

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
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CONVENTION MEETING

THORN ADDRESSES ROLE OF NEW MLB COMMISSION

About a dozen members attended the Origins Committee meeting on Thursday, July 7, at the SABR convention in Long Beach, California. President Larry McCray opened by summarizing the group's activities over the past year. A project to produce an origins research guide for new researchers is under way, and the newsletter continues to be produced. Introducing John Thorn, present to discuss the work of the recently-selected MLB commission on baseball's origins which he heads as MLB historian, McCray noted that Thorn has resigned as editor of *Base Ball*, the journal he founded to publish articles on the early game, including the origins era; he has been succeeded by Peter Morris.

John then described the MLB committee's mission as "serial beginnings": the chronicling of local origins and the discovery of principles or commonalities in those origins. In addition to reaching out to local sources of information, a fan-friendly space on the MLB site will bring the

discovery of beginnings to the personal level by inviting the baseball public to contribute their personal origins stories to the discussion.

Addressing the question of how SABR's Origins committee can support MLB's efforts, President McCray suggested initiatives in expanding the scope of the origins discussion to elements of the game, to derivative games such as indoor baseball and softball and to international origins.

Thorn and McCray also announced that the Protoball Chronology and the Games Tabulation, which presently are housed in baseballreference.com, will be databased and reorganized on MLB.com.

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THE MONTH IN 19cBB

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

ON THE LINKS

International Baseball Federation on Baseball's Origins

John Thorn posted a link to an anonymous essay on the origins of base ball

which he characterized as "drivel."

IDLE SPECULATION

Idle Speculation for Today

John Thorn noted, idly, that the pitching distance set at the first NABBP convention in 1857, fifteen paces, was the distance used by Burr and Hamilton (and doubtless other duellers before them) in 1804.

DISCOVERIES

Full Disclosure: "base ball" in Virginia, 1842"

Richard Hershberger sent a note that he had found a reference to "base ball" in an area of the country, the South, where he has posited that the primary "proto" bat and ball game was called "town ball".

INQUIRIES

"refreshments and wrenches" - 1858 post game

Priscilla Astifan inquired about the meaning of an unusual description of a post-game celebration in 1858. John Thorn, Craig Waff, Bob Tholkes, and Marcus Dickson took stabs at interpretation, Marcus' requiring that he call for the assistance of a party knowledgeable about the history of mixed drinks.

Deb Shattuck provided the link to a compilation of possible meanings.

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TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

MARK HOPKINS PLAYS
AND MENTIONS BALL
IN WESTERN
MASSACHUSETTS

Future physician and educator Mark Hopkins played some ball in his youth and college days. On June 16, 1815, he wrote to his brothers, who had asked what he did at school near Stockbridge, Mass.: "[you asked] what my diversions are when I go to school, you know I play ball some &c." The casual quality of the comment is striking; clearly ball is a familiar game to them all. In March, 1824, while a student at Williams College, Hopkins described to one of his brothers some Saturday afternoon ball play that featured some alcohol imbibing: "The rest of the time [after some study] we do as we please, play ball if it[']s dry. Last [S]aturday we had as good a game as I ever played there, perhaps twenty on a side, and the game I should think lasted two hours; we had three or four bottles on the carpet, and some of the fellows got pretty well towards the West Indies before we got through." Note here Hopkins indirect reference to other ball play. Later, as an instructor at Williams in 1831, Hopkins mentioned playing ball as part of a clean-up day: "This is what

we call here chip-day, and the students been sweeping and wheeling and hauling all the morning, they have now about finished, and in the afternoon I suppose will play ball." [Mark Hopkins], *Early Letters of Mark Hopkins and Others from His Brothers and Their Mother. A Picture of Life in New England from 1770 to 1857* (New York: The John Day Company, 1929), pp. 18, 101-102, and 236

TEACHERS WATCHING STUDENT BALL PLAY

In his 1834 manual for teachers, children's book author Jacob Abbott, himself a teacher, advocated that pedagogues pay attention to the sports played by their charges. "It is astonishing," he wrote, "what an influence is exerted by such little circumstances, as stopping at a play ground a moment, to notice with interest, though perhaps without saying a word, speed of running,---or exactness of aim, ---the force with which a ball is struck, ---or the dexterity with which it is caught or thrown." He then warned that teachers should not be too friendly and lose authority over the students, but that this type of interest in their sports was appropriate. Abbott also so advised in 1839 and 1844 editions. George B. Emerson reprinted Abbott's advice verbatim in his own 1842 teaching manual, *The Schoolmaster*.

Jacob Abbott, *The Teacher: Or Moral Influences Employed in the Instruction and Government of*

the Young (Boston: William Peirce, 1834), p. 146

WICKET PLAY AT AMHERST COLLEGE IN THE 1840S

William G. Hammond, a student at Amherst College in the mid-1840s, was a wicket enthusiast. In his diary entry for October 3, 1846, he wrote: "After dinner, which comes to pass between twelve and one, played a game of wicket, with a party of fellows, in the grove behind the colleges, where there is a gymnasium. Had a fine game, though I, knowing little of the rules, was soon bowled out." Despite his first bad performance, a couple of weeks later he was back at it, helping to arrange a wicket match with the juniors. That match took place October 16th, and Hammond described it thus in his diary: "After dinner there was a great game at wicket between twelve picked men of our class and twelve of the juniors. The first game our men were badly beaten 66 to 34. The second they [our players] beat [them] 49 to 40. A third to be played tomorrow will decide it." The next day his class won handily: "We beat them tremendously, 71 to 46. We have beaten them now in every way." A year later, on September 18, 1847, he observed more wicket play: "A great trial at wicket between the sophs and freshmen this afternoon, in which the freshies were most tremendously beat, in spite of their numbers." Four days later he recorded another match: Our class played

against the seniors at wicket today, and beat them, getting two games out of three, as well as a majority of whole tally. This we did last year too." A week later, Hammond again noted, "The rest of the P.M. was spent on the wicket ground." October 2nd' entry featured a similar notation: "P.M. was mostly spent on the wicket ground..." It is unclear whether Hammond played after that first match or was an interested onlooker. William Gardiner Hammond, *Remembrance of Amherst: An Undergraduate's Diary 1846-1848* George F. Whicher, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp.25-26, 31-33, 179, 180, 182, and 184.

MORE WICKET AT AMHERST COLLEGE

Dr. Edward Hitchcock, president of Amherst College and a passionate promoter of physical education, recalled wicket play at the college, probably before the Civil War: "In my days baseball was neither a science nor an art, but we played "wicket... on smooth and level ground about 20 feet apart were placed two "wickets," pine sticks 1 inch square and 8 to 10 feet long, supported on a block at each end so as to be easily knocked off. The ball was made of yarn, covered with stout leather, about six inches in diameter and bowled with all the power of the wicket tender at each end. The aim was to roll it as swiftly as possible at the opposite wicket and knock it down if possible. This was de-

fended by the man with the broad bat, 3 feet long, and the oval about 8 inches [broad], who must defend his wicket. If the bowler could by fair ball, striking twice between the wickets, knock down the opposite wicket, the striker was out. But if the batter could by a direct or sideways hit send the ball sideways or overhead the outside men, they, *i.e.*, the batter and his teammate at the opposite end. could run till the ball was in the hands of the bowler. But the bowler to get the batter out must with the ball in his hand knock the wicket outwards before the batter could strike his bat outside a line three feet inside the wicket...This game was played on the lowest part of the "walk" under the trees which now extend from chapel to the church. Edward Hitchcock, "Recollections", reprinted in William Gardiner Hammond, *Remembrances of Amherst: An Undergraduate's Diary 1846-1848* George F. Whicher, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 288.

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150 YEARS AGO

from the pages of the New York Sunday Mercury

August 4, 1861

The announcement of the return of the Thirteenth Regiment of Brooklyn induced the members of base ball clubs which had representatives in the regiment to make arrange-

ments to welcome their brave companions on their arrival home. Accordingly, on Tuesday last, when the Thirteenth Regiment, with their escort of military and firemen, reached the Brooklyn side of the river, they were received by a large deputation of the base ball fraternity of the city, comprising the members of the Atlantic, Excelsior, Putnam, Enterprise, Exercise, Constellation, Resolute, Niagara, Pastime, Hamilton, Brooklyn, and Continental, who ...formed a procession, under the flag of the Resolute supported on each side by a member of the Resolute and Constellation Clubs in uniform ; and having been yielded the position of honor, marched with the procession to Fort Green, where the parade was dismissed...The return of so many ball-players as were carried away by our militia regiments will of course have a revivifying effect upon our out-door sports in this vicinity, unless the greater portion again enlist, as many assert they will...It is somewhat gratifying to know that the base ball fraternity so nobly evidence their patriotism in time of danger, and are ready again to serve their country on the tented field.

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