

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
April 2010

© SABR

Vol. 3 No. 4

NEW FROM TOM ALTHERR

AN AMERICAN ORDER FOR JOHN NEWBURY'S *A LITTLE PRETTY POCKET BOOK*

While rummaging through some Revolutionary-War era articles, I ran across a reprinted invoice including two copies of the "Pretty Pocket Book" by William Allason, a merchant of Falmouth, VA. Dated 1771, I'm assuming that this was John Newbury's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, since I cannot locate a book of the exact title. The reference is in "The Letters of William Allason, of Falmouth, VA, found in the *Richmond College Historical Papers*, v.2 n.1 (1917), 143-144.

A TOWN BALL MISCELLANY

In a very perceptive article in the Fall 2007 *Base Ball* journal about Philadelphia town ball, the researcher Richard Hershberger notes that readers should not assume that town ball in Philadelphia was identical to town ball elsewhere. With that in mind I offer more references, mostly from outside Philadelphia. I located the following item concerning Chatham

Academy, Chester County, Penna. The issue of July 13, 1895, of the *Friend's Intelligencer and Journal* contains an interview with one Thomas Baker, who recalled playing "town's ball" at that time. In 1840, the *North American and Daily Advertiser*, another Philadelphia newspaper, noted that visitors to Cape Island in southern New Jersey were able to enjoy watching, and also perhaps playing in, a game of "town ball" in addition to bathing and the other beachside recreation.

Antebellum Americans outside the Northeast also could enjoy playing town ball, despite the monikers "New England Game" or "Massachusetts Game". I have uncovered several slave narratives referring to slaves playing what they identified as "town ball", references that I will cite and discuss at the April 17 SABR Nineteenth Century Committee conference in Cooperstown. Apparently, white southerners could also play: the November 29, 1859, number of the *Charleston Courier, Tri-Weekly* reprinted a short article from the *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* about a recent game of "town ball", presumably in Augusta. A biography of the Georgia politician William H. Crawford, while describing how Crawford and South Carolina politician John C.

Calhoun split bitterly over the contested presidential election of 1824, lamented that these "two illustrious statesmen and erstwhile school fellows, who had played town ball and marbles and gathered nuts together" had come to loggerheads. (J. E. D. Shipp, *Giant Days, or the Life and times of William H. Crawford* (Americus, GA, 1909), 167). Also, an Alabaman recalled that at Columbian Institute in Taylorville, in Tuscaloosa County, around 1861-1862 "town ball was wont to hold full sway" on the school's playground (Levin V. Rosser, "Columbian Institute", *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*, v.2 (1897-1898), 61-62).

Indianans were also quite familiar with the game, so familiar that a May, 1837 ordinance in Indianapolis prohibited it (as well as cricket, bandy, cat, corner ball or any other game of ball) within municipal boundaries ("Corporation Ordinance", May 13, 1837 *Indiana Journal*). Further to the southwest, the residents of Evansville were apparently fanatical before the Civil War for the game they called "town ball". Frank M. Gilbert's 1910 volume *History of the City of Evansville and Vandenberg County, Ind.* detailed their enthusiasm: "three times as many

Evansville people would attend a town ball match as would hear a political speaker" (v.1, 106-107).

By the 1890s, however, there was at least one reference to town ball indicating that the term had become something less than positive. The *Galveston Daily News* for June 8, 1891, in a piece entitled "Good Old Town Ball" called a recent baseball game a "very good exhibition of old time town ball." One team's "work was a kind that was wild, weird, and soul-killing – enough to give an ordinary 'fan' of the game the horrors." Presumably, for that writer town ball was an old-time inferior form of baseball. On the other hand, a charming and edifying Denver *Rocky Mountain News* account of September 16, 1884, too extensive to quote here, depicted a recent town ball exhibition as a welcome antidote to the overly - serious game of baseball. One additional musing, leading to a final question: when I played baseball as a teenager in semi-rural western New York, nearly every town had a town team, or in our case a few town teams, within the whole town. Playing briefly for one such team in the summer before college, I often heard the term "town ball" used in connection with this level of baseball. At what point did town teams start to form (my guess is the 1880s but this may be too early) and did the term "town ball" apply elsewhere?

originals

THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahoo group during the past month of March to pursue a number of topics.

INQUIRIES

Method of Picking Players

Dennis Pajot inquired on the origin of the custom of the venerable method of choosing sides for pickup games by tossing a bat to the two captains, who then alternate gripping the bat, ascending up the handle until the knob is reached. Skip McAfee replied with a quote from an 1864 novel.

First woman officer of base ball team?

Deb Shattuck inquired if Celia Brower of Brooklyn in 1860 was the first woman known to be a club officer.

Knickerbocker Base Ball Club Members in Baseball Encyclopedias

John Thorn noted that Harry Wright is the only Knickerbocker member who made it to a baseball encyclopedia, and asked for names of 1850s senior club players who also played in the National Association in the 1870s, beginning the list with two names, Dickie Pearce and Asa Brainard. Wes Fisler was nominated as making the list by Richard Hersh - berger. David Ball listed Berry and Berkenstock of the Athletics. The first

seasons that those players appear on senior clubs was sent by Brock Helander. Eric Miklich added Dave Birdsall and Charlie Smith.

DISCOVERIES

Montreal Baseball Club ca. 1873

Bob Tholkes hijacked into the Origins era (pre-Civil War) a series of posts on an 1870s topic by inserting a *Sunday Mercury* note about a Montreal club that formed in 1860, playing a mix of Massachusetts and New York rules. Richard Hershberger expressed his interest in the mix of rules used, speculating that over hand pitching was used. Patrick Carpentier noted that a club officer listed was involved in Montreal base ball in the 1870s. David Ball inquired if it was likely that this group used the 1858 Dedham rules. Richard considered that there was too little evidence in the note to determine that.

TANGENT

Richard, David Ball, and John Thorn exchanged views on the reason for the creation of a set of rules for the Massachusetts game in Dedham in 1858, concurring that it was in response to the creation of the New York rules.

Baseball humor - Morrisville, NY May 31 1860

Deb Shattuck posted an 1860 article which gives a facetious description of a set of "rules" used locally, suggesting that it was a send-up of the effort at that time to standardize play.

Early Baseball

Paul Browne uncovered an 1887 article describing an early form of the game; he offered to provide copies.

originals

150 YEARS

AGO

from the pages of the New York Sunday Mercury

April 1, 1860

BASE BALL IN CALIFORNIA

Base ball players will be glad to learn that the game has been introduced in California, and is become very popular. Following is a communication from a gentleman well known to the base ball players of New York, where he has often acted as umpire, which will undoubtedly be read with interest.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.
Feb. 29, 1860

To the Editors:

According to promise, I let you know of the earliest base ball matters transpiring here, that I think will interest your many readers of that department. Some few weeks since, the San Francisco Club issued a challenge signed by nine of their members, offering to play any other nine men in the State a game of ball according to the rules of our last Convention. Said challenge was accepted by two parties, who both seemed anxious to contest for the superiority. The Red Rover Association and the Sacramento Base Ball Club were the ambitious aspirants, and their accept

-ances came in the order named.

The match with the Red Rover Club was arranged to be played on Wednesday, February 22d, at 10 o'clock in the morning. The game's umpire had never seen the game played, but was as well posted as a man could become by studying the rules, and I will here say, that the few decisions I saw him give were, in my opinion, all right...

The play was at first in favor of the San Francisco Club, when in the third or fourth innings the Red Rover boys, imagining that their opponents' pitcher was not doing the right thing by them, objected to him. The ground of their objections, as stated to the umpire, was that he pitched too swift, and put too much twist on the ball. This they contended was underhand bowling, and not pitching. They finally succeeded in obtaining another pitcher in for that innings, the result of which was, that they made, before being put out, thirteen runs from the new man ... At the close of their eighth innings, the Red Rover boys were eight runs ahead. However, the San Francisco boys came up with a determined air... the result of their last innings was to place them one run ahead. By good and skillful play they put the Rover boys out for only one run. As this was a tie game...it was supposed that they would play it out, but the Red Rovers would not consent...

Remember me to all the lovers of base ball, and tell them if we only keep the

ball rolling, its track will soon encircle the globe. With best of wishes for the success and prosperity of every ball club in general, and the Eagle Club in particular, I remain, your sincere friend,
M. E.G.

originals

CORRESPONDENCE

SENT TO Originals.

Tom Altherr responded to the 19cBB item posted in February and entitled "how base ball exports the American Way", agreeing with George Thompson's opinion that the fatal camp ball game during the War of 1812 actually referred to the Dartmoor Massacre in England in 1815.

Tom Altherr wrote to agree with George Thompson's comment in last month's "Correspondence" that in the term "Bass ball", the word "bass" may not have been pronounced like the fish.

originals

CORRECTIONS

SENT TO Originals.

Tom Altherr sent a minor correction to his piece last month, "Chumney". In the sentence, "While most sources discovered to date place chumney later...", "chumney" should have been called "chermany."

SUBMISSION OF ITEMS.

Please send items for *Originals* to the editor, Bob Tholkes, at email rjtholkes@msn.com.