of Minneapolis.

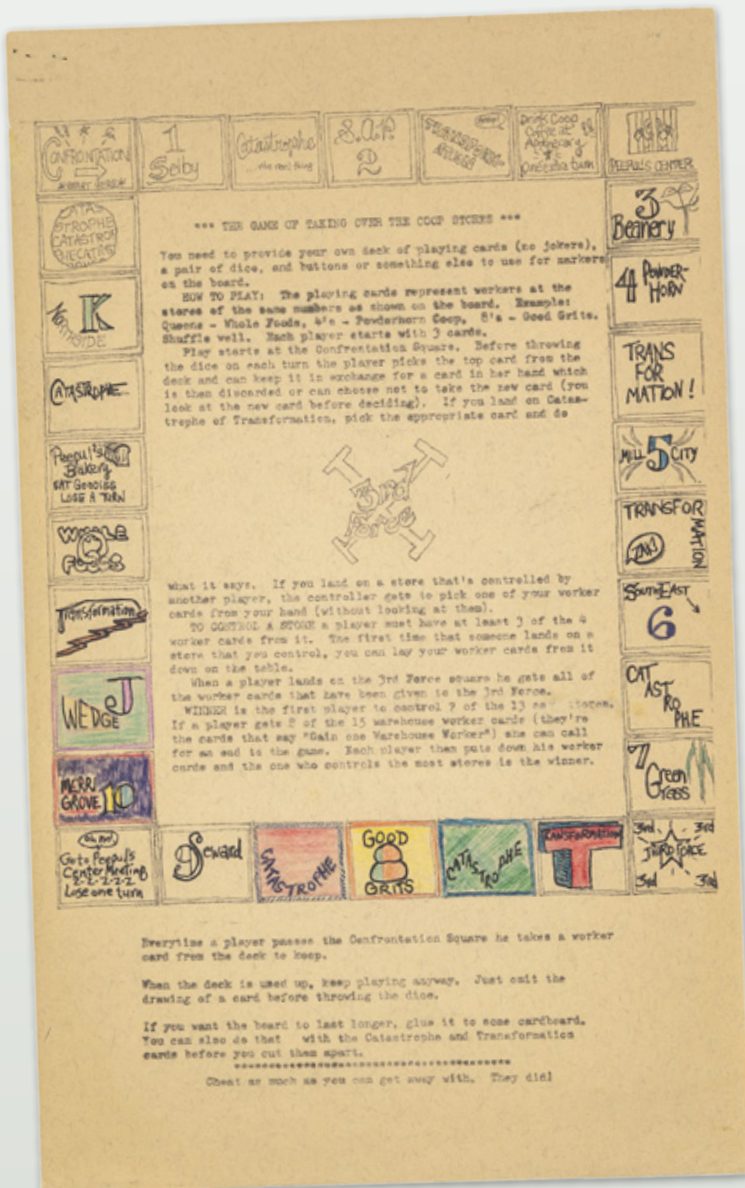
The game was created in the mid-1970s in response to events instigated by the Cooperative Organization (CO), a radical political group that arose within

the Twin Cities co-op community. CO members felt cooperatives should embrace a communist view and could better support their neighborhoods by providing cheaper, non-organic products, including canned goods, aimed at the working class, the target audience for their pro-revolution message. When their requests were denied, members of the CO broke into the People's Warehouse in March 1975 to take control of the supplies, precipitating a series of events over the next year that became known locally and nationally as the “co-op wars.” The CO also physically took control of several area co-ops, including the Seward Community Co-op in Minneapolis, where Olsen, a worker/owner, and another worker were beaten and thrown out of the store.

The satirical board echoes Monopoly, with squares representing “catastrophes,” “transitions,” and various Twin Cities co-ops operating at the time. Using a deck of playing cards and dice, players attempt to gain control of more than half of the co-op stores on the board, while drawing game cards to gain or lose warehouse workers. According to the rule sheet, players should “Cheat as much as you can get away with. They did!”—a reference to the underhanded and illegal tactics used by the CO.

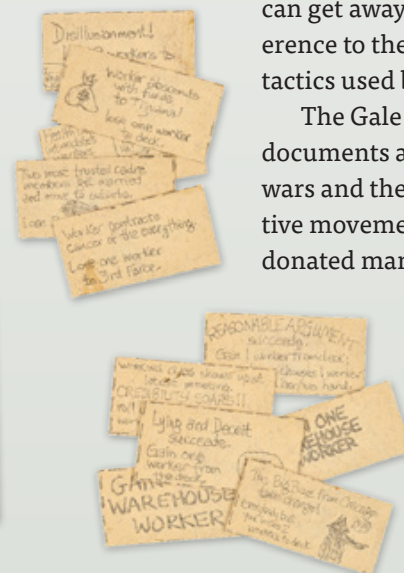
The Gale Family Library contains documents and records on the co-op wars and the history of the cooperative movement in Minnesota. Olsen donated many of these items.

—Stephanie Olson,  
collections assistant



*In the aftermath of the violent “co-op wars” of the mid-1970s, one eyewitness created a satirical board game portraying the takeover of several Twin Cities food co-ops.*

(MNHS COLLECTIONS/  
JASON ONERHEIM)





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