

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
November 2011

© SABR

Vol. 4 No. 11

IN MEMORIAM: DAVID W. BALL

His several SABR friends and research colleagues were shocked and saddened to learn by via a posting by David Nemeč on the Nineteenth Century Committee listserve on October 29 of the passing of David W. Ball, of Cincinnati, at his home, on October 26.

Age 60, Dr. Ball, a classicist with a doctorate in Roman History and a librarian at the University of Cincinnati, is survived by his sister, Sandra Ball, and two nephews.

Dr. Ball worked extensively in nineteenth-century baseball history, contributing to SABR's *Baseball Research Journal*, compiling a register of nineteenth century inter-club transactions and writing two biographies of nineteenth century players for SABR's Bioproject, several book reviews for the newsletter of the Nineteenth Century Committee, and a biography of O. P. Caylor that appeared in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Within his adoptive home state of Ohio, David was an expert on Cincinnati and Columbus in the American Asso-

ciation, and completed the day-by-day research for the five seasons of Columbus AA baseball for the Nineteenth Century Committee AA project. He was currently serving as book editor of the journal *Base Ball*.

Base Ball founding editor and MLB historian John Thorn noted in a post to the listserve that Dr. Ball "was a brilliant essayist on baseball, a Classics scholar, an outstanding contributor, and a friend."

An online guestbook through which condolences may be expressed to the family has been posted at <http://obit.ChasAMillerSons.com>

originals TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

CHARLES DICKENS
WATCHED BALL PLAY
AT NIAGARA FALLS IN
1842

In 1842, the famed British novelist made a whirlwind tour of the United States and Canada. In his subsequent *American Notes*, he recorded his impressions of some ball play on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. Wrote Dickens, "In the evening time, when the women and children were leaning over the balconies

watching the men [British soldiers] as they played at ball and other games on the grass before the door, they often presented a little picture of cheerfulness and animation which made it quite a pleasure to pass that way." Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 241.

MORE BALL PLAY IN SPROAT'S DITTIES FOR CHILDREN

Our Protoball compilation already lists, as 1821.1, Nancy Sproat's book *Little Ditties for Little Children*, which had an illustration of three children discussing going to play a bat and ball game. For a fuller description including the full text, see David Block's *Baseball Before We Knew It*, p. 190. But eight years earlier in her first version, called *Ditties for Children*, Sproat featured a different illustration and a different text with an even more didactic (if that's possible) message. In "Little Charles," there is a detailed illustration of a boy, with a bat over his left shoulder and a ball in his right hand, walking through a fence opening. The bat is interesting because, with a thin handle and thicker head, it resembles more closely later wood-tuned bat. The ball, however, ap-

pears to be about softball-sized. The accompanying text, however, is longer and more detailed:

Well, Charles is highly pleas'd to day,

I gave him leave to go and play

Upon the green at bat and ball;

And when he heard his playmates call,

Away he sprung across the plain,

To join the merry train.

But here he comes -- why, what means this?

I wonder what has gone amiss--

Why Charles, why came you back so soon?

I gave you leave to stay till noon.

"I know it, Pa, and I intended

To play till every game was ended;

But to say the truth, I could not bear

To hear those little fellows swear--

They cast such horrid, frightful oaths

From their abominable mouths,

And cursed so bold and fearlessly,

That cold chills ran over me--

For I was seized with awful dread,

That some of them would drop down dead--

And so I turned and came away,

For, Pa, I was *afraid* to stay."

Anyone wishing to see this source and its illustration, and who has access to *Early American Imprints, Second Series* (Shaw-Shoemaker), see #S28336 or S28337. [Nancy Dennis

Sproat], "Little Charles" in *Ditties for Children* (New York: Samuel Wood and Sons, 1813), pp. 26-27.

A PRESIDENT'S
NAMESAKE
REMEMBERS BALL
GAMES AT SCHOOL IN
THE 1850S

In his 1935 autobiography, *An Old Boy Remembers*, John Quincy Adams (born in 1849 and apparently named for the recently-deceased ex-president) looked back at the ball games of his district school in western New York. Referring to a half-acre lot outside the school building, Adams wrote, "The lot was large enough for the sports of those days, and one old cat, two old cat, and base ball as then played, were as popular as similar games are today." John Quincy Adams, *An Old Boy Remembers* (Boston: Ruth Hill, Publisher, 1935), p. 40.

FUTURE HISTORIAN
PLAYED BALL IN NEW
YORK CITY IN THE 1850S

John Bach McMaster, who later had an illustrious career as an historian, recalled how in the 1850s in New York City, he and his chums played ball wherever they could, even in winter: "During the winter my time was spent at school and in such sports as city boys could have. Our playground was the street and a vacant lot on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue. Behind its high fence plastered with advertisements, we played baseball

with the soft ball of that day." [John Bach McMaster], "Young John Bach McMaster: A Boyhood in New York City," *New York History* vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1939), pp. 320-321.

BOY SCOUTS FOUNDER
PLAYED TOWN BALL

Reminiscing about his Ohio childhood right before the Civil War, Daniel Carter Beard lamented that in Painesville, there was a lack of ball games (except shinny, a game that resembled modern-day field hockey). But when his family relocated to Cincinnati about 1859, he found a more active crowd of boys. Beard, later the founder of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910, played a variety of games including "town ball, the predecessor of baseball." Daniel Carter Beard, *Hardly a Man Is Now Alive: The Autobiography of Dan Beard* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1939), pp. 75 and 110.

BALL-PLAYING
RANKLES OHIO
MINISTER IN 1822

In 1822, minister John Rankin moved to Ripley, Ohio, in Brown County along the Ohio River. According to his biographer, "Wickedness of every kind abounded-- ball-playing, frolicking, dancing, and drinking were favorite pastimes." Rankin attacked "drunkards and ball-players from the pulpit." No report on who won that morality dispute. Andrew Ritchie, *The Soldier, The Battle, and The Victory:*

Being A Brief Account of the Work of Rev. John Rankin in the Anti-Slavery Cause (Cincinnati: Western Tract and Book Society, 1876), p. 26

BALL PLAY IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA IN THE 1850S

Looking back at his boyhood in the Fort Wayne area in the 1850s, Judge Ivory George Kimball wrote about the ball games:

There were several games of ball played when the weather would permit. The first was town ball and was played somewhat after the style of baseball, but without outfielders. The bases were much nearer together than in baseball. There is no question that baseball is an outgrowth of the old town ball. Another ball game was called 'Two Old Cat,' in which there was a batter at each end and when one of them hit they exchanged places, and either could be put out before he reached the other plate. As I remember only four could play at once.

No outfielders in town ball? Is there any other record of this? Ivory George Kimball, *Recollections from a Busy Life 1843 to 1911* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnahan Press, 1912), p. 31

originals

THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahoo group now and then

during the month of October.

DISCOVERIES

De Bost criticism

The reason for the sudden retirement from base ball of prominent Knickerbocker Charles De Bost in 1859, long reported to have been due to criticism of his play in the press, was illuminated by discovery in the *New-York Atlas* by Bob Tholkes of the critical items, which he posted. John Thorn noted that its substance fit with a passage in an 1865 letter of Alexander Cartwright to De Bost.

INQUIRIES

Pythians rejection at the 1867 National Association Convention

Ryan Swanson posted a request for the primary source of the connection between the Pythians' rejected application to the Pennsylvania state base ball association and the banning of black clubs by the national association.

originals

150 YEARS AGO

from the pages of the New York Sunday Mercury

November 10, 1861

MONMOUTH VS. WAVERLY. The return game between the second nines of these junior clubs, which was played at Brooklyn on the 8th inst., proved to be a very fine

game, and was played in double quick time, occupying only one hour and twenty-five minutes... for the Monmouth...G. Wright (a three-footer), caught a fly-ball in centre field finely.

November 17, 1861

A PECULIAR MATCH--

On Friday last, a somewhat peculiar kind of a match was played on the ground of the Star Club of South Brooklyn. The conditions of the game were: the nine making the LEAST runs should gain the victory, and the player scoring the most runs should gain the ball. The Nines were designated by "Skaats," and "Fairbanks Nine." The former was composed of players from the Hamilton, Star, Powhatan, and Waverly Clubs. Each player was numbered, and the runs made by one player scored to the one on the other nine of the same number. The contest was interesting from its novelty, and was productive of much pleasantry and amusement. The game was won by Fairbanks' side, the score being 14 to 18. Bergen of the Powhatan Club had the best score, and therefore took the ball.

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