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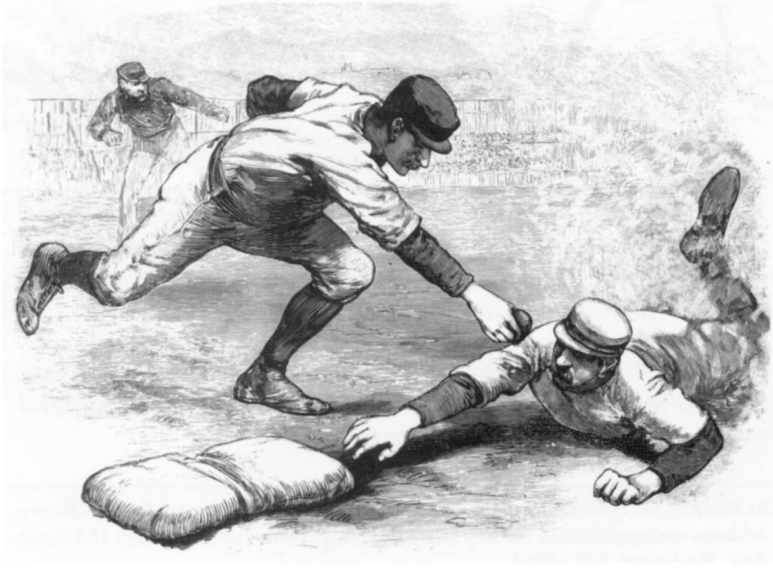
Baseball in the 19th Century

by Priscilla Astifan



Above: Stances and styles of play evolved over the decades. Rules were developed by The National Association as the game required them. There were many uniform varieties, but protective equipment was frowned upon by tough players and was difficult to obtain until after the Civil War.

Cover: A 19th century baseball player is tagged out as he slides into the base. Notice the base is tied down, the players do not have cleated shoes and they played without gloves or other protective equipment.

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The first official baseball stadium in the Rochester area was built at Windsor Beach in 1888. It seated 3,000 people. The street cars carried people from the city to enjoy the cool lake breezes, it was later lighted. Rochester teams played here often until weekend games in the city were legalized.

Baseball Before 1858

It is not known exactly how or when the New York game, modern baseball's 19th century predecessor, arrived in Rochester. One source says the game was taught to locals by a pair of vacationers in 1858, a questionable explanation. The *Post Express* series of recollections by early players offers a variety of conflicting, but interesting suggestions. One player recalled, "The first baseball clubs were organized in 1855, when the game had just begun to invade the country and Rochester responded nobly to the call." Three or four clubs formed a sort of league.

James Backus, Live Oaks manager and scorekeeper, may offer the most accurate speculation, since his team, which would win the first championship in 1858, appeared to be the most experienced. The Buffalo Niagaras, organized in 1857 are credited with becoming the first Western New York State baseball club, but Backus claimed his organization played throughout that year without attracting much attention, then began to play in earnest the following year. Another recollection claims that the Flour City, organized on April 28, 1858, was the first baseball club in the city.

Perhaps the newly regulated form of the game was first viewed by local cricketers at an inter-city match in Albany or New York City. Baseball is said to have been used as a pre-cricket warm-up game. Though many Americans still believe the now discredited Doubleday myth which originated in 1907 and was formally perpetuated in 1939 with the opening of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, early Rochesterians probably realized that the game predated 1839 when Abner Doubleday supposedly invented it in a Cooperstown meadow. An 1859 article in the *Union & Advertiser* alluded to the rhymed passages printed in *A Little Pretty Pocket Book,* which was first printed in London in 1744 and is now acknowledged as proof that the game of baseball predated 1839 and was not entirely American though it grew to maturity here. The *Union & Advertiser* reported, that there is a large class of people who are continually in the field dressed in "sojer's close," seeking health and recreation at the little end of the club and running from "bye to bye."

They probably realized the game had evolved most directly from the English meadow games of stool ball, rounders and cricket, brought to America by early immigrants.

By the early 1800s, it was being played in a number of cities and towns under a variety of names and rules depending on available players and circumstances. But two distinct forms had evolved, town ball which resembled rounder and would become the Massachusetts game and the New York game which bore a greater resemblance to cricket.

A game called "wicket," (probably one wicket cricket or something similar) was Rochester's immediate predecessor of the New York game of baseball according to early players.

It was the organization of socialite New York gentlemen known as the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club (formed September 23, 1845) that turned what had predominantly been a child's pastime into a challenging adult game.

Together with their leader, Alexander Joy Cartwright, now acknowledged as the real father of baseball, they changed the previously used square into a diamond and prompted the first set of standardized rules. They changed crude wooden posts or stones to canvas sacks for bases, eliminated the act of soaking (putting out a player by throwing the ball at him). It was they who incited and influenced a growing number of baseball clubs in and around New York City in the 1850s. By 1857, the National Association of Base Ball Players, the game's first formal

organization, was formed and held its first annual meeting in 1858. Members from represented clubs met every year and continued to evaluate, standardize and revise rules for equipment and game procedure. The National Association influenced the game's spread throughout the state and eventually the nation.

An 1859 Rochester newspaper reported that much attention had been given to baseball in the past few years. It continued by explaining that clubs had been formed, conventions held and general rules adopted and published. "The old games most of us played in our youth have been made into a truly manly game requiring expert strength, a true eye and steady nerves- a clear head and a well developed body," it claimed.

While many players readily accepted all facets of the newly regulated game, others, usually those of English origin, continued to play cricket, wicket or apparently their own unique combination of both. Even some who generally accepted the New York game, however, were reluctant to adopt the new style of pitching.

"We will have nothing to do with the new fangled tossing but will continue to throw the ball with a whole arm movement in the regular old-fashioned 'base ball' style," were the words boldly declared in the announcement of the newly established West End Club on July 2, 1858. The Union Club announced "The ball is to be thrown in accordance with the old system," another announcement exclaimed.

Rochester's Golden Era of Amateur Baseball 1858-1861

Perhaps because they had more free time or flexible schedules, baseball began as the sport of the elite. But it rapidly became the sport of all classes, competing for popularity with cricket, wicket and other similar games. Rochester's first currently acknowledged baseball club originated with early Rochesterville newspaper editor Thurlow Weed who played with other socially prominent men including attorney Addison Gardiner, Frederick Whittlesey, Samuel Selden, Dr. Frederick Backus (first treasurer of Rochesterville) and miller Thomas Kempshall. In 1858 the *Union & Advertiser* commented that the players were "aspiring gentlemen. . .from the ages of clerks and school masters, down to scholars in our intermediate departments. . . ."

Popularity of the game spread from upper class to middle and lower middle classes. By the onset of the Civil War, teams were made up of merchants, grocers, small shopkeepers, clerks, bookkeepers and mechanics. In spite of long hours in an office, at a machine or at heavy labor, the workers gathered at the ball fields after work, on Saturday afternoons or even mornings so early they had to "wait for the sun to come up."

There were no official playing fields laid out for baseball. As a matter of fact, the rising popularity of the game came into conflict with the quiet use of public squares. Games were played on the Babbit Tract, at Brown, Franklin and Jones Squares and on the old University grounds among the vines, fences and partially completed buildings.

Teams often met for practice twice a week. Sunday baseball was strictly forbidden and was punishable by a jail sentence. In May 1858, the *Union & Advertiser* reported that a large number of men and boys, "many of whom "would not like to see their names in print" were playing Sunday ball on the flats below the falls. Their excuse to the Chief of Police was that they were beyond the city limits. The newspaper exclaimed, "What a narrow view some people take of infinity!"

Despite the apparent disobedience of the laws, ball players were governed by rules of moral conduct and public behaviors as strictly as the rules of play. The *Democrat & American* declared "We are glad to see our rules of play. The young men associating themselves together for such purposes like that of the Flour City, and it would be well if more were disposed to enjoy themselves in such like innocent and healthful pleasures instead of resorting to more questionable means of finding recreation."

As in some other recreational activities, the attitudes of the public about baseball had to be persuaded to change from the image of recreation as immoral idleness to healthful pastime. In August of 1858 the *Democrat & American,* in a lengthy article captioned "Field Sports," defended the popular new forms of outdoor recreation; fishing, rowing and baseball by calling them healthy and innocent amusements. The article read, "The fishing rod, ball and club are looked upon as instruments of Satan rather than innocent and healthful implements to while away an occasional hour, apart from the dust and din of city life, the toil of necessary labor and carking cares." It is the duty of the more grave and matured portion of the community to favor these tendencies of field sports, and other outdoor amusements instead

of laying a guilt trip on those who steal away to enjoy these"-- The exhilaration of green fields and pure air will supplant the morbid and pernicious cravings for tobacco and rum, the article continued, and baseball playing would be a time for fathers, mothers and friends to share a common interest.

Private baseball clubs organized by neighborhoods, vocation, wealth or some common social or religious association or race. Frederick Douglass Jr. and Frank Stewart became prominent black players. Stewart particularly distinguished himself after the Civil War when he played on an all-black team. They acquired playing space and tried to preserve and strengthen social attitudes. Factory and business owners sometimes played along with their employees in the pre-Civil War period when the industrial revolution had not yet completely separated workers from manufacturing classes. One newspaper in 1858 gave an exaggerated figure of at least a thousand clubs that had formed in the Rochester area.

The problems created by the mushrooming popularity of baseball were more involved than attitudes, for it affected people who paid no attention to it, except that it forced itself upon their quiet neighborhoods and turned the public squares into playing fields. Walking paths became dusty and deeply worn as base lines cut into the turf and horses hitched to the enclosing fences during the games chewed holes in them. Young trees were being damaged by bystanders including truant boys who subjected nearby residents to a steady stream of "yelling, hooting and profanity louder than thunder."

The City's First Baseball Champions

The Live Oaks apparently became the city's first official champions in 1858 when they won a 39 to 7 victory over Genesee Valley in a game hosted by the Monroe County Agricultural Society. No pennant was yet awarded in the still-evolving sport, only an invitation to take tea with the society's managers and the distinction of helping them to judge the merits of domestic manufacture of bread, biscuits, cake and native wines. Across the nation, the first championships were often won at local fairs.

The baseball craze in Rochester, and apparently all of western New York continued through the following season. As an editorial in a Buffalo newspaper declared, "Almost everyone is

affected with the ball club fever here this season. . . . Almost everything pertaining to the game of the hour is of necessary interest . . ."

The Outbreak of War

The outbreak of the Civil War in the spring of 1861 signaled the end of the city's golden age of amateur baseball as many of its players marched off to battle. Early players John VanVoorhis, John Stebbins, James Backus and others recalled years after the war, "The black clouds of that struggle called the game off forever," and amateur baseball never again was played with the intensity and abandon for all other concerns. John VanVoorhis recalled that before the Civil War when the game was a true sport that a player wore muscle and nerves to the breaking point, when his club was the "flower" of the Flour City, was "hard as oak boards," trained down to the pink of condition, he was the possessor of keen eyes, a good head and rapid judgement. But in the field the hometown soldiers wanted to read about the somewhat limited schedule of games played and they played in field camps wherever they were stationed.

The Rules of the 19th Century

The 1858 game, played by the published rules of the National Association of Base Ball Players, was only basically similar to today's game for it was "still in its childhood day," and would not evolve into modern baseball until about 1903.

Nine innings instead of the original 21 runs were now specified by the Association to constitute a game. At its annual meetings the Association continued to evaluate and refine rules and equipment. Three outs, made by either 9 strikes or three caught balls or a combination of these two, retired a side. Unlike today, the ball could be caught either in fair or foul territory and on the first bound as well as on the fly. No balls were called on the pitcher, but strikes on refused balls would eventually be called on a batter if he appeared to be prolonging the game by refusing good pitches. First the umpire issued a warning, then he began to call strikes.

The Early Fields

Early baseball players, or those who did not use public grounds, were responsible for selecting and maintaining their own grounds. It is not clear who was responsible for the preparation of public squares for ball playing, but the public complaints about the ravaged squares abounded, leading one to believe that the team was responsible. Ball clubs were expected to police the playing fields during games as well as to protect them from destruction from spectators or malicious bystanders.

The National Association suggested that the field be 600 feet long and 400 feet wide, but acknowledged that a good game was possible on the smaller fields that out of necessity many early teams played on. The Association suggested that the field be level and free from all irregularities. Turf rather than soil was preferred. Dirt fields were to have a loamy soil placed around the base paths and all gravel was to be removed to prevent slips, slides and other injuries, particularly behind home plate and the catcher's area. Finally the ground was to be rolled to level it.

The Brown Square playing field, which was apparently the scene of Rochester's first inter-city match, was complimented by the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* as "the best we ever saw, long and wide and level as a door," with sandy soil that readily absorbed moisture and surrounded by beautiful trees. But one drawback, they considered, was that the field was so large that a ball could seldom be knocked over the fence without being out.

As previously mentioned, filled canvas sacks, painted white, replaced the sticks, stones and crude wooden posts that served as base markers before 1845. They covered a specified area 14 by 17 square feet and were secured to baseposts and held in position by harness-leather straps.

Bases were first apparently filled with sand, but later for safety reasons, were filled by lighter materials like sawdust, cotton and even hair. At the game between Flour City and the Buffalo Niagaras in September of 1845, two accidents were blamed on bases filled with sand instead of the customary sawdust-- "a dangerous practice." By 1860, foul posts, also painted white or whitewashed, were being used to mark foul lines.

Early baseball bats were a variety of long and heavy clubs, hand made or hand hewn and weighing up to three pounds and made from sturdy tree branches or even whittled down wagon tongues.

An unidentified Rochester baseball club posed for this photograph in 1894.

But the National Association began to regulate the dimensions, eventually authorizing a maximum diameter of 2 1/2 inches. The bat could be any weight and length but had to be made of wood. Ash was used most commonly, but maple, white or pitch pine, and hickory were also used as players experimented to develop the most effective bat. Medium weight ash was favored because of its toughness and elasticity, but English willow later became popular in Rochester. The famed "Louisville Slugger" was not manufactured until 1884, but purchase entries in team record books suggest that "clubs" were purchased by players much earlier.

The modern ball, too, gradually evolved as players experimented with specifications on weight and circumference, which varied as regulations regarding them evolved through the National Association. In the late 1850s the ball was made with an India rubber core and wrapped in yarn. A cork and rubber core, wrapped with cotton yarn and covered by sheepskin or horsehide eventually became preferred.

"I ordered the first white horsehide ball, just one, that came to town of (from) the secretary of the Atlantic Club of Brooklyn," later declared a Flour City Club secretary. "What a host of the

boys came to see it and to have a kindly handling." There was no endless supply of new balls when one became scuffed, worn or "dead" from improper storage. The ball was furnished by the challenging team and became the property of the losing team.

Protective Equipment

Protective equipment of any kind was unheard of in the early games. These rugged pioneer players displayed a contempt for later players who used it. Bruised and split-open hands, sprains and broken bones, especially fingers, and bloody encounters with the bat were common in the absence of cushioned gloves or mits, chest, face or shin protectors.

"I know from my father's description that baseball eighty-five years ago was no game for weaklings. He never got over a mild contempt for any player (except a catcher) who used a glove, and for a catcher who used a mask and chest protector," recalled Hestor Hopkins Cochrane in 1951. Rochester catcher John Morey's shins were said to be "One mass of black and blue bruises from foot to knee" after a game. He had a way of putting his ankles and knees together to stop low balls.

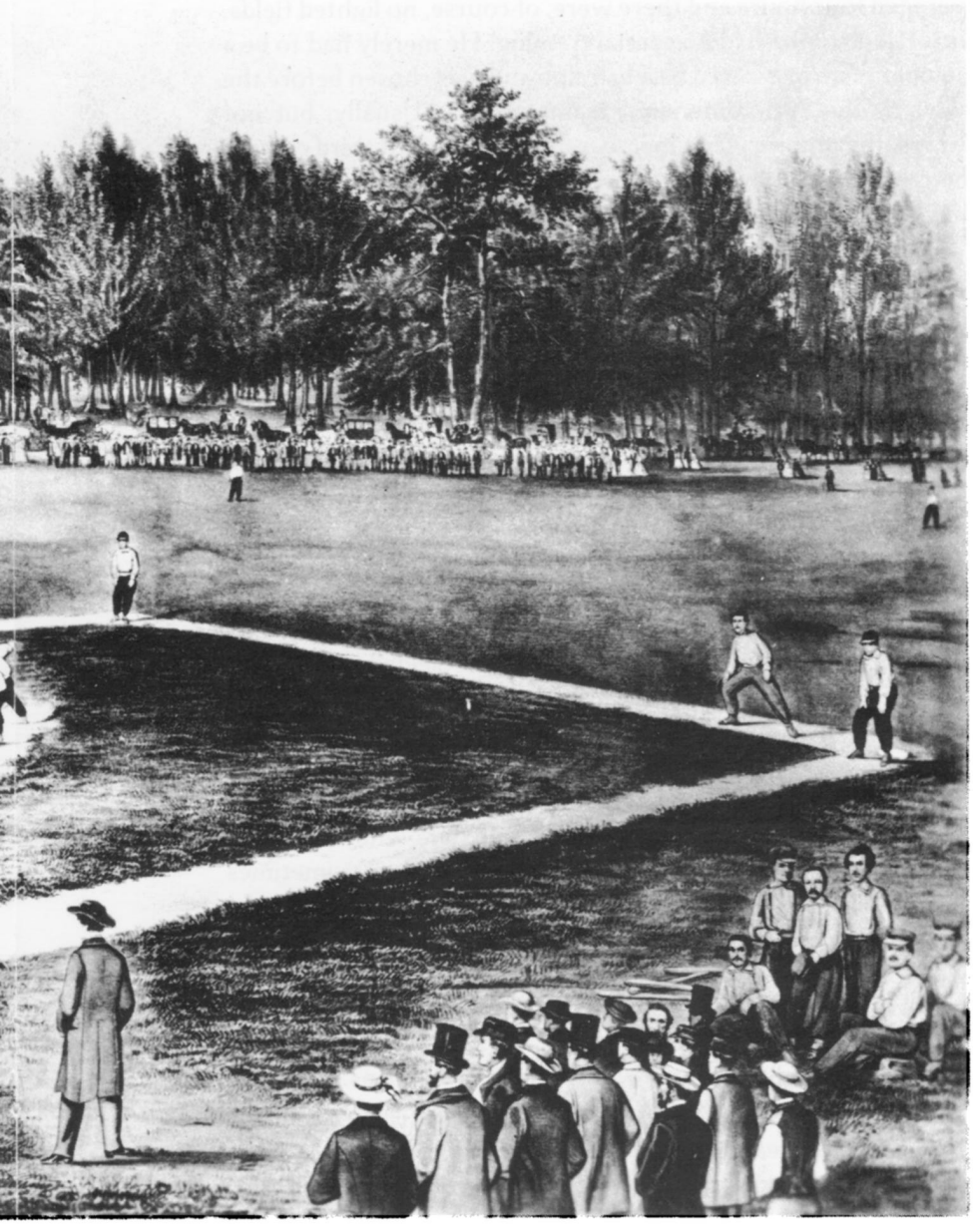
On August 15, 1860, the *Union & Advertiser* reported that the Tenth Ward Club's third baseman, Stephen Clark, was knocked down when he was struck in the face by a bat, and suffered a broken tooth when hit a second time, all in the same game but he "stood his ground like a hero to the last and still loved to play the noble game."

Player Positions

Nine players played the same basic positions as today, but the emphasis was not on the defense. The first baseman stood at the bag to catch throws, not to field grounders, later recalled Mike Burke, an early amateur player honored at a local Hall of Fame opening celebration game of the Red Wings in 1939. "The infield and outfield performed in much the same way as the modern game," he recalled.

One umpire ruled the game, instead of the former two specified by the Knickerbockers in 1845. That umpire alone had the right to

Before stadiums were built players held games in squares, parks



ks and meadows. The game became very popular after the Civil War.

call a game in case of darkness, a common occurrence when games averaged four hours and there were, of course, no lighted fields. Unfortunately he had no special training. He merely had to be a member of an organized baseball club and was chosen before the game by the two contending team captains. Usually, but not always, the umpire was a member of an indifferent third club. In the case of an inter-city or other special match, an umpire from the National Association might serve.

There were also two scorekeepers, one appointed by each contending team. They sat on stools at high wooden tables and recorded the game statistics.

The pitcher stood forty-five feet from the plate and pitched a strictly prescribed underhanded throw in a side-arm motion. His elbow was kept stiff and his arm was parallel to the body. There was no bull pen, no relief pitcher, in this early game, though replacements would become more common later in the 1860s as the speed of the ball increased and caused greater injuries to these bare-handed hurtlers.

Though a player was eventually required by the National Association to play the same position throughout the game, except in the case of injury, at first players seldom played the same position from game to game. Player positions and rules concerning them were still evolving. Though it was said that "the crack of a bat on a level liner" meant fame for a season, game emphasis was on hitting, base running and fielding. Not, as today, on pitching. However it was the early pitchers who received a legendary status and were, along with the catcher, sometimes given a special award. Pitcher Richard B. Willis was presented a gold pen and case by his club in 1860. In the estimation of many, he was the greatest pitcher that this city had ever seen, "with an arm hard as marble" and capable of such intense effort that he was sometimes led "almost fainting" to a tent where he was rubbed down and cold cloths were applied to his arms.

Jim Creighton, the New York Excelsior pitcher nationally known for his great speed and command of the ball, was said to have had great respect for Willis' pitching. John Stebbins, claimed to be Willis' equal, was also known for his fierce underhand delivery of the ball. He kept his elbow tightly bound in a stout bandage in order to pitch within the rules yet increasing the power of his arm. He practiced hour after hour at home. Neither Stebbins nor Willis "ran up" to get speed as most pitchers did in these early years before the National Association created the

pitcher's box and practically immobilized the pitchers in 1862. They were then required to stand perfectly still in a 12 X 3 foot space. Willis was said to have given up his life for the love of the game which didn't kill him outright, but definitely shortened his life. Creighton was fatally injured "in the line of duty" at the age of 21, according to several historical references, apparently during a game.

The pitcher picked chiefly for his ability to throw the ball close enough to the batter so it could be hit, generally "lobbed up 'slows'" with no attempt at deception, though gradually this developed a half speed ball and even an elementary change of pace. Rochester pitchers were apparently among the nation's more creative pitchers.

An action of the wrist, inaugurated by Creighton, gave an extra impetus to the ball, a twist rather than a curve. Anything that resembled a curving ball was declared unfair.

"Loder, I think, was the first man to pitch a curved ball in Rochester," an early player recalled, "The batters against whom we were playing didn't know what was happening to them when they found it approaching them and curving away and declared it unfair."

Though legends apparently abound in nearly every community about the origin of the first curve ball, Arthur Caddy Cummings of the Stars of Brooklyn, is credited with developing the first curve ball in 1865. First thought to be an optical illusion, it wouldn't become accepted until 1877 when Rochester astronomer Lewis Swift declared it was not an optical illusion as he had thought earlier.

Though it was allowable to take the ball on the first bound, more expert catchers like Morey stood up as close as they dared and received the delivery practically off the bat, no pleasant undertaking when stopping the powerful hurtles Willis or Stebbins could throw and without the protection of face, chest or shin protectors. "Morey used to get under the bat and catch the hot delivery without even dodging," one player recalled.

The Popularity of Baseball

On June 18, 1858 what may have been the first formal public baseball game was held and reported the next day by both the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* and the *Democrat & American*. A

"goodly number of spectators, including many ladies, were noted in spite of the heat."

Forty-five years later, in a *Post Express* article on the game's origins, a player recalled the first city match, "The day was fine and carriages lined up in the street and the youth and beauty of the town were there to see the first game of baseball played here."

Mid-nineteenth century baseball spectators generally stood on the field, moving around to follow the action or they sat in the variety of horsedrawn vehicles, even omnibuses, that brought them to the game. By 1860, however, some seating was apparently being provided.

Spectators were expected to stay behind the ropes placed around the playing field, not to lean on or in any other way damage fences and young trees and to refrain from touching the ball under any circumstances. Before an August 13, 1858 game, the *Democrat & American* printed a request by local clubs "that spectators refrain from leaning against or in any manner injuring shade trees on the square. Arrangements will be made to give everybody an opportunity to witness the playing without interference."

Spectators were expected to applaud both good and bad plays on both teams. At the conclusion of the game, three cheers, led by the losing team, were given.

The First Intercity Games

On September 4, 1858, the *Democrat & American* reported that "an immense concourse" had gathered yesterday on Brown Square, in spite of intermittent rain, for what was apparently Rochester's first intercity match, a contest between Flour City and the Buffalo Niagaras. "Some came in carriages, some on foot, but almost everyone (including ladies) came somehow," the paper reported. The *Union & Advertiser* reported that "thousands watched the game with intense interest." Unfortunately, the Flour City lost 30 to 20 to an older, more experienced team that boasted superior batters, basemen and catchers. The Niagara's George Love was able to strike the bases without being put out and, quickly became the favorite of the spectators. Their Mr. Higins boasted the largest number of runs. Scores were high in these minimally defensive games. At least temporarily, Buffalo "carried the broom" over Rochester.

On September 24, the return match was played in Buffalo before over a thousand men and women, including a "pretty fair carload from Rochester" assorted ball club members and others who took advantage of a special half-price round trip train fare that was offered by the railroad. In this early stage of the game's development, club members on both a local and national level, attended home and away games, even some at great distances, to improve their skills by observing. Again the Flour City lost. This time by six runs. No doubt they were heartened by the traditional post-game supper during which there were traditional sentiments and toasts, music and even poetry.

A special gift, sheet music of the "Baseball Polka" written by the Niagara club's musician/baseball player J.R. Blodgett, was dedicated and presented to members of the Flour City who were encouraged to give them to the ladies in their lives.

The National Association etiquette required that in intracity games the winning team hosted the losing team at a post-game supper. The home team hosted the visiting team in intercity games.

The First City and Regional Championships

The Live Oaks had become the champions when they defeated the Genesee Valley Club 39 to 7 at the annual Monroe County Agricultural Fair on September 16, 1858, but the following March, the city's apparent first baseball pennant, later described as "nothing more or less than an American flag" with the team emblem embroidered on it, hung in Arcade Hall. The banner was presented to the Lone Stars at the Monroe County Agricultrual Society in 1859. It showed the American flag with a wreath of green oak branches embroidered upon its stripes. Included was an inscription, "B.B.C. (Base Ball Club) Rochester by the Monroe County Agricultural Fair 1858."

Now declared the official city champions and the only senior club to pass the season without a defeat, the Lone Star wrested the regional championship title from the Buffalo Niagaras on September 22, 1860 here in Rochester. The Niagaras had previously declared themselves the champions of Western New York, but the Lone Stars' pitcher, Richard Willis, "never let on (up) his cannonball delivery" which earned them a 32 to 10

victory. This was the worst defeat the Niagaras had ever sustained and their only one except for the visiting New York Excelsiors.

A New Role For the Press

Though it is said that a newspaper article referring to Thurlow Weed's Rochester Base Ball Club appeared in an 1830 newspaper, the first regular local accounts of the game apparently appeared in 1858. Cricket game accounts appear as early as 1847 in Rochester newspapers, but the first reference to baseball appears ten years later when a group of boys was reported arrested for playing the game on the streets. Nationally the first notice of a baseball game appeared in the *Sunday Mercury* in 1853 and was entitled "Cricket and Base Ball."

These first local newspaper accounts of baseball were intermittent, inconsistent, varied and obscure notices, found on "Local Matters," "City Matters," or "Local Affairs " pages amidst notices of mill accidents, robberies, court proceedings, suicides and even murders. But they became sources of encouragement and support for the game's development, eventually shaping public attitudes to accept the new sport that was beginning to sweep the nation as well as the city.

Accounts of the first "baseball" games were sent to the newspapers regularly after 1858, by club secretaries and were printed at the expense of the club. The *Union & Advertiser* said in 1859, "We have never seen a game in Rochester and have no lively interest therefore." After the Civil War readers' interest required that the newspapers cover the games.

The first very sketchy accounts and preliminary box scores were modeled after cricket games. They continued to grow in detail to include synopses of innings, home runs, and even how many errors and balls pitched.

The game, well on its way to establishing itself as the national game with players and spectators alike, continued to grow in popularity. More suburban and city teams, neighborhood, company teams organized. Junior teams like the Washingtons, composed of "boys well down in their teens," were challenging the senior teams. The careers of players, then called "muffins" or "muffs," were followed by 1860, not the performance of the club alone.

The feature of the 1859 season was a contest between the All-England Cricket Team and a team of hand picked baseball "nines" from baseball clubs. Cricketers defeated the baseball players 17 to 7 even though the game was baseball. Apparently baseball was often played by cricketers as a warm-up before a match and some players were very good. A newspaper commented on the match, the "game bids fair to become a favorite game, perhaps in a few years our national game."

The following season, hundreds of people from Buffalo to Boston gathered at an August game in Brooklyn played before 15,000 spectators. Many people from upstate villages and cities had gone to learn by watching the great teams perform in what is now recognized as the contest that established baseball as a spectator sport.

By the end of the 1860 season baseball had become so heated that not even winter snows could cool it. On January 16, 1860, a game was played on ice skates on Irondequoit Bay near the Float Bridge (Empire Blvd.) One hundred spectators watched as players from the Live Oaks, Flour City, Olympics and Lone Star played an eight inning game that ended 27 to 25. The *Buffalo Express* commented, "We should think a little practice of this winter mode of playing ball could render it one of the best sports imaginable." The paper described the game as more animated, exciting and enjoyable with harder thumps, more shocking and bloody collisions, more frequent slips and falls, more laughable blunders and ludicrous, unlucky scenes.

Another game on ice, played in Rochester on New Year's Day in 1861 attracted 2500 spectators; including many ladies who had forsaken the traditional New Year's Day custom of "receiving gentlemen callers in their heated parlors."

By now the game had thoroughly taken hold of public attention. Players were increasingly striving for expertise, and winning rather than recreation was becoming the object of the game. The display of Rochester's first baseball pennant in Arcade Hall in 1859 probably awakened in many players the desire "to win" not just to play the game.

On July 9, 1860, the Brooklyn Excelsiors defeated the Live Oaks 27-9 at Rochester during the first tour in baseball history. Considered the champions of America, the Excelsiors who remained undefeated on this trip, had just beaten the Niagaras at Buffalo and then the Flour City in Rochester.

On July 16, 1860 the *Democrat & American* admonished the *Union*

& Advertiser for its apparent preoccupation with perfectionism. The paper reminded the public that local clubs played the Excelsiors not to win, but to improve their skills by observing the experts. The Flour City, in spite of their devastating 21-1 loss, had been successful in keeping the Excelsiors' score down, and the Live Oaks had exceeded their club's expectations in the number of runs scored. The Excelsiors, it was noted, were known for delegating a large amount of time to baseball; some of their players might even be considered professional, though compensation of players in any way was still strictly forbidden by the National Association, especially Jim Creighton who was rumored to receive a $500 annual salary. Rochester players, they emphasized, had demanding occupations and continued to play the game in their spare time for recreation and public amusement.

The *Union & Advertiser* observed, "More especially since the visit of the Excelsiors Club of Brooklyn has a goodly portion of craft in this city devoted a few spare hours weekly to the development of "muscular Christianity."

Increasingly during the 1860 season newspapers that encouraged playing ball for health and recreation were emphasizing perfectionism, and more criticism was creeping into their game accounts.

Late in the 1860 season, the Buffalo Niagaras were ridiculed for delivering "wild throws" in passes to bases and being generally "behind the times" in fielding.

As clubs sought greater strength and expertise, team jumping, a practice in which a player changes teams in an effort to strengthen another club during an important challenge, began to emerge.

Three Flour City club members were accused of joining the Washingtons within two to four weeks of a game at Lockport, for the purpose of bolstering the team to victory. This clearly violated the rules set down by the National Association which required that a player be a member of a contending team at least thirty days before a match game.

Almost from the beginning there was a need to tighten up the rules of the game and to reinforce the authority of the National Association. Problems continued to arise locally as well as nationally from the loosely regulated game as it rapidly grew in scope and popularity. Untrained and not always impartial umpires whose decisions were not respected or were thoroughly ignored, presented other problems.

"Why have an umpire at all if his decision won't be respected," complained the *Union & Advertiser* after the 1859 city championship game ended in a fight when umpire John Stebbins presumably called the game on account of darkness at the end of the sixth inning. A horde of unruly spectators stormed the field with "warm words of dispute making further play impossible." One of the first major games of the 1860 season ended in a similar dispute.

Though still in its early years, the game had already lost its innocence. Gamblers frequented the games and probably began to bribe umpires and even players. Player conduct was eroding also. A Buffalo paper complained that the "Live Oak boys" were a "quarrelsome bunch." A Rochester paper complained that there would be no public support by good citizens if "wrangling, contention, betting and bluffing" continued.

Audiences became increasingly demanding and began to abandon polite applause for lusty cheering when a favorite player scored a run or made a good play. Discreet silence following a bad play would eventually give way to the modern practice of booing.

But as reflected in the newspapers the public continued to demand fair, honest and exemplary play.

"Let all clubs cherish their well earned reputation of men, who claim to prove that amusements can be nationally pursued without the taint of vulgarity"... Let our ball grounds be a field of pleasure and play, where vulgarity, profanity and contention be forever banished." It went on to encourage honors borne meekly, and defeat met with patience instead of contention.

The Civil War

One of the last contests of the 1860 season was played in November by various club members who contended to support their favorite presidential candidates, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Douglas supporters won the game, but the election of Abraham Lincoln and the events that followed disrupted the game for nearly half a decade.

In the spring of 1861 it was announced in the *Union & Advertiser* that "The Lone Star have some of their best men in our volunteer regiment, among them their president and team captain, F.R. Schoeffel. In view of this the club has resolved to play no match games for three months.

Teams such as the Live Oaks and Olympic clubs opened the 1861 season by consolidating strength, in the hope that they could "take down anything this side of Brooklyn." Later began consolidating for survival as ball players were among the first to volunteer for soldiers.

"Some of our best members have left the agreeable recreation of pitching ball in a quiet field and volunteered to pitch balls at the "traitors of their country's flag," the *Democrat & American* went on to announce.

By September of 1861 the war had intensified and stories about the games were crowded out by reports from the battlefield and political commentary. But citizens still commited to baseball continued to play the game or follow the occasional newspaper accounts of local or regional contests which took place in spite of the absence of many of the best players. Increasing attention of others went to the workplace as manufacturers and businessmen worked longer hours filling orders for the Union cause.

Surprisingly, fans and newspapers did not lessen their demands for perfection. The *Union & Advertiser* admonished the Lone Stars for lack of practice and complained of their "frequent fouling" even though impromptu games included players home on furlough. Player R.E. Ellenbeck was presented with a Navy revolver on September 6, 1861 when he played in Rochester while home on furlough.

But soldiers took their love of baseball with them to the battle field and spread the game "like wildfire" across the nation following the war.

The game was frequently played in camps and soldiers sometimes sent home notices of these games to their local newspapers.

On September 6, 1864 the *Union & Advertiser* reported that baseball was among the various pastimes of off-duty regiment members and that a game at Camp Chemung in Elmira had given players from the 54th Regiment of Rochester a chance to oppose some of Brooklyn's best players during a game against the 56th Regiment.

Also in September 1864, when the State Fair was held at Rochester, the war weary public was treated to a deciding contest between the American national champions, the Atlantics of Brooklyn and the Canadian national champions, the Young Canadian Club of Woodstock, Ontario at a game held at Jones Square. The Atlantics were victorious 75-11. "Their presence

here has infused some of the base ball fever among our citizens. . ." the *Evening Express* declared.

After the war, old teams had been thinned by death or injury. Players who returned to their homes from the battle-field were older and more sober-minded than when they had gone off to war. Many had businesses to rebuild or jobs to find. But the game had changed too.

Early players were probably correct when as old timers they recalled the pre-Civil War years as Rochester's "golden age" of amateur baseball. In the years that followed the war, the game would rise again and enjoy new popularity. But never again would there be quite the enthusiasm for the game as when it was "new."

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Back Cover: By 1890 ball players were using chest protectors, gloves and regulation size bats but equipment was much less protective than it is today.