

Baseball Origins Newsletter

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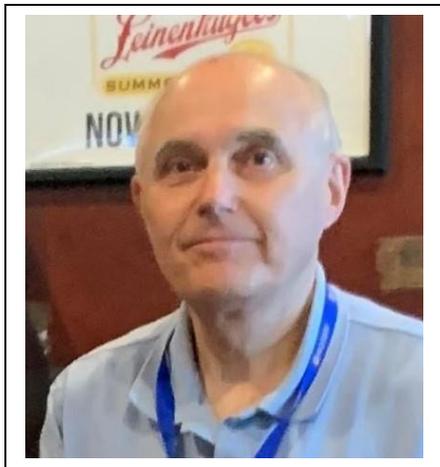
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The baseball origins newsletter is put out by members of SABR’s Origins Committee, and the website for baseball’s origins, www.protoball.org. It is intended to foster research and discussion of the origins of the game of baseball, baseball’s predecessor bat-ball games, and the growth of baseball prior to 1871 (when professional, league baseball was founded).

Comments, suggestions and articles should be submitted to Bruce Allardice, editor, at bsa1861@att.net or Larry McCray at lmccray@mit.edu.

Protoball Interview with Robert Tholkes



Larry McCray Note: Robert Tholkes of Minneapolis is a veteran contributor to SABR publications and to the journal *Base Ball*, concentrating on the game's amateur era (1845–70). Bob's past SABR activities include several years as an officer of the [Halsey Hall Chapter](#) (Minnesota), biographical research on major-leaguers with Minnesota connections, and service as newsletter editor for SABR's [Origins of Baseball Committee](#), and, beyond SABR, 20 seasons as operator of a vintage base ball club, the Quickstep of Minnesota.

Bob Tholkes

Q1. You were one of the Origin Committee's founding members, created and edited the Committee's newsletter, and later went on to compile a data base of over 5100 interclub base ball matches up to 1865. What forces led to your early interest in knowing more about the early evolution of the game?

My progression was from biographical research in the 1980s to "find" missing major league players and managers, largely from the 19th century, to starting a vintage baseball club playing 1860 rules in my SABR chapter, the Halsey Hall Chapter, in 1994, a pastime that persisted through 2013. Vintage baseball provided a concrete purpose for finding sources describing the rules and customs by which baseball was played in 1860, which was early in the modern game's evolution; contemporaries like Henry Chadwick tended to date its beginning from the foundational rule changes of 1857. My SABR connection induced a desire (not shared by vintage baseball) to reproduce that play accurately. From there my interest necessarily spread backward to the game's evolution up to 1860, for the most part to explain how the 1860 game had developed and buttress the evidence for accurate interpretations of baseball's rules and customs as found in contemporary sources. In recent years I've moved forward in time (modestly) to my present research of the 1867 season. The two contributions I can claim are to have, with Richard Hershberger, initiated collection of two historic sporting weeklies of the time which are not online (the *New York Sunday Mercury* and the *Spirit of the Times*, in its various iterations; they are available to researchers through Richard) and construction of a database of interclub matches from 1845 through 1865 which were played using the new National Association of Base Ball Players rules, the starting

point for the modern game. This period I believe defines baseball's amateur era. The "Register of Interclub Matches" is available for download on the Protoball.org website.

Q2. Having been in the vanguard of origins research, what two or three advances in the art have impressed you most in the past couple of decades?

The "art" has evolved primarily because of technology: the internet, which has made hundreds of historic newspapers and magazines available. Print being at the time the only means of systematic dissemination of innovations such as National Association-rules baseball, newspapers and magazines are the primary source for accurate information on the evolution of the game and the cultural milieu in which it developed. I concentrated pre-internet on the sport in my state (Minnesota) where bound-volume and microfilm collections were available to me, and advanced increasingly to online collections which could be obtained to gather information on the game as it developed nationwide. The internet can be said to have spurred the development of today's cadre of SABR researchers exploring the game's early evolution.

Q3 What are your favorite 2 or 3 new Origins publications in recent years, and why?"

"Recent years" to a 74-year-old history enthusiast could mean anything in his lifetime, but, assuming that the expectation is to refer only to the past handful: *Strike Four: The Evolution of Baseball* (Hershberger, Richard. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2019, 295 pp.), though specializing in rule development, rounds enough bases to be considered the best recent addition to the Origins canon. I could read *Strike Four* without encountering what I considered misinterpretations and factual errors and can agree with John Thorn's conclusion in the Foreword that Hershberger "writes of the rules with humor and a deep erudition lightly worn." More strictly in the Origins world is *Paradise Lost: The Humble, Original, and Now Completely Forgotten Game of English Baseball* (Block, David. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2019, 298 pp.). *Paradise Lost* masters an aspect of Origins I have regretfully never explored myself (why, when Block so effortlessly spreadeagles the field?) but always enjoy his style and substance. Finally, I must express my appreciation for Bruce Allardice's revival of the SABR Origins Committee's newsletter, which you are now reading. I let my editorship of the Committee's first newsletters lapse after a run of several years, and am delighted that it has resumed. Three cheers and a tiger for Bruce!

Single Wicket Cricket and the Origins of Baseball's Foul Line

By Bruce Allardice

As set forth in the September 2021 *Origins Newsletter* article "Towards a Definition of Baseball?," the major—perhaps defining—difference between New York Rules Base Ball (NYRBB) and preceding bat-ball games is the concept of "foul" territory.

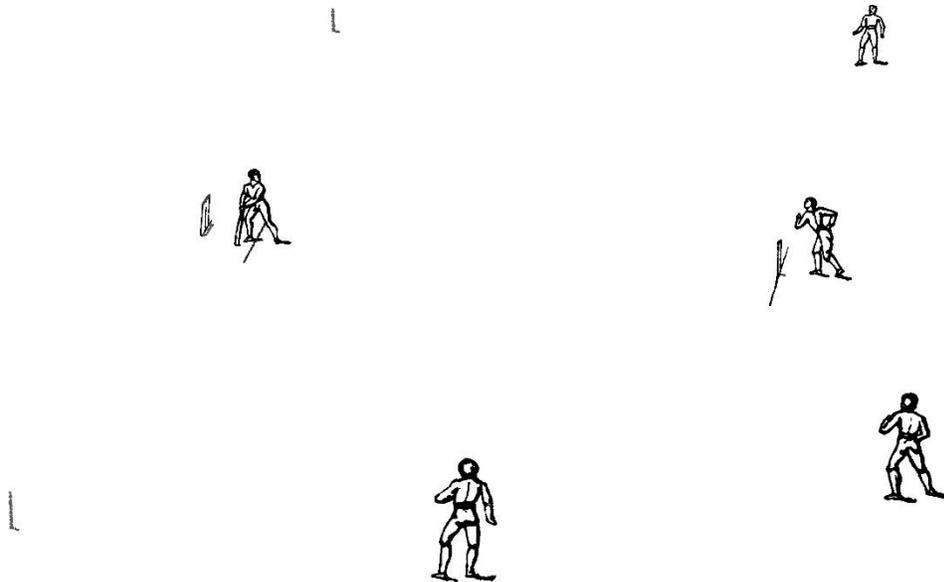
Cricket and other predecessor games had almost invariably featured an all-round, 360-degree field. Batters could if they chose to hit the ball sideways or even backwards and still make "hits." Having a "foul" ground, with (in addition) a "foul" hit being designated as a do-over, has been labeled a "revolutionary" change that NYRBB made.¹

And yet there existed a bat-ball game prior to New York rules baseball, a game well-known in New York City sporting circles, that featured foul ground: Single-wicket cricket. According to Major League Baseball's Official Historian, the New York game was "born in 1840 and systematized [i.e., with rules written down] by 1845," a chronology that fits in nicely with Single-wicket cricket. While we can't know for sure that the founders of NYRBB copied the concept of foul territory from single-wicket cricket, single-wicket cricket was, by 1840, a well-known game with published rules.²

Single wicket cricket (SWC) is essentially an adaptation of cricket when the regulation number of players (11 per side) cannot be found. Single-wicket cricket had been played in England as early as the 1700s, with the first recorded game being in 1712. One cricket history has identified 1,109 single wicket matches in England prior to 1840.³

"The first rule of single wicket, as mandated by the Marylebone Club of London and reported in the *Anglo American* of July 22, 1843: "When there shall be less than five players on a side, bounds shall be placed twenty-two yards each in a line from the off and leg stump." Rule 2 commences: "The ball must be hit before the bounds to entitle the striker to a run. . . ." The remaining eight rules do not address this boundary. A response to inadequate numbers to patrol the field of the traditional game, this concept of foul territory went back long before 1843, as the laws of single wicket were a part of each cricket code from the first in 1744..."⁴

The number of players ranged from 5 or less a side, to as few as one a side.



Modern depiction of historic SWC. The “foul line” extended from the wicket behind the depicted batter to the posts—effectively, a 180-degree fair territory. NYRBB retained the concept but reduced the fair territory to 90 degrees—which is what it is today.

Historian John Thorn believes that single wicket inspired the concept of foul territory to baseball. From his magisterial *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*:

"This New York game of three-cornered cat, whose players called it baseball, had already been modified for adult players a decade earlier, as [William R.] Wheaton would recollect in the San Francisco *Examiner* in 1887. The mention of foul territory, intuitively sound for occasions when there were too few players to cover a broad expanse, is of particular interest, as the only other early game that distinguished between fair and foul ground was likewise a modification of a game played in the round by full sides of eleven: cricket. That modification was single-wicket cricket, which when played by fewer than five to the side rendered foul those balls hit behind the wicket or beyond a sixty-six-foot distance on either side of it."⁵

We have evidence that Wheaton played cricket and was familiar with the single wicket variation. The October 25, 1845 New York *Herald* ran a report of a baseball game that Wheaton umpired, immediately followed by a match of single wicket:

BASE BALL PLAY.—The subjoined is the result of the return match between the New York Base Ball Club and the Brooklyn players, which came off on the ground of the Brooklyn Star Cricket Club yesterday. Messrs. Johnson, Wheaton and Van Nostrand were the umpires.

NEW YORK BALL CLUB.			BROOKLYN CLUB.		
	Hands out.	Runs.		Hands out.	Runs.
Davis,	2	4	Hunt.	1	3
Murphy	0	6	Hines.	2	2
Vail.	2	4	Gilmore.	3	2
Kline.	1	4	Hardy.	2	2
Miller.	2	5	Sharp.	2	2
Case.	2	4	Meyers.	0	3
Tucker.	2	4	Whaley.	2	2
Winslow.	1	6	Forman.	1	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>		<hr/>	<hr/>
	12	37		12	19

CRICKET MATCH.—On the same ground, after the above-mentioned contest, a single wicket match at cricket was played between two members of the Union Star Club against two members of the New York Club, for bats and balls, which resulted in the defeat of the latter. The following is the score, as made by the official markers, Messrs. Samuel Shaw and William Holman:—

UNION STAR CLUB.		NEW YORK CLUB.	
FIRST INNINGS.		FIRST INNINGS.	
C. Smith, b. by Lynch,	2	A. Barrett, b. by Smith,	0
H. Wilson, run out,	5	Lynch, b. by " "	2
	<hr/>	No ball,	1
	8		<hr/>
			3
SECOND INNINGS.		SECOND INNINGS.	
C. Smith, b. by Lynch,	10	Lynch, c. by Wilson,	1
H. Wilson, b. by " "	3	Barrett, b. by Smith,	1
No balls,	2		<hr/>
	<hr/>		2
	15		<hr/>
			5
Total,	23	Total,	5

Mr William Russel was umpire for the New York players, and Mr. King (late of the Marylebone Club, London,) for the Brooklynites.

While this report is not perhaps the “smoking gun” proof that Wheaton and the others adopted the foul territory concept from SWC, the coincidence (at a minimum) is striking.

While SWC stands unique among baseball’s bat-ball predecessors in having a foul line, at least two other early games, trap ball and rounders, had at least a concept of “foul ground.” Trap ball is a fungo-like game that doesn’t bear much resemblance to baseball. But the English game of Rounders has often been advanced as a precursor to baseball. In an 1828 book of sports, rounders is described as having a rule that if a batter hits the ball backwards, the batter is out: “if the ball, when struck, falls behind [the catcher] ... he is out.” The book’s illustration of rounders doesn’t show a foul line or exact foul territory.⁶

c
b e d
a

Adapted from the chart of rounders in the 1828 book, p. 29.
The four bases (“posts”) are denoted as a, b, c, and d. The
pitcher stands at e. The batter and catcher are stationed at
a.

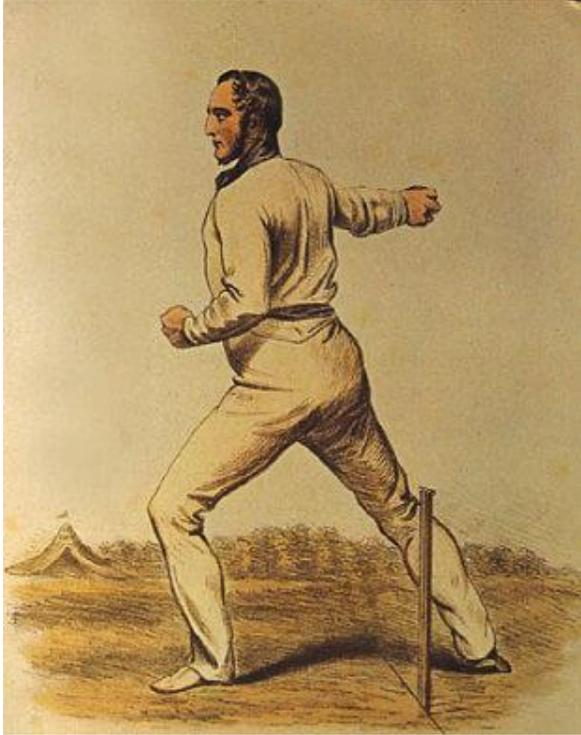
No evidence has been found that rounders was ever played in the U.S.—at least, under that name. And the 1828 reference to foul outs isn’t followed in all later accounts, casting doubt as to whether such a rounders rule actually existed. In fact, it wasn’t until 1884 that an official set of rounders rules appeared.⁷ However, English immigrants such as baseball pioneer Henry Chadwick played rounders in their youth, and would have brought their knowledge of the game (and its rules, or lack thereof) to New York City. It is therefore possible that the 1828 book’s description influenced baseball’s adoption of foul territory, though SWC remains the far more likely as an origin, especially since the book made a “foul” hit an out.

There is general agreement as to the reason WHY early NYRBB adopted the concept of “foul ground.” John Thorn, above, cites the frequent lack of players to cover a broader expanse. Having fewer players on a side made it easier to form teams and play match games. Peter Morris takes this a step further and suggests that New York City’s lack of suitably large playing grounds led to the adoption of a much narrower field of play.⁸

American cricket pioneer Jones Wistar believed that baseball greatly resembled SWC:

“Many features of the game of single wicket cricket correspond with base ball. The efforts of the batter are, limited to hits forward of the wicket, while the run is one hundred and twenty-four feet, but this style of cricket has become obsolete, owing to the same objections which exist in base ball, and has given place to double wicket cricket. There the impartial observer will find no undue advantage given either to batter, fielder or bowler.”⁹

Wistar suggests that of all the bat-ball games (rounders, cricket, town ball, etc.) advanced as predecessors of baseball, SWC bears the closest resemblance to NYRBB. This larger topic (SWC’s relation to baseball) will be explored in a future newsletter.



Alfred Mynn, 19th Century single wicket champion

In his book *Strike Four*, historian Richard Hershberger discusses how odd it must have seemed to early New York rules ballplayers that bat-ball games NOT be played “in the round.” In 1856 one traditionalist ballplayer complained:

“In my experience in playing, it was always understood that the striker [batter] had the right to knock the ball with his bat in any direction he chose, the object to put the ball as far out of the reach of his opponents as possible, and thereby enable him to go his rounds in safety, and score one more for his side.”¹⁰

Single Wicket Cricket games in the U.S. had been played prior to the first known writing down of NYRBB’s foul rule, the Knickerbocker rules of 1845. As early as 1839 four players of the New York Cricket Club, Messrs. Adams, Russell, Groom and Cordray, challenged any four players to a match game of SWC. This newspaper challenge strongly suggests that Single Wicket was so well known to the team sport public that the game referred to needed no further explanation. Undoubtedly New York’s community of English immigrants, men such as Henry Chadwick and Samuel Wright, had seen in England, and knew of, single wicket. A three-game home and home SWC match in 1843, New York vs. Philadelphia, garnered extensive newspaper coverage.¹¹ Early (1827 and on) New York City cricket and baseball fields neighbored each other, enabling the ballists to see and interact with the cricketers. Given all this, the founders of the Knickerbockers undoubtedly were aware of single wicket and its rules.

It is safe to say that for years prior to 1840, New York City bat-ball enthusiasts knew of, and had seen in action, Single Wicket and its foul rules. We lack a smoking gun to directly connect SWC to baseball's foul rule, such as a quote from Will Wheaton or Doc Adams saying "Yah, we took the foul line concept from single wicket." But there is ample circumstantial evidence for the connection.

Appendix—Excerpt from the 1823 Rules of Cricket, as set forth by the Marylebone Club.

"LAWS FOR SINGLE WICKET

1. When there shall be less than five players on a Side, Bounds shall be placed twenty-two yards each in a Line from the Off, and Leg Stump.
2. The Ball must be hit before the Bounds to entitle the Striker to a Run; which Run cannot be obtained unless he touch the Bowling Stump (or Crease in a line with it) with his Bat, or some Part of his Person; or go beyond them; returning to the Popping Crease as at double wicket according to the 22nd Law.
3. When the Striker shall hit the Ball, one of his Feet must be on the Ground, and behind the Popping Crease; otherwise the Umpire shall call "No Hit".
4. When there shall be less than five Players on a Side neither Byes, nor Overthrows shall be allowed; nor shall the Striker be caught out behind the Wicket, nor stumped out.
5. The Field's Man must return to Ball so that it shall cross the Play between the Wicket and the Bowling Stump, or between the Bowling Stump, and the Bounds; the Striker may run till the Ball shall be so returned.
6. After the Striker shall have made one Run, if he start again he must touch the Bowling Stump, and turn before the Ball shall cross the Play to entitle him to another.
7. The Striker shall be entitled to three Runs for lost Ball, and the same number for Ball stopped with Hat; with Reference to the 29th, and 34th Law at double wicket.
8. When there shall be more than four Players on a side there shall be no Bounds. All Hits, Byes, and Overthrows shall then be allowed.
9. The Bowler is subject to the same Laws as at double Wicket.
10. Not more than one Minute shall be allowed between each Ball." *[BA note--an early pitch clock?]*

¹ Peter Morris, *But Didn't We Have Fun* (Chicago, 2008), 28. Morris also labeled “revolutionary” the NYRBB prohibition on “soaking” a base-runner.

² The 1840/45 date is from John Thorn in his *Our Game* blog, Oct. 31, 2018. The possible single wicket/baseball connection is discussed in John Thorn, *Base Ball in the Garden of Eden* (New York, 2011), and Richard Hershberger, *Strike Four* (Lanham, MD, 2019), *inter alia*. U.S. newspapers of the early 1800s tended to label the game “single wicket” rather than “single wicket cricket.” This article generally uses the more correct terminology.

³ See https://crickethistory.website/single_wicket/index.html, an excellent website of the history of cricket in general, and single wicket in particular. For more on SWC, see A. G. Steele et al., *Cricket* (London, 1889), 381-388.

⁴ Thorn, *Eden*, 78.

⁵ Thorn, *Eden*, 27-28.

⁶ See David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It* (Lincoln, NE, 2005), 84-85, citing William Clarke, *The Boys Own Book* (first American edition, 1829), 20. Quote from the 1881 edition of Clarke, page 29. David's fine article on Rounders is in the May 2021 *Origins Newsletter*.

⁷ For more, see the Protoball article at https://protoball.org/What_Was_Rounders,_Anyway%3F

⁸ Morris, *But Didn't We Have Fun*, 28, 30, 48.

⁹ Jones Wistar, *A Bawl for American Cricket* (Philadelphia, 1893), 11.

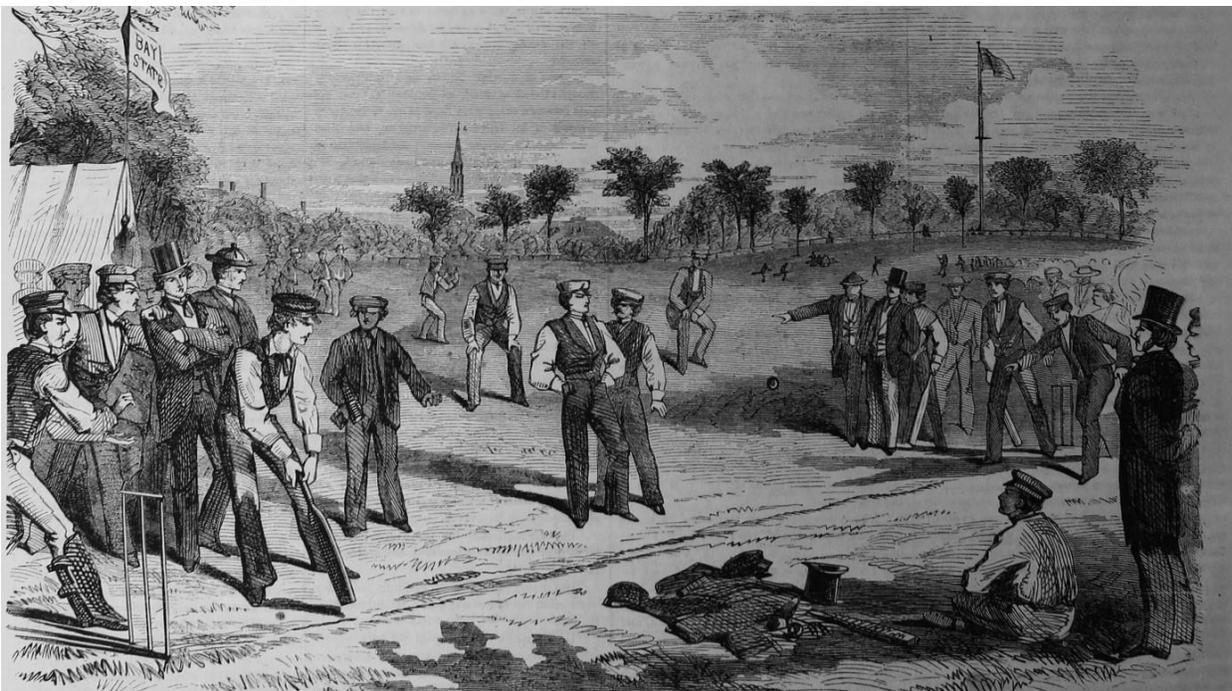
¹⁰ Hershberger, *Strike Four*, 18, quoting a letter to *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, Dec. 1, 1856.

¹¹ *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, Nov. 2, 1839; *The Anglo-American*, July 22, Aug. 5, 19, 1843. *Our Game* blog, June 8, 2020. See also www.Protoball.org, Predecessor Games. Samuel Wright, the father of baseball pioneers George and Harry Wright, played in the 1843 single wicket games.

Cricket and the Rise of Baseball

By Bruce Allardice

It is well substantiated that cricket preceded baseball as America's first widespread “team” sport, with organized clubs, match games, and intercity match games.¹ As sports historian Tom Melville has observed, the transplanting of cricket to the U.S. “almost certainly ensured that some form of bat and ball sport would be a component of America's sporting culture. Cricket was perhaps the earliest team sport to develop a settled structure with enduring adult appeal and its impact on habituating American society to a socially acceptable, adult, bat and ball form of play — even one that was fragmented and sporadic — should not be underestimated.”² The “newspaper of record” of 1850s sports reporting, the *New York Clipper*, admitted that in Philadelphia, at least, “every boy who plays ball at all” had a background in, or knowledge of, cricket.³ As baseball historian John Thorn has written, “It is impossible, I think, to understand how baseball became “our game” — the national pastime, as it was first termed in 1856 — without a knowledge of cricket in America.”⁴



Cricket on the Boston Common. From *Ballou's Pictorial*, Jan. 4, 1859

The two bat-ball games shared much, for example terminology (“innings”), but perhaps most notably many of the same players. The cricket-playing Wright brothers (George and Harry) brought to baseball both their existing cricket skills and their genius for organizing clubs, to become baseball superstars. The legendary James Creighton excelled at cricket as well as baseball.⁵ The two sports shared playing grounds as well. The 1858 game between Chicago’s two best baseball clubs was held at the Prairie Cricket Club grounds, and an 1860 game between two Boston baseball clubs was played at the Boston Cricket Club grounds in Cambridgeport. Cricket teams sometimes played baseball teams at the latter’s game, most notably the Detroit Base Ball Club and the Detroit Cricket Club in 1860. Indianapolis made official the connection of the two sports, hosting a “Base Ball and Cricket Club” in 1866.⁶ Historian John Thorn has pointed out that “cricket supplied the model” for baseball’s box score.⁷ And let’s not forget Henry Chadwick, the father of baseball reporting, got his start as a cricket reporter.

Cricket Club.

THE Members of the CRICKET CLUB are hereby notified, that the first Meeting for the present Season, will be at the Old Ground, on Thursday the 7th of May next. The Wickets to be fitched at 3 o'clock.

Such Members who wish to propose any of their Friends to fill the vacancies, occasioned by the removal of some of the Members since the last Season, will please to return their names to the President as soon as possible.

New-York, April 20, 1789.

New York *Daily Gazette*, April 20, 1789

Analysis of Cricket and Baseball in this article: a note on methodology: While baseball historians have long noted baseball's commonalities to earlier bat-ball games such as cricket, with the advent of online historical newspapers, scholars are now able (in some fashion) to quantify when and where the cricket-baseball nexus occurred. This article will attempt to quantify, by date and by location, how the two games developed in the U.S. The analysis method is based on the historico-geographic method developed by the Finnish scholar Karla Krohn in the early 20th century. The technique requires gathering all recorded versions of an item and charting them, along with the year they were published.⁸

This analysis takes the 50 biggest American cities, per the 1850 census,⁹ and compares the year when each city had its first cricket club/match and first baseball club/game.

City	1 st Cricket	1 st Baseball	Difference
New York	1778	1845	67
Baltimore	1804	1858	54
Boston	1809 ¹⁰	1857	48
Philadelphia	1831	1858	27
New Orleans	1822	1858	36
Cincinnati	1845	1858	13
Brooklyn	1820	1849	29
St. Louis	1856	1859	3
Albany	1837	1856	19
Pittsburgh	1830	1860	30
Louisville	1843	1858	15

Charleston	1821	1866	45
Buffalo	1846	1856	10
Providence	1856	1857	1
Washington	1848	1859	11
Newark	1845	1855	10
Rochester	1847	1858	11
Lowell	1856	1860	4
Chicago	1850	1856	6
Troy	1839	1859	20
Richmond	1795	1866	71
Syracuse	1847	1858	11
Allegheny	1859	1860	1
Detroit	1856	1857	1
Portland	1825	1858	33
Mobile	1860	1860	0
New Haven	1818	1857	39
Salem (MA)	1855	1860	5
Milwaukee	1851	1860	9
Roxbury	1855	1858	3
Columbus (OH)	1866	1860	-6
Utica	1845	1859	14
Charlestown (MA)	1860	1857	-3
Worcester	1851	1857	6
Cleveland	1851	1865	14
New Bedford	1885	1858	-27
Reading	1859	1866	7
Savannah	1737	1859	122
Cambridge	1846	1857	11
Bangor	1859	1867	8
Norfolk	1811	1860	49
Lynn	1859	1860	1
Petersburg	1811	1864	53
Wilmington (DE)	1857	1865	8
Manchester (NH)	1855	1860	5
Hartford	1767	1860	93
Lancaster	1857	1866	9
Oswego	1859	1859	0
Springfield (MA)	1853	1858	3
Fall River	1860	1866	6

As can be seen, cricket almost invariably preceded baseball in these cities. Of the 50 biggest cities, only three had baseball prior to cricket—and these three had other bat-ball games prior to baseball.¹¹ The average gap between the first cricket and the first baseball in these 50 cities is 19 years. However, using an average for comparison here is a bit misleading, as the average is skewed by those older cities (such as New York or Savannah) that had cricket in the colonial era. A better measure of the gap is the median. Using this measure shows that the typical big city had its first organized baseball in 1858/59, and previously had nine year's exposure to the team sport of cricket.¹²

A case can be made that the 1840 population distribution is a better timeframe to measure cricket v. baseball than 1850. A similar analysis of the top 50 cities in 1840 removes a handful mostly-western cities and adds mostly eastern cities. These changes do not alter the nine-year gap found for the 1850 cities.

While the cricket line of bat-ball games aren't *direct* predecessors of baseball, the fact that these cricket teams existed, and that they were composed of respectable "middle class" individuals, undoubtedly helped popularize team sports in general, and baseball clubs in particular. The fact that the top cricket clubs paid their players¹³ helped lay the groundwork for the paid, professional baseball of the late 1860s and 1870s.

¹ Cf. George Kirsch, "American Cricket: Players and Clubs Before the Civil War," *Journal of Sports History*, vol. 11 no. 1 (Spring 1984), 28-50; Tom Melville, *The Tented Field: A History of Cricket in America* (1998); George Kirsch, *Baseball and Cricket: The Creation of American Team Sports, 1838-72* (2007); P. David Sentence, *Cricket in America, 1710-2000* (2006); Beth Hise, "American Cricket in the 1860s: Decade of Decline or New Start?" at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/american-cricket-in-the-1860s-decade-of-decline-or-new-start-3d4dd866e467>; Beth Hise, *Swinging Away: How Cricket and Baseball Connect* (2010); David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It* (2005), 143-145; John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden* (2011).

² Tom Melville, "Pre 1840 American Cricket and the Formation of a National Sporting Culture," *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 17, no. 1 (May 2010) 49-65, 56.

³ *New York Clipper*, Oct. 22, 1859.

⁴ *Our Game* blog, June 8, 2020.

⁵ Tom Gilbert, *How Baseball Happened* (2020), 194.

⁶ References from Protoball database (www.protoball.org).

⁷ Protoball, Chronologies 1853.16.

⁸ Critics note that this approach amounts to charting the recording of an item, not the item itself—a problem inherent in any historical analysis. In this instance, the abundance of sources (mostly newspaper articles) ensures that the two coincide.

⁹ The 1850 is chosen because it better reflects the adult age population spread of the 1850s, than the 1860 census does. The 1850 lists five "districts" of Philadelphia, the Lafayette (old city) portion of New Orleans, and the Williamsburg(h) section of what is now Brooklyn, as separate cities. These districts became part of the larger city in the 1850s.

"First" baseball dates taken from Protoball database. "First" cricket club/match dates also taken from Protoball.

¹⁰ For Boston and Philadelphia, the "Massachusetts" and "Philadelphia" baseball games were played a few years earlier than the dates listed here. The dates given here are for the New York rules game.

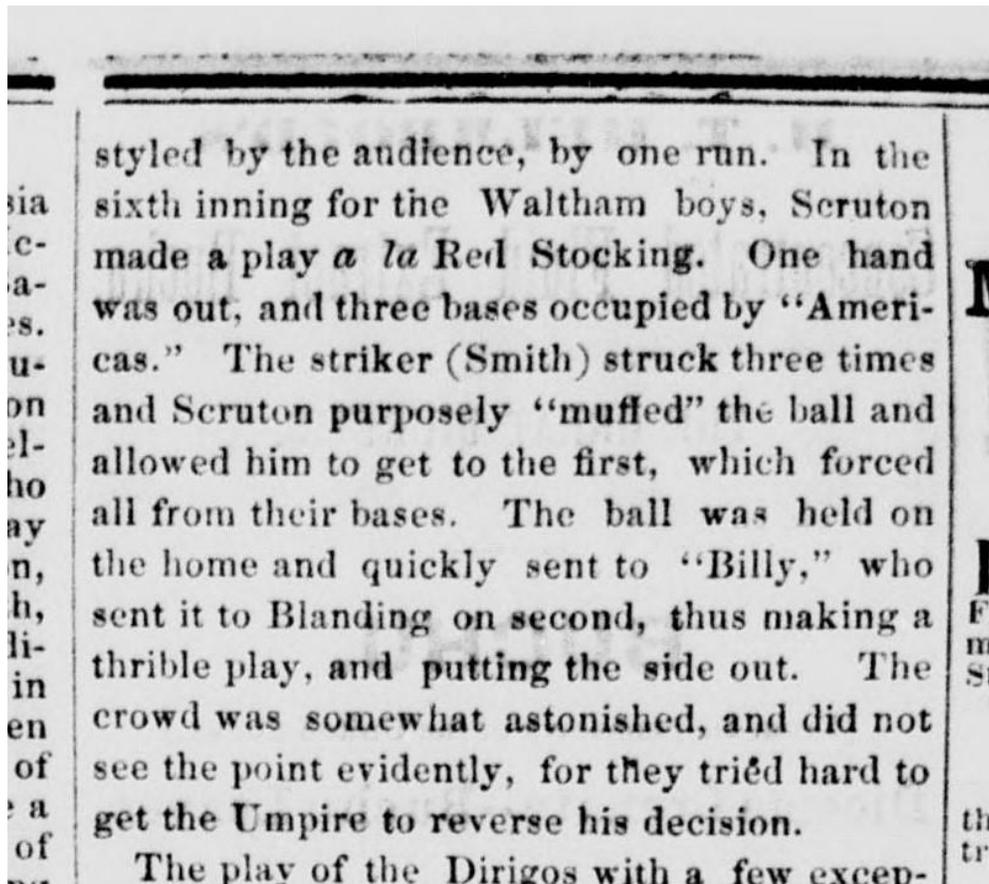
¹¹ See Protoball.org, Predecessor games.

¹² A similar analysis of medians shows that the 50 cities had some form of bat-ball game 20 years prior to having baseball.

¹³ Gilbert, *How Baseball Happened*, 193; Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 124.

An Early “Thrible” Play

(from the Augusta, ME, *Daily Kennebec Journal*, Aug. 30, 1870)



This is one of the earliest recorded instances of a (very alert) catcher taking advantage of the early rule that a “dropped third strike” was treated as a batted ball, which forced the batter and runners to advance.

Fatal Attraction

By Bob Tholkes

“If it bleeds it leads”, one of the modern bywords for producers of broadcast news, had its equivalent among American journalists of 1867, who reliably, and in some cases gleefully, reported and reprinted stories of fatalities among baseball players and spectators. This was at a time when the sport’s effect on the well-being of young men remained under scrutiny.

“FATAL ACCIDENT”. John Dunham, in an interval of the game sat down on the ground and began whittling. Another player running for the ball accidentally ran against him, and plunged the knife the length of the blade into Dunham’s breast, just below the heart, killing him almost instantly.”¹

“NEWS OF THE WEEK.” Two young men died in New York City, and one in Brooklyn, died last week from drinking ice water while playing base ball.”²

“DEATH FROM OVER-EXERTION. James Brown...A *post-mortem* exposed the fact that his viscera had become invaginated while stooping in catching the ball. It seems that base-ball is not unattended with danger.”³

“CURRENT TOPICS IN BRIEF...Lemuel Grosvenor Perry, of Brown’s University...a *post mortem* examination of his remains showed that his death was caused by an abscess resulting from inflammation of the *psoas muscles*, brought on by excessive exercise at the time of the University match-game of ball between the students of Harvard and Brown.”⁴

“DEATH FROM BASE BALL. ...John Gray, of New Pottsville, died from the effects of violent exertion in playing base ball.”⁵

“NEWS ITEMS. J. Allen, of Hazleton, Schuylkill county, died on Monday of last week of the effects of over-exertion in playing base ball.”⁶

“A boy died in Chicago on Thursday from injuries received from a blow by a base ball club. The blunt end of the club struck and ruptured the lower intestines, and, mortification supervening, death ensued. Noble game.”^{7 8}

“Fatal Accident”. Carl Ruff, a young man, was killed by a sharp fence picket piercing his throat while he was jumping a fence, playing base ball.⁹ *An example of the case(s) where a widely reprinted report is subjected to distortion through editing. A later article reprinting the entirety of the original revealed that the accident happened not during a game but after the players had stopped playing and were leaving the field.*¹⁰

“THE NEWS. The deaths from base-ball violence number about one per month...Henry Goudolf, aged fourteen, while making a ‘home run’ was struck by a ball in his groin...the symptoms indicating an internal rupture...in spite of the utmost exertions of medical skill, he died.”¹¹

One brave soul issued a terse defense:

“TOPICS UPPERMOST. Base ball kills one of its votaries every month. The exercise save lives by the hundred.”¹²

A final widely reprinted report with a sensational twist appeared in November:

“VARIOUS ITEMS. In Allen’s Prairie, a Michigan village, there is a base ball club composed of ladies. One day last week they played a game, when a Miss Howard was made ill by overexertion, mortification ensued, and she died on Friday last, after three days’ sickness.”¹³ *It’s civic pride apparently wounded, the local paper issued a denial:* “LOCAL. Several cases of typhoid fever had occurred in the family during the last three months. Miss Howard was attacked, and after eleven days sickness died from the disease.”¹⁴

The post-Civil War nationwide fever for baseball began abating in the following years. Did the press, which had been so instrumental in the sport’s rise before the war, now hasten its decline?

Notes

1. *Augusta (ME) Maine Farmer*, May 9, 1867.
2. *Ebensburg (PA) Cambria Freeman*, July 4, 1867.
3. *Richmond (VA) Daily Dispatch*, July 13, 1867.
4. *Brooklyn (NY) Union*, July 19, 1867.
5. *Bloomsburg (PA) Democrat*, August 7, 1867.
6. *Sunbury (PA) Gazette*, August 10, 1867.
7. *Bath (ME) Times*, August 27, 1867.
8. *Augusta (GA) Constitutionalist*, August 27, 1867.
9. *Cincinnati (OH) Gazette*, October 11, 1867.
10. *Minneapolis (MN) Tribune*, October 16, 1867.
11. *Cincinnati (OH) Enquirer*, November 4, 1867.
12. *Elmira (NY) Advertiser*, November 11, 1867.
13. *Chicago (IL) Post*, November 20, 1867.
14. *Coldwater (MI) Sentinel*, November 22, 1867.

“Escape from New York”: When the “New York Game” Left New York (and Brooklyn), and Moved to Philadelphia

By Bruce Allardice

For the December 2021 issue of this newsletter I wrote an article showing how the “New York Game” of baseball¹ was by 1857 being played more in neighboring Brooklyn than in New York City.² If by 1857 baseball was centered (assuming baseball had a “center”) in Brooklyn, did another city supplant Brooklyn by 1871, the year the first professional baseball league started, and if so, when?

The same statistical analysis used in the December article shows that Philadelphia, the “City of Brotherly Love,” could by the end of 1866 claim to be the “Baseball Capital of the World.”



Much has been written about the 1866-67 Brooklyn-Philadelphia rivalry for the “champion” base ball club of the nation, notably the challenge to the Brooklyn Atlantics by the Athletics of Philadelphia. Many observers at the time, and baseball historians thereafter, believed the Athletics had a claim to being the best team, but were denied an outright championship because the New York area clubs collaborated to manipulate the championship system to exclude outside clubs.³ By 1866 the Athletics boasted the largest membership of any base ball club in the nation.

But here I wish to focus instead on the **total picture**, not just on the ten or so elite players of two elite teams. The Athletics were just 1 of 387 Philadelphia teams during this era--albeit the best—and thus less than 1% of Philadelphia’s ballplayers ever played for this team. And judged by a better, more complete measure--the number of baseball clubs--by 1866 Philadelphia had surpassed Brooklyn, just as Brooklyn had surpassed New York City nine years earlier.

A search of the Protoball database (www.protoball.org/PrePro_Baseball) shows that through 1866 Philadelphia had (or had had) more baseball clubs than either New York City or Brooklyn.

Number of Clubs Through 1866

Philadelphia	387
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Brooklyn	306
New York City	285 ⁴

It's easy to see why Philadelphia surpassed Brooklyn. First and foremost, Philadelphia was a much larger city. Philadelphia was the nation's second most populous city in 1870, with 674,000 residents, surpassed only by New York City's 942,000, and far ahead of Brooklyn's 396,000. Philadelphia resembled Brooklyn in that it possessed an abundance of open spaces to play baseball, in contrast to the confined spaces of Manhattan Island. Compared to New York City teams, Philadelphia teams had easier access to ball fields outside the city limits, such as those in Camden, New Jersey, across the Delaware River.

Even the New York sporting press acknowledged that by 1867 metropolitan New York City had lost its dominance. Early that year the New York *Daily Tribune* manfully, yet regretfully, acknowledged this.

“As late as the year 1860, base ball was confined to one or two of the Middle States—New York being the center. Now it is played in every state of the Union, from Maine to Oregon. **New York in a measure lost its ascendancy in the game, Philadelphia now being the base-ball center of the country. There are ten clubs in the Quaker City to one in the metropolis**, and last year the best record made by any club in the United States was made by the champion club of Pennsylvania—the gallant Athletics of Philadelphia...”⁵

“New York to Brooklyn to Philadelphia” may not slip off the tongue as easily as “Tinkers to Evers to Chance.” Poetic or not, baseball’s “escape from New York” meant that, geographically at least, baseball was no longer “the New York game.”

¹ Which more accurately should be labeled New York Rules Baseball.

² See Bruce Allardice, “Brooklyn Rules”, *Origins Committee Newsletter*, Dec. 2021.

³ Cf. Richard Hershberger’s article on the Athletics, and Craig Waff and William Ryczek’s article on the Atlantics, in Peter Morris et al., *Base Ball Founders* (Jefferson, NC; McFarland, 2013), pp. 126, 235. See also William Ryczek, *When Johnny Came Sliding Home* (Jefferson, NC; McFarland, 1998), pp. 94-97; Thomas Gilbert, *How Baseball Happened* (Boston, David R. Godine, 2020), pp. 258-260; *New York Clipper*, Nov. 3, 1866. Gilbert correctly notes that several Athletics players were transplanted, and perhaps hired, New Yorkers.

⁴ Count as of June 1, 2022. Club totals per the contemporary city boundaries.

⁵ *New York Daily Tribune*, March 30, 1867 (emphasis added). Echoed in the *New York Clipper*, March 23, 1867. The Big Apple-centric newspaper was mistaken in claiming that by 1860 baseball was confined to the “middle states.” As early as 1858 many baseball clubs existed outside the NY-NJ-PA area.

Potpourri

How the Game was Played in 1858. From the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, May 27, 1888

This is an analysis of the game played at Elysian Fields, Hoboken, NJ, July 29, 1858, between the Knickerbockers and the Eagles, both of New York. The Eagles upset the Knickerbockers 45-18. The game lasted 9 innings, 3.5 hours. For the box score of the game, see the New York *Clipper*, Aug. 7, 1858. The *Clipper* blamed the Knicks' poor performance on the absence of their regular catcher.

Note that the losing Knickerbocker pitchers tossed 429 pitches, or an average of 47 pitches per inning—a number that would confound modern pitch counters. The winning Eagles tossed little more than half as many (25 per inning). The catchers combined for 53 passed balls—about one in every 8 pitches. Many more flies were called “outs” on the first bound rule, than as a caught fly ball.

PITCHING.

Knickerbocker -		
Balls pitched by Welling—five innings.....	218	
“ “ “ Wright —three “	140	
“ “ “ Davis —one “	71	
Most in one inning—Welling	73	
“ “ “ Wright.....	60	
Least in one inning—Welling.....	29	
“ “ “ Wright	36	
Eagle—		
Balls pitched by Bixby—two innings.....	84	
“ “ “ Winslow—seven innings,	140	
Most in one inning—Bixdy.....	52	
“ “ “ Winslow.....	35	
Least in one inning—Bixby	31	
“ “ “ Winslow.....	10	
Average to an inning—Bixby.....	45	
“ “ “ Winslow.....	20	
Knickerbocker—		
“ “ “ Welling	53	
“ “ “ Wright.....	46	
“ “ “ Davis.....	71	

CATCHING.

Knickerbocker -		
Balls passing Welling.....	9	
“ “ “ Wright.....	20	
Eagle--		
Balls passing Gelston.....	8	
“ “ “ Brinckerhoff.....	16	
Foul balls caught by Gelston.....	1	
“ “ “ “ Brinckerhoff.....	6	
Knickerbocker--		
Foul balls caught by Wright	2	
“ “ “ “ Welling.....	4	

FIELDING.

Knickerbocker--		
Balls caught on the fly.....	5	
Eagle--		
Balls caught on the fly.....	6	
“ “ “ “ bound.....	10	
Knickerbocker--		
Balls caught on the bound.....	18	
“ “ “ “ bases.....	4	
Eagle--		
Balls caught on the bases.....	11	
Home runs were made by Vredenburg and Brinckerhoff.		

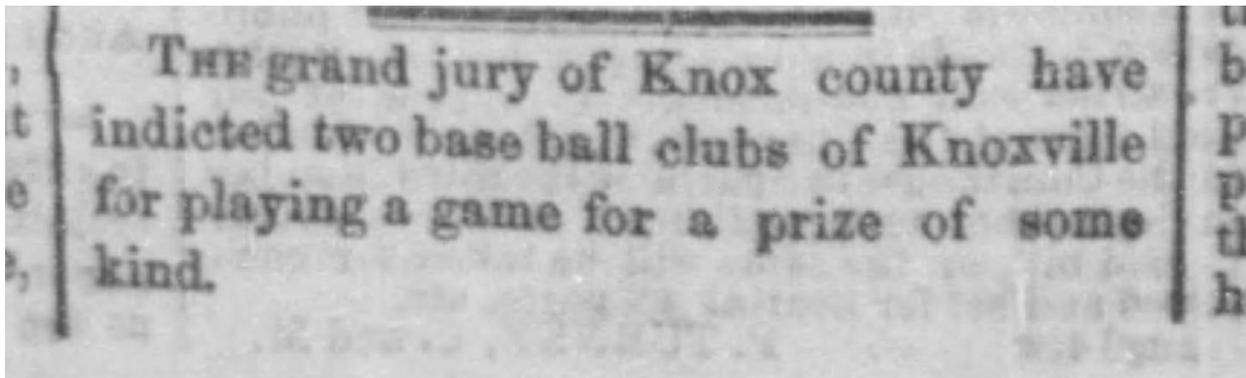
Baseball versus other Pastimes, 1867

In 1867 the New York *World* published “an elaborate estimate of the sporting classes of that city. The following figures it believes to be approximately true:”

Men connected with horses and horseracing:	26,000
Men connected with dogs and dog fighting	900
Amateur and professional fishermen	3,000
Owners of fine birds and patrons of cockfighting	500
Owners and crews of yachts	900
Prize fighters and patrons of boxing	3,000
Base ball, cricket, quoit players, etc.	3,000

The baseball numbers seem a little low, and being lumped together with quoits (horseshoes) is a bit demeaning to the so-called “National Pastime,” but the point made is—horse racing was then considered the most popular New York (and American) pastime, ahead of baseball by a large margin. (Knoxville *Daily Free Press*, July 27, 1867)

No Prize Money for Baseball?



Nashville *Union and American*, Aug. 20, 1867

The Attorney General for Knox County promptly denied that the Grand Jury had done any such thing. An early instance of “Fake News?”

Latest Protoball Additions

Total numbers—As of Sept. 24, 2022, the Protoball Pre-Pro (pre-1871) Database contained 11,468 clubs and 3,916 ballgames, with a further 5,000 games in the searchable Tholkes RIM file but not yet entered into the Pre-Pro database. Since the last newsletter, 186 clubs and 36 ballgames have been added.

Of the 291 U.S. cities in 1870 with a population of 5,000 or more, pre-1871 baseball has been found in 289 of them. The fishing cities of Gloucester, MA and Calais, ME are the only exceptions.

For the so-called “predecessor” games such as townball and cricket, there are 607 U.S. entries. Since the last newsletter, 178 such games/clubs have been added.

267 early U.S. baseball fields are described, including baseball fields in all 50 states.

New “Predecessor Games” have been added for Single Wicket Cricket (first recorded U.S. game, 1839), Shinty (1836. See Chronologies 1836.14), and Hurling (1772. See Chronologies 1772.1)

Find of the Month

The Ultimate Baseball Graveyard?

The first baseball game played in Montana was played in 1866 in the gold rush town of Virginia City. Recently the location of that game was added—a field near the “Boot Hill” Cemetery where several famous western outlaws are buried.



“Boot Hill” Cemetery, Virginia City, north of Daylight Gulch, is one of the area’s most popular tourist attractions. The Cemetery is the last resting place of the infamous five road agents (bandits) hanged by the local Vigilantes on January 14, 1864.

Research Requests

Elysian Fields Project: Protoball is opening a page on the state of knowledge about Elysian Fields and its influence on the evolution of base ball. Irwin Chusid and Jon Popovich have expressed strong interest in writing further about Elysian Fields, and will participate in this limited-term discussion. For a riveting presentation on Elysian Fields from a base ball researcher's point of view, see Irwin and Jonathan's recent Youtube presentation at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwJGWeWDHPA>.

The nascent Protoball page is titled "Re-Thinking Elysian Fields 2022." Visit https://protoball.org/Re-thinking_Elysian_Fields_2022.

Protoball has found and listed baseball in all but seven of the world's 200 countries. But we're still looking for baseball in the tiny countries of Andorra and Liechtenstein (Europe); Dominica (Caribbean); Maldives, Timor-Leste (Asia); Sao Tome, and Equatorial Guinea (Africa). Plus the UK dependencies Montserrat and the Isle of Man.

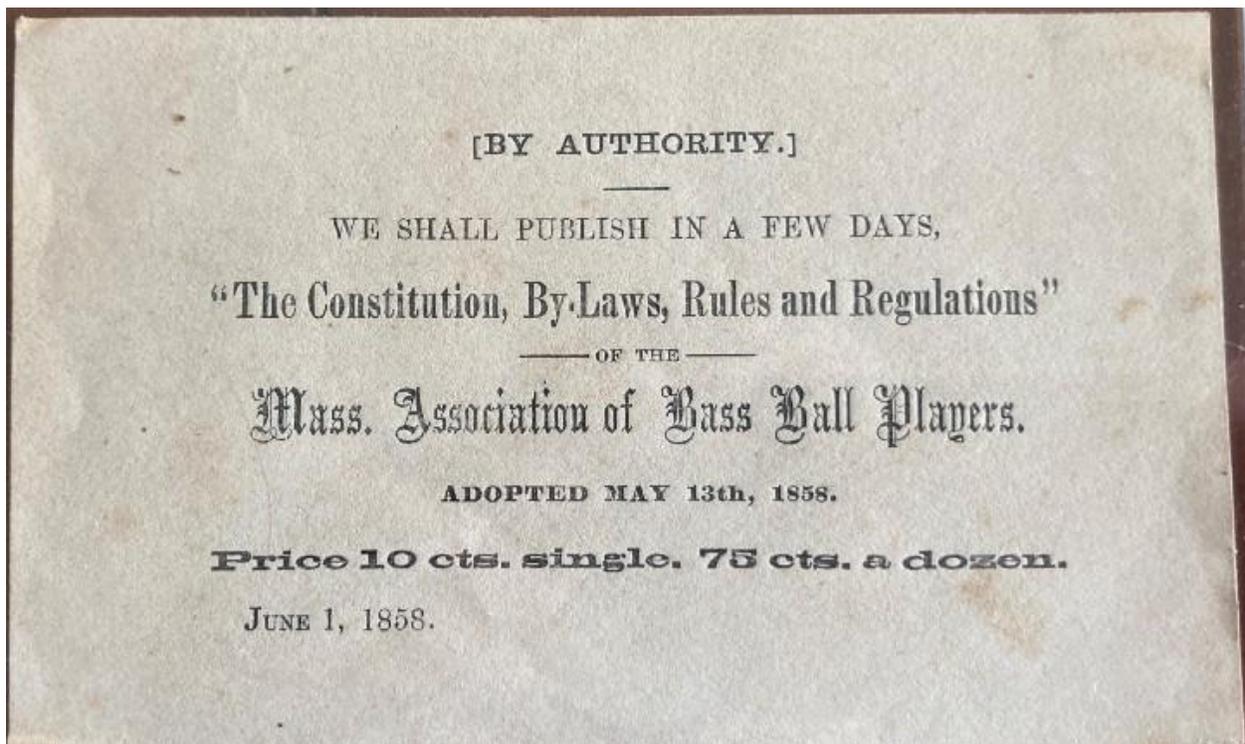


BULLETIN BOARD

Richard Hershberger's new book project is tentatively titled "The Evolution of Baseball: 1744 to 1876." The publisher is U. of Missouri Press, and target publication date is 2024. Knowing Richard, it promises to be an engaging book.

Erik Miklich's article on betting and fighting in an 1863 ball game, "Unfamiliar Side of the Coin: Mutual vs. Atlantic, August 1863" appeared in *Base Ball* vol. 12.

MLB's official "Our Game" blog, headed by **John Thorn**, is always a delight to read. John is currently publishing a series "Baseball in 25 Objects" which often has an Origins/Pre-Pro Baseball article. One example is his Aug. 8th article on "A Massachusetts Game Relic," highlighting the 1858 publication of the rules of Massachusetts-style baseball. See <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/a-massachusetts-game-relic-e8dddb9c1473> for more.



Promotional card for a Massachusetts Game booklet. From Our Game blog.