

The Next Destin'd Post

Notes on Research on Ballplaying Prior to the Professional Leagues

Issue Number 1

Note: A mere ten years ago, research into baseball's earliest roots was a little like farming arid lands. The redoubtable [David Block](#) was, then, mainly a book collector; [Tom Altherr](#) was still poking around assorted dusty places looking for references to early ballplaying; the amazing [Peter Morris](#) was still mainly a world-class Scrabble whiz; the plucky members of [SABR-UK](#) were only beginning to infiltrate British libraries, museums, and playing fields; [Paul Wendt](#)'s inspired [19cBB list-serve](#) wasn't to provide our daily nourishment for 4 more long years; and those young wizards at Google hadn't yet handed us the ability to go find big handfuls of choice needles in mammoth haystacks. Jeez -- did [John Thorn](#) have anyone to *talk to* in those dark old days?

It's all different now. Lots more of us share in common toil -- trying to figure out where baseball came from, and how. This minimalist newsletter is intended to throw a little more light on the whole bunch of us, and on our current quests. Below, you'll see initial highlights. Please send us material on work or happenings you know of for posting here in Issue 2 -- which is, . . . uh . . . the next destin'd post of ***The Next Destin'd Post***.

--[Larry McCray](#)

Conceived and edited by [John Thorn](#) [Kingston NY], the new McFarland offering [Base Ball: A Journal of the Early Game](#) will be appearing soon. The inaugural issue will have several substantial articles on pre-1870 ballplaying, including [Joanne Hulbert](#)'s work on Fast Day in Massachusetts, [Angus MacFarlane](#)'s work on San Francisco's first ballclub, [Fred Ivor-Campbell](#)'s take on the 1857 Convention, and John's own reflections on that surprising find of *bafeball* in 1791 Pittsfield MA.

[Tom Altherr](#) [Conifer CO] is preparing a paper for the [June Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture](#) on the reasons that baseball-type games caught on in the first part of the 19th century. And he's still out there digging up more accounts of ball playing for us, having recently spent a week at Dartmouth and the American Antiquarian Society.

[Priscilla Astifan](#) [Rochester NY] is expanding her earlier work on early base ball in Rochester into a monograph, and has recently examined the circumstances surrounding Samuel Hopkins Adams' famous story about base

ball in the Flower City in 1827. She and [Larry McCray](#) [Lexington MA] have drafted a 10-page research note on what was called “old-fashioned base ball” – it was portrayed as the predecessor to the New York game -- in Western New York State.

The latest book by [Peter Morris](#) [Haslett MI] is [Level Playing Fields How the Groundskeeping Murphy Brothers Shaped Baseball](#). It includes coverage of the development of early ballfields before 1872. Peter’s next project is a textbook on the history of baseball from 1840-1870, and will include the scoop from new sources that Peter has recently turned up.

McFarland now lists [Base Ball in Philadelphia](#) as “available for immediate shipment.” The book traces the history of baseball in Philadelphia before 1900. It was written by [John Shiffert](#) [Newnan, GA], and sports favorable reviews by Tom Altherr and John Thorn.

A book-length evaluative history of baseball from 1845 to 1857 -- Knickerbocker Base Ball -- is occupying [Fred Ivor-Campbell](#) [Bristol RI]. A first segment, treating the 1857 base ball convention, is slated for the inaugural issue of *Base Ball*.

The March 2007 update of the [Protoball Chronology](#) is imminent, and incorporates about 120 new entries submitted by 15 researchers in recent months. The new version will comprise about 625 items. The Protoball website occupies a small corner of the [Retrosheet](#) site, and is found at <http://retrosheet.org/Protoball/>.

[Kyle DeCicco-Carey](#) [New Bedford MA] is researching early base ball on the southern coast of Massachusetts, from Fall River to New Bedford. He reports finding a 33-inning Massachusetts-rules game from 1858, and has discovered that New Bedford clubs in those transitional days were willing to play by either NY or MA rules.

The earliest days of California base ball are being investigated by [Angus MacFarlane](#) [San Francisco CA]. He identifies the local Knickerbockers as the first CA team, and is working with Mexican historian [Cesar Gonzalez](#) to ascertain the role of the New York Volunteer Regiment, which sailed to CA in 1846, in implanting baseball in Mexico. [

[David Arcidiacono](#) [East Hampton, CT] has been looking to confirm the report that baseball gloves were first used in an 1858 Massachusetts-rules game. Old-timers later recalled that a ball with a bullet core was put in play, and that players then donned gloves to protect their hands. Contemporary accounts haven’t, as yet, confirmed this story

[David Nevard](#) [Waltham MA] has researched and written *Wikipedia* pieces on [Town Ball](#) and the [Massachusetts Game](#), and has also written a brief overview

of the whole class of safe haven games for the site. Next: he's trying to understand, and to explain, what those "old-cat" games were all about.

The [Bobby Thomson Chapter of SABR](#) [United Kingdom] is preparing to resume publication of [The Examiner](#), which has given us several accounts of members' research on English ballplaying. [Martin Hoerchner](#) [Kent, England], who has uncovered contemporary stoolball and trap ball in the olde country, is leading the renewed effort.

[Brock Helander](#) [Sacramento CA] is collecting information on baseball history in towns -- like Syracuse and Troy NY -- that once had, but then lost, major league teams.

"[The Cartwright Conundrum: Fact and Fiction of Cartwright's Baseball Legacy](#)" was the subject of a poster session by [Monica Nucciarone](#) at the SABR 36 convention. She is in the rewrite phase of her treatise on Alexander Cartwright, and may present some results at the St. Louis SABR convention. She spent part of last April doing research in Hawaii.

[George Thompson](#) [New York NY] recently re-discovered the elusive 1859 *NY Tribune* article that challenges the superiority of the New York Game to the Massachusetts Game. George continues to examine all aspects of life in New York City from the 1790s to 1860, including all varieties of sports.

A chronology of the evolution of ballmaking has been assembled by [Rob Loeffler](#) [Rancho Santa Margarita CA]. It will appear on the Protoball site. Rob has a collection of photos of well over 200 nineteenth century baseballs and is analyzing them to estimate their sizes and weights.

[Dan Selz](#) [New York] and associates are collecting information for a prospective documentary on the meaning of baseball for local towns. They have interviewed [Priscilla Astifan](#) about events in early Rochester

Newly added to the list of "Local Diggers" on the Protoball website: [David Arcidiacono](#) [Gloves], [Kyle DeCicco-Carey](#) [New Bedford Area], [Richard Hersberger](#) [Philadelphia], [Rob Loeffler](#) [Ballmaking], [Phil Lowry](#) [Length of Games], [Angus MacFarlane](#) [San Francisco], [David Nevard](#) [Town Ball], and [Bill Wagner](#) [Digger-at-Large], and lastly....

[SABR](#) Research Services Manager [Rod Nelson](#) would like to invite one and all to join the new [SABRorigins Yahoogroup](#) online discussion list. Just click [here](#).

The ball once struck off,
 Away flies the boy
To the next destin'd post
And then Home with joy."

Send news and comment to: Larry McCray, 125 Vine Street, Lexington MA, or lmccray@mit.edu.