

BASE BALL PART 1 - BASE BALL FEVER - 1869

This is one of the first references to baseball on Kelley's Island. While organized baseball had been around for several years, 1869 marked the first year that a recognized all-professional baseball team took the field. An Ohio team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, was the first team to be openly paid a salary. They closed the 1869 season with a record 65 wins and no losses. This Ohio team fired up the baseball spirit of the islanders.

January 1869 - "A few thoughts concerning Base Ball – The great game of American base ball has been having a 'great run' throughout the United States, ever since the greater excitement of the late war has terminated, say since or within the last three years. The 'fever' has not, until the present winter, reached the Island but it is now here in its most virulent form and the probabilities are that the Doctor will have all she can attend to unless those liable to be taken, exercise a great deal of caution during its prevalence.

All the preliminary symptoms of the disease have been developed within the past week though it had broken out in a mild form some four weeks ago in the 'East End School' in a sort of Hermaphrodite form. It is expected that the genuine article will soon be developed.

The first symptoms of the malady seemed to be a desire on the part of those that became infected, to congregate about the Lodge and all talk at once about their own ideas of how the laws of the disease operate. The old heads, who have passed through the fever in their younger days in a sort of varioloid stage, occasionally undertake to give in their experience, but they soon get talked down. The disease has now assumed a more definite character and is found to be subject to 'known laws' like unto those of the Medes & Persian, of which their old heads are for the most part in a state of blissful ignorance, so far as their former experience goes to teach them.

After their first symptoms, which are of a decidedly windy character, have had a few days run, the disease farther develops and takes shape. Old stockings and boot legs are brought forth from their secret hiding places and are developed into balls. The wood pile is overhauled to find a stick that it is thought may have in it a bat. The ax and draw shave are applied to it and if the person who handles them is a good mechanic, the club is eventually found in a more or less perfect condition. It is observable however that it is always a little too long, too short, too large, or small, heavy or light, too full here, or taken away too much there and never made of the right kind of wood. All this according to the light in which different persons 'see it.'

A great old photo of one of the Island's base ball teams, probably around 1910.



The ball is also liable to equally as many criticisms, though we don't recollect hearing of any being too long or short. For a regular game there are regulation sizes for clubs, balls, &c., &c., they cannot go above or below certain fixed figures. Eighteen persons, nine on a side, constitute a quorum for a 'club' (not a bat) to play the game. The difference between the club and the bat is this. The bat is used to knock the ball, whereas the ball never is used to knock the bat, but frequently does some part of the 'club.'

The person who pitches the ball to the catcher (who stands behind the batter) is called the pitcher and is usually full of ale or other fluids; hence if a ball happens to hit the nose of the pitcher, the pitcher being full, of course runs over.

The person who uses the bat becomes a batter and if hit in the face with a ball, becomes battered, or if in the eye will likely become blind, hence the saying 'blind as a bat-ter.' If the batter sends the ball a long distance, it is a 'decided hit' but if he does not send the ball inside the range of the 1st and 3rd line or base, it is a 'foul'.

None of the batters may run after a foul lest the foul ball may put out the batter. If a foul is caught and I am the batter, it puts out the said I and sometimes the whole side. Hence I don't want any fouls gobbled up by my adversaries. If I am the batter and send the ball inside the line of the bases, it becomes a 'fly' and if caught before it lights, also puts me out. This however don't 'put me out' so bad as foul catching; because we think more of fouls than flies, for a general thing, and don't want to have them caught. It would seem from these considerations that a ball ceases to be a ball when it becomes a 'fly' or 'fowl.' These fowls are too poor for culinary purposes.

In this game, more depends on suppleness than main strength and stupidity. A person of over 200 lbs avoirdupois is prima facie a bad base baller, though they will answer to stop a ball occasionally. I noticed in the game a day or two ago that some of the players took a horizontal position occasionally. This was evidently a great mistake as none of them went on all fours over a length or so before they found it out and resumed the perpendicular. This performance is apt to produce a 'black and blue' aspect on the player and a too frequent practice will inevitably eventuate in the opposite sides 'whitewashing' you, which restores the equilibrium.

The students, clerks and others whose occupations are of a sedentary character, this game is undoubtedly well calculated to counteract the unhealthiness of their pursuits, but for those who in the regular order of their labors have plenty of exercise, I can see but little benefit to be derived, particularly as it can only be played in good weather when their time is most likely needed to procure a livelihood. As we have but few people here of sedentary habits, I do not look for a very long lived base ball club in this neighborhood. A 200 pounder – ASK”

A little premature in his prediction, A. S. Kelley would be quite surprised to know that even today we still have a soft ball team, although the 'league' consists of just our team and various teams at Put-in-Bay. Avid supporters of the Kelleys Island team travel to the other island for a rare baseball adventure when the team plays an away-game.



Island men would embrace the sport for many years. This was the team uniform in the 1940's.

Islanders took to this new sport with enthusiasm, sometimes with more enthusiasm than their better halves would have wanted. "We learn that a base ball club has been organized on the Island. Of whom composed we have not been informed. At present the zeal manifested by the base-ballists is intense. It engages the attention of old and young and every other consideration is swallowed up in the interest and excitement it has created. At any time when the game is in progress, the old and decrepit may be seen vying with the youthful and the strong with energy and earnestness. How long the excitement will last we are unable to say but presume that when the busy season returns this popular amusement will be abandoned for the more useful pursuits of business."

Commonly played in the summer, Island baseball was played in the winter. There wasn't time in the summer because of quarrying, grape growing, and working in general. Winter was the best time for competitive sports as this report from March 1871 shows: March 9, 1871 - "Sunday – Wind west and a very little snow on the ground in the morning which didn't look very propitious for playing ball. The sun came out however and melted most of the snow off and the great ball match between the First Nine of the High School and the Butter Fingers came off in the afternoon according to agreement. The Butter Fingers getting the choice opposition took the field. Everything went off lovely for the Laurels; they whitewashed their opponents promptly. In the 4th inning, Hettrick struck a hot fly to pitcher who received it handsomely on his stomach and retired. There were several very handsome flies caught on both sides and the Butter Fingers did some as pretty miffing as one could wish. The result was: Laurels 4/4 doz. to Butter Fingers 9. Hurrah for the Butter Fingers and long may they wave.

Tuesday – More Base Ball. Lecture in the evening by Rev. M. K. Holbrook, second of the series. Wednesday – More Base Ball. Thursday – Some Base Ball again. Jno. Rinehamer started for Sandusky with his pound boat but had to come back on account of the stiff head wind. Third and last of Mr. Holbrook's series of lectures, all of which were exceedingly interesting.

Saturday – In the afternoon the Cock of the Walks and Little Rocks joined their forces and played the scrub Nine a game of Base Ball which resulted in a complete victory for the allied army. Score stood 32 to 9. The Scrubs whitewashed their opponents twice and only got served to that dish once. Give credit where credit is due.

In the 1930's a variation of baseball was played on the ice. The rules for playing baseball on ice were quite different than those used in regular baseball. Different rules, different playing fields, and different seasons could not discourage the enjoyment of this sport.



In later years, the games moved to the summer months. There were several fields on the Island including Carpenter's Grove on the west end and George Bristol's field on Woodford Road, pictured here around 1930.



“The match game between the 1st nine of the East End and the 1st nine of the Champion Club of Kelley's Island came off on the ground east of Mr. Bristol's on Monday the 6th. The following are the names of each club.

East End: G. P. Bristol (Captain), Chas. Dwelle, Peter Motz [Mootz], Thos. Martin, Thos. Hetterick, Wm. Harvey, Dan McGettigan, James Martin, Francis Hegmey.

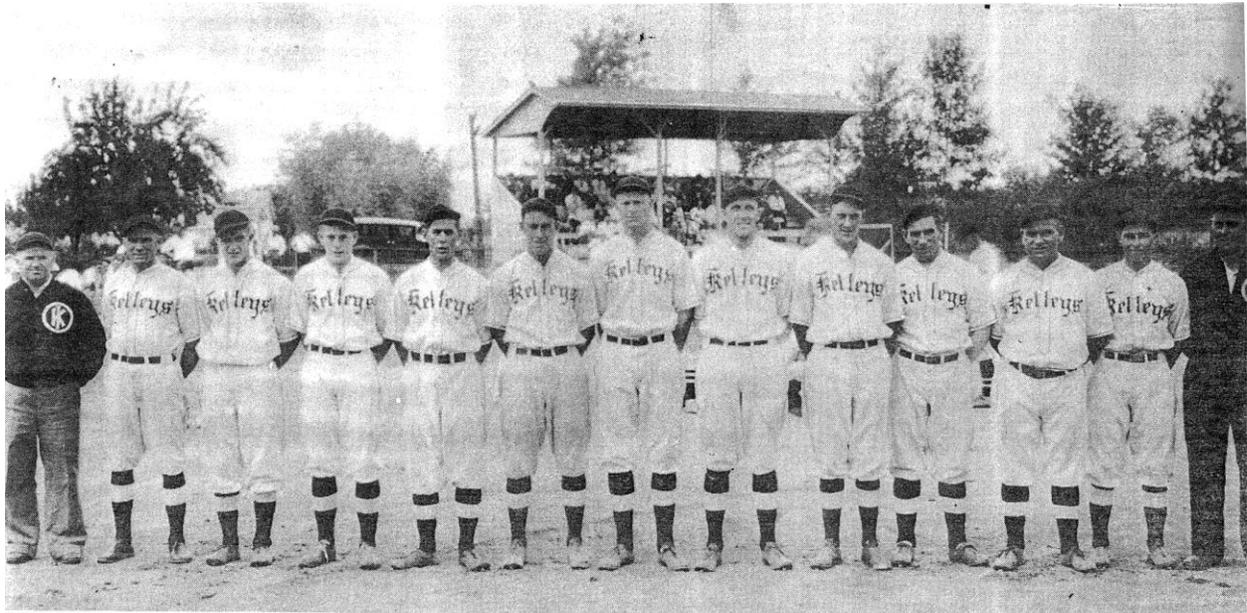
Champion Club: Jacob Rush (Captain), Morris Lincoln, David Seeton [Seton], A. A. [Austen] Stencell, Eddie Ward, Col. Lincoln, James Seeton [Seton], J. F. Dwelle, Titus Hamilton. The captains chose E. Huntington umpire and J. E. Woodford and Uri Ward scorers, [with] J. Lincoln and J. Estes-Marshals.

Some delay was caused by D. Seeton's [Seton] not coming to time. Uri Ward took his place and H. Worden took Ward's place as scorer and the game commenced. The East End got their first inning by the toss. First inning East End made one score and Champions four. Second inning East End got white-washed; Champions made six scores. In this inning W. S. Webb took U. Ward's place. 3rd inning, East End made three and Champions one score in this inning; A. Dwelle took Webb's place. 4th inning both sides were white-washed. 5th inning East End made one and Champion seven scores. 6th inning East End got white-washed; Champions made two scores. 7th inning east end made one and Champions two scores. 8th inning East End was white-washed; Champions made three scores. 9th inning East End was white-washed, Champions made one score. This closed the game. Total scores for East End 6, Champions 26. [Bristol wrote that on February 8 he “played ball, our school got beaten bad today.” He also played twice more that week.]

The East End white-washed the Champions once. The Champions white-washed the East End five times. It will be seen by the above that the Champions beat by a good deal and great credit is due to Morris Lincoln, pitcher and A. A. Stencell [Stancel], catcher for the success of the Champions, and we wish to add a word for the East End. This club is composed of boys (Mr. Bristol's school) and they play well. They make better field men than older ones, better than most in the Champion Club, but are not as good batters as the Champions, nor could it be expected of them. They cannot be swift balls like older

ones, but they caught some flies in good style and passed the ball over the field without dropping. The champions were mostly all men and without practice. Most of them would make good players by practice.

The East End have challenged the Champions to play them next Monday and it has been expected. We hope that the ball will be pitched not thrown as before, for both want a regulation ball and learn to pitch. They may as well come to that first as last, for come it must if they intend to remain a base ball club.”



**TAKE ME
OUT TO THE BALL GAME.....**

THE KELLEYS ISLAND BIG TEAM: Featured from left to right: Charles Martin Sr., Jay Norris, Clarence Duigan, Alfred McKillips, George Durket, Oliver Schlesselman, Oscar McKillips, Bill Schnittker, Clayton Schlesselman, Aaron (Bud) Erne, Art McKillips, Sam Bauman and Al Reidy. This picture taken approximately 1934 also shows the bleachers which once stood near the ball field providing seating for those who attended the exciting games. According to reports from islanders who remember the games, matches were arranged between Kelleys Island and various teams from throughout the area including the Put-In-Bay team. Several members of the team were approached by scouts from the professionals, but all declined the offer. Visiting teams arrived at the island via ferry, and island players were transported the same way. Friendly rivalry existed between island teams and an avid booster crowd was always present in the cheering section.