

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
June 2012

© SABR

Vol. 5 No. 6

THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahoo group sparingly during the month of May.

Need Assistance Finding Articles

Deb Shattuck requested help in locating the source newspapers for the items on women and baseball referenced in the May issue of *Originals*, and received responses from Richard Hershberger, Tony Kissel, Wendy Knickerbocker, and George Thompson.

Was Louis Wadsworth on the 1857 Rules Committee?

Richard Hershberger sent this timely question, and in a brief essay reviewed the primary sources bearing on the topic, and added an aside on the genesis of the "fly game."

playing ball in Mississippi, 1843

George Thompson posted a diary entry mentioning ball play by free blacks.

Hits at American Whims and Hints for Home Use

Richard Hershberger sent a "pretty good, of non-specific, description of the game" he found in a recollection published in

1859, which he dated to the 1810s.

So That's Why They Called It "Base" Ball (1858)

Deb Shattuck found a magazine article about the new version of base ball which bemoaned that it was accompanied by much cursing, and so was called "base" ball, instead of rounders. Richard Hershberger noted that the item becomes the oldest baseball item known to him regretting the departure of the "good old days."

originals

TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

BUFF-BALL?

In October, 1773, Philip Vickers Fithian, a former Princeton student and current tutor for the Robert Carter family in Virginia, was in Baltimore. While there he engaged in an activity he called "Buff-Ball." In his journal entry for the 28th, he wrote: "In Baltimore for some Buff-Ball." He then listed expenses of one shilling, six pence, although it was not clear if that was for travel costs or connected to "Buff-Ball." Fithian did not describe what "Buff-Ball"

was, but at least one historian has equated it with baseball-type games such as trap ball. Without further detail, that may be a risky assumption. A preliminary search of databases, dictionaries, and books about games did not uncover any ball game of that name. One dictionary published 125 years later referred to a "buff-ball" as a morally risqué dancing party where participants were nude. Fithian seems to have been a fairly straight-laced fellow, but who knows? But we must allow for at least the possibility "buff ball" was a game, maybe even a ball game. Perhaps Fithian misspelled a word "buff" or the editor misread bass (or bafs, given the orthography of the time) as buff. The *Oxford English Dictionary* listed for a primary meaning of "to buff" as to hit something, to stroke. Then there was the common kids' game of blind man's buff, which was not a ball game. But perhaps some version in Fithian's time did involve a ball and striking. Any thoughts from fellow Origins Committee members? [Philip Vickers Fithian], *Philip Vickers Fithian Journal and Letters 1767-1774*, John Rogers Williams, ed. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969 [1900]). p. 49;

Ruth W. Fink, "Recreational Pursuits in the Old South," *Research Quarterly of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation*, vol. 23, no. 1 (March, 1952), p. 35; and Albert Barrère and Charles G. Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon, and Cant*, vol. 1 A-K (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1967 [1899]), p. 191.

BALL PLAY IN NATCHEZ IN 1797

In June, 1797, Andrew Ellicott, a federal survey commissioner, was in Natchez, Mississippi Territory during a yellow fever epidemic. Someone, possibly he himself, suggested ball play as part of a regimen for cure. He wrote thus in his journal:

As those fevers frequently produce a langour or partial lethargy which is generally removed by action, athletic exercises were encouraged, particularly playing ball,, for which purpose a convenient ball-alley was prepared. The good effects of removing from the river, and the plan of exercise were soon visible in the recovery of the greater part of our people;....

The ball game may have been fives, hence the ball-alley, but the reference still may have been to a base ball-type game. Andrew Ellicott, *The Journal of Andrew Ellicott, Late Commissioner on Behalf of the United States during Part of the Year 1796 the Years 1797, 1798, 1799, and Part of the Year 1800* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1803), p. 291

150 YEARS AGO

*from the pages of the New
York Sunday Mercury*

June 1, 1862

INDIAN QUARREL OVER A GAME OF BALL--

The refugee Indians who have been driven to Burlington, Kansas, by the Secesh tribes, and who are awaiting assistance from the General government to enable them to fight their way back to their hunting-grounds, have been in the habit of entertaining the citizens of Burlington twice a week with a game of ball on the public square. On the 23rd ult., they had assembled as usual to have a game for a prize of one hundred pounds of tobacco, offered by Col. Coffin, the officer in charge of the station. The Register says:

"The game was progressing fairly, when all at once, probably on charge of foul play, the whole posse of players commenced tapping each other over the head with their ball clubs. At this juncture, Billy Bowlegs and Opotheyohole, of the Creeks, Passova, of the Seminoles, and some others in authority, rushed to the scene of action, and by a few peremptory orders dispersed the combatants, and sent them off the ground, not permitting them to finish the game. Col. Coffin, however, willing to show more charity for them than their own chiefs were willing to al-

low, called it a "draw game," and sent out the tobacco to be equally divided among the two parties, and eventually all left the ground in apparently good humor; but--there has been no ball-playing since."

BALL PLAYERS OFF TO THE WAR--

But few of the fraternity, in comparison with the number who left in May, 1861, have gone off to the war this time in the militia regiments. Of the first nines of the Brooklyn clubs, the Eckford lose Sprague ; the Star, Kelly ; the Hamilton, Bergen ; Holt, too, the catcher of the Henry Eckford's, has left. All the clubs have their representatives in the several regiments, especially in the Thirteenth Regiment; but the hegira of warlike ball-players is nothing near as great as in 1861, the necessity not being as pressing as it was a year ago, or otherwise the clubs would have suffered considerably in the loss of members through the departure of the State Militia.

originals

Send comments, questions, and other correspondence for *Originals* to the editor, Bob Tholkes, using e-mail rjtholkes@gmail.com