

# Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research  
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## TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

### MAINE AUTHOR JOHN NEAL REFERS TO BALL PLAY

Although the Portland, ME writer John Neal is more known for his literature and his athletics penchant centered on a gymnasium movement in that city in the late 1820s and 1830s, he did make at least one reference to ball play. In an 1835 essay which appeared in *The Token* for that year, Neal included a birthday celebration that surrounded a gathering of ball play. The birthday seemed more important than the ball play, yet Neal's casual reference may indicate the recreation fairly common. John Neal, "Children --What Are They?" reprinted in Benjamin Lease and Hans-Joachim Lang, eds., *The Genius of John Neal: Selections from His Writings* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), p. 196

### BALL PLAY AS A BRIEF RESPITE FROM ACADEMIC DRUDGERY

In an 1869 scathing portrayal of schoolboy life in New York City forty years earlier, an anonymous contributor likened his miserable experiences

to being in prison. But one reference to recreation outside the school building, including ball play, unde-scored his confinement: "Broad unenclosed acres stretching out of sight, where we were wont to fly our kites, play at marbles, ball, and tag, made up its background." Even at that recess was a rare occurrence. "My School-Boy Days in New York City Forty Years Ago," *The New York Teacher and American Educational Monthly* (March, 1869), p. 90

### TENNESSEE TEACHER PLAYED TOWN BALL

Thinking back on his boyhood in Robertson County, Tennessee in the 1850s, James William Turner, himself a longtime Illinois teacher, fondly recalled one of his teachers as an enthusiastic participant in school recreations: "I remember Sanford Granger as a great lover of school games of all kinds. He was a very fast runner, and none of the larger pupils were his equals in a game of base [presumably prisoner's base], or any other game in which swift running was a factor. He could knock the ball farther than any of them in a game of "town ball," and seldom missed when at the bat. James W. Turner, *Half a Century in the School Room or Personal*

*Memoirs of Jas. W. Turner* (Carrier Mills, Illinois: Turner Publishing Company, 1920), p. 19

### TOWN BALL IN LAN- CASTER, OHIO IN THE 1830s

In his autobiography, Seymour D. Carpenter, later a doctor and Union lieutenant colonel, remarked about ball games at his rural school near Lancaster, Ohio in the 1830s:

"BALL GAMES. The ball games were of two kinds -- "town ball" and "bull pen ball." In the former, two boys with bats would stand opposite each other, about ten yards apart, with a pitcher behind each; the ball was thrown from one pitcher to the other, the batter attempting to strike it; if he succeeded the batter ran alternately from each standing point, the pitcher meantime recovering the ball, and trying to put it in the base, which put the player [presumably the runner] out; the game was decided by the number of runs."

Although Carpenter termed this "town ball," the running functions much more resembled those of cricket or wicket, but perhaps early versions of town ball consisted of this format, which is more rudimentary than the game the 1858 Dedham, Massachusetts rules described. The ensuing details on "bull

pen ball" made clear that there was no bat involved, but was instead a kind of dodge ball. As Carpenter was born in 1826, these descriptions might have also carried over to the 1840s. Seymour D. Carpenter, "Autobiography," in Edwin Sawyer Walker, ed., *Genealogical Notes of the Carpenter Family* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Journal Co., Printers., 1907), pp. 78-79

#### MORE ON LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA BALL PLAY

Last month I included material from a Lancaster, Pennsylvania author about ball play in his boyhood. The same writer, William Riddle, made further references in a book of verse celebrating "Old Lancaster." Commenting on current recreation in the town in about 1908, Riddle reminded readers that there had been a time in the 1840s when "Shinny," "Town" and "Corner-ball" were all the go in spring and fall. William Riddle, *Tribute to Old Lancaster City and County Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster County Historical Society, 1908), p. 49

#### CORNERBALL IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA IN THE 1830s

In an 1888 collection of poetry, Henry L. Fisher versified about cornerball:

"The ruling school-day game was corner-ball--  
A favorite one among the larger boys;  
Methinks I hear again, th'  
exultant shout--

"I hit you fair, I'm in, and you are out!"

*Methinks I hear, again,  
the louder noise*

Perhaps, the merriest ever heard on earth--

Of overflowing, rural, school-day mirth."

In another poem, Fisher waxed nostalgic about other boyhood frolics presumably also in the 1830s, when he and his chums were the "Brave knights of bat and ball." Henry L. Fisher, *Olden Times: or, Pennsylvania Rural Life, Some Fifty Years Ago, and Other Poems* (York, PA: Fisher Brothers, Publ., 1888), pp.211 and 438.

#### A BAT AND BALL PRESENT

An issue of 1842 of *Brother Jonathan* contained a short mention of bat and ball play. In a short story entitled "Lucy Gray," the writer reminisced about his school days when the suitor of his teacher, Lucy Gray, "made me a present of the handsomest bat and ball." Ezekiel Jones, "Lucy Gray," *Brother Jonathan* vol. 1, no. 8, February 16, 1842, p. 198

#### ELECTION DAY BALL PLAY IN MASSACHU- SETTS IN 1830

Worcester, Massachusetts lawyer Christopher Columbus Baldwin recorded in his diary for May 26, 1830: Wednesday: Election Day: Eat cake: See the people play ball and attend a horse race." Baldwin, later a librarian for the American Antiquarian Society in that city, didn't specify what ball game he saw or

who the "people" were playing it, but his entry is further confirmation that early 19th-century Americans tied recreation and politics together, allowing ball play and horseracing to occur on the same day as ballot-casting. Jack Larkin and Caroline Sloat, *A Place in My Chronicle: A New Edition of the Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 1829-1835* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2010), p. 50

#### WASHINGTON GLADDEN AND BASEBALL

In the Protoball listings, we have one, 1666.1, in which the noted Social Gospel minister Washington Gladden commented on John Bunyan's famous cat game passage. In his autobiography, Gladden recalled playing some ball at Williams College from 1856 to 1859. "We played, among ourselves, an occasional game of what we called baseball --class against class;" he wrote, "and in our senior year we had one match with Amherst, but the interest in athletic sports was a negligible quantity." Gladden's laconic tone may have resulted from the fact that Amherst drubbed Williams in that contest, 73 to 32. But in another writing, an 1866 sermon on amusements, Gladden took a different attitude, praising such diversions if played morally. He lamented that baseball in that year suffered from too much gambling, yet earlier in the sermon he reflected on how playing ball had posed something of a mor-

al dilemma in his 1840s childhood in upstate New York: "In my boyhood I used to think that if I became a Christian it would be wrong for me to play ball; or if I engaged in the sport I must do so in a serious thoughtful way, with none of the hilarity and abandon which made the ball-ground so attractive to me." He went on to admit that his "boyish exuberance..."proved stronger than those mistaken convictions of duty." Washington Gladden, *Recollections* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), p. 79, and Gladden, *Amusements: Their Uses and Their Abuses: A Sermon Preached in the First Congregational Church, North Adams, Mass., Sunday Evening, November 26, 1866* (North Adams, MA: James T. Robinson and Company, 1866), pp. 6 and 19

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## THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahogroup during the blustery month of March to pursue a number of topics of interest.

### DISCOVERIES

***Two Old Cat mentioned in early 19th century memoir***  
Priscilla Astifan found an 1880s memoir by a pre - Civil War player describing two old cat play, including a note that a pitcher had used the modern underhand (submarine) motion,

and that it was considered and "insult to the batter." Richard Hershberger and Jack Little added comments on these details.

***Creighton and the playing of two sports***  
Craig Waff posted a *Spirit of the Times* note mentioning that Creighton's effectiveness as a pitcher was on at least one occasion diminished by his simultaneous employment as a cricket bowler.

THORN, OBH

### ***EDEN Excerpt in New York Times***

John Thorn, newly designated Official Baseball Historian for mlb.com, opened his tenure with an initial effort to elevate the general public's awareness of the New York Game's true origins by publishing an excerpt from his new book, *Baseball in the Garden on Eden*, in the venerable New York daily, and posted the link. The *Times* returned the favor by misdating the accompanying historic photo. The article contained little-known biographical information about Louis F. Wadsworth, including the possibility that he was the first player to change teams for financial considerations, an assumption on which David Ball posted his views. John thereupon posted more extensive information on Wadsworth, which David Nemeč elaborated upon. Richard Hershberger sent an elaboration on another topic in John's *Times* article, concerning Wadsworth and the Mills Commission. John also relayed with his comments a note

from John Bowman about a *New York Times* article in 1916 that also placed Alexander Cartwright in Cooperstown at the time of the immaculate conception of 1838.

TANGENT

The material on Wadsworth touching upon the subject of pre-Civil War player movement between senior clubs, Craig Waff provided a list of player movements in the period that are known to him. Craig termed this "revolving"; Harry Higham expressed his belief that the term "revolving" involved contract jumping. John Thorn added to Craig's list (*sorry- ed.*)

### 'NOTHER ORIGINS COMMITTEE

#### ***This Just In***

John Thorn posted MLB's announcement that it has formed a committee of 12 notables, which it is giving a familiar name, the Baseball Origins Committee, to investigate baseball's origins. John, in his new capacity as MLB's OBH, will act as chair. Original Origins Committee chair Larry McCray is one of the members as is Origins Committee stalwart David Block. John, Rod Nelson, Priscilla Astifan, David Dyte and Richard Hershberger traded comments about Doubleday's future in baseball history, so to speak. Enrico Accenti inquired about the role in the group of MBL Commissioner Bud Selig; John assured Enrico that Selig's role would be as an ordinary member only.

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