

Originals.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research
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SABR MEETING MEETING SUMMARY

Committee chairperson Larry McCray supplies the following summary of the Committee meeting held at this year's SABR convention.

To Origins Committee Members --

The SABR 40 (Atlanta) meeting of available members of the committee on the Origins of Baseball took place on August 9. About 30 members attended.

The Chairman reviewed the committee program, outlining remaining areas where incipient projects need volunteer help. He commended the monthly committee newsletter, "Originals," and highlighted the new research finds that Tom Altherr is now publishing there. He encouraged other members to use "Originals" as a way to inform the full committee membership of new finds.

The chairman commented on the state of research on origins generally. He has heard from Mike Ross [who leads the SABR chap-

ter in the UK) that the Bobby Thomson chapter, so active in investigating British sources in the 1990s, expects to have new initiatives along those lines soon.

The chairman reminded newer members of the appeal of the 19CBB list-serve as a way to follow current news, and current debates, about origins research. He estimates that about 40 of our 270 members are already active on 19CBB.

The committee's most active research project addressed the local origins of baseball, tabulating evidence on the spread of the game across the nation and around the world. About 600 data points are now shown on the SABR-pedia site at this point, and the Protoball project's New York Spread project, engineered by new SABR member Gregory Christiano, has about 200 playing locations for the New York area. All these data were reflected on a poster presentation at the Atlanta convention, one that attracted spontaneous group discussions throughout the convention.

Much of the committee meeting itself addressed a set of propositions that, while firmly held in the past, seem less strong in light of the most recent data. These weakening ideas were suggested by our

most active researchers, including John Thorn, Peter Morris, and Richard Hershberger.

Several of these conversations addressed the nature of the spread of the game in the South following the Civil War, for which systematic data are now emerging.

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THE MONTH IN 19cBB

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

DISCOVERIES

early Yale base ball reference

Rick Stattler posted an 1844 source mentioning base ball played informally at Yale.

"the simple cricket of the country boys

Richard Hershberger sent an 1851 passage from a book of boys' games describing a boyish version of cricket and observed that the terms "wicket" and "cricket" were probably used interchangeably. John Thorn added that the same book has a good description of Prisoners' Base. David Dyte and Jack Little noted simi-

larities to a game played in their own youths.

interscholastic baseball in 1853

Richard Hershberger sent a source which claimed that two schools played a baseball game in 1853. This would be the earliest known to Richard. David Ball noted that one, Phillips, produced a number of well-known early players.

"the good old fashioned game of base"

Richard Hershberger sent an 1859 New Orleans note which supports his belief that the Knickerbockers were not playing a drastically altered form of base ball. Monica Nucciarone noted a similar item in a Honolulu paper of 1860, where an "old-fashioned" base ball game had been played. Debbie Shatner inquired if Monica knew how the game had spread to Hawaii. Monica replied with a quote from her book on Alexander Cartwright, and John Thorn noted that the alleged instigator of the Knickerbocker Rules apparently wasn't involved in spreading his game to Hawaii. Monica fired off a further piece where Cartwright comments on the game's development. Richard Hershberger sent a concluding observation.

cleeping

George Thompson asked if anyone had seen this term, used in a 'boy' book of games published in 1851, the same book referenced by Richard Hershberger in "***the simple cricket of the country boys***", above. It describes a means

of picking partners in the game of Prisoner's Base. John Thorn provided both Shakespearean and Middle English references equating it with the modern "call", an educated guess later backed up through another source.

High Stakes cricket, 1831

George Thompson posted an 1831 New York notice of a match between gentlemen of New York and gentlemen of Brooklyn for a prize of \$200.

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TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

EARLY BOSTON AND HARVARD BASE- BALL PLAY

Edward Everett Hale, a Boston literary man best known for his story "The Man without a Country," twice referred to playing what he called "base-ball" on Boston Common, perhaps as early as 1827, and at Harvard in the 1830s. In an 1885 sketch, "Boston Common and Fort Hill," about white and indigenous lads playing lacrosse and football with each other, Hale declared, "We played base-ball and foot-ball where we chose and when we chose." (*The Independent*, Nov. 26, 1885) Then, in his memoir, *A New England Boyhood* Hale stated about his Harvard days: "We had base-ball, in utter ignorance that there were ever to be written rules for base

ball, or organized clubs for playing it...." (*A New England Boyhood* [1898, p. 257]). Whether Hale and his chums actually used the term "base-ball" in the 1820s and 1830s or whether he was using a term that would be familiar to his readers is unclear.

BALL PLAY AND BOREDOM IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Most references to soldiers playing ball games during the American Revolution reflect their enthusiasm or at least a neutral notation. But in 1778 Quartermaster Sergeant Simon Griffin remarked, "Nothing to do But Play Ball in Ouer Regtment." Griffin was a member of Col. Samuel B. Webb's regiment. Griffin (whose name may have been Giffin or Giffen) may have been bored, but his statement indicates that ball play occupied the troops during downtime. Griffin, *Diary*, May 20, 1777 to March 2, 1780, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, quoted in Bonnie S. Ledbetter, "Sports and Games of the American Revolution," *Journal of Sport History*, v. 6, n. 3 (Winter, 1979), p. 29

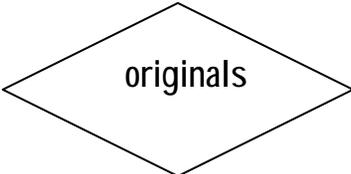
A HESSIAN CHAPLAIN COMMENTS ON BALL PLAY AMONG THE AMERICANS

In June, 1778, Philipp Waldeck, a chaplain with a Hessian regiment stationed near Long Island,

made the following observation about American ball-playing habits: "The Americans, from their youth on, participate in vigorous body exercises, and when nothing else is to be done, they hit a ball. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to see an old man playing ball with young people. This activity would be considered beneath the dignity of the old man in Germany." Bruce E. Burgoyne, ed., *Eighteenth Century America: A Hessian Report on the People, the Land, the War, As Noted in the Diary of Chaplain Philipp Waldeck (1776-1780)* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1995), p. 66

TOWN BALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN THE 1850s

Remembering his days as a student at the University of Alabama in the 1850s, George Little wrote of the penchant for playing town ball: "Our favorite outdoor game was town ball. This game was played very much like the modern game of baseball but was played with a soft rubber ball. The ball was thrown at the runner and if he was hit while between bases he was out." [George Little], *Memoirs of George Little Tuscaloosa, AL*: Weatherford Printing Company, 1924), p. 14.



150 YEARS AGO

*from the pages of the New
York Sunday Mercury*

Oct. 7, 1860, p.5

A SUGGESTION.—We observe that matches of base ball are now being got up by business establishments the *World* and *Times* news papers had a match week before last, and the *World* nine has several other matches arranged. We presume we shall next have a contest between *Spaulding's Prepared Glue* and the *Retired Physician*, or a *Brandreth's Pills* nine vs. *Townsend's Sarsparilla*. Why not? A little gratuitous advertising may, perhaps, be got in this way. But, for goodness' sakes, gentlemen, don't run the thing into the ground.

Oct. 7, 1860, p.5

THE MASSACHUSETTS MATCH FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP.— After four days playing, the \$1,000 base ball match at Worcester was adjourned, on the 25th ult., owing to the necessity of giving up the grounds to an agricultural show. The game stands: Upton, 38; Medway, 23. As it is for 100 points, it will be seen how little progress has been made; and at this rate it will take two weeks more of constant playing. The clubs are so well matched, and play so sharp, that there is inning after inning without a tally, and we are informed there has not been three instances where the ball has not been batted as

many rods. The ball is thrown with astonishing swiftness at one of the three catchers.

Oct. 7, 1860, p.5

NEWARK, OCT. 5, 1860

If a man is on third base, and a foul ball is struck, the man on third base goes back and touches the base, and the ball is fielded to the pitcher, who intentionally lets it pass him, and the man running the bases comes home, and the pitcher gets the ball and throws it to the third base, is the man out? What say you about it?

C. I. F.

Section 16 of the rules will answer the question: "No ace or base can be made on a foul ball," and "the ball shall be considered dead and out of play until it shall have been first settled in the hands of the pitcher." The man was therefore out. He could not make a base on a dead ball, and it was his business to wait on the third until the ball was settled in the hands of the pitcher.

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.