

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
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CHAIR DETAILS NEW EFFORTS

From Committee Chair
Larry McCray:

In recent months, the Origins Committee has launched two new efforts, and we could use a bit of help with both from the members of the Origins Committee.

NEW PROJECT ON THE SPREAD OF BASE BALL

The Committee will, in February, publicly launch a new Project on the Spread of Base Ball. This project will collect local information dealing with the expansion of the modern game of baseball - the game now identified with the Knickerbocker Rules of 1845 - from New York both throughout and beyond the US. We have at this point located in published sources about one hundred accounts of the spread of the game to particular locations, and will invite SABR members and others to scout around locally and to add to this initial data base. We hope that an interesting map of the diffusion of baseball will thus begin to take shape.

For each locality of interest to a contributor, we will invite known claims of:

[A], the first game[s] played by the new base ball rules; [B], the first club[s] formed to play the new game; and [C] any reports of any predecessor games played in the area.

In time, this will provide us with a more complete understanding of how, when, and perhaps why the New York game grew to become America's national pastime; it can also yield a better idea of the many earlier forms of ballplaying that the new game replaced.

Peter Garver of the SABR staff is already designing ways to display the results on maps and tables. The project will also include the origins of play in other nations.

There are numerous bite-sized and meal-sized tasks that Committee members can potentially help with:

- coordinating input from contributors for particular towns/states/regions
- helping identify and search specialized data sources
- assisting contributors who have little experience with historical research
- helping manage the project

- other tasks that seem interesting
- help with Beta-testing in January

THE NEW ORIGINS COMMITTEE WEBSITE

A barebones version of the website is already up at <http://research.sabr.org/origins/>. Take a look at it.

The idea of the site is both to help those beginning origins research to make a start, and to share data on current research aids among Origins Committee members themselves. It is also the repository of the past issues of "Originals."

There is plenty of room for improvement on the site, and for new ideas about making it useful for those inside and outside SABR. Please consider whether there is a role for you in:

- expanding the coverage of research resources -- adding links to relevant sites, special collections, free or subscription online sources, and so on.
- serving as webmaster or pagemaster
- organizing other new features -- Mini-reviews of new books/articles? New find of the month? Tips about obscure online resources?
- other tasks that seem like they would be fun to do.

We also seek help with the general administration of the Committee itself. To participate in any of these areas, or to request more information, contact Larry McCray at 781-862-2976 or at Lmccray@mit.edu.

originals

THE MONTH IN 19cBB

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

DISCOVERIES

Base Ball in a Civil War Camp

Dennis Pajot posted an 1863 note from Milwaukee that the 24th Wisconsin had played base ball in camp. It was noted by Peter Mancuso that it is an example of the game being spread by someone other than New Yorkers.

Ball in Sacramento, 1851

John Thorn posted notes from papers reporting ball played in 1851 and 1854 in the California city. Jack Little noted that it was the metropolis of California at that time.

Stolen Roller

Richard Hershberger sent an offer of a reward for the recovery of stolen property published by an Oneida, N.Y. cricket club in 1848, noting that the game was surprisingly widespread in that part of the state.

First Slide

John Thorn sent an 1857 note in which "dropping" was executed by a runner stealing a base, apparently to avoid a tag.

Base Ball in Wisconsin, 1819

Dennis Pajot uncovered an 1865 note about an early Wisconsin resident said to have played base ball at Prairie du Chien, in the state's southwest, in 1819. Richard Hershberger was surprised at the early date. David Ball agreed with Richard that the date may be an approximation, and that the separate mentions of base ball and town ball in the note may have been a retrojection and that we need information about settlement patterns in the area. Monica Nucciarone mentioned that some early settlers were German, and that a base ball game is now also known to have been played there. This was considered by Richard to be less likely than the introduction of the game into the area by American easterners. David restated that a recollection 35 years after the date is of doubtful reliability.

FOLLOW UP

Silver Ball Championship - Definition

Craig Waff added an 1861 note (published April 3, nine days before the first shot of the war was fired at Fort Sumter) detailing the silver ball prepared for a proposed competition that year. As mentioned earlier, that competition was postponed until 1862.

MEDIA ATTENTION

The Onion on the origin of baseball

Richard Hershberger sent a link to a recent *Onion* article recreating the scene at Doubleday's invention of baseball, which however did not point out that the whole thing actually never happened. David Dyte and Bob Tholkes lamented the persistence of belief in the myth.

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ROUND CAT FOLLOW-UP

From Tom Altherr:

Following up on Larry McCray's segment about round cat in the October *Originals*, I tracked down copies of the four Bernice Kelly Harris novels which mention it, out of curiosity about what the term meant to a 20th-century author writing about eastern North Carolina:

Purslane (1939): Indicates that round cat was not baseball, was for young children, and an activity that any baseball players would indulge in while just goofing around.

Portulaca (1941): Suggests that round cat imitatedv baseball to the extent of using three outs.

Sage Quarter (1945): No information on rules or play other than a ball and bat were involved.

Wild Cherry Road (1951): Heckling a pitcher during a baseball game, fans yell that he should "stick to round cat."

Clearly, whatever round cat was, eastern North

Carolínians considered it as an inferior version of baseball, as a kids' game or for substandard players. the author Bernice Kelly Harris seems to have considered it as a common childhood game of enough importance to mention in four novels.

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NEW IN THE PROTOBALL CHRONOLOGY (CONTINUED)

Third in our series of installments.

1850c.26 -- Needed: More Festival Days – Like Fast Day? -- for Playing

1851.5 – Robert E. Lee Promotes Cricket at West Point?

1852.10 – Fictional “Up-Country” Location Has Bass-Ball and Wicket

1853.7 – Didactic Novel Pairs “Bass-Ball” and Rounders at Youths’ Outing

1853.8 – Were Bats and Balls Coinage, They Were Millionaires

1853.9 – Strolling Past a Ballgame in Elysian Fields

1853.10 – First Base Ball Reporters – Cauldwell, Bray, Chadwick, Kelly

1854.10 -- Ball Played at Hobart College, Geneva NY

1854.13 – English Visitor Sees Wicket at Harvard

1855c.14 -- Base Ball Comes to Rochester NY

1855.16 – Scholar Deems 1855 the End of the Cricket Era in America

1855.17 – In Novel, a Girl is Chided for Preferring Playing Bass-Ball To Chores

1855.18 – Stodgy Novel Makes Brief Mention of Bygone Ballplaying.

1855.19 – Clipper Editor: NYC Now Has Five Clubs “in Good Condition”

1855.20 – Base Ball Game Reaches Really Modern Duration; Score is 52 to 38

1855.21 – Spirit Eyes Three-Year Knickerbocker - Gothams Rivalry

1855.22 – Search for Base Ball Supremacy Begins? It’s the Knicks, For Now

1855.23 – Association Rules Appear in Syracuse Newspaper

1856.19 – Five-Player Base Ball Reported in NY, WI

1856.20 -- 100 to 98 Round Ball Game Played, After a Most Sticky Rules Negotiation

1856.21 – Trenton Club Forms for “Invigorating Amusement”

1857.24 – London Rounders Players Arrested

1857.25 – Season Opens in Boston with Olympics Victory

1857.26 – The Tide Starts Turning in New England – Trimountains Adopt NY Game

1857.27 – Game of Wicket Reaches IA

1857.28 -- Boston Sees Eight Hour Match of the Massachusetts Game

1857.29 – Six-Player Town-ball Teams Play for Gold Ring in Philly

1857.30 – Olympic Club’s Version of MA Game Rules Published

1857.31 – Rounders “Now Almost Entirely Displaced by Cricket.” : English Scholar

1858.22 Rochester NY Editor: Base Ball to Curb Tobacco, Swearing (if not Spitting)

1858.37 – In English Novel, Base-Ball Doesn’t Occupy Boys Very Long

1858.38 – Brooklyn Base Ball Admirer Sizes up the 1858 Season

1858.39 – San Francisco Organizes for Base Ball . . . Again

SUBMISSION OF ITEMS.

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