

# ORIGINS.

Newsletter of the Origins Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research  
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## THE MONTH IN 19cBB.

Origins Committee members pursued several threads of interest on the 19cBB yahoo group during the month of April.

### HOAX DETECTORS.

*Elysian Fields Soil.* Jean Ardell posted an inquiry about the *bona fides* of a collector's reported claim to have an 1846 sample of the "sacred soil" of the Elysian Fields, collected after the famous match between the Knickerbockers and the New York Club. Both John Thorn and Richard Hershberger considered it to be either an ancient or modern jest of the sort now perpetrated, as Mr. Thorn mentioned, by the Baseball Reliquary, about which Tim Wiles and Tom Shieber supplied information.

### DISCOVERIES.

*Foul Lines in Rounders?* Richard Hershberger, engaged in exploring English newspapers, posted an 1869 newspaper article describing a game of rounders which may indicate that foul lines were in use at the time, and invited comment. David Ball opined that it indicated a local variant rather than a general

practice, and John Thorn pointed out that the distance between the bases, also specified in the article, matched that used by the Knickerbockers.

*Revealed at Last! The Inventor of Baseball!* Richard Hershberger, still exploring England, cited an 1889 article crediting Henry Chadwick with "practically" developing the game of baseball in the United States.

### TANGENTS

The article posted in *Revealed at Last!* also mentioning that Chadwick had lost two sons in "an epidemic", John Thorn requested info on the epidemic referred to; Andrew Schiff replied that Chadwick had a son and a daughter who died young and within a few days of each other, but of different causes. Since the article was printed on the occasion of Spalding's 1889 tour, Beth Hise proposed that Spalding's experience of Englishmen dismissing baseball as merely a form of rounders influenced his later urge to establish the game's American heritage. David Ball pointed out that most English coverage of Spalding's 1874 tour was positive, with which Beth agreed, and contributed a lengthy post about that tour. Richard Hershberger

contributed a summary of the discussion in England at the time of the 1889 tour about baseball and rounders.

*A Sunday Incident.* Joanne Hulbert posted a curious 1858 Boston newspaper note reporting a game played by a group of "squaws" (!?!).

*Base-ball: a sign of the Anglicisation of America.* Richard Hershberger posted an 1858 newspaper note which in turn was posting an English article reporting that English games like "base-ball" were gaining popularity in America.

*Playing at Base, but When?* George Thompson posted a quote from an 1845 novel set in New York City that refers to the playing of "base". George and David Ball engaged in a follow-up discussion on the questions of the time period to which the author was referring, the author's reliability as a source, since Ned Buntline's (pen name of Edward Judson) reputation for veracity in his novels is poor, and finally whether "base" referred to base ball or prisoner's base.

*Albany NY Civil War Deaths.* Scott Feisthumel posted a note describing an Albany, New York, newspaper article of 1866

which preprinted the rosters from an 1860 match between the Champions club of Albany and the Knickerbockers which also mentioned the names of two participants who had died in the Civil War. Craig Waff supplied a source for an account of the match.

*Confederate Base Ball, 1862.* John Thorn posted a note from the *Charleston Mercury* in 1861 and 1862 which maintain that base ball was played in Confederate camps, and invited comment. Richard Hershberger commented that he was aware that the game was played in the South before the war, but that the *Mercury* notes indicates that it was more widespread than believed hitherto, and later elaborated, describing the New York game in the south before the war as known but not widespread, analogous to the present-day status in the United States of lacrosse. Parker Bena supplied further information about post-Civil War baseball in the former Confederate states, and Priscilla Astifan a pre-war note about Northerners who had founded a club in Galveston, Texas, reinforcing Jonathan Sharkey's contention that antebellum baseball in the South owed its start to Northerners who traded at its seaports.

*Complaints about Umpires or Field Conditions.* Scott Feisthumel posted an early

instance of a team blaming a loss on bad calls by umpires and/or field conditions, from Utica, NY, in 1864, which reminded David Ball that a Knickerbocker was fined six cents for swearing, perhaps at an umpire. Richard Hershberger expressed his certainty that the ignoble art of "kicking" significantly antedates 1864.

#### REVIEW REVIEWS.

*NYT review of Morris, "But Didn't We Have Fun?"* The *Times* review of Mr. Morris' new book was panned by David Ball and Greg Spira, on the grounds that it largely ignores its alleged subject. Richard Hershberger reported that the *Washington Post's* review of the book is far more satisfactory.

#### TONGUE IN CHEEK.

*The Secret of Dickey Pearce's Longevity.* David Ball observed that since Pearce was born on February 29 that he was only ten years old during the 1876 season.

#### HELP!

*Athletics' Trophy Case.* Richard Hershberger posted a request for the source of a photo of the Athletics of Philadelphia trophy case of the 1860s that he remembered seeing.

*May 21, 1870 - Excelsiors vs. Tri-Mountains.* Tom Shieber posted a request for the box score for the above event.

#### WAXING THEMATIC.

*First Oldtimers Game.* John Thorn posted a reference to an 1869 source describing a match between the 1869 and 1859 Excelsiors, apparently the earliest reference to an old-timers' event, and observed that baseball has been a backward-looking game from the beginning. Priscilla Astifan agreed, noting that references to the good old days can be found in Rochester from 1858 on. Kyle DeCiccio-Carey inquired about the rules used.

#### REFERENCE WORKS.

*Odd Old Document Crossed My Path Just Now.* John Thorn reported finding in his papers a note about documents from the Federal Writers' Project housed in the Illinois State Historical Society Library which concern early baseball in that state, and which he considered worthy of further research. He invites someone to "pick up the ball."

## AT CLEVELAND.

Larry McCray, Committee chair, advises that the Origins Committee meeting at the SABR convention in Cleveland will take place at 8:00 a.m. on Friday morning, June 27. Mr. McCray apparently mistakes the meaning of the phrase, "early baseball enthusiasts".