

# Originals.

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## TOM ALTHERR'S NOTEBOOK

### MORE ON BASTEBALL

Most baseball historians have characterized John Rhea Smith's famous diary notation about playing basteball at Princeton in 1786 as a variant spelling or misspelling of base ball. That may indeed be the case here, although throughout his journal, Rhea Smith did not misspell any word, a rare feat in an era when orthography was still fairly sloppy. But Rhea Smith's diary jottings have prompted a search for other uses of the term "baste ball" or "baste-ball," and a few have surfaced.

Now come two more references, courtesy of Google.

In a 1788 number of a British satirical magazine called *The Trifler*, a writer discussing Homer's *Odyssey* declared that Nausicaa was "not above playing a game of bafte-ball with her attendants;...." (Note the eighteenth-century spelling, using an "f" for an "s.") Keeping in mind that there is disagreement just what ball game Nausicaa and her attendants were playing, what is interesting about this reference is that it is nearly contemporan-

eous with Rhea Smith's usage across the pond in New Jersey.

A second reference popped up sixty-some years later, in the September 1849 monthly report of a British benevolent society. A description of a festival at a school in Boxford contained this sentence: "After the repast, the party engaged in various sports, consisting of cricket, basteball, dancing, etc." Was this another spelling error or a lingering variant name for a baseball-type game? *The Trifler*, n. 29, December 13, 1788, p. 374, and "Boxford National School Fete" in *Monthly Paper Issued by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church*, n. 22, September 30, 1849, p. 36.

### DID INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LEARN BALL PLAY FROM EUROPEANS?

In his long compendium on Eastern Woodlands indigenous customs, long-time Moravian missionary David Zeisberger wrote in about 1780 that, "Ninepins, ball playing and cards they have learned from the whites." Zeisberger did not provide any examples or documentation, so it is unclear which ball play he meant. Cer-

tainly indigenous peoples played variants of lacrosse much earlier than the eighteenth century. Baseball historians, including Priscilla Astifan and myself, have been researching the adoption of baseball-type games by indigenous peoples, but so far not much has shown up in the records. Zeisberger's remark may be some proof, however limited, that acculturated tribal peoples played ball games other than lacrosse. David Zeisberger], *History of the Northern American Indians*. Archer Butler Hulbert and William Nathaniel Schwarze, eds. (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1910), p. 118.

### "INTENSE" BALL PLAY IN DELAWARE COUNTY, NEW YORK

A writer in an 1898 history of Delaware County, New York commented that ball play during the noon recess was an "intense" pleasure for school children: "No enjoyment was ever so intense as the plays and races and frolics which were indulged in during this noon hour. Although ball playing was not reduced to the system which has made it the national game, I venture to assert that these school-boys got as much pleasure out of playing 'two old cat' as the

great professionals now derive from the most scientific game." Although the writer did not specify a time period, most of the rest of the discussion seemed to center on the 1830s and 1840s, maybe even earlier. Interestingly, the place of publication, Delhi, New York, was the location where in 1825 some men challenged an adjoining town to a game of "bass-ball." David Murray, ed., *Delaware County, New York: History of the Century, 1797-1897* (Delhi, New York: William Clark Publishing, 1898), pp. 124-125.

#### OLD CAT IN REMSEN, NEW YORK

Writing about early sports in the Oneida County town of Remsen, New York, Millard Roberts stated in his 1914 town history that "old cat" was "the popular ball game among the boys previously" before the spread of baseball right before the Civil War. In contrast to the seriousness and professionalism of sport by 1914, Roberts summed up the reasons for sports in the earlier days: "Sports were simply what the name implies, and were esteemed only for the amusement or pastime they afforded, or as a means of physical development, or for the acquirement of the skill and dexterity that would enable one successfully to meet an adversary [in various games and contests]." Millard F. Roberts, *A Narrative History of Remsen, New York* (Remsen, New York?: pvt. ptg., 1914), p. 220.

#### BALL PLAY ON "FIRST PLAINS" IN KINGSTON

In his 1888 history of Kingston, New York, Marius Schoonmaker discussed a patch of land known as "first plains." Before 1820, this land "lay in commons for many years, furnishing a fine sporting ground for the boys --ball ground and other amusements in spring, summer, and fall, and good skating always after the January thaw in winter." Perhaps John Thorn, who knows Kingston well, can shed further light on this location and ball play. Marius Schoonmaker, *The History of Kingston, New York, from Its Early Settlement to the Year 1820* (New York: Burr Printing House, 1888), p. 369.

#### BALL PLAY IN SOUTH CAROLINA IN THE 1820s

Surveying many different aspects of South Carolina in the mid-1820s, engineer/architect Robert Mills occasionally wrote briefly about amusements. When he described the Spartanburg district's customs and recreations, he wrote thus: "There are no particular customs here different from those prevailing in other parts of the country. The common amusements here are the pleasures of the turf, hunting, fishing, playing at ball, and whist...." The use of the word "country" may be vague --did Mills mean other parts of the South? Of South Carolina? Of the nation as a whole? Whatever the case, we can assume that Spartanburg

Carolinians and others played "at ball" frequently enough to merit the adjective "common." Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of Natural Civil, and Military History* (Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826), p. 735.

#### MORE JACOB ABBOTT BALL-PLAY REFERENCES

The September, 2010 *Originals* contained an item concerning Jacob Abbott's reference to playing ball in New England. Abbott, an extremely prolific antebellum author, writing some 150 books, many of them for children, occasionally referred to ball play by his characters or used it to carry the freight of his usual didacticism. In a series of books featuring a boy named Rollo, sporadic references to ball play pop up.

In *Rollo at Play* (1848), Abbott employed an incident wherein a boy hit a ball that broke a parlor window as a parable about admitting guilt. In *Rollo's Museum* (1839), Rollo's father attempted to demonstrate how adult males settle disputes in contrast to boys arguing over different activities, including playing ball. Similarly, in *Rollo at Work* (1841), Abbott embedded a long story in a chapter in which Rollo's mother described boys disputing what toys to buy. A character called Wise, as opposed to his comrades, Selfish and Shallow, buys a ball which the other two ridicule. The choice proved wise (no

pun intended) as Abbott moralized:

Then Selfish and Shallow went out and found Wise playing beautifully with his ball in the yard; and he invited them to play with him. They would toss it up against the wall, and learn to catch it when it came down; and then they made some bat-sticks, and knocked it back an forth to one another, about the yard. The more they played with the ball, the more they liked it, and, as Wise was always very careful not to play near any holes, and to put it away safe when he had done with it, he kept it a long time, and it gave them pleasure a great many times all summer long.

Not quite baseball, but a bat-and-ball game nevertheless. Ironically, in a book entitled *Rollo at Play* (1838), ball play did not even rate a reference.

In another series of books starring Rollo's cousin Lucy, there was at least one ball play reference. In *Lucy at Play* (1850), in yet another moralistic conversation, Lucy learned that a boy who had had bought a whistle instead of a ball soon regretted that choice when he outgrew the whistle and had no ball to play with.

There may be other ball play references in other Abbott novels and books, but while he certainly did not dwell frequently on such games, he felt confident of their familiarity from time to time to utilize them to preach a parable to two to his young readers. Jacob Abbott, *Rollo at Play*, 2nd ed.

(London: James S. Hodson, 1848), pp. 18-19; Abbott, *Rollo's Museum* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, and Company, 1839), p. 91; Abbott, *Rollo at Work; or The Way for a Boy to Learn to Be Industrious* 5th ed. (Philadelphia: Hogan and Thompson, 1841), pp. 180-186; and Abbott, *Lucy at Play* (Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1850), pp. 69-70.

#### NO SABBATH BALL PLAY AT DAYTON ACADEMY IN 1821

Worried that their students were not adhering to moral principles, the board of trustees at a Lancasterian academy in Dayton, Ohio declared that any student "found playing ball on the Sabbath" would "forfeit any badge of merit," lose other rewards and suffer additional punishment from the tutors. The board required that this announcement be read every Friday to remind the boys of the consequences. It is unclear whether or not they permitted ball play on other days than Sunday. Resolution reprinted in W.W. Boyd, "Secondary Education in Ohio Previous to 1840," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, v. 25 (January, 1916), p. 128

#### ANOTHER REFERENCE TO AFRICAN AMERICANS AND BALL PLAY

James Still was the son of a free black and grew up in Burlington County, New Jersey. Born in 1812, Still became a doctor and a notable practitioner of alter-

native medicine in his day. In his autobiography, Still mentioned twice that he didn't like "childish sports" and wasn't any good at them anyway. "At most plays I was a poor hand," he remembered, "I learned none of them, not even so much as a game of marbles, and at ball I was only chosen to make up the number." Despite his personal ineptitude, he was familiar with ball play and played, however badly. His account thus serves as evidence for African American contact with ball play in the 1820s and 1830s.

James Still, *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1877), pp. 17 and 18-19

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## THE MONTH IN 19cBB

Members of the Origins Committee used the 19cBB yahooogroup now and then during the month of September.

#### DISCOVERIES

##### **1855 Match between "colored" clubs**

John Zinn posted a find from Newark, NJ setting the date of the first reported match between colored clubs back to 1855. John Thorn noted that the previous early date had been 1859.

#### INQUIRIES

##### **Oh, Abner!**

John Thorn posted an inquiry made to his blog post

"As The Fan Turns" concerning the Abner Doubleday myth.

### **Baseball at Williams College in 1831?**

Deb Shattuck posted a find referring to the use of a "ball-club" at Williams College in 1831 and asked if anyone knew if this is a baseball reference. John Thorn provided the source for the complete reference, ( in a collection of letters), which does not explain the type of ball game involved, but both John and Christopher Green that Williams is near Pittsfield, Mass., home of the famous 1791 ordinance. A. J. Milner found another ball-playing reference in the same collection of letters. Peter Mancuso asked if the home area of the writer of the letters (Alvan Hyde) is known. John posted the information that Hyde was a Dartmouth graduate.

### LINKS

#### **Doc Adams**

Joe Williams posted the link to a recent newspaper article about a vintage base ball event honoring Doc Adams as a "founder" of baseball. Richard Hershberger posted an evaluation of its accuracy, and noted that it references a previously unknown 1832 journal item with a "bats and balls" reference. Richard later added an essay on what it means to state that baseball was "invented".

#### **Chadwick Statistics 1859**

John Zinn requested an explanation for Chadwick's statistical category called "Clear Scores". Bob Thol-

kes didn't have a definitive answer but believes it referred to games where a player scored after every plate appearance.

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## 150 YEARS AGO

*from the pages of the New York Sunday Atlas*

*In its issue of Oct. 27, 1861, under the subhead, "How Bunsby Operates", the Atlas waxed sarcastic about Henry Chadwick's organization on behalf of his employers, the New York Clipper and the Brooklyn News, of a New York vs. Brooklyn all star game. Jack Bunsby is a minor, buffoonish character in Dickens' Dombey & Sons.*

Bunsby, of the Brooklyn News, has been and gone, and dirtied himself again ; he has managed to get himself made a member of the Atlantic Base Ball Club, and caught an idea that if he could only manage to get somebody to give a prize, and he have the management of it, he would try to get up a Ball Match in such a way as would not only play the prize into the Atlantics' hands, but would also create a little bunkum in favor of himself, to say nothing of the extra privileges of pitching-- to a greater extent than ever-- into the Sandwiches, Chowders, and Lagers, which generally abound at Base Ball Matches. As Brooklyn his is ome, although Hingland his is nashun ; he thought he would also make the

match under the name of Brooklyn vs. New York, and in such a way as to insure a victory for Brooklyn ; and being employed as a reporter for the New York *Clipper*, he conceived another bright idea to help his position in that paper, by humbugging Frank Queen ( *the editor-ed.*) into the idea that if he would present a silver ball to be played for, it would increase the circulation of the *Clipper* immensely, and in addition fully convince the general public that that sporting paper was the only really creditable and reliable organ of Base Ball, Cricket, and other honorable out-door sports. To accomplish all this, we have learned from the *News* and *Clipper*, that the nines were selected by himself ; indeed he whines over the difficulties he has had to contend with, and says editorially in the *News*, that he would not go through what he has, again, for \$500 ; thus claiming for himself, as representing the *News*, all the gratitude of the Brooklyn Ball Players, and repudiating the *Clipper*. The whole affair was from first to last, intended for the Brooklyn market, no notice being taken of the New York players, and all criticism of the play being devoted to the Brooklynites.

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