

# Originals.

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## THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahoogroup during the past month of June to pursue a number of topics.

### INQUIRIES

#### *I am severely remiss*

David Dyte inquired for the venue for viewing the report of the 1845 match on the Union Star grounds between teams from New York and Brooklyn.

#### **The Book of Baseball, 1911**

Priscilla Astifan asked for information about a book said to have reminiscences by early players. George Thompson posted a link on the subject.

#### *N. D. McLaughlin*

Richard Hershberger sent a note inquiring about the umpire of a non-New York rules game if 1855; McLaughlin is listed as a Knickerbockers member. John Thorn sent a couple of biographical notes, including McLaughlin's age, which prompted posts about the frequency with which men in their late 30s continued, in the pre-Civil years, to participate as players in general and pitchers specifically, which morphed into a discussion

of the striker - pitcher duel at the time, with David Dyte, David Ball and Bob Tholkes adding observations.

### SOURCES

### DISCOVERIES

#### ***First Club in Rockland County Founded April 1856***

Jerry Kuntz posted a newspaper item announcing a club formation. John Thorn added more information on local clubs. Richard Hershberger sent a note considering it "barely possible" that a club initiated at that time played New York Rules. Jerry later posted a description of the club's first game which indicated that the New York Rules were likely in use, though ten players were used. In response to Jack Little's post he noted that fielding positions were not available. Jerry added a December 1856 item in the same paper in which a child's composition mentioned two kinds of ball-playing. Larry McCray sent the list of foundation dates for upstate New York clubs gathered by the Origins Committee's Spread project. Jerry inquired if the spread to the area owed its direction to such transport arteries as the Erie Canal and the Hudson River.

### TANGENT

Richard Hershberger added a discussion of possible positions assumed by 10th players. John Thorn posted a note that the Empire Club used two catchers in an 1856 match, though he could not immediately provide the reference. Richard considered that the practice may have reflected the onset of swift pitching and the lack of backstops.

originals

### CORRESPONDENCE SENT TO Originals.

Tom Altherr sends the following items:

#### **ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND BASEBALL- TYPE GAMES BEFORE THE PRESIDENCY**

A. Lincoln's appreciation of baseball during the Civil War years has sufficient documentation, as William Mead and Paul Dickson declared in *Baseball: The Presidents' Game*. But there's some murkiness about his earlier experiences. Protoball has weighed in on a couple of references, especially a citation from James Gourley, that in the mid-1830s, in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln played town ball. Gourley was one of several "informants" that early

Lincoln biographer, William Herndon, relied on for corroborating testimony. In that same interview, Gourley remarked that in 1844 he, Lincoln and others played fives, a type of handball game. Then Gourley stated: "Lincoln played ball the day before his nomination [in May, 1860]-- probably he played Some in the morning-- Early." (Gourley references, p. 451 and p. 453 in Douglas O. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants*, University of Illinois Press, 1998).

This statement, and maybe others, gave rise to claims that Lincoln allegedly said the Republicans coming to congratulate him would have to wait until he got another turn at bat. Mead and Dickson dismissed that story as unlikely. Another Herndon informant, Charles Zane, said that the game played that day was fives, not town ball (*Herndon's Informants*, p. 492.) Other books have repeated the town ball claim as a certainty. One source said Lincoln "tossed" town ball that day. Tossing is a physical action more suited to town ball.

Whatever the case about that nomination day, several of Herndon's informants spoke of the younger Lincoln as a ball player. Gourley was quite direct in characterizing the game they played as "old fashioned town ball." Andrew Kirk listed town ball and another early baseball-type game, cat, with other recreations cur-

rent in the Springfield area circa 1840. Similarly Bunbry Lloyd recalled that Kentuckians of Lincoln's generation played "generally ball-- corner ball, called bull pen, cat & town ball." Abner Ellis linked Lincoln to ball play in New Salem, Illinois circa 1833. And J. Rowan Herndon remembered Lincoln as "fond of Exercise," including "Paying [sic] Ball." (*Herndon's Informants*, pp. 603, 533, 170, and 92, respectively).

### CARLISLE, PA BANS BALL PLAY AT THE MARKET-HOUSE

The borough of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which would become famous later in the century for its indigenous star athletes at the Carlisle Institute, banned ball play at the market-house, as early as 1815. An ordinance concerning nuisances warned residents not to "frequent and use the market house as a place for playing at ball, or any game whatever" or face a fine up to ten dollars. An 1840 version of the same law listed the same prohibition.

### NICHOLAS BLUNDELL, STOOLBALL, HANDBALL, AND MERRY-NIGHT

In a previous version of Protoball, a more accurate provenance of Nicholas Blundell's May 14, 1715 diary reference to stoolball was requested. The most recent version of Protoball supplies such a citation, an 1895 selection

of entries from Blundell's journal. Now there exists a three - volume reprinting of what appears to be his whole journal. The entry in the journal for May 14th, 1715, appears with one more word, "had", inserted than does the 1895 version.

More importantly, these three volumes show Blundell, a large landowner in a Lancashire town called Little Crosby, to have been quite a sportsman. His pursuits ran more to the outdoor field sports, hunting, horseracing, and the like, but he also was passionate about lawn bowling. If we can trust to the indexes, he wrote only once about a ball-type game, this one about stoolball. Perhaps he observed more of these types of games than he described in the journal.

The term "Merry-Night" in the entry may be of some use in tracking down other ball games. Merry-nights (or toward the Scottish border, "merry-neets") were rustic festivals, apparently often impromptu, that involved feasting, dancing, and according to one dictionary source, "amusing games." Some of these merry-nights featured handball contests, with tansy-cakes also being a prize. It may be possible that if we locate more descriptions of merry-nights, we will uncover more references to early ball games. Because stoolball may have had no bats but hand propulsion of the ball instead, some of these

merry-night handball games may have actually been stoolball, not fives or some sort of variation we often associate with the term handball today. Last, these merry-nights may also help us gauge the continued participation of women in these types of ball games.

## ANOTHER "BASE" RECONSIDERATION

In my 2000 article in *NINE*, I cited William Southgate about games of "base" in Scarborough, ME, that included Native American players. After further thought, however, and keeping in mind my Spring 2009 *Base Ball* article about prisoner's base, I believe it possible that the game in question in Maine was prisoner's base. According to Southgate, the game was played on a beach. players squeezed early types of ball games into some small fields, but depending on the dimensions of the beach, the game of prisoner's base may have fit the beach dimensions just as well.

originals

# 150 YEARS AGO

*from the pages of the New  
York Sunday Mercury*

**July 1, 1860**

### THE MUFFIN MATCH.

The match between the muffs of the Putnam and Excelsior Club, of Brooklyn, which was played on

Monday last, on the Putnam ground, was, as anticipated, an extraordinary affair, and productive of much amusement. We must confess that we have rarely seen anything to equal it, in some respects. The batting was of a high order, and home runs became as common as dishwater, five being made on the Excelsior side, and twelve on the Putnam. The Excelsiors fielded rather better than their opponents; but in the eighth inning they "took it all back" by letting the Puts get twenty-two runs. Hobby and Van Valkenberg, of the Putnam, and Wicks and Brainerd, of the Excelsior, should never be allowed to play in the muffin nines again-- they belong somewhere else. People who can hold a ball (except by accident) when it is thrown to them, reflect upon their associate muffs, and don't deserve to have a place in their nines. Mr. D. Godwin won the admiration of all present for his superior style of running-- as graceful and fleet as a gazelle, his performance excited the envy of his associates...

It was a "high old game" all through, and was "as good as a play" to many of the spectators. We may mention on striking tableau, which was presented through the agency of Andriese and Clark. The latter, having struck the ball set out with all his might and main for the first base, which was carefully guarded by the ever-vigilant Andriese. Clark overran the base, and the ball overran Andriese; each, however, made for the object of his

pursuit, and Clark picked up the base, which his foot had dislodged from its accustomed place, and held it aloft as a trophy of victory; while Andriese, quickly grabbing up the ball from the ground, turned a double somerset, and landing on one leg, projected the hand which held the ball gracefully toward the base, high in the air, and called for judgment. Inasmuch as Clark, though under the base, held two fingers and a thumb over it, the umpire decided that he "had the base", and wasn't out. The attitude of the two players "called down the house" for a moment, and then the play went on.

The proceedings were wound up by a fine entertainment given by the Putnam nine, to which the representatives of all clubs present did ample justice. The Crescent City Club, of New Orleans, was among the clubs honored.

## SUBMISSION OF ITEMS

Readers are encouraged to forward corrections, notes, and other types of correspondence. Such items will be gratefully received, and published in the following issue. Send to the editor, Bob Tholkes, using e-mail [rjtholkes@msn.com](mailto:rjtholkes@msn.com).