

# THE Base Ball Player's CHRONICLE

A Quarterly Publication of the Vintage Base Ball Association

Winter 2005

[www.vbba.org](http://www.vbba.org)

Volume 8 Issue 1

## "SO LONG SCREWY, SEE YA IN ST. LOUIS!"

Dear 2005 VBBA individual member and club member contact,

A couple items for you.

First of all, thanks for joining or renewing for 2005! Our club members for 2005 are posted at <http://vbba.org/members.html>.

The Vintage Base Ball Association 10th Annual Convention in St. Louis is right around the corner. If you have not visited the VBBA website to get caught up on the details, I invite you to do so. The Greater St. Louis Base Ball Historical Society is our host, the folks who play as the St. Louis Perfectos.  
<http://www.perfectos.org/>

They have asked that everyone register for the convention as soon as possible I have pasted below my name and e-mail from Rick Rea that was sent out to the 1860vintagebaseball Yahoo! group list. I know not all VBBA members actively monitor that group.

VBBA page: <http://www.vbba.org/2005convention.html>  
Host website: <http://vbba05.org/>  
Online registration page: <http://vbba05.org/register.html>  
Form to fill out and mail in with your registration fee:  
<http://vbba05.org/payment.doc>  
If you cannot read Microsoft Word files, let me know.

Remember, full club members are able to send two delegates to the business meeting Sunday morning. If only one delegate can attend, they will have two votes. ♦



V I N T A G E  
**BASE • BALL**  
A S S O C I A T I O N

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# Bits and Pieces

## Base Ball: Birth of an American Classic.

The Milwaukee Public Museum is offering a 45 minute their Passport Distance Learning Series session entitled: **Base Ball: Birth of an American Classic.** This is a Distance Learning lesson available for 1st graders through adults. It is a journey back in time to discover vintage base ball. Explore the origins of the national pastime, including how rules and attitudes have changed over time and in what ways this game has reflected changes in American society. We will explore the "Doubleday Myth" and see how the Civil War impacted the growth of base ball. See how a base ball was hand stitched and view vintage bats from days gone by. This session is hosted by Gary "Handlebar" Hetzel, Captain of the Milwaukee Cream Citys BBC. It is one of fourteen programs offered through the Distance Learning Program at the Milwaukee Public Museum that covers topics from Dinosaurs, to Egyptian Mummies, Native American Lifestyles, and much more.

This program allows people around the world to explore natural and cultural history in an exciting videoconference format. It mixes live interac-

tion between students and Museum educators with a detailed, content-rich curriculum that can't be found in textbooks. Students can see artifacts and collections unavailable to the public and ask questions during real-time learning sessions. Connections are available via ISDN, IP or DS3.

If you are interested in booking this program, contact the Museum's Distance Learning Series Department at 414-278-6146 or email Erik Roedig at [passport@mpm.edu](mailto:passport@mpm.edu). Already we have students from Wisconsin, Ohio, and Texas signed up for this special presentation.

The direct link to this program is:  
[http://education.mpm.edu/schools\\_and\\_teachers/distance\\_education/programs/passport\\_program\\_people\\_and\\_culture\\_2004-2005.php](http://education.mpm.edu/schools_and_teachers/distance_education/programs/passport_program_people_and_culture_2004-2005.php)

## Tourney and Festival Submission Page on VBBA Web site

Have a tourney or festival you want to publicize go to:

**<<http://vbba.org/ed-interp/tournaments/submissionform2005.html>>**

and post your event.

## Mutuals to speak at Hall of Fame

The New York Mutuals will be speaking at the Baseball Hall of Fame on April 26 to elementary school children about vintage base ball and the history of the game. The talk will also be sent across the internet for other schools across the country. This talk will be broadcast across the internet continuously. Check back in the next issue for a link to this event.

## Ohio Cup on the Radio

As some of you may recall, two years ago Sam Levene from the Canadian Broadcasting Company came to the Ohio Cup and recorded a show about Vintage Base Ball. I had always wanted to hear the broadcast but never knew when or where it might be heard. I discovered a link to the original piece that was done.

**<[http://soundprint.org/radio/display\\_show/ID/620/name/For+the+Glory+of+the+Game](http://soundprint.org/radio/display_show/ID/620/name/For+the+Glory+of+the+Game)>**

You can purchase copies for around \$12.50

## FROM THE EDITOR

by Tom "Big Bat" Fesolowich

The past few months have shown me that there is a great interest in continuing the VBBA newsletter. As editor of the newsletter I am putting out a plea for articles. I'm sure once the season starts they will pour in along with photos. Please keep the newsletter in mind or if you wish send me your team/league newsletter and I will include articles from it. It is always enjoyable to read about other programs so please share. ♦

### Base Ball Player's Chronicle

Published Quarterly  
courtesy of the  
Vintage Base Ball Association  
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Editor

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The Cream City Gazette

## A "DEJA" VIEW OF BASE BALL

Feeling like George C. Scott in Patton as he viewed the ruins of an ancient Carthaginian battlefield, I exclaimed, "I've been here before!" "Of course you have," said fellow Muffin Doug Smith, "we played here last year." No, really, I had been here. The Twins vs. the Indians, the Giants vs. the Cardinals, and the Met's championship season, I was there. Smith looked puzzled as I recounted these legendary contests. The sand and dirt of the infields have been pounded solid by warrior's feet. The fences sit rusting like abandoned defenses from a forgotten war. Gone too are some of the battlefields. Like Cleveland Municipal Stadium, they are only memories. But ones that I think of fondly when I remember my little league days at Canal Fulton (Ohio) Community Park.

The Twins were my team and the Indians were our opponents. I was cheating in from centerfield to back-up any pick-off attempts. The ball got past the short-stop to me just as the runner rounded third. My brother Ed and I had practiced this throw a hundred times in the backyard. With one bounce and a tag by the catcher, I made my first assist at homeplate.

Behind the Tilt-a-Whirl and other festival rides currently in the park, there was a diamond where the Giants and Cardinals met in 1978. It was where Ed and I would first play against each other. That day, like today, I was the victorious brother. But at what price? Seeing my Ed's head bowed after a game has always felt like a loss for me as well.

In our final year, Ed and I went from worst to first with the Mets. We watched together as the coach was given a ceremonial drunk in the canal following our victory. I looked around the park remembering these and other moments of a baseball career taken from me at age of 13 when I was told talent mattered.

Bringing me back to the present, Smith tugged on my arm and reminded me that "all glory is fleeting." I nodded in sad agreement. Yet win or lose, when the time comes each week to play this child's game, I echo General Patton when I say, "God help me, I love it so." ♦

## FIELDS OF DREAMS

A lot of ink has been given to the players, uniform equipment, and standard rules, but what about the fields we play on. Base ball could not be played without a field. Nor would any game be as memorable without the subtleties of each field. Fans and players alike remember balls striking off the "Green Monster" at Fenway Park or bounding into the ivy along Wrigley Field's walls, outfielders running up the sloped grass of Schibe Park in Philadelphia, Earl Weaver's tomato plants at Memorial Stadium in Baltimore and the "Big Beer" at Milwaukee's County Stadium. There are players among us who could tell us of their fond memories of attending games at Crosley Field in Cincinnati and Ebbetts Field in Brooklyn. We even have a description of America's first "field of dreams," Elysian Fields.

"...A mile and a half from the ferry, up the Jersey shore of the Hudson River, along a road that skirted the river on one side and was hugged by trees and tickets on the other. (The road) brought one suddenly to an opening in the forest primeval. This one spot was a level, grass covered plain, some 200 yards across, and as deep. (It was) surrounded upon three sides by the typical eastern under-

growth & woods, and on the east by the Hudson River. It was a perfect greensward almost year round. Nature must have foreseen the needs of baseball, and designed the place especially for that purpose." (1)

While nature has not always been so kind to our present day fields of vintage baseball, we each represent a piece of this "paradise." Spiegel Grove in Freemont, Ohio, has its forests, Stan Hywett Hall in Akron, Ohio, features long grass-covered plains, and the Fulton Mules' field in Canal Fulton, Ohio, is bordered by the Ohio Erie Canal.

These fields are unlike the fields of today where owners search for tax breaks and brag, "if we build it they will come." Fans come to these fields to be close to the game and be entertained by our skillful play and gentlemanly behavior. Sometimes whole towns turn out to see us play. In Sycamore, Ohio, fans come out in droves to sit along the banks of their hillside cemetery to watch games. Many are dying to be there next to their beloved Grasshoppers.

The Ohio Village Muffins have played our games on prairie grass (Denver), crab grass, plastic

grass (Three River and Cooper Stadiums), and no grass (modern softball diamonds). From the Statehouse lawn to the slopes of Mad River Mountain ski area, all we need is ninety feet square and enough room to chase those "cloud bursters" fly balls.

When our playing days are over, it will be these fields we remember, not the specifications of a bat or whether our foot goes on or behind a line. George Wright of the original Cincinnati Redstockings recalled of Elysian Field, "It was here I spent most of my boyhood days... Oh, that I were a boy again!" (2). Let us remember each week as we step onto these little pieces of heaven that we are given a chance to be boys once again, and it is for the glory of the game of base ball that we play.

(1) Recollections of William Shepard, an early playmate of George Wright; "The First Boys of Summer;" Greg Rhodes & John Erardi; Road West Publishing Co.; Cincinnati, OH; page 7.

(2) See above. ♦



# The Origins of Base Ball in Milwaukee

## Cricket's Failure Leads to Professional Base Ball

Article Originally Published in the Winter 2005 Issue of the Cream City Gazette

In the mid 1800s, Milwaukee had a community cricket team that tried, but failed, to survive in league play. Since it was evident that cricket was not going to catch on and become a national sport, a group, led by Rufus King, the *Milwaukee Sentinel's* editor, formed the city's first base ball team on April 5, 1860. The team only lasted for one season, playing at a ball diamond on Spring Street Hill. General King and many of the players traded their bats for arms and went off to fight in the Civil War, thus ending Milwaukee's first attempt at fielding a base ball team. Some criticized this as a feeble excuse since everybody knows the war will be over in three months. So why break up the ball club? Eventually the war did end

and when survivors returned,

a team called the Cream City Club was organized. The team

developed over the years and won the state championship in 1868, beating the all-German team, the Monitors. Gaining recognition, the Cream Citys were able to attract the Cincinnati Red Stockings, America's first professional nine, to Milwaukee. The Red Stockings defeated the Cream Citys 85-7 on July 30, 1869, on their way to an undefeated 65 game tour around the nation. The Red Stockings extended their streak to 130 games before losing in 1870. In 1870, the Cream Citys schedule included a match against the Chicago of Chicago, losing 71-19. The Chicago would eventually

evolve into the Chicago Cubs.

Eight years later, the Cream Citys, aka Grays, joined the National League. The Cream Citys played their home games at the Milwaukee Base Ball Grounds. Poor crowds

and little money led to the team filing for bankruptcy after only one year in the league. The Cream Citys finished the 1878 season with a record of 15-45.

### Resources:

Wells, Robert W.

*This is Milwaukee: A Colorful Portrait of the City That Made Beer Famous*, Doubleday; Garden City, NY 1970

# Upon Closer Inspection...

by Tom Fesolowich

Many of you do not recognize the name Ken Balcom except for those familiar with the program at Old Bethpage Village Restoration on Long Island.

Ken Balcom was the Director of the Old Bethpage Village for over 32 years until his retirement this year. Ken along with a handful of others are responsible for starting vintage base ball at Old Bethpage Village in 1979 with a Civil War reenactment game played between the soldiers. The next year vintage base ball became a staple at the village with the formation of two teams, the Hempstead Eurekas and the Mineola Washingtons. The league went through many changes over the years including the expansion to an 1887 league.

Ken is also responsible for bringing Vintage Base Ball to the forefront of American Society starting with numerous newspaper articles to a small article in *American Way* magazine to the *Smithsonian Magazine* and more recently the *Conan O'Brien Show* and *This Week in Baseball* just to name a few. The publicity in the *Smithsonian* alone is often

pointed to by many a ballist as the reason they started in vintage base ball.

I personally have known Ken for over eight years and have worked with him over the last three as volunteer coordinator of the base ball program at Old Bethpage. As a Nassau County employee Ken often found himself handcuffed by red tape and cutbacks which often threatened the base ball program and the village itself but this never dimmed Ken's spirit and love for the game. While Ken would be the first to shun the attention, we owe Ken a great debt of gratitude for helping start something we all love so dearly.

The players at Old Bethpage honored Ken this past February with base ball stories from his past including his brief playing career and a bat signed by the players, inscribed with his name.

Just as the creation of the game of baseball cannot be pinpointed a specific time or person neither can the game of vintage base ball, but if you were forced to pick just one, that person would be Ken Balcom. ♦

## Rounding Third

Yes, it's what many of us wait all winter for, those famous words, "pitchers and catchers report."

While this winter has been a rough one for most, the spring will surely wipe all memories of that quickly away. We have reached that moment in time when we realize that baseball season is upon us. What lies ahead for us this year, is it a renewed friendship or perhaps a new one.

Maybe it's that one special feeling one gets as they round third and score that winning run. For each of us it is something different but no one more important than another. We are all bound by that one common thread, baseball. I for one look forward to it.

The season ahead will surely bring many special moments for many of you why not share that with others send your thoughts to us at:

[nymutuals@optonline.net](mailto:nymutuals@optonline.net)

♦

## "George Wright: The Citizen Kane of Vintage Base Ball?"

What becomes of a man who has done all he can do in his chosen profession, does he retreat to some secluded mansion high above everyone else to live in obscurity. If so, what keeps that man going, what does he think of? Charles Foster Kane (Citizen Kane) conquered the newspaper world, yet all his life he search for something that had long since become a part of his past. What of base ball's immortals? Could George Wright have been the same?

Perhaps one could hear him say her name in his sleep at night. Into his later years, he kept a woodcarving of her, just as Kane had kept the snow globe from his youth. George's childhood days were spent with her by the banks of the Hudson River. He was with her when his father taught him the game of cricket, and it was her who first showed him and his older brother Harry the game of base ball.

She stayed behind when base ball stole George away. He left her and established himself as the greatest player of his time. He traveled around the country with base ball, winning many

trophies and the admiration of all. Soon the trophies would tarnish, gambling and drinking would invade the sport, and base ball would no longer be the lovely maiden that had stolen his heart in Hoboken.

Could George find his earlier love again? Disgusted with what base ball had become, the one time champion ballist retired to cricket, perhaps searching for her. Long had she been faithful to George and the other ballists that would court her on sunny days. She has since become a footnote in history with little more than fond memories of her, but George would often look at her woodcarving and long for the times they spent together. Charles Foster Kane skillfully created a path to wealth and power, yet his last thoughts were also of his youth, and a sled he had lost along the way. In spite of the fame George found as a ballist, he would remember the love he left behind, the heavenly green pasture known as Elysian Fields. Was this his "Rose Bud"? ♦

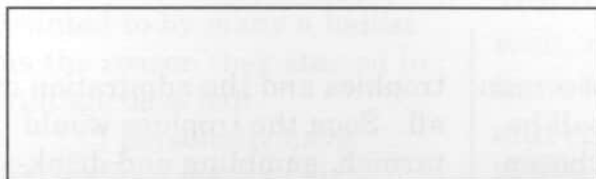
## Head West Young Man

Bay Area Vintage Base Ball (BAVBB) has received Incorporation approval from the State of California. As an official entity, it now has the ability to act on behalf of it's members and move forward with growth. "It's a crucial first step in getting the league organized, both legally and financially", said Steve Gazay, President of BAVBB. "Our next step is to secure non-profit status so that we can take advantage of tax breaks and cheaper field use fees. Incorporation also makes it easier to do things like open a checking account under the league name and to get insurance." Bay Area Vintage Base Ball started in July 2004 and will be starting it's inaugural season in February or March. Playing by 1886 rules and using the equipment and wearing uniforms of the period, it hopes to raise awareness of the sport from long ago. "We also hope to inform the public and work with local non-profits, museums, etc to jointly showcase history of the time period using base ball as an educational tool... plus it's a LOT of fun!", said Gazay. BAVBB hopes to have 2 teams in San Jose, 1 in Morgan Hill-Gilroy, 1 in SF/Peninsula and 1 in Oakland/East Bay. For more information or to sign up as a playing or non-playing member, contact Steve Gazay at (408) 378-1872. ♦



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