

When Baseball Was A Strange, New Sport

By ROBERT A. CURRY

Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current file); Feb 6, 1922;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Christian Science Monitor (1908 - 1996)

When Baseball Was A Strange, New Sport

Spalding's Collection Exhibited at the New York Public Library

By ROBERT A. CURRY
NEW YORK (Special) — Lovers of baseball are appreciating Albert G. Spalding's rare collection of manuscripts, drawings, photographs and score books dealing with the early days of the game, which is now on exhibition at the New York Public Library. The generous donor of these "three thousand objects" to that institution is Mrs. Elizabeth C. Spalding.

The visitor is greeted by a chart which shows the steps by which baseball has reached its present form. The "foundation" is "a ball." From there it moves to "one player bounding a ball," then "two players and a bat—barn ball," and three players at "one old cat." In rapid succession come "two old cat" with four men, "three old cat," "four old cat," and "town ball, frequently played at town meetings with ten to twenty players on a side." The New England game of "round ball," afterwards known as the "Massachusetts Game of Base Ball," with 10 to 14 players on each opposing team, was the last and immediate precursor of baseball.

The long controversy as to the origin of the game was settled in 1907 when the Baseball Commission made its report. The commission concurred with popular belief that the sport was entirely of American origin, and they unearthed the fact "that the first scheme for playing it, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday, at Cooperstown, N. Y., in 1839." This same Doubleday was subsequently graduated from West Point and entered the army. Later on, as major-general, he was in command of the Union forces at the close of the first day's fight in the Battle of Gettysburg, and he passed away at Mendham, N. J., in 1893.

The First Gathering

So runs the tale from the glass cases. And a certain faded glory ekes from this musty page and lurks from that photograph in this museum of baseball lore. Mr. Spalding expresses this when he says of the very first baseball gathering, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York, founded September 23, 1845, that "for more than thirty years the club maintained an amateur organization, and as such was regarded as a model in every respect."

Glancing down the list of its first members, copied in a slow, legible handwriting, we find them to be merchants, custom house brokers, and others. A page from a score book for Oct. 6, 1845, declares one team "winners by three aces." The score mounted higher when the games were played on the Elysian Fields of Hoboken, N. J. On another page one team is shown to have made 39 runs in a single game! It is noted that one of the players, Drummond, was disqualified for "interfering with the umpire."

The Cincinnati Red Stockings are introduced more informally than their record would seem to justify. In 1869 they won 56 games, tied one, and lost none. Their first defeat was met in the next season when the Atlantics of Brooklyn triumphed over them. Cast in attitudes of genial grace, be-whiskered and pantalooned, these Atlantics loom below their former victims and stand over the fact of "National Champions, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1868 and 1870."

Chadwick's Story of a Game

In a scrapbook, off which the dust of 40 years has been carefully brushed, the pages have been opened to a clipping from the Brooklyn City News for Sept. 19, 1862. It contains a "write up" of one of the most spectacular contests of the period, and is written by Henry Chadwick, who has been called "The Father of Baseball" and the "Dean of Sporting Writers." The "lead" of his story follows and is of interest when compared with the work of the best sport writers of today.

The glorious uncertainty of our national game of ball was never more forcibly illustrated than in the match played on the Union ball grounds yesterday between the Atlantic and Eckford clubs. The result, both sides being equally represented and in a condition to play, was of course doubtful. . . . But the experience of this season has shown that the game of baseball, like cricket, possesses the eminent attraction of being one of the most uncertain games in existence, and we are pleased to note the fact, it adds a charm to the many otherwise attractive features of it that must tend to increase its popularity. Were it a game to be decided by skill alone, one or two clubs would ever be in the ascendant. But it is otherwise, and therefore all have a fair chance of reaching the goal of success by perseverance and application, or in other words by meriting it. (The Eckfords, to borrow Chadwick's classic style, were enabled to become victorious.)

Spalding's baseball guidebooks fill a long case but the collector himself appear among the photographs only twice. In the group of the Forest City Ball Club of 1869 he is a slim, boyish figure, a pitcher, "third from the right." He is found again among the players of the Boston Baseball Club.

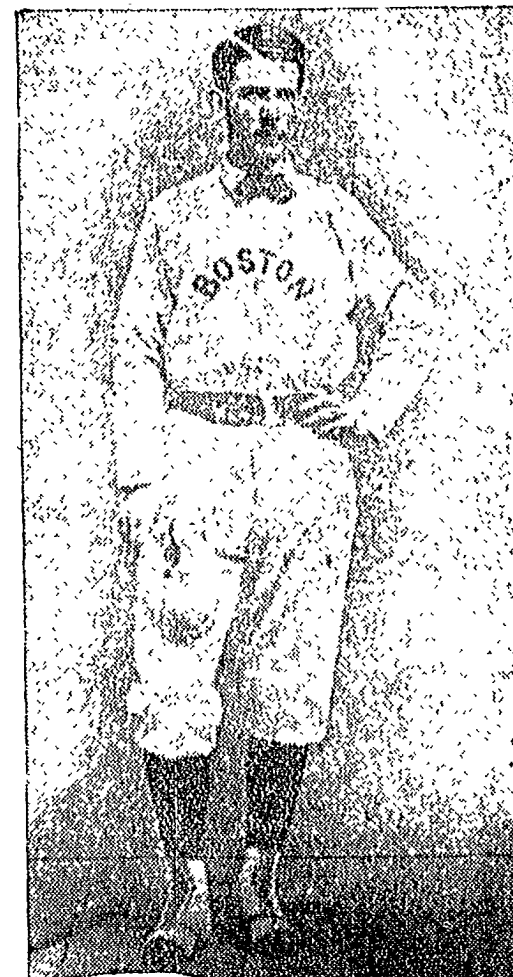
At the end of the case along the east wall an interesting old contract is displayed. It is dated in 1879 and represents the agreement between the Boston Baseball Association and a certain E. B. Sutton. Some of its terms are worth reviewing. The association agrees as "hereinafter stated to pay him for his services at the rate of \$171.43 per month during the continuance of this contract," and it requires further on "that while traveling with the 'nine,' the sum of 50 cents per day shall be deducted from the player's wages on account of the board of the player."

Davenport's Cartoons

The western wall is given to the originals of Homer C. Davenport, sport cartoonist and illustrator of A.



CHICAGO AND ALL AMERICAS FIRST WORLD BASEBALL TOUR - WINTER 1888-89. BACK ROW - LEFT TO RIGHT - BURNS, DALEY, PETTIT, SULLIVAN, BALDWIN, TENER, HEALY, CARROLL, WOOD, BROWN, MERRING. - CENTER ROW - WILLIAMSON, PEPPER, ANSON, SPALDING, WHILD, FOGHRTY, SIMPSON. - FRONT ROW - MRS. SCOT, GEO. WRIGHT, ED. HANLON, EARL.



A. G. SPALDING
Pitcher - 1871.
"The Grand Old Man of Baseball."



DAVENPORT'S
CARTOON OF
"SPALDING AS
UMPIRE," 1897.



"EXCELSIORS" OF BROOKLYN,
WHO PLAYED IN 1850 AND WERE THE CHAMPIONS OF
THEIR DAY.

G. Spalding's book of the '70s, "America's National Game." The artist's most forceful drawing shows Uncle Sam, coat off, and dressed to suit the fancy of every American boy, with a baseball bat in his hands. Other subjects covered in this broad pen and ink work are, "When the game reached Silvertown," with Henry-from-the-corn-patch making a great catch. "It was a warm proposition in the old days," gives the effect of a fast ball stopped by a player without a glove. Davenport goes a little deeper and takes himself more seriously when he exhibits a hyena, with "Gambling" scrawled on its back, standing over the prostrate form of a baseball player.

The western wall is loaded down with paintings illustrating the manner in which the game was played in "Egypt, India, China, Alaska and elsewhere." "In all ages and in all climes," recites the card beneath the pictures. The Civil War is depicted in the same free way. For instance, a ragged looking crowd of men are battling and holding over the title, "On Tented Fields, and in Prison Pens During the Civil War." To prove that "Baseball follows the Flag," the banner of the United States waves over crowded stands while teams battle for honors in Porto Rico, the Philippines and Hawaii.

Other records of particular interest included in the collection are the constitution of the earliest National Association, effected in 1858, the printed manuals of the later National Association of Professional Players, and the proceedings of the National Amateur Association.

It would take longer than one short visit to do justice to the multitude of minor features but the popularity of Mrs. Spalding's gift is amply recorded in the steady stream of visitors which are passing in and out of the "Baseball Exhibition" daily.