

*The Ball once struck off,
Away flies the Boy, To*

The Next Destin'd Post

And then Home with Joy

Volume 2, № 6—October 2013

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Interview with Richard Hershberger

Protoball: A few years ago you started posting to the SABR list-serve on early base ball, and quickly became one of our most prolific and discerning participants. What factors led to your interest in the topic? And what in your personal background affected your approach to the subject?

Hershberger: I have been a baseball fan and a history buff my whole life, so combining the two came easily to me. The trigger was some ten or twelve years ago when I stumbled across the online *Brooklyn Eagle*. I put in a search on baseball and was enchanted to find perfectly understandable box scores from the late 1870s. I was also mystified to find references to the "National Association." I had done some casual reading of baseball history before then, and knew of the National Association of 1871-1875, but this was a few years later. Here was a "National Association" I had never read of, and I wanted to figure that out. This turned out to be pretty trivial, but I was hooked.

Protoball: And what were your initial impressions of the field and the state of knowledge about early ballplaying?

Hershberger: A big part of what hooked me was my reading of the secondary literature. I quickly realized that there are huge swaths of nearly virgin territory. The basic chronology of baseball history had been worked out, at least for the top tier clubs, but very little analysis of why people were doing what. Much of what passed for analysis was actually a repetition of propaganda points. This situation is tremendously appealing to my quasi-academic amateur history bent. This is a field where someone like me can do interesting and original work. The first baseball history paper I published, in 2007, was on why the National

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League was founded (see <http://mcfarland.metapress.com/content/q0733145474n3332> -- LMc). This would seem like an obvious topic of interest, but it was hardly addressed. People took the existence of the National League to be the obviously correct order of things, and rarely thought to question why it came about. What discussion existed was either incoherent or didn't stand up to scrutiny. That was a particularly low-hanging fruit, but I have never since found any difficulty finding topics for research and analysis.

Virtually everything to do with baseball's origins is rife with misconceptions. The Cartwright myth is a great example of this. People who justifiably consider themselves educated about baseball history routinely buy into the Cartwright myth, while disparaging the Doubleday myth. A more subtle example is the underlying--and usually unspoken--assumption how to model pre-modern baseball. People tend to see it as a series of forms starting from a distinct early form, through one or more intermediate forms, to the Knickerbocker rules of 1845. If they can name these forms, their job is done. So we get the claim that baseball came from rounders, with town ball as an intermediate form. The problem is that this is a terrible model. It doesn't fit how pre-modern games work, and it doesn't fit the most rudimentary facts of baseball history.

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Find Stories from Bruce Allardice

“Sometimes we don’t realize how lucky we are to be alive today.” I know, I know, you hear that clichéd catchphrase and you conjure up an image of some old curmudgeon, stuck in the past.

But modern baseball historians ARE lucky. Lucky to have the internet, lucky to have search engines, lucky to have OCR capability, and above all lucky to have online, searchable historical newspapers.

With more than a thousand entries in Protoball’s PrePro data base, I can verify that without newspaper collections such as Genealogybank, Newspaper Archive, Chronicling America, 19th Century Newspapers, and Paper of Record, I never would have found a tenth of that material. The U. of Pennsylvania has a great website that lists online newspapers by state, and includes newspaper digitalization by libraries and historical societies.

What I like most is to glance at the Protoball map, pick out a blank area (one that doesn’t have an early team/game already entered), and set myself the task of filling that blank. Or maybe I just am familiar with a city (say, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, site of a Civil war battle) or country (I just visited Scotland) and have 15 minutes between classes to do a quick search.

For example, recently I tried to find early baseball in western Kansas, specifically, Dodge City, the cow town where “Wild Bill” Hickok and “Bat” Masterson were lawmen. I found mentions in the local newspaper of

baseball as early as 1876. The game probably reached there a few years earlier, but the online newspapers only began in 1876, and the earlier newspapers for the rest of Kansas had no mention of any Dodge City game prior to this. Indirect evidence suggests that around 1875 Hall-of-Famer Charles Comiskey played baseball on a college team in Dodge. But since the year given for Comiskey's play was vague, and the sources, newspaper articles many years after, I put this information in a footnote to the verified Dodge date.

It's also satisfying to find an unusual name for a club. The best I've found so far is the name of a Hopkinsville, Kentucky team from the 1870s. The main team in Hopkinsville was the "Brown Stockings" (there are dozens of teams with that nickname) but this rival club named itself the "Sweet Gum Deadeners"! Sweet Gum trees abound in that part of Kentucky, but what the nickname refers to beats me. In Illinois I've found clubs named the Plowboys, Lively Turtles, Sticktights, Dirty Stockings, Nesthiders, and Red Hots.

My most gratifying find? A team organized in Matamoros, Mexico, in 1869, composed partly of American speaking settlers, partly of Mexican natives. That team was formed and playing 14 years earlier than historians had given for the first team in that country. Or Scotland, where I found mention of baseball teams in Dingwall, in the remote Highlands, in 1870, at least four years before games were played in London. It warms my Scots heart to think that the Scots beat the Southrons to the game.

The find I'd like most to follow up on? Probably the story of Dr. Caleb Guyer Kelly (d. 1960). A Methodist missionary, former Baltimore City College ballplayer, and friend of Ned Hanlon, Kelly organized baseball clubs all across northern Africa in the 1920s. Preaching both baseball and Protestantism to the area, Kelly boasted of forming 107 teams in Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco in North Africa, and was known as "the father of North African Baseball."

Bruce Allardice, October 2013

Digger News

Article Lauds David Block, Our Own "Karate-Chopper" of Base Ball Lore

A long, wry, and fairly reverent article on the amazing **David Block** can be found at http://www.grantland.com/story/_/id/9681627/baseball-archaeologist-david-block.

Bryan Curtis' "In Search of Baseball's Holy Grail: How One Man is Rewriting the History of the Game - One Diary at a Time," was posted at the Grantland site on September 18, 2013.

Protoball's favorite nuggets from the Curtis article:

- "In a just world, Block would be an archeological hero. What Bill James did for 20th -century baseball, Block is doing for 18th-century baseball."
- "Said Tom Schieber . . . [David's book] 'Baseball Before We Knew It' and its aftermath is to me probably the single most important baseball research of the last 50 years, if not more."
- "When David started his work and I started my work, this [topic of origins] was the dark side of the moon," said [John] Thorn."
- "Block had confirmed that the Doubleday theory was bunk. But he had also discovered that the rounders theory was bunk. Everything we knew about baseball's parentage was wrong."
- "Block is being painfully modest. Let me be immodest on his behalf. Block is a scholar on a lonely frontier. He is karate-chopping the wisdom of the ages."

Protoball later asked the author about the response to the article. Bryan Curtis' reply: "The Block article attracted a very large amount of attention--larger, in fact, than my typical articles about star players. Which was wonderful, because David's more interesting than most of them."

□ Deb Shattuck's Online Talk about Women and Base Ball

Deb Shattuck's thesis work on the history of women's base ball continues, and you can see a lot of it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVdQvArqScs>. This 80-minute talk includes much new information on female play prior to 1870, some of it altogether new to Protoball. Deb writes: "my talk was a compilation of the work done by those before me (David Block, Dorothy Mills, John Thorn, and the many contributors to the Protoball and 19cBB group) who have generously shared their research findings with me and other researchers. When I finally finish my book (later this year, fingers crossed) I hope to make my research available to as wide an audience as possible. I will begin by filling in the blanks on the Protoball site; after that I hope to work with SABR and the Women in BB Committee to create a searchable database of every female player and team we can find."

Deb's talk, "Bloomer Girls," was delivered on July 19 at the Yachats Academy of Arts and Sciences on the Oregon Coast. Her forthcoming PhD dissertation at the U of Iowa covers women base ball pioneers.

□ John Zinn Digs into Early New Jersey Ballplaying

John Zinn's objective is to understand how the New York game came to New Jersey and then developed and expanded throughout the entire state. He has been examining close to 50 contemporary newspapers that survive as well as national publications. In the pre-war period (1855-1860) there were organized base ball clubs in only about a third of New Jersey's 21 counties. He plans to look at other information such as the reach of the railroad to try to understand why the game did and didn't reach the different parts of the state. He is now shifting to the 1861-1870 period.

John wrote the New Jersey section [Baseball Founders](#). He is on the planning committee for the November 2014 SABR symposium on 19th century base ball in the greater New York area, including New Jersey.

□ Dorothy Mills' Recent Contributions

Dorothy Seymour Mills is publishing "Who Ever Heard of a Girls' Baseball Club?" She writes: "Everyone needs to know that women and girls have been part of the baseball culture as long as men and boys - and not just as fans, but as players, umpires, and even club owners." The electronic book's title is taken from a writer who "didn't realize that girls and women have been playing baseball since at least the 1860s - in long skirts, of course."

Dorothy has been asked to submit four articles on baseball history to the National Pastime Museum's website at <http://www.thenationalpastimemuseum.com/article-category/historians-corner>. The first one, "Those Nimble American Girls," should appear shortly.

□ Bob Tholkes to Address Local SABR Chapters

Bob Tholkes will be a presenter at the November meetings of the SABR chapters in Pittsburgh and Providence. The Pittsburgh meeting is focusing on baseball statistics, and Bob will discuss the birth of base ball stats. Last year, Bob made presentations at the Chicago and San Antonio-Austin SABR chapters.

□ 2014 NYC Symposium on 19C Base Ball Planned

Planning is proceeding for a November 2014 symposium on 19C base ball in New York City. This event will be co-sponsored by the 19th Century Committee of SABR and the Origins Committee of SABR. Members

Protoball Project - <http://protoball.org>, lmccray@mit.edu

of the planning committee include Diggers Bill Johnson (Origins Cttee Chair), Larry McCray, Peter Maancuso (19th C Cttee Chair), Deb Shattuck, George Thompson, John Thorn, and John Zinn. The Protoball Project has offered to pull together relevant data for symposium attendees. The event will be held at John Jay College in Manhattan.

Big New Reference, Base Ball Founders, Hits Print

Base Ball Founders is now available from McFarland for about \$45: see <http://www.amazon.com/Base-Ball-Founders-Northeast-Established/dp/0786474300>. This book encompasses the stories of 40 early clubs in the US northeast as written by 12 researchers. It is the companion volume to Base Ball Pioneers, published last year. The lead editor is project manager Peter Morris, and Bill Ryczek did a lot of hard work in getting the new volume out.

New On the Protoball Website

Jeff Kittel Seeds Protoball's "Roots of the Rules" Project

Several Diggers have agreed to review the initial draft of a compendium of histories of each one of the 35 individual rules in the 1857 official rule set. The draft was written by **Jeff Kittel** this summer, and successive drafts will appear on the Protoball site as more facts become available in assorted research crannies.

If you would like to review parts or all of this 60-page draft this month, please contact Protoball.

New Charting of Base Ball's Spread, 1859-1870

Bruce Allardice has traced and charted the growth of base ball in the US from 1859 to 1870 as it is presently captured on the PBall site. See http://protoball.org/The_Spread_of_Base_Ball,_1859_-_1870. These data clearly show the moderating effect of the Civil War on (non-soldierly) ballplaying, and the dramatic "Base Ball Fever" spread of the game to new areas right after the war.

Note: A few Protoballers are venturing to chart the modern game's earliest growth, from 1843 to 1859. Wish us luck as we try to determine which ones of the reported games were really played by modern rules.

□ Protoball Advisory Committee

Protoball has formed a small Advisory Committee and is pleased to note that **Bruce Allardice**, **Jan Finkel**, and **John Thorn** have agreed to serve as its charter members. Bruce, recent winner of a SABR “best article” award, has entered over 1,000 of the 4,400-odd listings of early clubs and games in the PBall “Pre-Pro” Data Base. Jan is, among many other things, a co-editor of McFarland’s Base Ball Founders and Base Ball Pioneers, and is a highly-valued SABR colleague. John is, as you may have read somewhere, Official Historian of MLB and architect of MLB.com’s <http://mlb.mlb.com/memorylab>, which has loads of origins data.

Our main idea in setting up the Advisory Committee is to provide site users multiple avenues for making suggestions for improving the PBall website.

□ Tholkes, Shattuck Chip In

Deb Shattuck has offered to help fill gaps in Protoball’s data base on female play, and to help curate the site’s coverage of women in early base ball. (Finishing her PhD program comes first, of course.)

Bob Tholkes has offered to extend and improve the Protoball Chronology’s coverage of base ball in the 1850s, and has already registered several ideas for improving the Chronology. He is enjoying his retirement, in part by quickly becoming one of our most knowledgeable colleagues on early newspaper coverage of base ball.

□ Site to Collect Search Tips from Veteran Diggers, Starting with These, from Bruce

The Protoball site is now beginning to accrue research tips for new and less-experienced Diggers. The first offering, from **Bruce Allardice**, is below, and is posted on the PBall site under “Search Tips on the “Articles” pages.

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For serious research of early baseball—I can suggest a few tips that might help.

i) There’s no substitute for using and citing original sources. As seen with the Abner Doubleday myth, a secondhand story, once in print, can be endlessly repeated in other print sources even though it’s easily disproven. Use secondary sources only after you verify them with primary sources.

- 2) Online newspaper collections such as Genealogybank, Newspaper Archive, Chronicling America, 19th Century Newspapers, and Paper of Record are simply invaluable as primary sources. The SABR website links to several of these, plus several baseball journals. The U. of Pennsylvania has a great website that lists online newspapers by state, and includes newspaper digitalization by libraries and historical societies. For outside the U.S., online newspaper collections can be found by doing a Google search for the country's name and the words "historical" "newspapers".
- 3) Online newspapers employ several different search engines, with different capabilities. Some don't allow you to search for the phrase "base ball" but force you to search for articles containing both words. Some (Fulton County (northern New York newspapers)) don't have a good date limit search. 19th Century isolates individual articles on a page, whereas Chronicling America just highlights (in red) the hits on the entire page.
- 4) In your online searches, if you're searching for games/clubs, search for the words "base ball" up to say 1900, then "baseball" (one word) thereafter. The best practice is to do a separate search for each. If no hits, try "ball club", "match game" or "ball game".
- 5) Searching for the words "base" and "ball" will, depending on the search engine, result in dozens and dozens of meaningless hits.
- 6) Realize that newspaper articles are often datelined by the city, not the country. For example, I found a first game for Haiti by searching for "baseball" and "Port au Prince", Haiti's capital. The search using "Haiti" didn't turn this game up. Also be aware that spellings change. In the Haiti example, the article used the old spelling of "Hayti". Names also change. I found a first game (1906) in Iran by searching its former name, Persia.
- 7) Don't assume that just because an author has penned a book on, say, Early Baseball in __ City, that the author found all the early games.

-- by Bruce Allardice

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Introducing ... Hershie's Nuggets!

Richard Hershberger has offered to supply short pieces on assorted sweet subtopics in early base ball history. The first of these, *Sliding in the Amateur Era*, is a 3-page summary of contemporary news accounts' evidence on sliding.

It begins: "Did base runners slide in the amateur era, and if so, how frequently? Looking at period reports, the most striking feature is that the evidence is thin. There are undoubted reports of runners sliding, but they are few and far between. The problem then is to determine if reports of sliding are rare because sliding was

rare, or because it was commonplace and therefore unremarkable: are they man bites dog reports, or dog bites man? Or something in between?"

Nugget #1 is found at <http://protoball.org/Sliding>.

Larry's Most Wanted Facts for October -- Outs of Africa?

As recounted at <http://protoball.org/-3000c.i>, 66 years ago an Italian researcher reported that Berbers in Libya were playing a two-base safe-haven game with several base-ball-like rules. He suggested that the game had come to Africa centuries earlier. It's time to poke a bit at that conjecture.

Is this the only claim for a base ball predecessor game in Africa? If it were a common pastime, shouldn't we now have many additional sightings by now? Can we at least locate someone who might do some web searches in Arabic? Can we rule out the possibility that later forms of base ball were taught to locals, say 70 or 100 years ago?

Deb Shattuck's Column

For Health and Fun - That's Why She Played

The study of baseball is a study of American culture. If we look carefully, we can see reflections of the tapestry of American life in our detailed studies of the game's equipment, rules, statistics, playing venues, media coverage, finances, fans, players, etc. In the laws crafted to control the spaces in which players played and the days on which they played, we see the tensions between urban and rural, religion and state. In the enthusiasm of baseball boosters, anxious to spread baseball to the newly vanquished South, and the push-back of proud Southerners determined to withstand Northern cultural imperialism, we see the still raw wounds of a deadly Civil War. As I work to reverse the amnesia regarding women's baseball heritage, I try to understand the context in which nineteenth-century women played our national game. One of the most obvious threads weaving its way through women's baseball history is how the broader women's rights movement influenced women's involvement with baseball as fans, reporters, and players. I am convinced that, at least through the late 1860s, the vast majority of women baseball players took up the game because it was a fun, healthy diversion. They made no proclamations about invading men's sphere on the baseball diamond because, prior to this point, baseball was still a gender-neutral sport, despite the fact that baseball boosters were increasingly employing the term "manly" to distinguish it from children's bat-and-ball games.

The 1850s saw a renewed push in the United States for physical education and it is in this context that the majority of girls and women played. An initial surge of physical fitness activity in the 1820s and 1830s driven by German, British and Swedish immigrants had waned during the 1840s and, by the late 1850s, social commentators were prophesying that the unhealthy living conditions in American cities were threatening the survival of the Anglo-Saxon race. A new fitness craze swept through the East and Midwest; a new profession of “physical educator” emerged, and these “scientifically trained” men and women promoted healthy outdoor sports like baseball. As I mentioned in my last column, by the late 1850s, men and women, boys and girls were playing baseball at sanitariums and schools. Many of the female baseball teams that sprang up at the Eastern women’s colleges after the mid-1860s were promoted by female physicians or physical educators. Male and female physical educators alike recognized the importance of promoting the physical fitness of American women to ensure they had the stamina to give birth to healthy children. In June 1859, the Kansas Herald of Freedom reprinted an article from the Philadelphia Bulletin entitled, “Genius in Women.” It argued that girls and young women must be taught to be more physically active because at present “the greater majority even of American girls in the healthiest period of life are semi-invalids, while a still greater proportion are constant sufferers when a little advanced in life. All of this is the direct consequence of neglect [of physical education].” Among the sports these educators recommended to promote physical fitness was baseball. Famed women’s rights activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had described the female baseball team she encountered in Peterboro, New York in July 1868, wrote another letter from Peterboro the following week in which she lamented women’s sedentary lifestyle and its impact on the human race. Stanton made a strong argument for women to be engaged in more vigorous outdoor work to improve their health instead of being cooped up inside all the time sewing, doing laundry and keeping house. Her argument echoed the commonly held notion that weak, feeble women gave birth to weak, feeble offspring. She wrote:

“These feeble men we see about us may trace back their paralyzed limbs and softened brains to sickly, silly mothers, shut up in what is called woman’s sphere within four walls. As woman is naturally more nervous than man, how suicidal for the race to assign her all the employments that tax the nervous system, without giving her an opportunity for the development of muscle and bone.”

Given these concerns, it is no wonder many women embraced baseball in the 1850s and 1860s. Like their brothers, uncles, fathers and cousins, they saw the wonderful potential of the national sport to provide them a fun and healthy diversion.

Note: this is Deb’s second essay for the Next Destin’d Post. The first one is found at <http://probball.org/Don%27t%20Forget%20the%20Girls>. Her email address is shatz@aol.com.

Recent 19CBB Postings - culled by Bob Tholkes

Base ball vs. cricket-- Richard Hershberger posted an item, probably by Chadwick, describing the advantages playing base ball had for success at playing cricket, and added his comments.

Explain this: cricket in a court? Richard Hershberger posted an 1860 reference to cricket being played in a court, and requested an explanation. John Thorn suggested that it referred to single wicket. Hugh MacDougall posted a 1755 English reference referring to baseball as a juvenile version of tennis. Richard's own guess was that the term "court" was being used in an atypical fashion.

The Clipper not at the Atlantic-Excelsior match. Richard Hershberger noted indignantly that the alleged base ball bible, the New York Clipper, didn't even have a reporter at the famous 3rd Atlantic-Excelsior match in 1860.

Base Ball--assumed to be of English origins in 1858. Deb Shatner posted an 1858 note from an African-American paper quoting a New York correspondent to a London publication opining that Americans were becoming more Anglicized because, among other things, of the recent craze for English games like base ball.

Image of the Unions of Morrisania Ball Field. John Thorn posted a discovery, an 1868 woodcut of the Union of Morrisania's field at Arthur and Tremont Streets, of which there was no previously known image.

Women's lacrosse- 1851. Bob Tholkes posted an item in a St. Paul newspaper describing ball-play among a group of Sioux women.

The Atlantics move to the Union grounds for a better share of the gate. Richard Hershberger posted a "business of base ball" item from 1867, using a newly-accessed source, the New York Sunday News.

Baseball and Wine? Brian Sheehy inquired for any known connections between early base ball and wine. John Thorn and Richard Hershberger sent information about the champagne tastes of 1860s clubs.

Hershberger Interview - concluded from page 2

Hershberger: Going beyond that, there is a traditional history of baseball that was written in the early twentieth century. There is the old saying that history is written by the victors. In this case, history was written by the survivors. The guys who were still alive and active in the twentieth century got the attention. Henry Chadwick and Al Spalding were particularly shameless about inflating their early roles. Even when we aren't faced with personal aggrandizement, baseball history was written through the filters of competing

interests, especially the classic conflict of capital versus labor. The result is that if you are serious about getting past that, you have to be aware of the traditional baseball history, and you have to be prepared to reject it if necessary.

Protoball: Our field has been transformed in recent years by major new works by Block, Morris, Ryczek, Thorn and others. What other diggers occur to you as our unsung heroes? What older work do you see as underappreciated for its insights?

Hershberger: I am reluctant to start naming names, since I will get myself into trouble when I inevitably overlook someone. I do, however, want to give mention to the late David Ball. He didn't publish much, but his research and insights were top rate. He and I corresponded a great deal. I still sometimes go back and review our email conversations. We had just begun planning a joint article defending the major league status of the Union Association. This is now on the very back burner. I hope to write it some day, but it won't be as good as it would have been with him. His passing away is a great loss to the early baseball community.

As for older writers, I have to cite Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills. It might seem a stretch to cite them as "underappreciated," given that their book is generally recognized as the foundation of our field. But I am constantly amazed at how well it stands up, fifty years later. I have learned when I have some mind flash to go check to see what they said on the subject. They often will turn out to have gotten there first.

Beyond that, I admire Melvin Adelman's *A Sporting Time*. It is one of the finest books on early baseball, even though that is only about a third of the book. There was a brief time in the 1980s when academic historians ventured into baseball history. *A Sporting Time* is the cream of the crop: informed by theory while still grounded in concrete events.

Protoball: Online searches have led us to many new insights about early ballplaying. Do you think that that new vein is now being played out as major newspaper uploads are completed, or can we look forward to lots more new sources in the next decade or so?

Hershberger: Only a tiny fraction of newspapers have been uploaded. I don't know if there is the funding to continue such projects, but there is no end in sight of potential material.

That being said, there is a lot to be said for old-fashioned browsing. Computer reading of text is imperfect even under ideal circumstances. Old newspapers, much less old newspapers on microfilm are far from ideal. If you rely on searchable data you are going to miss a lot. There is no substitute for sitting and reading, knowing that most of what you read won't be of interest.

The less obvious breakthrough is the ability to take digital images of text. This isn't as sexy as creating searchable text, but it still is huge. In the old days a researcher had to go to a research library and sit there reading text, whether in bound volumes or microfilm. It was an exercise in speed reading and vicious triage of what to copy. Nowadays you take a camera or use the library's scanner and leave at the end of the day with a flash drive in your pocket. The actual reading is done at leisure, taking notes which will themselves be searchable. The activity of reading text and taking notes has been transformed, much for the better.

Protoball: What have you been working recently?

Hershberger: I always have several irons in the fire. Last spring I gave a presentation on the creation of the Cartwright myth. I am polishing the final draft of a written version, probably for the Baseball Research Journal. Probably the next piece after that will be on the early spread of the New York game. I realized some time ago that it was possible to make an absolute count of antebellum clubs. I have finished the raw count, and will be analyzing it. The count can't be complete, of course, but it gives semi-hard data of where the game was being played when, and by how many? My long term project will be a book on how baseball went from an obscure folk game to being formally organized and codified and recognized as the national pastime.

