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HOBOKEN & THE BEGINNINGS OF BASEBALL



Monument to Battery A 1st N.J. Artillery in Gettysburg, Pa
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Issue No. 22 - 1998



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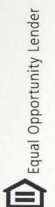
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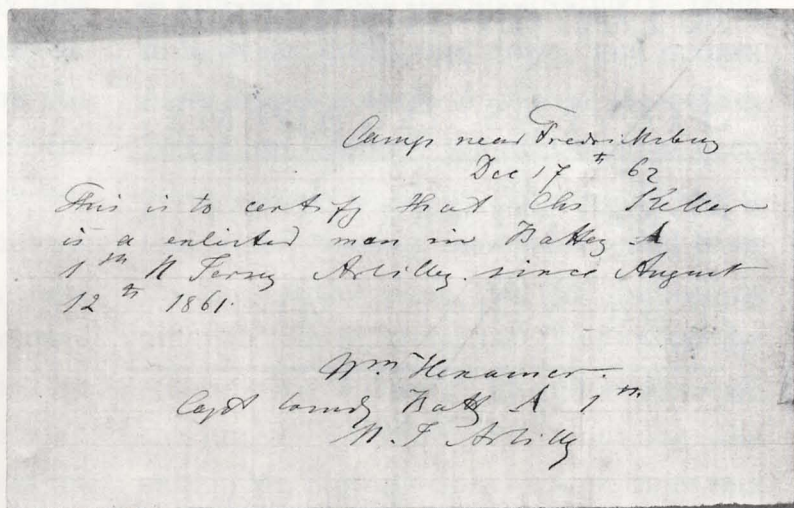
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On the Cover

The monument to Battery A, 1st New Jersey Artillery under the command of Captain William Hexamer of Hoboken. Photo compliments of the Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg, Pa.

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Document penned on Dec. 17, 1862 by Captain William Hexamer during the Civil War at a camp near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Collection of John DePalma. See related story on page 6.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE AT STEVENS ACADEMY:

FOND MEMORIES OF A HIGH SCHOOL MENTOR

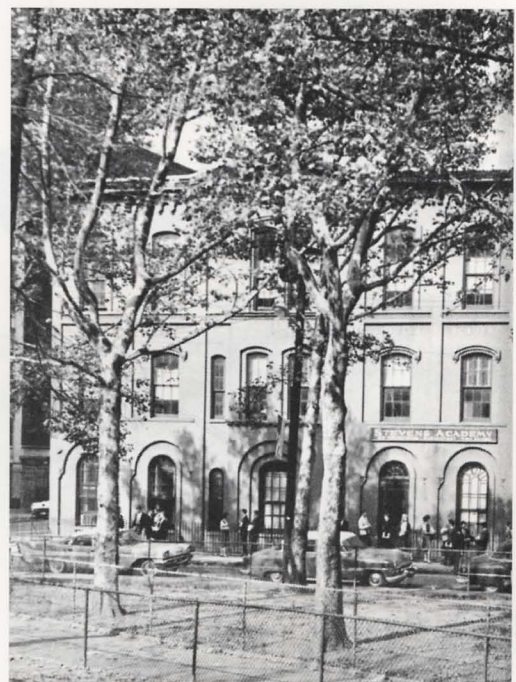
By Jack Satter

"I'm sorry for you. You'll have to stay for the penalty period!" You might think you were listening to an unusually polite referee at a hockey game. However, if you attended Stevens Academy, you'd know you were hearing the infamous Mr. Stevens, and you'd also know you were in trouble.

Mr. Stevens was of no relation to the Stevens family which started Stevens Institute of Technology and played a vital roll in the establishment of the Academy. Although, you would think he was a direct benefactor by the way he took care of his classroom and watched over the students to make sure they did not abuse the facility. "Books are precious!" he often said.



*He was a dapper dresser,
always wearing heavily
starched shirts, a suit,
highly shined shoes, and
usually a bow tie.*



Top: Instructor William J. Kenealey-Stevens, below: Stevens Academy looking north from Church Square Park. The Sentry 1963

He was in charge of attendance for both the students and the faculty, no easy task in the days before computers. Probably because of this function, he became the school's disciplinarian, responsible for the punitive duty of baby sitting those of us who were unfortunately caught misbehaving and having to stay after school. Oh, there were a few teachers that preferred to have the pleasure of our company at their own "Tea and Sympathy" disciplinary parties, but for the most part, Mr. Stevens was the mainstay in this area.

Born William J. Kenealey-Stevens, he would introduce himself to his students by his full name explaining that the name "Kenealey" meant "horse thief" in some ancient Celtic language. He was a dapper dresser, always wearing heavily starched shirts, a suit, highly shined shoes, and usually a bow tie. Topped with wire-rimmed glasses and a graying crew-cut, he was the persona of "gentlemanly," and attempted to teach us "refinement" by example.

Mr. Stevens headed the Humanities Department at the high school. His forte was history, geography, and current events, all of which he knew more about than anyone I've ever met. He accentuated the problems and people in history and modern days with insight and perceptions along with the facts.

I remember one geography lesson vividly. We were discussing the Amazon River and he asked how the river flowed through the land. We all sat as bewildered as ever as to what exactly he was talking about. When no one offered a response, he got up from

his desk, folded his hands together in front of him, and began to walk around the room in-between desks, up, down, and across. After about a minute of this, he asked, "What am I doing?" We all looked at each other blankly thinking, "He's really lost it this time!" "Pacing," someone yelled from the back of the room. "No! No!" he said in anguish, "I'm meandering! That's what the Amazon River does! It meanders through the jungle!" As you can see, nothing was easy in Mr. Stevens' class because there was always something beyond the obvious he was expecting. Needless to say, we learned a lot of new words along with a lot of history, geography, and current events. He made what for some was boring, at least challenging, which forced us to listen. Like Mr. Bennett, our illustrious English teacher and last Head Master at Stevens Academy, Mr. Stevens could and would embarrass you in front of everyone if you were not on your toes. One of his favorite ploys, especially if you were nodding off, was to be looking at the opposite side of the room from you, but asking YOU the question. Flustered, most



As Head of the Social Studies Department, Mr. Kenealey-Stevens also served as Faculty Advisor to the Current Events Club. The Sentry 1963.

of us would stammer out an answer trying to save face, only to have Mr. Stevens give one of his famous facial expressions of anguish and disappointment and then call on someone else to redeem us. This always managed to get snickers which finished off your humiliation, even if it was his weird facial animation that was causing the laughter.

Mr. Stevens was a smooth operator. He never got flustered. His classroom was located on the first floor and once, during his class, someone lowered a chalkboard eraser down on a string from the second floor and began banging on his window. He turned from writing on the blackboard, observed the fray of the eraser, threw down the chalk, announced through gritted teeth, "I'll be right back!" and bolted out of the classroom. Thirty seconds later, we could hear him bellowing overhead, "What is the meaning of this!" followed by desks falling over and the thunder of people scattering up above. Soon Mr. Stevens wisped past the window in the door of our classroom with some upper classman in tow by the collar, headed for the principle's office. As refined as he was, he was in shape and jogged daily. Hence, with the agility of a cheetah, there weren't too many students who could outrun him. When I look back on it, he had all the sophistication of a lazer guided, computerized "Surface-to-Air Missile," and yet every time he caught someone, it was always such a surprise to him or her.

Being good at imitating his voice, on more than one occasion, I left the lunch room early and hid behind the lockers. When a sufficient number of classmates had arrived, I'd yell

out: "What is the meaning of this!" or "Get down to my office immediately!" and watch people with horror-struck expressions trying to climb over each other to get to the hallway.

Another time, my sister was in his history class. She was wearing a charm bracelet. When she went to scratch her knee, the bracelet snagged her hosiery and she couldn't get it undone. So she asked Barry, the guy next to her, for assistance. When Mr. Stevens looked up he saw the two of them, heads together, looking under the table where all hands were fully involved in trying to free her. Mr. Stevens exclaimed, "Linda! What are you doing?" "I'm caught, Mr. Stevens." came the reply. "You certainly ARE!" he scolded.

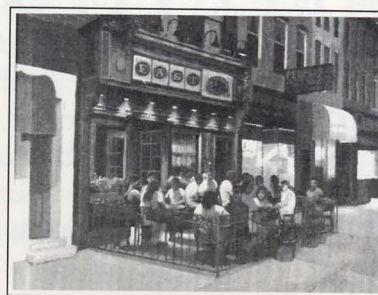
Along with all the knowledge and entertainment he brought to us, he was a really nice human being and was very proud of each of us. He was always very professional, leading by example. But once when my sister had a detention, she asked him why he never married. At first he told her to concentrate on her homework, but after about three queries, he opened his wallet and took out a picture of the young women he had been engaged to.

He simply said that while he was away serving his country at war, she became ill and passed away. That lead to another question about what he did in the war. Proudly, he announced that he was a "Remington Raider." This gave way to the explanation that he was a typist in the Communications Corp. His "weapon" was a Remington typewriter.

He did not own a television. He was an avid reader, which made him a wealth of knowledge of history, geography, obscure subjects and minute details, and a master of Life. When it came to teaching, he was a true artisan who really cared not only that "you got it," but that it had meaning in your terms so that your life was enriched by the knowledge. As I look back, how I wish I had gotten to know him better and used his vast knowledge more. He was always willing to discuss darn near any subject at length outside of the classroom. He had been to many places and knew so much. In spite of his disciplinarian roll, he was a gentle and generous soul who would go out of his way to help his students or fellow faculty members. You would almost think the main character of Goodbye Mister Chips was fashioned after him.

Mr. Stevens began his tenure at the Academy in 1954. He had both Bachelor and Master Degrees from the University of California in Berkeley; graduate studies at Columbia University; New York; attended Frankfurt University in Germany; Oxford University in England; and Trinity College in Ireland. He was one of the pillars of the school and integral in the day-to-day running of the Academy. Well traveled and scholarly, he was devoted to his students and dedicated to our school. If he were still around today, I am sure he would be just as entertaining and fascinating as he was back in high school. Mr. Stevens showed us the way and helped shape us into responsible adults without our being aware of it. He left us better having known him.

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HEXAMER'S BATTERY

By George Long Moller



GENERAL
GEORGE E. PICKETT

Moller's account of a little known episode in the Battle of Gettysburg first appeared in the then Official Historian of Hoboken's 1964 book, Hoboken of Yesterday. James M. McPherson, in Battle Cry of Freedom, has described Pickett's Charge as "the Confederate war effort in microcosm: matchless valor, apparent initial success, and ultimate disaster." The role of Hexamer's Battery, composed of men from Hoboken and commanded that day (for reasons no one has ever made clear) by Lieutenant Augustin N. Parsons, bears repeating. Editor's Note



GENERAL
ROBERT E. LEE

IT WAS THE THIRD DAY AT GETTYSBURG.

For the past two days the Confederate Army under General Robert E. Lee had been attacking the Union Army's flanks without success. Today, the third day, a Confederate division led by General George E. Pickett would try and pierce the Union center. Assembling on the far side of Seminary Ridge, where they were out of sight of the Union guns, were the Brigades of Generals Lewis A. Armistead, Richard B. Garnett, and James L. Kemper's division. Acting as right flank guard for Pickett were the Brigades of General Cadmus M. Wilcox and Colonel David Lang.

At 1:04 P.M. the Confederate artillery opened the attack by laying down a heavy fire of the Union lines. The Federal guns responded immediately. For over an hour, the artillery duel continued, then, as planned, Pickett's troops began moving down from Seminary Ridge to the fields below. These men, 15,000 of them, would attempt an advance of almost one mile across open fields under heavy fire in an effort to dislodge the strongly entrenched Union forces.

The lines of Confederate gray began the sweep across the fields in perfect order. For a few moments the Union troops watched in silent admiration. Then their guns began taking their toll on the oncoming men. Shortly before the advance started, Pickett had sent word back that he thought he could take the position and that if he did he would need reinforcements.

General James Longstreet, Lee's second in command, immediately ordered Wilcox and Lang, the right flank guard, to move out to Pickett's support.

Due to intense Union fire and the intense smoke that covered the battlefield, these two Brigades veered off to the right and approached the Emmittsburg Road about one mile south of where Pickett was engaged. However, Wilcox and Lang, due to this error, posed a threat to the Union 2nd Corps, which was defending the Federal lines at that point. General R. O. Tyler, commanding the Union's artillery reserve, dispatched Battery A, First New Jersey Artillery from its position southwest of Power's Hill to the scene. This battery was under the command of Captain William Hexamer of Hoboken, but, at the precise moment of General Tyler's order to move out, the Battery was commanded by its junior officer, Lieutenant A. N. Parsons.

It was 3 P.M. when the Battery galloped up to the 2nd Corps position and reported to Captain R.H. Fitzhugh, the senior artillery officer. Fitzhugh told Parsons to place his guns near the stone fence in front of General Webb's troops near the Taneytown Road. This was just to the left of Captain Fitzhugh's own command, Battery K of the First New York Artillery. What happened after the New Jersey Battery arrived is told by Fitzhugh in his official report of the battle. This is an excerpt from that report.

"At this time," said Fitzhugh, "the enemy were making a strong effort to break the Second Corps' line, their infantry having charged to a stone fence near a small wooded knoll about 75 yards on my right, while their artillery fire swept the ground occupied by the two batteries. Just then there were no other batteries at that point, and there seemed to be a good deal of confusion. The rebel artillery fire, from a house and barn about 1,000 yards on my left and front, was especially severe, but soon materially slackened, and became very wild under a fire of percussion and time shells from Battery K. In the meantime, Lieutenant Parsons poured 40 rounds of shrapnel into the flank of the rebel infantry charging the Second Corps, and in about half or three-quarters of an hour the enemy abandoned the attack at that point altogether.

"After a pause of about an hour, the rebel infantry began forming on the right of the house and barn before spoken of, while from the same quarter their artillery opened upon us a brisk but poorly directed and inefficient fire, to which, by direction of General Hunt, I made no reply, but awaited the attack of their infantry, who soon charged over the open field toward some broken ground about 500 yards on my left, as they did so giving the two batteries an opportunity to pour in an enfilading fire, which they did with great effect, for the enemy did not reach the point, but broke and gave way in all directions when about the middle of the field.

After this, we remained in position on the same ground until about 10:00a.m. July 5, when I was ordered to rejoin the artillery reserve.

"Of the conduct of officers and men, both of Battery A, First New Jersey Artillery, Lieut. A. N. Parsons commanding, and of K, First New York Artillery, with the Eleventh New York Battery attached, I cannot speak too highly. Coming into position at a critical point of the rebel charge on our center and under a galling fire, the guns were worked with great deliberation and a most decided effect."

Battery A, First New Jersey Artillery that Captain Fitzhugh speaks so highly of was from Hoboken, NJ.

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It was organized and commanded by Captain William Hexamer and was affectionately known throughout the Army of the Potomac as Hexamer's Battery.

It had a brilliant battle record, serving in 30 major engagements and was on the right of General Phil Kearney's division when that famous New Jersey general was killed at Chantilly.

The 151 men and five officers composing the battery were all volunteers, coming mostly from the many German families then living in the town.

The Battery, in its four years of service, was frequently mentioned in dispatches and, in addition to Gettysburg, was, among other places, at Antietam, the mine explosion before Petersburg, and Lee's surrender at Appomatox.

Its first engagement with the enemy took place at West Point, Virginia, in May 1862. The official dispatches report that the Battery displayed "great gallantry" that day. The Battery then went on to fight at Mechanicsville, then Gaines Mills, and later on in the Wilderness Campaign.

Its first casualty was a private who was struck by lightning while manning the guns before Mechanicsville on May 30, 1862. Other battle casualties, as well as some from exposure and disease, were suffered later.

Hexamer organized the Battery in Hoboken as part of the militia force of the State of New Jersey. It was attached to the 3rd Regiment, Hudson Brigade.

The Battery at full strength consisted of five officers and 151 men, but, on the night before the Battle of Gettysburg, sickness and casualties had reduced the number who answered roll call to four officers and 112 men.

When the Civil War broke out, the services of the battery were tendered to the Governor of the state, but, because the state had not received authority from the federal government to accept this branch of the service, the offer was declined.

The organization of the Battery continued, however, and, once it was at full strength, it waited

only an opportunity to enter the service. The Battery was finally accepted under the provisions of an Act of Congress approved on July 22, 1861, and by authority received from the Governor from the War Department on July 29, 1861.

The battery was mustered into the service of the United States for three years or the duration of the war by Captain Frederick S. Larned, of the 12th Infantry, U.S. Army on August 12, 1861 in Hoboken. It left Hoboken on August 20 on its way to Washington, D.C., where soon after its arrival it was equipped with guns and horses. The Battery was then assigned to the First New Jersey Brigade and ordered to Virginia to join this outfit in operations against Lee.

Almost immediately, the Battery began to build a reputation for its skill and valor. One observer has remarked that, "from the time of Antietam forward, Hexamer's was one of the most famous Batteries of the War. It fought first to last with a heroism unsurpassed by any other volunteer organization."



The Monument to Battery A flanked by twin cannons at Gettysburg, Pa. Photograph compliments of Gettysburg National Military Park.

Lieutenant Parsons's official report to General Tyler, the commander of the Artillery Reserve of the Army of the Potomac, was not included in Moller's book. We quote it here from The Official Record of the War of the Rebellion:

"General: I have the honor to report that on the 3rd instant, about 3 p.m. I received orders from General Hunt to move the battery to the front as quickly as possible. I at once obeyed the order and soon had the battery in position about one-fourth of a mile south of Gettysburg Cemetery and near the Second Division, Second Corps, Captain Fitzhugh's battery following immediately after me and taking position on my right. At this time the enemy's infantry were advancing very rapidly. I at once opened fire on them with ease, shot, and fired about 120 rounds with good effect. As soon as they fell back, I opened fire upon one of the enemy's batteries (which by this time had gotten an exact range of my position) with shell and used 80 rounds, when I received orders from General Hunt to cease firing. My shells were telling upon the enemy battery, and I believe I could have completely silenced it in five minutes more.

"During the action I lost 2 men killed and 7 wounded. I also lost 3 horses killed and 2 wounded, which have since died.

"I am, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

A. N. PARSONS,
First Lieutenant, Commanding Battery"

Editor's Note: With his questioning, after the fact, of the rationale behind his commander's orders, Parsons shows clearly that he was not intimidated by rank. However much we may admire the lieutenant's enthusiasm, he was decidedly wrong in his assessment of the situation. As a matter of fact, military historians agree that the cease fire order given by General Henry J. Hunt, the commander of Union artillery, was a clever ruse that contributed greatly to the Union victory. Hunt's objectives in calling for the cease fire, both successful, were to convince the Confederates that they had knocked out his artillery and to conserve ammunition with which to greet the attacking rebel infantry.

DECATUR DORSEY:

HOBOKEN'S CIVIL WAR MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER

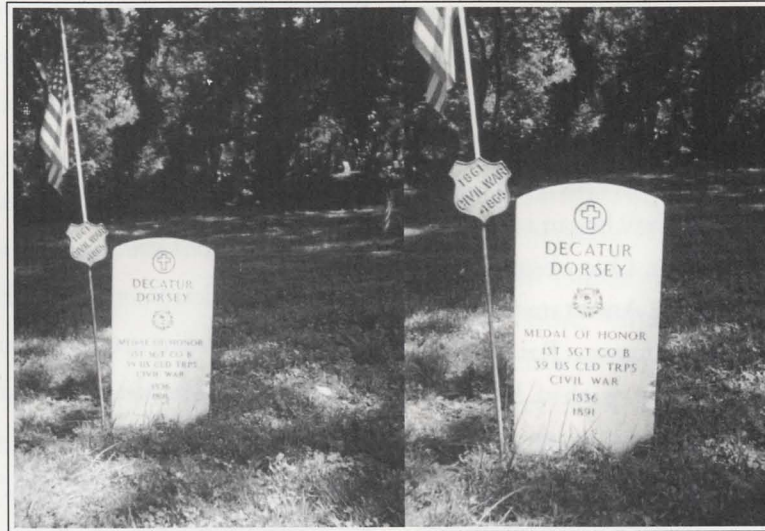
By Nicholas Acocella

ON MAY 21, 1984, SERGEANT DECATUR DORSEY, WHO LIVED IN HOBOKEN UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1891, WAS RESCUED FROM COMPLETE AND UNDESERVED OBSCURITY.

Decatur, who was born in 1836, was an escaped slave who enlisted in the Maryland 39th Colored Regiment in March of 1864 and went on to win the Medal of Honor at the infamous Battle of the Crater during the siege of Petersburg in 1864. (Coincidentally, Hoboken's Battery A of the First New Jersey Artillery was also involved in this encounter.)

Almost immediately after being organized in Baltimore, the Maryland 39th fought in the Wilderness Campaign in May and June 1864, a mutual battering that nevertheless prompted General Ulysses S. Grant to wire Washington the succinct summary of his bold plans, in marked contrast to what other Union generals had proposed, that heartened President Abraham Lincoln, and that became Grant's signature statement: "I propose to fight it out along this line if it takes all summer."

Taking Petersburg was one of the keys to Union victory, because, situated as it was at the junction of five railroad lines, it was the main link to Richmond. To take Petersburg would be to cut Richmond off from its supply lines to the south. Despite several major assaults of the Confederate position on the high ground outside the city and intermittent bombardment of the city itself, Grant's Army of the Potomac stalled before the city for nine and a half months. Then, in June 1864, a Lieutenant Colo-



*The Gravestone of Sergeant Decatur Dorsey in Flower Hill cemetery.
Photographs compliments of Nicholas Acocella*

nel named Henry Pleasants, an engineer by trade, picked up an idea from one of his men in the 48th Pennsylvania, made up of pre-War coal miners, and persuaded General Ambrose E. Burnside that he could dig a tunnel under the Confederate battlements and blow them up from beneath.

Having failed to go through or around the rebels, Grant approved the idea. It took more than a month to dig a tunnel more than 500 feet long. (Regular Army engineers, who had no faith in the project, refused to take part in the effort, which was completed by the 48th Pennsylvania, often using makeshift equipment.) Early on the morning of July 30, 1864, four tons of gunpowder were exploded inside the tunnel collapsing a Confederate fort, leveling several hundred feet of defensive earthworks, and blowing a hole in the ground 170 feet long by 60 feet wide by 30 feet deep. After an initial technical success, the Battle of the Crater turned into a fiasco because of faulty decisions by the Union leadership.

The original plan had been to send the all-black Fourth Division, commanded by General Edward Ferrero, and including Dorsey, into the gap created by the blast. The black troops were to expand the gap and clear the way for the three other divisions under

Burnside's command to break through to the high ground where they would have a clear shot at Petersburg. Before this, black troops had been used only to guard trains and facilities in the rear. Given this opportunity, Ferrero's troops had been rehearsing the role enthusiastically for a week.

The day before the explosion, however, General George G. Meade cancelled Burnside's order and, with the approval of Grant, decreed that a white division should lead the charge. Grant and Meade, who had been criticized by abolitionists in the past, did not want to create the perception that, if the going got rough, they were using black troopers as cannon fodder. Burnside, who had great faith in his black soldiers, tried unsuccessfully to have the order rescinded. With only 12 hours to go before the explosion, Burnside reluctantly gave the lead to an untrained white division led by inexperienced General James H. Ledlie. Ferrero's Fourth Division would bring up the rear.

Instead of rolling out to the left and the right to roll up the enemy's flanks, Ledlie's men ran into the trench where, after some initial Confederate confusion, they were cut down by a Southern counterattack. The two white divisions that followed only added to the chaos. Only the black troops broke through the general confusion, even though Ferrero and Ledlie both remained behind in a shelter drinking rum. Dorsey was among those who reached the battlements, but a Confederate countercharge forced the Union troops to retreat.

It was at this point that Dorsey distinguished himself, rallying his troops and getting wounded in the process. According to "The Negro in the Civil War" (Civil War Times Illustrated, Eastern Acorn Press, 1988): "Sergeant Decatur Dorsey of the 39th Regiment won the Medal of Honor for planting the colors in advance of his men on the Confederate works and for rallying them after they had been driven back to their lines." (It is worth pointing out that, while many such honors of the time were presented for rather ordinary pursuits such as capturing an enemy flag, Dorsey's, unlike some 900 others between the 1860s and the 1910s that were rescinded, was reviewed and allowed to stand.)

The Battle of the Crater brought little glory, however. It was the last battle for Burnside. Meade wanted him court martialed, but Grant would have none of it. Ledlie was denounced by a Court of Inquiry. (Ferrero,

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The Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864. Civil War Times Illustrated, courtesy of Fred W. Kiger

on the other hand, was somehow promoted to major general.) Grant called the incident “the saddest affair I have witnessed in this war.”

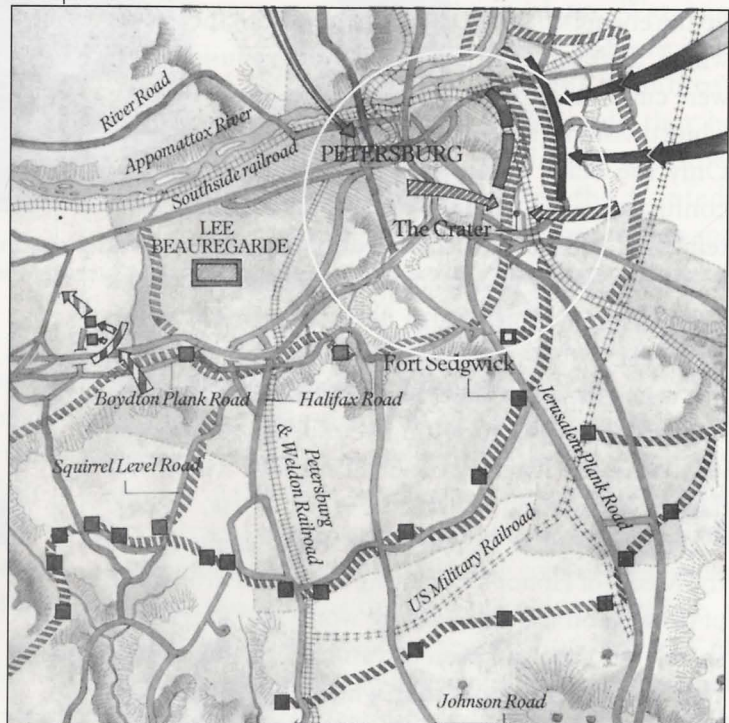
In January 1865, after the Crater, the Maryland 39th fought with Alfred Terry’s Provisional Division at the storming of Ft. Fisher, a sand-and-dirt fortification with 47 guns that protected Wilmington, North Carolina, the South’s last great outlet to the sea. Lee referred to the railroad running from Wilmington to Petersburg as the “lifeline of the Confederacy.” Others called the fort protecting the city the Gibraltar of the Confederacy. On January 15, after a Union Navy artillery took out most of the fort’s guns, 4,500 infantrymen, including the Maryland 39th, stormed and took the fort — suffering more than a thousand casualties in the process. With Wilmington soon in Union hands, Lee’s army at Petersburg was cut off from the outside world. In fact, so decisive was Ft. Fisher that, because of its outcome, several Confederate Congressmen began calling for peace on the North’s terms.

After Ft. Fisher, the Maryland 39th, now under General John McAllister Schofield, remained in North Carolina, where it maneuvered in cooperation with Sherman as his army fought its way north after devastating Georgia and South Carolina. In less than a year of battle, the six Maryland regiments made up of black troopers lost only 352 men, earned five Congressional Medals of Honor, and suffered only 221 desertions at a time when white Maryland units were experiencing desertion rates as high as 40 percent. The

Maryland 39th was mustered out on December 4, 1865.

Sometime after the war, former Sergeant Dorsey moved to Hoboken, where he lived, probably on Newark Street, until he died in 1891. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Flower Hill Cemetery in North Bergen. It wasn’t until 1983 that Paul Angelo, then the state Medal of Honor liaison officer, learned that Dorsey was one of only 56 (at the time) black servicemen on the Medal of Honor roll. While he found Dorsey’s grave, he did not

live to see it moved, with full military honors and the dedication of a headstone paid for by the federal government, to its present site at the west end of the cemetery the following year.



Sallie Alane Reason, detail from *Battlefields of the Civil War*, Salem House Publishers

Editor’s Note: For assistance with the research on Hexamer’s Battery and Decatur Dorsey, we are indebted to Fred W. Kiger of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, whose knowledge of the Civil War is matched only by his generosity in sharing it.



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HOBOKEN & THE BEGINNINGS OF BASEBALL

June 19 was the 152nd anniversary of what has come to be regarded as the first baseball game. Nevertheless, the other day the editor encountered someone walking down a local street wearing a shirt that said "Cooperstown, Birthplace of Baseball." So, we suppose, it is probably time to reprint the following, an abridged version of an essay published by the Hoboken Historical Museum to commemorate the 150th anniversary of that all-important game in Hoboken.

BY NICHOLAS ACOGELLA

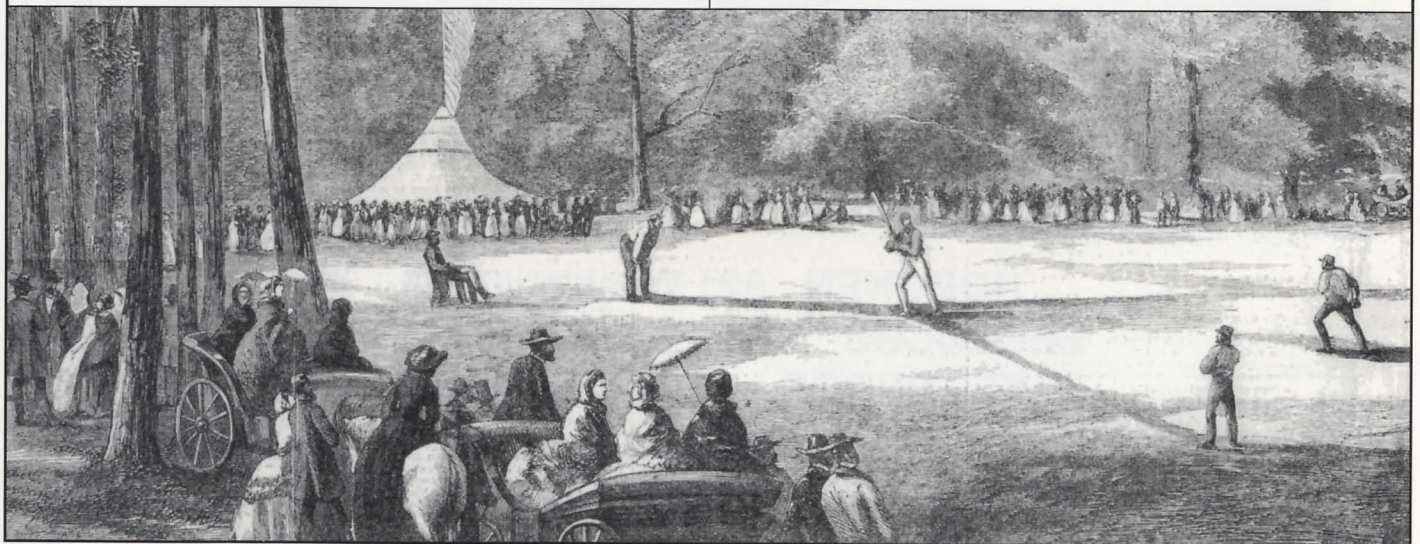
The unadorned fact is that no one "invented" baseball. Not, at least, the way Edison invented the incandescent lamp or, probably a better analogy, the way Naismith invented basketball.

People have been swatting balls with bats for recreation at least since the ancient Egyptians. (There is a 3,500-year-old mural of Pharaoh Thotmes III hitting fungoes to two of his priests in the Temple of Deir-er-Bahari. Most commentators ascribe a religious significance what they are doing, but it is altogether possible that the clergymen just needed the practice.) People have been playing ball games on these shores at least since Christmas Day, 1621, when William Bradford,

the Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, reprimanded some young men for playing stool ball. (The game involved two bases, designated by stools, between which players ran after hitting the ball with bare hands.)

More sophisticated was rounders. Originally a children's game, rounders was played by two teams of unspecified size. Each team remained at bat for as long as its players, wielding an 18-inch truncheon one-handed, hit safely in an effort to advance runners through four bases to score a "rounder." (The "bases" were posts driven into the ground about 40 feet apart.) The opponents scattered about the field and tried to retire the hitting team's players either by catching a batted ball on the fly or on one bounce, or by hitting a runner with the ball while he was off base. This practice, known as "plugging" or "soaking," was not so painful as might appear since the ball was stuffed with rags.

Rounders evolved into town ball, an informal folk game, for the most part, with rules that varied from place to place. Fairly common were the prevalence of a square field, the batter's "stand" between the first and fourth base, the "back game" that allowed hitting the ball behind the batter (as in cricket), and plugging/soaking. One variation awarded a contest to the team



with the most total bases rather than the most runs scored. Another was the number of players — which depended, as often as not, on how many people were still sober at the annual Fourth of July picnic when the game began.

Rounders, town ball, round ball, and base ball (or simply base) became virtually indistinguishable terms referring to a variety of similar but locally delineated games played throughout the eighteenth century. John Newberry's *A Pretty Little Pocket-Book*, first published in London in 1744 and reprinted in the colonies as early as 1762, includes a woodcut illustration and a description (rhymed, no less) and of what the author calls Base-Ball but is almost certainly a form of rounders. The first written mention of an actual contest is by George Ewing, one of Washington's troops at Valley Forge, who wrote in his diary on April 7, 1778: "exercised in the afternoon in the intervals played base."

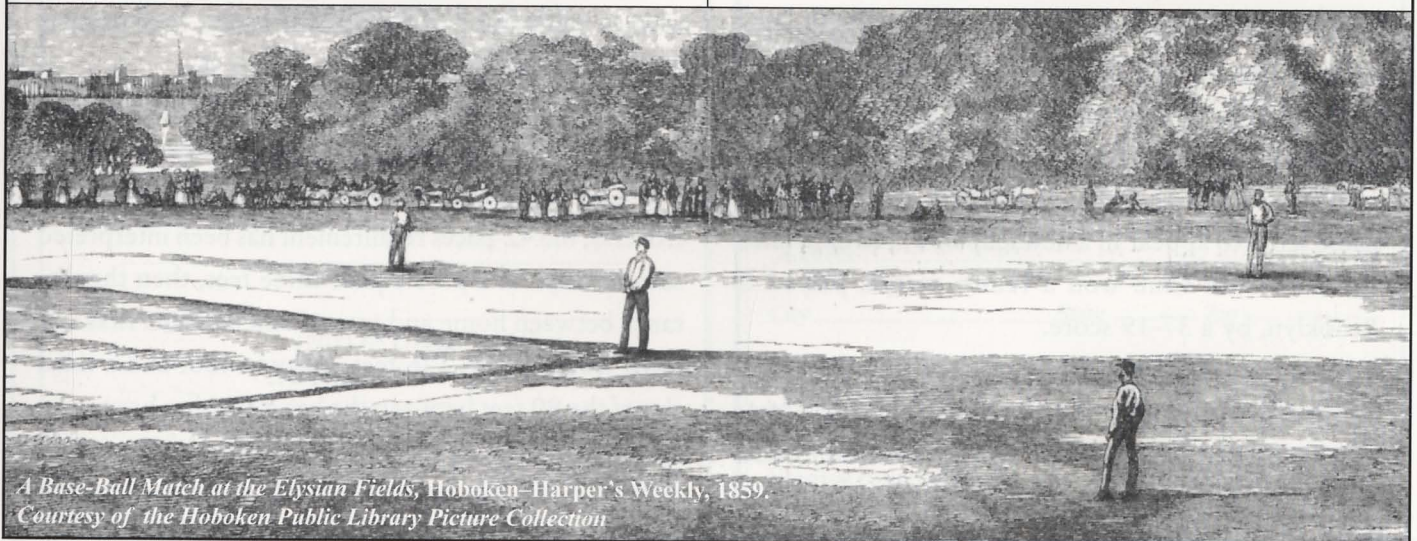
By the 1840s, the most common bat and ball sport was the Massachusetts Game, played by teams of 10 to 14 players on a 60-foot square field with bases at the corners. As in rounders and town ball, the batter stood between the first and fourth bases, there was no foul territory, and soaking was still the order of the day. Differences with the older folk games included overhand pitching from a distance of 30 feet, one out to retire the side, the addition of three strikes for an out, no one-bounce outs on fly balls, and a specified number of runs scored to determine the winner.

ALEXANDER CARTWRIGHT AND THE KNICKERBOCKER CLUB



Born in 1820, Alexander Cartwright had been playing a different version, the New York Game, recreationally since 1842, first at Madison Square, then at 34th Street and Fourth (Madison) Avenue. A clerk at the Union Bank and a volunteer fireman, the young Cartwright helped form the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York. Organized on September 23, 1845, this social and athletic club resembled a college fraternity or a country club more than a modern professional sports franchise. Its members were middle-class young men, whose circumstances allowed them to get away at 3 o'clock for regular Monday and Thursday games and provided them with sufficient income to pay an initiation fee of two dollars and annual dues of five: lawyers, doctors, merchants, brokers, bank and insurance clerks — in effect, the yuppies of the day.

The newly organized Knickerbockers rented — for \$75 for the year — a playing field and dressing rooms at Elysian Fields. Their Manhattan field was getting too congested for team sports, and Hoboken, only a short ride away on the Stevens-Barclay Street Ferry and already a playground for New Yorkers, was a natural choice for the fledgling group. The fare was just 13



*A Base-Ball Match at the Elysian Fields, Hoboken—Harper's Weekly, 1859.
Courtesy of the Hoboken Public Library Picture Collection*

cents, round-trip. Elysian Fields, conveniently located on Hoboken's northern riverfront and a popular spot for trysting and other recreational pursuits, had often been used for pre-Cartwright versions of Base Ball. It didn't hurt either that the field was within walking distance of established eateries such as McCarty's Hotel and, later, the Odd Fellows Hall, where the players repaired for postgame banquets that were at least as important to the participants as the ball games themselves.

Soon after the formation of the Knickerbockers, Cartwright set down the first baseball rule book. The Knickerbockers used most of the 20 new regulations in four intramural games. The first recorded in the club's scorebook took place on October 6, 1845, an 11-8 game with seven men on a side. (An earlier game had gone unrecorded.) The next season, on June 19, 1846, the Knickerbockers were the hosts in what just about everyone recognizes as the first organized baseball game. In that contest, the New York Base Ball Club defeated the Knickerbockers 23-1, in four innings. A nice footnote is that Cartwright, who served as umpire, fined James Whyte Davis of the New York Club six cents for swearing during the game.

The New York Club, however loosely organized, had existed as early as 1843. On October 21, 1845, its team, playing a form of Base Ball, defeated by a score of 24-4, a Brooklyn squad that included a number of prominent cricket players. Played at Elysian Fields, this contest included three players (including the profane Davis) who would appear against on Elysian Fields eight months later to best the Knickerbockers. The results of the 1845 game were reported in the New York *Morning News* the following day and included a box score, similar to a cricket tally — the first for a Base Ball game score to appear in a newspaper. Three days later, the New York Club won a return match, played in Brooklyn, by a 37-19 score.

From this distance it is impossible to discern the differences between the 1845 games and the one played in 1846. (Even the 1845 box score was indistinguishable from the one kept for the 1846 game.)

THE CARTWRIGHT RULES

Cartwright did not invent Base Ball out of whole cloth; on the contrary, his rules formalized several longstanding practices while adding a few new ones. This in no way denigrates Cartwright's accomplishment. On every evolutionary scale, there are moments — epiphanies — when something emerges that, while similar in some respects to what had gone before, is a totally new creature. Cartwright's rules was just such a moment. The 1846 game was the first known to be played between two distinct clubs, under formal, written rules that, in many important respects, resemble those of modern baseball. That is as good a line of demarcation as we are likely to get.

Some of Cartwright's precepts are as much a part of major league baseball today as they were for him and his amateur associates; others have been eclipsed. To understand his contribution, it is worth looking at what those rules included.

Cartwright formalized the role of the umpire, who decided "all disputes and differences" without the possibility of appeal. So, not only is the umpire always right, he always has been. He also recorded the number of runs scored and outs made by each player, as well as incidents such as Davis's fine. The Knickerbockers' statistics may not have been as comprehensive as those in *Baseball Weekly*, but the impulse toward tabulation of accomplishments was present from the beginning.

He specified the dimensions of the field, 42 paces between home and second and between first and third. The Cartwright rule that has attracted the most controversy, the 42-paces requirement has been interpreted several ways. If a pace equals three feet, then the distance between home and second and between first and third works out to 126 feet, or just a foot and a third shy of the 90 feet between the bases that has been standard since 1857. If, on the other hand, the three-foot definition of a pace appeared only in the late nineteenth

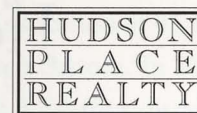
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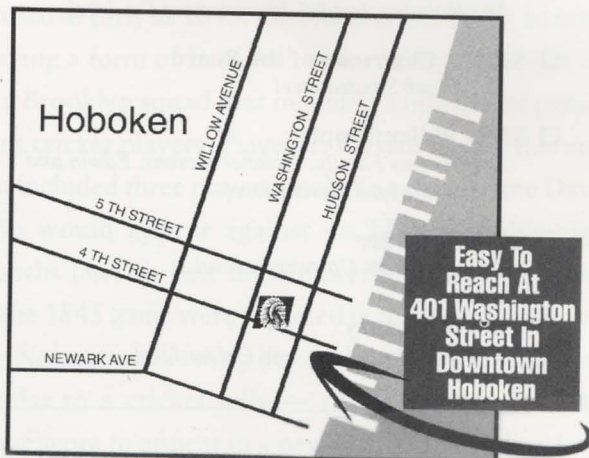
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century and the actual dimension at mid-century was two-and-a-half feet, then the distance from home to second would have been 105 feet, with slightly less than 75 feet between bases.

He also created foul lines — with dramatic repercussions. Without foul lines, every batted ball, as in cricket, is in play, and there is no way for spectators to get close to the action. Foul lines not only focus the game for the players, they also create a prescribed place for fans to stand or sit — close enough to become engaged in what is taking place on the field. This innovation helped spread the popularity of Cartwright's rules and enabled them to eclipse other versions of the game. While he allowed no base to be made on a "fould strike," a foul ball did not become a strike on the batter until 1901; for Cartwright, it was simply no pitch.

He formalized "Three strikes and you're out." But in Cartwright's day there were no called strikes or balls; a batter could stand at the plate all day waiting for a pitch, walks were nonexistent, and a batter had to swing and miss for a strike. An embryonic definition of the strike zone was introduced in 1858, allowing for called strikes. Five years later, called balls — and the base on balls — were introduced. But Cartwright's requirement that the "behind" (or catcher) handle a third strike has remained unchanged.

He defined interference as an out, initiated the first balk rule, specified three outs to a half-inning, and mandated a regular batting order.

What he didn't do is equally instructive. He did not specify nine men to a side. From accounts of games, however, we know that nine to a side was the norm; in a game played in May 1847, for instance, the Knickerbockers had 22 players available but chose to field only nine on each side and to keep two players on each team as reserves. But nine to a side was a norm, not a requirement, and deviation from the custom was common. Aside from those of the pitcher and catcher, the positioning of the nine players would be unfamiliar to a modern fan: Basemen stood directly on their respective bases, there was no shortstop, and there were four outfielders.

His definition of a game was not nine innings but "twenty-one counts, or aces." An 1857 convention of amateur ballplayers overturned this primitive solution by giving approval to the inspired perception that a baseball game ends, not when one or the other team scores 21 runs, but after nine innings — more only to evade the abhorrent vacuum of a tie. No one, however, has ever even suggested tampering with the Cartwright-ordained right to last licks for the team that is losing.

He required that "the ball must be pitched, and not thrown, for the bat." Since Base Ball was deemed to be about hitting and fielding rather than pitching, the feeder (or pitcher) had to lay the ball in underhand and within easy reach of the batter. That is obviously no longer the case. Curiously, nowhere in Cartwright's rules is there any mention of the pitcher's distance from the batter. The 1857 rules established the distance between home plate and the pitcher's location at 45 feet, probably formalizing what had been custom. In 1893, after a brief experimentation with a 50-foot distance, the pitching distance was set at the current 60 feet, six inches.

He allowed but did not insist on catching the ball on the fly; grabbing it on one bounce was good enough for an out. As early as 1859, the Knickerbockers adopted the "fly game" for intramural contests. At their insistence, but only after years of debate on the issue, the National Association of Base Ball Players decreed in 1860 that, to record an out, a fielder had to catch a batted ball before it bounced and, until 1865, only if both teams so agreed beforehand.

He eliminated soaking but did not create the force out. Instead, he replaced it with two possibilities. One was the tag out; the other a sort of proto-force out that allowed a fielder to record an out by holding the ball and standing on the base toward which a runner was headed. (Little wonder, then, that the basemen stayed put on their respective bases.) An 1848 revision allowed such putouts only at first base, a refinement still in effect; and it left the team in the field with only the tag-out option at other bases— even when there were runners on preceding bases. The force out, which allows a

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fielder in the example above to record an out merely by stepping on the bag with the ball in his possession, has often mistakenly been included among Cartwright's innovations; it was not introduced, however, until 1854.

He defined what was, in effect, a ground rule single, a rule that no longer exists, although the modern rule book does provide for the ground rule double.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAME

By 1858, there were, in the New York area, 60 organized clubs playing under Cartwright's rules. That same year, patrons were asked for the first time to cough up the price of a ticket: 50 cents for each of three all-star matches, between teams made up of the best players from Brooklyn and New York City, played at the Fashion Race Track in Long Island. Four years later, an entrepreneur named William Cammeyer built the first enclosed baseball park, Union Grounds in Brooklyn, and charged admission on a regular basis. From there it was only a short hop to a demand by players for a share of the gate; a series of quick skips to paying players under the table, the creation of the all-professional Cincinnati Red Stockings in 1869, and the end of baseball as a gentlemanly amateur recreation; and a middling jump to multi-million dollar, long term, no-cut contracts.

While the New York Club disappeared from history soon after the 1846 game, the Knickerbockers continued to play intramural matches. Their next match game was on June 3, 1851, when they defeated the Washington Club 21-11 at the Red House Grounds in Harlem. Later, the Knickerbockers became one of the bulwarks of the National Association of Base Ball Players, the governing body of amateur baseball from 1857 to 1869. Their sporty uniforms of blue woolen pantaloons, white flannel shirts, and straw hats became familiar reminders of the club's historical primacy.

The Knickerbocker Club resolutely resisted charging admission to games, however. Clinging to its amateur status until 1882, the club eventually foundered on its opposition to professionalism. (The once profane James

Whyte Davis, who became a member of the Knickerbockers after the demise of the New York Club, had obviously mended his ways and, with age, adopted a redoubtable moralistic stance: He resigned from the Knickerbockers in 1870 in protest over the club's compromise of participating in games at which admission was charged even though it refused to accept any of the gate receipts.) Nevertheless, the effort to keep baseball the private preserve of gentlemen and amateurs was doomed from the moment the first fan stepped up to the ticket booth at the Fashion Race Track and put down his four bits.

Elysian Fields continued to be used for ball games for some years. In 1859, eight clubs used its facilities on a regular basis. In the same year, a cricket match between the United States and England attracted 24,000 spectators to the site. And, on October 21, 1861, Brooklyn and New York all-star teams met there before a crowd of 15,000. (Brooklyn won 18-6.) The United States government acquired the site in 1917 and turned what had been an idyllic park into a collection of war-related warehouses. The Maxwell House division of General Foods acquired the property in 1938.

Cartwright himself was long gone from New York even before the game he codified had spread even as far as Philadelphia or Boston. In 1849, he joined the rush to the California gold fields, and, in 1852, he moved on to Hawaii for his health. But his pioneering included a role as baseball missionary. Traveling overland, he organized baseball games along the way, using as players — a spectacle to be imagined with relish — mountain men and Native Americans, as well as travel-

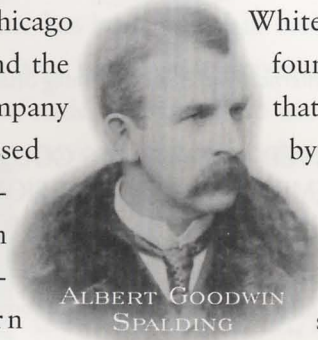


ALEXANDER CARTWRIGHT

ing companions. He also introduced baseball on what were then the Sandwich Islands. He died in 1892, one of Honolulu's leading bankers and merchants, the founder of the city's library and its fire department, and the manager of the Hawaiian royal family's finances.

THE DOUBLEDAY MYTH

The fantasy that Abner Doubleday was somehow the spontaneous progenitor of a brand new game called Base Ball is less a myth than one of the great historical hoaxes of all time. It was conceived by Albert G. Spalding, a star pitcher in the 1870s, the manager of the first National League pennant winning club in 1876, the owner of the same Chicago White Stockings in the 1880s, and the founder the sporting goods company that still bears his name. Distressed by the prevailing view that baseball had evolved from rounders — a belief championed by British-born sportswriter and baseball chronicler Henry Chadwick in a 1903 article — Spalding formed a commission two years later to study the origins of the game. As such things often go, he had predetermined that baseball was an exclusively American game. (He was given to pronouncements on the “manly virtues” of the game, virtues he associated with the United States and considered antithetical to anything associated with England.) For more than two years, the commission, headed by former National League president A.W. Mills, did little but collect old reminiscences and partisan diatribes on the rounders/no rounders debate. Then came the letter from Abner Graves.



ALBERT GOODWIN SPALDING

Recounting events that had allegedly taken place 68 years earlier, Graves told how, in 1839, his boyhood chum Abner Doubleday had reconfigured town ball for a prep school contest in Cooperstown, NY, because, with 20 to 50 players on a side, the older game had resulted in too many injuries from collisions. In the process, Graves maintained, Doubleday not only invented a new game but also christened it Base Ball. Ignoring the initial protests of commission member Chadwick (not to mention the available historical evidence), Spalding pounced on this “proof” that the game's beginnings were “free from the trammels of English tra-

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ditions, customs, and conventionalities." On December 30, 1907, Mills issued his report, crediting Doubleday not only with the spontaneous creation of baseball but also with the abolition of soaking — this last despite Graves's explicit recollection that the practice was integral to Doubleday's "new" game.

The truth did not emerge until the late 1930s, after baseball officialdom had decided to locate its Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. In the midst of preparations for the "centennial" of Doubleday's spontaneous domestic creation, to be marked by the opening of the Hall of Fame, a librarian named Robert W. Henderson published several papers in which he cited nineteenth-century books about sports to prove conclusively that baseball had indeed evolved from rounders. At about the same time, Bruce Cartwright, a grandson of the old Knickerbocker, produced diaries detailing his ancestor's role in baseball's origins. This combination of events sent the baseball hierarchy and Cooperstown's city fathers into a tizzy. They resolved their dilemma by going ahead with their plans for 1939 but paradoxically electing Cartwright a member of the misplaced Hall of Fame in 1938. The most that can be said for the inscription on his plaque is that it is at least more accurate than the Mills Report:

ALEXANDER JOY CARTWRIGHT, JR.

"FATHER OF MODERN BASEBALL"

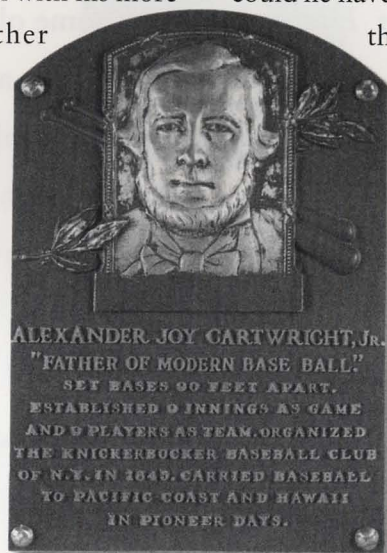
SET BASES 90 FEET APART.

ESTABLISHED 9 INNINGS AS A GAME
AND 9 PLAYERS AS A TEAM. ORGANIZED
THE KNICKERBOCKER BASEBALL CLUB
OF NY IN 1845. CARRIED BASEBALL
TO PACIFIC COAST AND HAWAII
IN PIONEER DAYS.

No one any longer takes seriously the official fable, although the Hall of Fame still possesses a dilapidated old ball that Graves's son found in a trunk and that was once celebrated as the one Doubleday used in his ur-game. Even Thomas R. Heitz, from 1983 to 1994 the Librarian at the National Baseball Library and Archive, a branch of the Hall of Fame, concludes in an entry on

the “Rules and Scoring” he co-authored for Total Baseball that “some basic baseball principles can be traced back for centuries” and “the codified Knickerbocker rules serve as a direct link to the rules of today.” (He nowhere mentions either Alexander Cartwright or the City of Hoboken in his essay, however.) Organized baseball’s approach to the matter has vacillated between gingerly and wistful. Heitz has even come up with a second Abner Doubleday, a cousin of the future general. This Abner Doubleday lived in Cooperstown in 1839 and Graves probably confused him with his more famous relative. Whether this other Doubleday was given to drawing diagrams of games with a stick is immaterial; the game Graves describes, absent the embellishments of the Mills Report, is still town ball or rounders with the number of participants limited for reasons of safety. For the most part, though, baseball officialdom’s commitment to Cooperstown comes with a wink, as if to say, “If baseball wasn’t born here, it should have been.”

And the village, nestled at the southern tip of Lake Otsego, is admittedly beautiful. Perhaps, if baseball’s origins had been rural instead of urban, the game should have been born there. But baseball is more than a myth to the village of Cooperstown; it is the major source of the community’s tourist trade and the basis of its economy. No one there — or, for that matter, in organized baseball, which has so much, both financial and otherwise, invested in the place — is going to gainsay the Doubleday hoax or entertain the possibility that Alexander Cartwright and Hoboken can supplant their “inventor” and their claim. (Also, the village has a near stock in trade in hoaxes. Another of its popular tourist attractions is the Cardiff Giant, a stone statue that was once advertised as the petrified remains of an oversized man. Another attraction, less well known, is an “historical” marker on the eastern shore of Lake Otsego, the Glimmerglass of several of James Fenimore Cooper’s novels; the plaque purports to mark the place



where Chingachgook, Natty Bumppo’s companion in *The Leatherstocking Tales*, repaired to die. The only difficulty, of course, is that the last of the Mohicans was a fictional character.)

And then there is Doubleday himself. Born in Ballston Spa, 65 miles northeast of Cooperstown, and schooled in Auburn, 85 miles northwest of that village, he is an unwitting and unlikely party to the conspiracy. There is no record of his ever having set foot in the place with which his name has been linked in baseball lore. Nor could he have been there when Graves said he invented

the national pastime to accommodate the boys at Otsego Academy and Green’s Select School: In 1839, at the very time he was supposed to be drawing a diagram of the first baseball diamond in the Cooperstown dirt, he was, in fact, a West Point plebe and ineligible for leave.

Doubleday later had a distinguished Army career, rising to the rank of major general during the Civil War. He wrote extensive memoirs without ever once mentioning baseball. Since he died in 1893, he was not around to protest the unwarranted use of his name by Graves, Spalding, and Mills. By all accounts a gentleman of integrity, he might very well have done so, and directly, since he and Mills were old war buddies who belonged to the same veterans group. (Aside from his friendship with Mills, who served as one of the general’s pallbearers, the only known connection between Doubleday and baseball is that one of his descendants is currently the majority owner of the New York Mets.) Perhaps most damning to the hoax is that baseball officialdom has never been imprudent enough to award Doubleday a Cooperstown plaque. If he were to be so honored, the inscription writers would have to look no farther than the judgment of Branch Rickey, the then-St. Louis Cardinal executive, who, referring to the fact that Doubleday commanded the battery that fired the first shot from the Union side at Fort Sumter in 1861, said, “The only thing Doubleday started was the Civil War.”

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