

The Origin of Baseball
Baseball's Trip to Cooperstown
The Civil War and Baseball

Introduction

Our first interesting topic follows the introductory chapter of the book. After reading the introduction to "Sandlot Stats", it is appropriate to discuss the theories concerning the origin of baseball and how the Hall of Fame arrived at Cooperstown, NY.

The Origin of Baseball

Baseball was played in America starting in the early 1800s. The teams were either club teams or informal teams and they played under local rules. By the early 1860s, the popularity of baseball had grown to the point that it was described as America's "National Pastime".

Five of the most important dates in the history of baseball are:

1845 Alexander Cartwright published a set of basic rules for his Knickerbocker Club of New York. These rules were adopted nationwide.

1869 The Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first salaried team and thus considered the first professional team.

1871 The first professional baseball league was established and called the "National Association of Professional Baseball Players".

1876 The first Major League, called the National League, was established.

1901 The American League was established.

One of the early studies in baseball was involved with the following question: What is the origin of the game of baseball?

In 1904, a special commission was created by A.G. Spalding (1850-1915) to discover who was responsible for the creation of the game of baseball. Yes, he was the sporting goods manufacturer. Two theories of the time were (1) baseball was an offshoot of the British game of *rounders* and (2) baseball descended from an old American game called *One Old Cat*. Because of his extreme patriotism, the second theory was favored by Al Spalding. Henry Chadwick, a baseball writer who covered the sport, favored the British theory. Later, we will discuss the contributions of Chadwick to the development of baseball.

It should be noted that in the late 1800s Al Spalding was a great pitcher. In fact in 1875, a year before the founding of the National League, Spalding posted a 57-7 record. He pitched for Boston of the National Association.

Spalding personally selected the seven people to serve on the commission. The selection process consisted of Spalding asking candidates for the commission the following question: Do you believe Chadwick could be right that baseball evolved from the game of rounders? Those persons who answered yes to this question were automatically disqualified. In Chapter 1 of the book, this type of selection process is an example of what is called “*selection bias*”.

The actual study was conducted by Spalding. One part of the study consisted of a survey administered to correspondents. The correspondents were asked if they ever heard of a game called rounders. When none of the correspondents answered yes, Spalding concluded that baseball could not have descended from rounders. Of course, the case could be made that rounders evolved into baseball before these correspondents were born. In Chapter 1, a survey will be used as an example of an *observational study*. A survey designed with misleading questions or questions favoring a certain response is said to have a “*design bias*”.

Besides the results of the survey, the panel based its finding on one letter Spalding obtained from a Cooperstown resident, Abner Graves. Graves, who served under Doubleday in the military and attended school with him in Cooperstown, said he witnessed Abner Doubleday, in 1839, draw a diamond diagram in the dirt and explain the rules of the game of baseball. This story provided the commission, called the *Mills Commission*, the evidence they needed. No one from the commission interviewed or met with Graves. It was not important to the Mills Commission that Abner Graves was five years old in 1839 or that Doubleday was enrolled in the military academy at West Point in 1839 and not in Cooperstown, NY.

Abner Doubleday was a 1842 graduate of West Point. He served in both the Mexican and Seminole wars. In 1861, he was stationed at the garrison in Charleston Harbor. He was an artillery officer, who aimed the first Fort Sumter guns in response to the Confederate bombardment that initiated the war. He also commanded a division at Gettysburg where his division helped to repel the infamous "Pickett's Charge". His outstanding military service has been all but forgotten yet his controversial baseball legacy still lives on. Regardless of whether he was or was not the actual "inventor" of the modern version of baseball, Doubleday did apparently organize several exhibition games between Union Divisions.

The commission's final report was released on December 30, 1907. The report was called the Mills' report, named after A.G. Mills, the chairman of the commission. The final report said, "The first scheme for playing baseball, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday at Cooperstown, New York in 1839. Baseball is of American origin and has no connection to rounders or any other foreign game."

The controversy over who is the real father of baseball will be discussed in the next section.

Baseball's Trip to Cooperstown

Twelve years after the Mills' report was published, a group of Cooperstown residents bought the lot that Graves identified as the birthplace of baseball. A group from the Chamber of Commerce of Cooperstown convinced the National League President to come to Cooperstown and dedicate the Doubleday Field in 1923. In 1934, an old baseball was discovered in a trunk once owned by Abner Graves. Since the trunk had belonged to Graves, baseball people jumped to the conclusion that this ball must have been used by Doubleday in the first baseball game. Stephen Clark, the heir to the Singer Sewing Machine fortune, was a local resident of Cooperstown. He bought the ball for \$5 and with that ball and other memorabilia conducted an exhibition. The exhibition was so popular Clark decided a national museum was a good next step. He convinced Ford Frick, the National League president at that time, a national museum would help rekindle an interest in baseball.

Elaborate plans for a centennial celebration for baseball began in 1936. The Centennial was to be held in 1939. This date corresponded to 100 years after Graves' discovery. About a year before the event, Bruce Cartwright, grandson of Alexander Cartwright (1820-1892), produced his

grandfather's diaries. These diaries showed Alexander Cartwright was responsible for creating the Knickerbocker Baseball Club on September 23, 1845. The following spring, on June 19, 1846 at Elysian Field in Hoboken, New Jersey, the Knickerbocker team played its first game. They were beaten soundly by the New York Nine by a score of 23 to 1. It should be noted that the umpire was Alexander Cartwright. The Knickerbockers continued to play other organized teams throughout New York and New Jersey. Despite their success the New York Nine was never heard of again.

The diaries revealed Alexander drafted 20 rules to set it apart from any other game using a bat and a ball. He set bases 90 feet apart. He established nine players on a team, three outs per half-inning, and an unchangeable batting order, three outfielders, one catcher, and fair and foul lines.

Because of this evidence, the Hall of Fame officials decided to reverse their decision. They anointed Alexander Cartwright with the title of "Father of Baseball". Alexander Cartwright was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1938. Unfortunately, Abner Doubleday, the man responsible for the Hall of Fame being placed in Cooperstown, was never inducted into the Hall of Fame.

The Clark family is still very active in Cooperstown. In a recent visit to Cooperstown, residents told me that Clark's granddaughter still lives in Cooperstown. They remarked that she watches over the city and the Hall of Fame. One resident told me she was responsible for keeping a fast food chain out of Cooperstown. After she discovered where they wanted to put their establishment, she told the owner, no matter what the fast food chain offered, she would pay them more. Seeing her resolve, the fast food chain abandoned their attempt. Another resident told me she offers to pay all college expenses for any needy Cooperstown resident who graduates from their regional high school. The same resident told me she bought all new fire trucks for the city.

From an article, entitled "*Spalding's Commission*", the authors summarize the controversy by saying, "The result of what later became known as the Mills Commission, named after A.G. Mills who headed the commission, did nothing more than cause controversy over a moot issue: the origin of baseball. That baseball was, and is, an inseparable part of America, the American identity, and the American spirit is undeniable. That it may or may not have evolved from an English game is irrelevant."

Baseball during the Civil War

It has been documented that countless baseball games, originally known as "townball", were organized in Army Camps and prisons on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line. Very little documentation exists on these games and most information has been derived from letters written by both officers and enlisted men to their families on the home front. For the hundreds of pictures taken during the Civil War by photography pioneer Matthew Brady, there is only one **photo in the National Archives that clearly captured a baseball game underway in the background.** Several newspaper artists also depicted primitive ballgames and other forms of recreation devised to help boost troop morale and maintain physical fitness. Regardless of the lack of "media coverage", military historians have proved that baseball was a common ground in a country divided, and helped both Union and Confederate soldiers temporarily escape the horror of war.

George Putnam, a Union soldier, recounts the following incident in a letter, *“Suddenly there was a scattering of fire, which three outfielders caught the brunt; the centerfield was hit and was captured, left and right field managed to get back to our lines. The attack...was repelled without serious difficulty, but we had lost not only our centerfield, but...the only baseball in Alexandria, Texas.”*

It should be noted the game of baseball, played during the Civil War, followed the rules of “townball”. Some of the rules were: (1) the pitcher could only throw underhand, (2) no stealing of bases, (3) posts were used as bases; and (4) all balls hit were considered fair.