

# “A Perfect Mania”:

## The Origins of Base Ball in Knoxville, Tennessee

By William E. Hardy\*



Long before Knoxville became crazy about football, there was baseball. The American-made game arrived in the “Queen City of the Mountains” two years after the end of the Civil War. Still a few years shy of becoming a modern, professional sport, “base ball” (predominately spelled as two words in the nineteenth century) boomed in the late 1860s as Americans of all ages, classes, races, and even gender flocked to urban and rural ballfields from coast to coast to play what was fast becoming coined as “the national game.”<sup>1</sup> Although the game was already established in Nashville and in at least seven other southern cities prior to the Civil War, the history of Knoxville’s first two baseball clubs provides a case study for how the sport developed in the post-Civil War South and rapidly evolved

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<sup>1</sup> *Spirit of the Times*, December 6, 1856; Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York, 2000), 6. For the purpose of this essay, I have chosen to use “baseball” rather than “base ball” except in the case of identifying individual amateur era clubs. See John Thorn, “Baseball as One Word or Two: More,” April 21, 2014, *Our Game* (blog), <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/baseball-as-one-word-or-two-more-6445baf6825b>. The periodization of the Amateur Era of baseball, a club-based fraternal sport, is traditionally bookended by the organization of clubs in the 1830s and 1840s and the formation of the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players in March 1871, which signaled that the game had become an entertainment business run for profit that featured skilled-player employees. For the origins of baseball and its development as an American-made game, see Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (Oxford, 1960); Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, 1989).



from a regional folk game played by amateurs more interested in social fraternization and recreational exercise into a modern, commercialized professional spectator sport.<sup>2</sup>

## After the Flood

Knoxville's baseball roots can be traced back to a March 1867 natural disaster that brought the city to a standstill. Torrential rains and rapidly melting mountain snow caused the creeks and rivers of the great valley of East Tennessee to swell into raging floodwaters. The waters of the Holston River through Knoxville rose twelve feet above the previous high mark of 1847. The river washed away mills, factories, warehouses, bridges across First Creek and Second Creek, and between 100-200 homes. Knoxville's business district, which sat atop a half-square mile plateau overlooking the Holston River, became an island surrounded by the surging floodwaters. On March 13, the *Knoxville Whig* reported: "For the greater portion of last week, nothing was thought or talked of but the flood." Bystanders lined up to gaze upon the rising waters, which began to recede on March 10.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps among those in the crowd was Samuel Billings Dow, a twenty-seven-year-old, ambitious merchant. He was among the city's emerging urban upper middle class. Dow sought a social, spiritual, and physical stimulus for both him and his friends—organizing Knoxville's first baseball club. Baseball was not a foreign game to Dow. Raised on "Dow's Hill," his family's Exeter, New Hampshire farm, it is quite possible that he was among the throng of spectators that turned out to watch students at the local academy first play a form of the game known as the "Massachusetts Game" before adopting the more nationally popular "New York Game" born in Brooklyn in the mid-1850s. On the eve of the Civil War, Dow arrived in Louisville, Kentucky to work alongside his older brother, Charles,

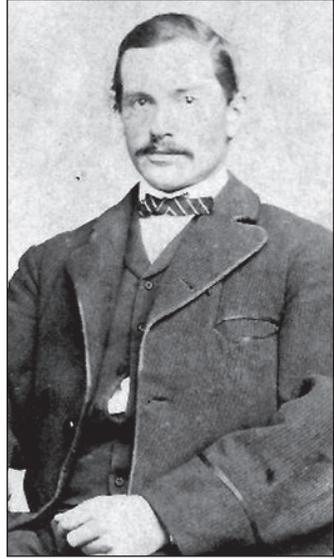
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<sup>2</sup> While no comprehensive study of baseball in the antebellum or Reconstruction South exists, a few important studies that shed light on how baseball spread in other southern cities (New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville, Baltimore, Norfolk, Macon, Augusta, Galveston, and Houston) and the organization of individual southern baseball clubs during these eras. See, Peter Morris, et al, *Base Ball Pioneers, 1850-1870: The Clubs and Players Who Spread the Sport Nationwide* (Jefferson, NC, 2012); George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime During the Civil War* (Princeton, 2003); Ryan A. Swanson, *When Baseball Went White: Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Dreams of a National Pastime* (Lincoln, NE, 2014); Bruce Allardice, "The Inauguration of This Noble and Manly Game Among Us: The Spread of Baseball in the South Prior to 1870," *Base Ball: A Journal of the Early Game* 6 (Fall 2012): 51-69.

<sup>3</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, March 13, 1867; US Congress, House, "The Chattanooga Flood Control Problem," House Doc. 91, 76th Cong., 1st Sess, (Washington, DC, 1939), 70-75.



*In 1867, Samuel Billings Dow, a twenty-seven-year-old Civil War veteran and merchant in Knoxville organized the city's first baseball team. Private collection.*



as a clerk and salesman in the grocery firm of William and Henry Burkhardt. By that time the New York Game had taken root nationally. There is no evidence to indicate that Dow played baseball in the Falls City, but during that time a number of young, aspiring “high and low white-collar” working professionals joined the Star Base Ball Club and the Louisville Base Ball Club who regularly played on open lots adjoining the business district.<sup>4</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861, Dow was intent on joining the Union. Dow made his way to Camp Joe Holt located along the Ohio River in Jeffersonville, Indiana. There he enlisted in the 2nd Kentucky Cavalry. But Dow’s Civil War did not last long. He became severely ill after the Battle of Shiloh in the spring of 1862 and returned home to New Hampshire where he remained with his parents until he fully recovered. Dow then took a job with the US Revenue Service and was later stationed in Knoxville shortly after that city was liberated from rebel control in September 1863.<sup>5</sup>

While stationed in Knoxville as a revenue officer, Dow began to lay down roots. He became a partner in a grocery firm with William H. Lillard and son. Dow was admitted into Knoxville’s most renowned masonic lodge, the Royal Arch Masons, Pearl Chapter, No. 24. He quickly acquired a vast network of professional and personal relationships with other urbanites including bankers, lawyers, insurance and real estate men, physicians, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs. An avid hunter, marksman, and foot racer of great merit, Dow enjoyed athletic competition. A sporting fraternity emerged in nineteenth century American middle to upper-middle-

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<sup>4</sup> Peter S. Dow, Eulogy for Sam B. Dow, in Sam B. Dow Diary, private collection; Laurence M. Crosbie, *The Phillips Exeter Academy, A History* (Norwood, MA, 1923), 233-34; Seymour, *Baseball*, 23-34; George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports: Baseball and Cricket, 1838-72* (Urbana, IL, 1989), 57-73; Thomas W. Gilbert, *How Baseball Happened: Outrageous Lies Exposed! The True Story Revealed* (Boston, 2020), 172-73, 228-31; *Louisville Daily Courier*, June 30, July 15, 1858; *Louisville Daily Journal*, July 12, 15, 1858, July 24, 1860, September 14, 1865.

<sup>5</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 21, 1922; *Knoxville Daily Journal*, November 27, 1894.

class culture that emphasized clean sport and exercise to improve health, character, and morality. Moreover, some reformers equated piety in sports with an active participation in social reforms and other affairs of the world. These ideas were the embodiment of “Muscular Christianity,” a catchall term for the development of moral, devout, and physically fit men. Thus, baseball served as an ideal vehicle to improve one’s physical and spiritual well-being while providing masculine camaraderie, socialization, and entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

When the war ended, Dow and other Union veterans became fascinated with baseball. According to the *Daily National Intelligencer*, the game became “a perfect mania” in which almost every person “of the masculine persuasion, irrespective of age, station, or condition, has . . . an attack of the base ball fever.” Four long years in military service had made the young men “wonderfully gregarious” and eager to socialize through team sports. Countless southern soldiers had witnessed baseball matches on battlefield encampments and inside prisoner of war camps. They too, caught “base ball fever,” which represented a distraction from the tragedies and loss of the war. Following the war, scores of baseball clubs sprung up across the South in both large urban centers and small rural areas. By 1867, there were baseball clubs in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Sewanee, Tazewell, and many other Tennessee towns.<sup>7</sup>

An infusion of former Union soldiers into the urban centers of the Upper South also contributed to the rapid expansion of baseball south of the Mason-Dixon Line. A number of veterans who had experience playing baseball constituted Dow’s circle of friends. Most hailed from Ohio and Michigan and had served under the command of General Ambrose Burnside who liberated Knoxville from rebel occupation in the summer of 1863.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, October 25, 1865, September 5, 1866. For studies examining the intersection of sport, masculinity, and religion in nineteenth century America, see Elliott Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, 1986); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Steven A. Reiss, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Wheeling, IL, 1995), 14-18.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), September 11, 1866 (first quote); *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1867 (second quote); *Richmond Times*, November 2, 1866 (third quote); *Home Journal* (Winchester, TN), April 18, 1867; Seymour, *Baseball*, 41-58; Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 113-29. The first known use of “base ball fever” to characterize the rapid spread of baseball in postwar America appeared in the August 4, 1865 issue of the *New York Times*.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolnton and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (New York, 2006); Earl J. Hess, *The Knoxville Campaign: Burnside and Longstreet in East Tennessee* (Knoxville, 2012).



*Baseball games were common in Union and Confederate prisoner of war camps. This 1863 lithograph depicts a baseball game within a Union prisoner camp in Salisbury, North Carolina.*

*Union Prisoners at Salisbury, N.C., by Otto Boetticher (New York, ca. 1863), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC, <https://lccn.loc.gov/94508290>.*

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## Organizing Knoxville's First Base Ball Clubs

In mid-March 1867, as the Holston River's floodwaters subsided, Dow compiled a list of nearly sixty men whom he thought might enjoy playing baseball. In addition to the Union veterans that he counted among his closest friends, Dow's list included Confederate veterans and others from families who had supported the rebels. He put out a call for all interested parties to meet March 19 at Joseph Cooper's Star Billiard Saloon located on the first floor of Ramsey's Hall on Gay Street. Dow later recalled that only a few former Confederates attended, the rest were nearly all former Union officers or recent arrivals from the North.<sup>9</sup>

The attendees wanted to play the game and most had a basic understanding of its rules. At the meeting, they organized a club, named themselves "the Knoxville Knoxvilles," and unanimously elected Dow as captain. Spencer Munson, an insurance salesman and real estate agent who had worked with Dow in the US Revenue Service after having served as an officer in three Union regiments, was appointed club president. Dow's colleague and close friend, Homer C. Squire, the chief clerk of the US Revenue Service, was appointed club secretary, a position responsible for keeping club minutes and issuing or responding to any match challenges.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; *Knoxville Whig*, March 20, 1867.

<sup>10</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, September 4, 1867.

The earliest nineteenth century amateur era baseball clubs played both a socially and racially segregated game according to their own values and ambitions. The Knoxville's were no different. The team consisted of young (the average age was 25.5), white Protestant men who represented an emerging professional class. Thirteen players had served in the Civil War (all but three held a rank of second sergeant or higher). Education was another common trait for the players. Approximately one-third of the members were either practicing lawyers or law students enrolled at East Tennessee University (a forerunner to the University of Tennessee). Other players held professional positions such as teacher, druggist, merchant, banker, and physician. Similar to other clubs, the members of the Knoxville's club represented a cross-section of the city's young professional and business elite, as well as a future directory of the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce.<sup>11</sup>

Members of the Knoxville's enjoyed playing baseball, however, like most amateur clubs, they relished the trappings of elite culture more. Members paid an initiation fee (between \$2.00 and \$5.00), annual dues (\$5.00 being standard), and purchased their uniform and equipment out of their own pockets. Appearances were important—members wore elaborate uniforms complete with proper shoes, pants, a monogrammed shirt, cap, and often a colorful belt. The club uniform not only instilled a sense of pride in membership, but also contributed to the legitimacy of the game. Each club adhered to a code of personal conduct, had admission criteria, and charged players fines for using profanity on the ballfield. Those who violated the code of conduct were often blackballed.<sup>12</sup>

After each game, players followed a set of social practices. For example, following each match the defeated team presented the game ball, often wrapped in gold foil with the final score and date inscribed, as a trophy to the victorious club's captain or president. Often additional special prizes (badges, scorebooks, silver or gold mounted balls, and bats) or even bouquets of flowers were awarded to the batsmen who scored the most aces (runs). The best basetenders (infielders) and scouts (outfielders) who exhibited defensive artistry in the garden (ballfield) also received awards. But the after-game festivities were among the most significant sociological and cultural

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<sup>11</sup> Allardice, "The Inauguration of This Noble and Manly Game Among Us," 51-69; Morris, et al., *Base Ball Pioneers*, 307-17.

<sup>12</sup> Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 108-11; Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 89.

Table 1: Roster of the Knoxville Knoxville  
Base Ball Club, 1867

Name	Age	Position/Role	Occupation	Civil War Service Record
Edward P. Bailey	25	Club Dir.	banker	Clerk, Quartermaster's Corps (Union)
William M. Baxter	17	1B	lawyer	
Charles H. Brown	24	2nd VP	banker	Priv., 104th Ohio Vol. Inf., Co. E (Union)
Eldad C. Camp	27	3B/RF/Club Dir.	lawyer	Sergt. Maj. 142nd Ohio Vol. Inf. (Union)
William P. Chamberlain	26	LF	merchant (druggist)	1st Lieut., 23rd Ohio Vol. Inf., Co. A (Union)
Samuel B. Dow	27	P/1st Club Capt. and Treas.	merchant (grocery)/ asst. assessor, US Revenue Service	Priv., 2nd Ky. Cav. (Union)
Andrew R. Humes	19	2B/2nd Club Capt.	clerk, US circuit court	
Ansel B. Ingersoll	30	1B	merchant	
Henry H. Ingersoll	23	2B	lawyer	Musician, 7th Ohio Vol. Inf. (Union)
[?] Lane		C		
George L. Maloney	22	3B	teacher/ student, East Tenn. Univ.	1st Lieut., 6th Tenn. Inf., Co. C (Union)
Spencer Munson	26	LF/Club Pres.	real estate agent/ insurance salesman	Corpl., 2nd Ohio Vol. Cav., Co. G/1st Lieut. and Adjt, 8th and 10th Tenn. Cav. (Union)
John W. Paxton	43		physician	Capt., 19th Tenn. Inf., Co. E, "Paxton's Grays" (CSA)
Abijah Sidney Prosser	28	CF	lawyer	Sergt., 10th Ill. Inf., Co. C/1st Lieut, 2nd Tenn. Cav., Co. H (Union)
William J. Richards	31	SS/1st VP	manager (rolling mill)	
Augustus J. Ricks	24	Club Dir.	lawyer	1st Lieut., 104th Ohio Vol. Inf., Co. E (Union)
Thomas Rodgers	20	C	clerk (drug store)	
Charles Seymour	23	2B	lawyer/real estate	
Charles Smith	16			
Homer C. Squire	25	1B/1st Club Sec.	chief clerk, US Revenue Service	Sergt., 2nd Ohio Vol. Cav., Co. G (Union)
Luther S. Trowbridge	30		lawyer	Brig. Gen., 10th Mich. Cav. (Union)
William Tuttle	30	2nd Club Sec.	secretary, Knoxville Iron Company	1st Lieut., 105th Ohio Vol. Inf., Co. E (Union)



*This photograph of Gay Street was taken in spring 1867 just as baseball enthusiasts were organizing the first teams. Several of the early baseball players owned businesses on Gay Street, including William Chamberlain whose drug store is seen on the right side of the street. The Gay Street Base Ball Grounds are located where the trees are in the middle foreground of the photograph on the right side of the street.*

*Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville.*

elements of amateur era baseball. Following each match, the home team organized lavish postgame banquets full of food and music, capped off with rounds of toasts and treats such as ice cream, cigars, and brandy.<sup>13</sup>

Once organized, the Knoxvilleites searched for a field to play the game. In the postwar urban South, baseball was often played on desolate lots on the fringe of city limits. But with much of Knoxville's available flat lots either still flooded or muddy, Dow and his teammates had few options. Complicating matters was the fact that the city's business district, which sat atop a 60-foot bluff, was in the middle of a building boom. There was, however, a single large vacant field within the business district that sat at the bottom of a steep hill on the east side of Gay Street. Today, this property is bordered by Union Avenue to the south, State Street to the east, Summit Hill Drive to the north, and Gay Street to the west. The high banks around the field made a natural earthen amphitheater of

<sup>13</sup> Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 17-20; Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 91-92.

grandstands and bleachers. Itinerant circuses often sat up their big tents on this field and put on a stunning set of shows for throngs of people of all ages who lined its banks.<sup>14</sup>

The downtown lot was a perfect field to play ball apart from two major issues. First, the field was overgrown and was quickly becoming known as the city's trash dump. Second, the property was owned by the grandchildren of Knoxville's original surveyor and largest landholder Colonel Charles McClung. Members of the McClung family had designs on developing the land for commercial real estate. Thus, Dow and fellow teammate Charles Seymour, a lawyer and Spencer Munson's partner in the insurance and real estate business, approached Frank and Charles McClung to lease the property until the owners chose to build on the land. With the McClung family's blessing, in spring 1867, Dow and Seymour hired hands to cut down overgrown sticker burs and jimson weeds, remove the trash, and clear the field so the Knoxvilles could begin practicing on the grounds.<sup>15</sup>

While the Knoxvilles improved their field, another group of aspiring baseballists met at Cooper's saloon to discuss forming their own club. Some members of this group had been on Dow's invitee list, while others were students from East Tennessee University. Much like the players for the Knoxvilles, these young, white professionals craved social camaraderie and athletic competition. The members were generally younger than the Knoxvilles, with an average age of 22 years old. Robert Aiken Armstrong, a descendant of one of Knoxville's first families, was elected captain, while Robert Leonidas Woodward, a printer and the son of prominent Knoxville doctor Alex Woodward, was chosen to serve as the club president. After some discussion, and perhaps influenced by the recent flood, they settled on naming themselves the Holston Base Ball Club. Although there are no extant sources that documents the Knoxvilles' uniform, the Holstons donned a blue cap with a white star, a white shirt, blue pants with a cord, and a red belt. They also brought a field flag with them that was red with the letter "H" within a blue field. The Holstons were lauded for "their gentlemanly bearing and fine appearance" on the ballfield.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Knoxville Daily Journal*, July 23, 1895; *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921.

<sup>15</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; Knox County Warranty Deed Books, Book H-3, 96-102, Knox County Archives, Knoxville.

<sup>16</sup> *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, May 3, 1867; *Nashville Republican Banner*, September 13, 1868 (quote).

Table 2: Roster of the Holston Base Ball Club, 1867

Name	Age	Position	Occupation	Civil War Service Record
Frank Wells Armstrong	16	C/LF		
Robert Aiken Armstrong	22	SS/3B/1st Club Cpt.		
Oscar F. Bell	29	Club VP/3rd Club Cpt.	hotel owner	
William Caswell	20	1B	student, Washington College, Virginia	courier (CSA)
Tully Robertson Cornick	14		law student, East Tenn Univ.	
[Thomas Creage]		RF		
Thomas D. Dobson		1B	clerk	
H.L.W. French		Club Sec.		
Asa Hazen	18	3B/LF/RF	student, East Tenn Univ.	
Tim Homer		LF		
[?] Joyce		C		
James T. Lowery	23	2B/SS/3B	merchant (grocery)/dance teacher	
James C. Luttrell Jr.	26	2nd Club Pres.	merchant (hardware)	1st Lieut., 4th Tenn. Inf., Co. C, "Rhett Light Artillery" (CSA)
Samuel B. Luttrell	22	CF	clerk/asst. postmaster/merchant (hardware)	Corpl., 12th Tenn Cav. (Union)
John Crannell Minor	24	SS	professor, East Tenn Univ.	medical cadet (Union)
Orville Seth Putnam	19	1B/2B/CF	clerk	
William Joseph Ross	31	P		
A. Wynn Smith		Club Treas.	US claims agent	
Herbert Leslie Terrell	24	SS	lawyer	
Andrew Park White	18	CF	dentist	
George McNutt White	20	2B	salesman	
James Chamberlain Williams	19	1B/2B/RF/2nd Club Cpt.	lawyer	
Robert Leonidas Woodward	31	1st Club Pres.	printer	

Though Dow later claimed that the Holstons were comprised of rebels who refused to play alongside Unionists, the truth is that they represented a somewhat equal mix of Civil War era sympathies. The Holstons had a few sons of prominent rebel sympathizers among them, such as Robert and Frank Armstrong, whose father James Houston Armstrong was a wealthy Knox County merchant and antebellum planter who owned twelve enslaved people on the eve of the Civil War. The only former Confederates among them were Unionist mayor James C. Luttrell's son, James, who had served as a 1st lieutenant in the 4th Tennessee Infantry and William Caswell, who had been a teenage courier for the rebel army. There were in fact an equal number of players on the Holstons who had fought for the Union during the war. For example, the mayor's other son, Samuel, had been a corporal in the 12th Tennessee Cavalry. Also, Dr. John Minor, a New York medical cadet from West Point military academy, had served at a Union hospital in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and then after he mustered out taught chemistry and the natural sciences at East Tennessee University.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than two clubs defined by their Unionist and Confederate wartime loyalties as Dow later claimed, the rosters of the Holstons and Knoxville's suggests a connection between post-Civil War politics and the organization of Knoxville's first baseball clubs. With one exception, John W. Paxton, previously a captain in the 19th Tennessee Infantry (CSA) who belonged to Dow's masonic lodge, the Knoxville's were comprised of Unconditional Unionists, most of whom had served in the Union Army and were likely to vote Republican. The Holstons' roster had fewer veterans and represented a mix of Conditional Unionists and those who supported the Confederacy during the war. Reconstruction politics further separated Unionists into those who supported the Republican policies of Governor William Brownlow and those who supported Democrats and former Confederates. Therefore, in 1867, just one year after Tennessee had reentered the Union, Knoxville's two baseball teams represented the Republican Party (Knoxvilles) and the Democratic Party (Holstons). As further evidence of this divide, the Knoxville's named a number of prominent Tennessee Radical Republicans, including Brownlow, US Representative Horace Maynard, and Judge Oliver P. Temple,

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<sup>17</sup> *Knoxville Daily Journal*, July 23, 1895; *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921.

as honorary members of the club. Thus, Tennessee's bitter postwar political divide of Republicans versus Democrats, characterized the formation of Knoxville's first two baseball clubs.<sup>18</sup>

Once organized, the Holstons faced the same quandary as the Knoxville's—finding a suitable ground of their own to play ball. The Holstons settled on a vacant lot situated on the north bank of First Creek along the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, a few blocks east of the roundhouse and machine shops at the intersection of Depot and Crozier streets. This area became commonly known as Cripple Creek during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a dangerous and notorious section of the city plagued by rampant crime and vice. In spring 1867, the more immediate problem for the Holstons was that the recent flooding had turned the field into an unplayable surface with ankle-deep mud. Unable to practice the Holstons kept their spirits and in late April issued a challenge to the Knoxville's to play a match at a future date to be determined.<sup>19</sup>

## Organizing a League and the First Game

On May 1, 1867, Spencer Munson, president of the Knoxville's, and Robert Woodward, president of Holstons, joined representatives from eight other Tennessee baseball clubs in Chattanooga to form the Tennessee Base Ball Association (TBBA). Leaders formed committees, approved a constitution and by-laws, and adopted the 1866 National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) rules and regulations. The NABBP's rules and code fit the amateur era club-based fraternal game and conformed to its ideas of order, dignified competition, and fairness. For example, both sides had to agree upon close plays in the field. This was especially important because the underhanded delivery of pitches made it easy for the batter to put the ball into play. Thus, a better defense often won the match.<sup>20</sup>

Knoxville's first two baseball clubs began at a time in which the game and its rules were very much in flux. The amateur era baseball game had noticeable differences from the twentieth century game. Limited equipment was the most significant—players had no gloves

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<sup>18</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, May 15, 1867; Thomas B. Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1950); William E. Hardy, "Fare well to all Radicals: Redeeming Tennessee, 1869-1870." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2013). On the topic of amateur era baseball and politics, see Seymour, *Baseball*, 52; Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports*, 255.

<sup>19</sup> *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, July 8, 1900.

<sup>20</sup> *New York Clipper*, May 18, 1867; *Nashville Union and American*, May 3, 1867.

and fielded bare-handed, which resulted in a number of injuries such as bruised hands, dislocated fingers, split lips, black eyes, and broken noses. Also, the amateur era began with the “bound game,” which meant that an out could be recorded by either catching the ball on the fly or on one bounce. Most teams had around two dozen players on the roster which meant two different teams could play under the same banner. The “first nine” were the best nine players making up the main team with a “second nine” of reserve players. Most games lasted around three hours, but as pitchers improved the speed of their underhanded throws and hitters anticipated the pitch the matches stretched as long as five hours. Therefore, umpires began calling balls and strikes to expedite the game which gradually eroded baseball’s amateur club-based fraternal ethic and pushed the national game closer to a professional sport. Moreover, the pressure to best one’s intercity rival or win a championship series threatened to displace the traditional notion that how one played the game mattered most.<sup>21</sup>

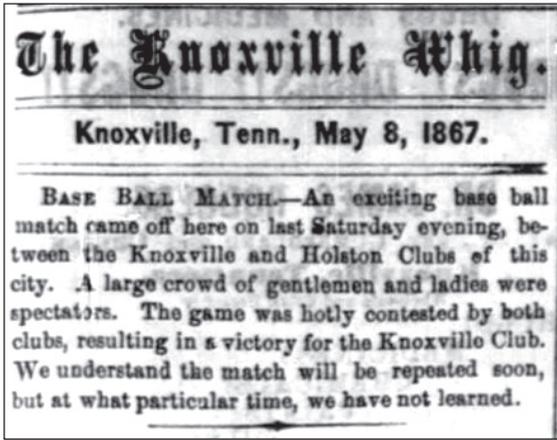
As the TBBA’s first state convention closed on May 1, 1867, the delegates discussed the controversial issue of determining a state champion. At the time, there was no organized tournament to determine the best club in the state. In fact, any club defeating another team in a best-of-three series could claim themselves to be the city, county, state, or even national champions. The Mountain City Club of Chattanooga claimed to be the state champion of 1866 having bested several Tennessee clubs, but so did the Lookout Club of Chattanooga and the Cumberland Club of Nashville. Delegates awarded the Mountain City Club the title of state champion and recommended that a state tournament should decide the next year’s winner.<sup>22</sup>

Following the convention, Munson and Woodward returned to Knoxville and prepared their respective clubs for the city’s first baseball game. The date of that first game has long been incorrectly reported as 1865. Closer inspection of newspapers articles, however, confirm that Knoxville’s first baseball game was played between the Knoxvilles and the Holstons on the Gay Street home grounds of the

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<sup>21</sup> John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game* (New York, 2011), 106, 122; Tom Melville, *Early Baseball and the Rise of the National League*, (Jefferson, NC, 2001), 10; Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, December 1, 1866; *Nashville Republican Banner*, November 29, December 1, 1866, March 31, 1867; *Nashville Union and American*, May 3, 1867.



*The first organized baseball game in Knoxville took place on May 4, 1867, between the Knoxvilles and the Holstons. Knoxville Whig, May 8, 1867.*

Knoxvilles on May 4, 1867.<sup>23</sup> Dow and Seymour later recalled that hundreds of men and women turned out to watch the match. The game was widely publicized and many businesses closed their doors early so that all interested parties could attend.

As the city's brass band entertained the crowd, the starting players took the field. But before the game began, Robert Armstrong contested two of Dow's players who he argued were ineligible according to the NABBP's thirty-day "probationary" period rule because they had only recently moved to the city and thus could not be a member of the Knoxvilles in "good standing." After some discussion, the Holstons dropped their protest and the game commenced. According to the *Knoxville Whig*, the match was a "hotly contested" affair in which the Knoxvilles prevailed. Although the newspaper's reporter did not provide a final score, Dow's 1921 recollections put his club up over the Holstons by seventeen runs. The barehanded games of the amateur era were often high scoring affairs, even more so until a club gained defensive experience. The *Knoxville Whig* reported that a second game between both clubs was played the following week on the same grounds with the Holstons besting the Knoxvilles to earn their first victory and square the series—an intercity rivalry that would excite and spread "base ball fever" across East Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; *Knoxville Daily Journal*, July 23, 1895. See Jack Neely, "Huzzah! The Knoxville Holstons Bring Back Vintage Base Ball, to Encouraging Crowds," *Metro Pulse*, August 14, 2014, 16-22; Ron Allen, "Same Old Smokies": A Brief History of Baseball in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1865-1954 (Knoxville, 2008). Adam Alfrey's findings have served as the bedrock for my own study. See Adam H. Alfrey, "Brief Notes on the History of the Holstons of Knoxville and the Dry Town Boys of Harriman," unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

<sup>24</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, May 8, 15, 1867; *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; *Beadle's Dime Base Ball Player* (New York, 1867), 17-18; Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 89.

## Promoting Baseball and Defining Audiences

Newspapers helped promote the game of baseball. As historian Harold Seymour explained, “Baseball news sold newspapers, and newspapers sold baseball.” With breakthroughs in technology such as the steam driven rotary press and cheap paper, large scale circulation of daily newspapers became possible over the course of the mid-nineteenth century. Newsboys sold the papers on street corners for a penny a copy, prompting editors to refocus the content for a growing working-class readership. What began as brief blurbs about a game with an occasional accompanying box score soon became full-column descriptions and eventually inning by inning accounts in daily papers such as the *New York Clipper* and *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times*. Newspapers hired sports writers who played up their favorites and criticized their least favorites. Readers enjoyed the expanded coverage which documented both the play on the ballfield and social activities of each club.<sup>25</sup>

In most cities, competing newspapers marketed themselves as the baseball paper. In Knoxville, both John Fleming’s *Knoxville Daily Free Press* and William J. Ramage’s *Knoxville Daily Herald* vied for that honor. Both papers favored the Holstons, a team made up of former rebels and conservative Republicans. Fleming and Ramage were ardent boosters of the national game and dispatched reporters to record elaborate details of games for readers of their papers. Fleming in particular, stoked the intercity rivalry between the Holstons and the Knoxville. He ridiculed individual members of the Knoxville for their lack of athletic prowess. On the contrary, Brownlow’s *Knoxville Whig* devoted more attention to the Knoxville, a squad of primarily Union veterans who had named the governor an honorary member of their club. But unlike the other papers, the *Knoxville Whig* carried limited details of baseball matches.<sup>26</sup>

Newspaper coverage of these early games promoted baseball to Americans regardless of age, class, race, and social status. The racial divide in baseball, however, took root only a few years after

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<sup>25</sup> Seymour, *Baseball*, 32-34; Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 7-10; Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-1870* (Urbana, IL, 1986), 126, 137; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991), 385-86.

<sup>26</sup> William Rule, *Standard History of Knoxville* (Chicago, 1900), 332-33; *Knoxville Sentinel*, October 29, 1900; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, August 23, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Herald*, December 6, 1867.

the sport gained national appeal. As the sport boomed in the late 1850s, Black men flocked to urban ballfields to play the national game. Black men from the growing professional class organized teams and most often played other Black teams. There were exceptions, however, especially in the North. For example, on July 4, 1859, recently retired white antislavery Republican Congressman Joshua Giddings of Ohio played in a game with two Black baseball teams to demonstrate his support for equality. The great abolitionist writer and orator Frederick Douglass frequented many Black baseball games in his hometown of Rochester, New York. He watched his two sons play on several Black baseball clubs.<sup>27</sup>

Black baseball clubs in Tennessee mirrored many of the trends of other Black teams in the postwar South. First, many teams had support from Black schools and fraternal, literary, and social organizations organized by Black leaders. Second, Black teams started in urban areas such as Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, and Chattanooga. Just like matches between white teams, Black baseball games in Tennessee were highly competitive. The first known championship for Black teams in Tennessee occurred in Nashville in 1869. In Knoxville, there were at least three organized Black clubs by fall 1867. The demand for Black teams in Knoxville to play was so great that in November 1867, team leaders asked Frank and Charles McClung to play on the Gay Street Grounds where the white teams played. The McClungs agreed.<sup>28</sup>

This nod to acceptance of Black teams and potential racial integration of baseball teams proved fleeting. In November 1867, with Black and white baseball clubs playing across the state, Knoxville's city leaders organized a grand baseball tournament and extended an open invitation to all clubs across the state. When Black baseball clubs applied, however, tournament organizers refused all such requests. Outside of some postwar integrated matches played in the Upper South, particularly Washington, DC, there does not appear to be any evidence of white southern baseball clubs willing to play Black clubs. Many new Southern clubs communicated white exclusivity by choosing team names such as Dixie, Secesh, and Pride of the South.

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<sup>27</sup> James E. Brunson III, *Black Baseball, 1858-1900: A Comprehensive Record of the Teams, Players, Managers, Owners, and Umpires*. (Jefferson, NC, 2019), 1:3-4, 241-50; Swanson, *When Baseball Went White*, 10-14, 113-14, 181-90; Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 82, 122-29; David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet or Freedom* (New York, 2018), 507-508.

<sup>28</sup> *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 9, 12, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, December 11, 1867.



Historian Ryan Swanson explained that “the close identification of baseball with white Southern ideals and sectionalist rhetoric made baseball a racially divisive game.”<sup>29</sup>

The decision by tournament organizers in Knoxville to exclude Black baseball teams reflected a movement at the national level to deny NABBP membership to Black clubs. In December 1867, the NABBP met in Philadelphia for their annual convention. The NABBP nominating committee rallied against racial integration of the sport. The committee held that, in the spirit of sectional goodwill and to avoid racial and political controversy, any baseball club composed of one or more Black baseballists would be denied admission to the NABBP. League president, Arthur P. Gorman, endorsed the committee’s recommendation. Despite exclusion from the NABBP, Black teams continued to play and formed leagues of their own.<sup>30</sup>

Baseball has long been a sport in which women have both played and attended games in great numbers. The earliest known female clubs were organized in both the North and South in the late 1860s. The first report of a female club seeking to play in Knoxville appeared in October 1884. According to the *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, an anonymous female club proposed to come to Knoxville and play any club provided suitable arrangements could be made. No team took the offer and the editor of the *Knoxville Daily Chronicle* reported that “there seems at present no club in the city willing to step on the diamond against the fair sex in a game of base ball in Knoxville.” Fleming and Ramage may have shared *Sporting Life* editor Francis Richter’s disdain for women competing in baseball, who wrote that a “Woman has no place in base-ball except as patron and enthusiast,” but their newspapers consistently noted the presence of large numbers of women at Knoxville baseball matches.<sup>31</sup>

Nineteenth century Americans embraced the concept of “true womanhood,” which celebrated piety, purity, submission, and domesticity as virtues of a true woman. According to Victorian ideals, a true woman’s superior moral nature held the potential to

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<sup>29</sup> Swanson, *When Baseball Went White*, 100-104, 125-27, 194-95 (quote); *Nashville Republican Banner*, November 21, 1866; *Memphis Daily Post*, May 25, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, October 16, 23, 1867.

<sup>30</sup> Swanson, *When Baseball Went White*, 100-104, 194-95.

<sup>31</sup> *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, October 23, 1884 (first quote); Francis Richter as quoted in Scott D. Peterson, *Reporting Baseball’s Sensational Season of 1890: The Brotherhood War and the Rise of Modern Sports Journalism* (Jefferson, NC, 2015), 140 (second quote).

control men's behavior, preventing the vulgar, coarseness that often marred an all-male environment. Theoretically, women spectators domesticated the ballfield. Thus, it was thought that the presence of women kept both male players and spectators orderly while bringing a sense of legitimacy to the sport. Henry Chadwick, the first great baseball sportswriter, agreed: "Experience has shown that nothing tends so much to elevate the game, to rid it of evil influences, to lead to proper decorum and to gentlemanly contests than the countenance and patronage of the ladies." In addition to influencing the behavior of players and spectators, women organized and participated in banquets before and after games, as well as off-season social events, that did not directly challenge conventional gender roles. After one such match, the *Knoxville Daily Herald* reported that Delia Baxter, the daughter of Knox County Judge John Baxter, had presented the visiting club with a "beautiful loaf of cake."<sup>32</sup>

## Widening the Circle

Once the Knoxville and Holstons had a couple matches under their belts, the recently crowned 1866 state champions, the Mountain City Base Ball Club, challenged both clubs to a friendly exhibition match. The Chattanooga club was in the middle of a barnstorming tour of various cities throughout the South and had crushed all their opponents on the diamond. The "bully boys" of Mountain City arrived in Knoxville on May 17, 1867 to great fanfare including a lavish banquet and musical performance. The more experienced state champions easily bested both clubs, beating the Knoxville by 28 runs before handing the Holstons a humbling defeat by a score of 86 to 45. With the victory, the Mountain City Club had capped off their Tennessee tour with an undefeated record.<sup>33</sup>

Following their defeat by the Mountain City Club, both the Knoxville and Holstons played friendly match games against local clubs that were comprised of teenage boys and skilled craftsmen. The Knoxville sparred against university clubs, such as East Tennessee University and Greeneville College. The Holstons accepted a

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Chadwick as quoted in Ellen W. Gerber, *The American Woman in Sport* (Boston, 1974), 26 (first quote); *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 30, 1867 (second quote); Debra A. Shattuck, *Bloomer Girls: Women Baseball Pioneers* (Urbana, IL, 2017), 34-35, 239-40; Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH, 1976); Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 20, 38-40.

<sup>33</sup> *Nashville Republican Banner*, May 19, 1867; *Memphis Daily Post*, May 20, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, May 22, 1867.

challenge to play a much advertised July 4th exhibition match with the Emmett Machinist Club, a team composed of machinists and laborers in the shops and roundhouses of the East Tennessee and Georgia and East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad companies. The exhibition game was played on the Holstons' field and attracted an immense crowd of spectators. Despite their inexperience, the Emmett Machinists held their own until a line drive struck their pitcher William Hurley. He left the game and thereafter the Holstons scored so many runs that both clubs agreed to close the match after five innings with the Holstons up by 53 runs.<sup>34</sup>

Injuries were commonplace in the barehanded amateur era game. The rules of the "Massachusetts Game" permitted fielders to put a runner out by "soaking" or "plugging" them—that is, to hit them with the ball. The "New York Game" was hardly less injury-ridden. It had its share of pulled or strained muscles, dislocated fingers, broken bones, and head injuries. More often than not, players suffered minor ailments as a result of coming straight from the workplace to the ballfield and not warming up.

Nineteenth century baseball was a dangerous pastime. For example, during a game between the Holstons and the Knoxville, outfielder Spencer Munson snagged a long fly ball, but when he threw the ball to the infield his arm suddenly snapped above the elbow. His teammate Dr. Paxton had to set the arm. Later, in that same game, a line drive broke the pitcher's middle finger. On another occasion, the Knoxville's hitting ace, William Chamberlain, hit a high fly directly to Samuel Luttrell in center field. But Luttrell lost sight of the ball in the sun and struck him in the forehead. According to Seymour's recollection, Luttrell "dropped like a beef." Knocked unconscious by the violent blow to his head, Luttrell's Holstons teammates carried him from the ballfield. It would be the last game Luttrell ever played.<sup>35</sup>

In the late summer of 1867, the Mountain City Club challenged the Holstons to play a best of three series for the state championship. The Holstons held high hopes to avenge their earlier loss and accepted the invitation. The first game was played September 3 on the home grounds of the Mountain City Club and under the watchful eye

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<sup>34</sup> Seymour, *Baseball*, 61; *Knoxville Whig*, June 26, August 7, 14, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, July 2, 3, 4, 6, 1867.

<sup>35</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 20, 1921; *Knoxville Daily Journal*, July 23, 1895; *Knoxville Whig*, August 21, 1867; Seymour, *Baseball*, 19.

Spencer Munson was an insurance salesman and real estate agent who had worked with Samuel Dow in the US Revenue Service after having served as an officer in three Union regiments. In 1867, he was appointed president of the Knoxville Knoxville. During a game against the Holstons his arm snapped above the elbow as he threw a long fly ball back to the infield. Photograph from John P. Gurnish.



of Charles C. Siegfried, the president of the Lookout Club of Chattanooga, who umpired the match. The Holstons fell 79 to 50 in the first game. Some of the Knoxville's players accused Siegfried of favoring Mountain City and making several questionable calls. When the two teams met ten days later in Knoxville for the second match, the Holstons squared the series with a 52 to 31 victory. The deciding match was played on neutral ground in Athens, Tennessee on September 21. Although neither a detailed report nor a box score exists, the Holstons defeated the defending state champions to claim the title of champion club of Tennessee for 1867. In spite of the dubious manner in which a club could claim a state championship, the Holstons had quickly improved. During their inaugural season, the Holstons averaged 53 runs a game and their defense gave up fewer runs to both the Knoxville and the Mountain City Club with each successive game that they played.<sup>36</sup>

When the Holstons returned home as the state champions, they received a hero's welcome from the people of Knoxville. Even Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig* celebrated the Holstons' triumph proclaiming, "Three cheers and a 'tiger' for the Holston." Following the home club's success, city leaders organized a Grand Base Ball Tournament and announced that all TBBA affiliated clubs in the

<sup>36</sup> *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, August 31, September 5, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, September 18, 25, 1867.

state were invited to play. Knoxville's captains of industry put up a number of prizes to be awarded to the winning club and the best players. Baseball clubs from across the state, including teams from Nashville and Memphis, asked to be part of the competition. Tournament organizers made it clear that games were more than just friendly matches, they would decide the best team in the state through competitive play on the field. To help bolster rosters, the organizers dropped the NABBP's thirty-day "probationary" rule, which meant that anyone could immediately join or switch clubs for the tournament. For example, the Knoxville's poached two standout players from the College Hill Club of Greeneville—brothers Ansel and Henry Ingersoll—and George Lafayette Maloney, a veteran of the 6th Tennessee Infantry (Union) who was a student at East Tennessee University and taught in a local primary school.<sup>37</sup>

Inclement weather ahead of the tournament resulted in numerous cancellations. Only one team outside of Knoxville—the College Hill Club of Greeneville—made the trek. Lone players from a number of other East Tennessee baseball clubs arrived by train to participate in the individual skills competition. For example, William Goddard Lenoir of the prominent Lenoir family of North Carolina and Tennessee, put on a hitting show, striking pitches further than any of the players. Due to the number of no-shows, tournament organizers permitted two junior clubs to open the two-day event and play for the fourth-place prize, a handsome scorebook. The Holstons' second nine played the East Tennessee University Club for third place and a prize of two silver mounted balls. The Holstons' squad fell to the college students by a final score of 51 to 47. The umpire in the second-place match for a stand of colors mercifully halted the contest after six innings awarding the victory to College Hill Club of Greeneville who had a commanding 78 to 27 lead over the Knoxville City Club, yet another Knoxville team.<sup>38</sup>

The first Grand Base Ball Tournament in Knoxville concluded on the afternoon of November 6, 1867. The Knoxville's and Holstons played for a silver mounted bat in the first-place match. The Holstons jumped out to a commanding lead, nearly going through the batting

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<sup>37</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, September 25 (quote), October 16, 23, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 2, 5, 7, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, November 5, 1867; *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, May 24, 1919.

<sup>38</sup> *Nashville Republican Banner*, November 3, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, November 13, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, November 6, 7, 8, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 6, 7, 1867.



order twice. At the end of the first inning, the Holstons led 13 runs to none. They scored 27 more runs in the second inning, which ended with a score of 40 to the Knoxville's 6 runs. The Holstons were led by the bats of James Williams and Aza Hazen, who recorded a homerun, and Orville Putnam's solid hands at first base. Despite the last-minute additions to their roster, the Knoxville's could not equal the hitting and fielding prowess of their opposition. The umpire called the match just shy of three hours in favor of the Holstons by a score of 90 to 25.<sup>39</sup>

With two consecutive titles under their belts, the Holstons sought more formidable opponents. The Holstons took note of the success of the Gate City Club, an undefeated team out of Atlanta comprised of "high and low white-collar" working professionals from that city's most prominent families. Robert Armstrong of the Holstons challenged their captain, Robert Dohme, to a Thanksgiving Day match in Knoxville. Dohme accepted the invitation. Knoxville's newspapers stoked the fires of baseball mania in advance of the match. "On Thanksgiving Day, we expect an exciting game," Fleming's *Knoxville Daily Free Press* announced. The paper explained that "We are not saying that the proper way to pay respects to the national holiday is to play Base Ball but if the boys think so, let them thus 'give thanks.'"<sup>40</sup>

The Gate City Club arrived in Knoxville on Thanksgiving morning. The team had distinctive uniforms of "light blue knee pants with a broad red stripe, orange shirts, and black glazed military caps." Shortly before 2:00 p.m., the city's brass band led the members of the competing clubs up Gay Street as they walked arm-in-arm towards the Holstons' field. A later recollection of the game estimated the crowd to be in the thousands. The teams were evenly matched, which resulted in some spectators in the crowd betting on the outcome. Thus, a gentlemen's game had the potential to including gambling and cheating—the worst elements of competitive sports.

The Holstons took the field first, and after five innings led the Gate City Club by a score of 15 to 9. The Gate City Club clawed its way back into the game to within one run of the Holstons by the eighth inning. In the ninth inning, the visiting team pulled ahead of

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<sup>39</sup> *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 6, 7, 1867.

<sup>40</sup> *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, November 24, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 22, 26, 27, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, November 27, 1867; Morris, et al., *Base Ball Pioneers*, 314-17; Alan Morris, "The Origins and History of the Gate City Club of Atlanta," unpublished manuscript in author's possession.



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*The Gate City Club was an undefeated team out of Atlanta comprised of “high and low white-collar” working professionals from that city’s most prominent families. The Holstons challenged the Gate City Club to a Thanksgiving day match in 1867. The Holstons lost the match by four runs. Photograph from Alvan Morris of Atlanta, who is a docent of Oakland Cemetery where many of the players are buried.*

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the Holstons. John Gregg led off with a base hit and then advanced to second on a hit by Robert Dohme. The next batter, William “Billy the Butcher” Sparks, an eighteen-year-old heir to one of Atlanta’s most prominent meat and produce market houses, hit a ground ball toward Holstons shortstop, James Lowery. Instead of making an easy play or a double play, Lowery muffed the ball and his wild throw to first base resulted in two more runs for the Gate City Club thus giving them the lead. The opposing team went on to score five more runs that inning against the demoralized Holstons. Down by six in the bottom of the ninth inning, the Holstons rallied, but lost to the unbeaten Gate City Club by three runs.<sup>41</sup>

The excitement of such a close game and the loss of the home team resulted in conflicting reports of the postgame. Knoxville newspapers indicated that the game ended on a positive note. The *Knoxville Whig* explained that after a hard-fought contest in which the members of both clubs recognized in the other “a foeman worthy of their steel,” the players embraced one another and then retired to Joseph Cooper’s saloon where they enjoyed drinks and played billiards as they waited for a grand banquet held at the Lamar House

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<sup>41</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888, December 9, 1913; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, November 29, December 3, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 30, 1867; *Knoxville Whig*, December 4, 1867.

later than evening. But Atlanta newspapers told a different story. According to their accounts, the Holstons were so chagrined at their defeat that they refused to speak to the Gate City players after the game and did not attend the banquet. Fleming's paper denounced the story as a malicious rumor circulated by pompous Gate City Club fans. The story of the ungentlemanly Holstons of Knoxville circulated in Atlanta for decades, often resurfacing when newspapers reported on the city's early baseball teams or when members of the famed Gate City Club passed away.<sup>42</sup>

## Defending their Title

A week later after their stunning loss, the Holstons' second nine suffered a 34 to 14 defeat at the hands of the Knoxville City Club. As the season ended for the winter, "base ball fever" in Knoxville subsided. Members of the Holstons focused on their professional careers but continued to meet regularly at Cooper's saloon for social camaraderie. In spring 1868, they hardly had enough players for scrimmage matches and were largely dormant until the summer.<sup>43</sup> Other Knoxville baseball clubs, such as the East Tennessee University Club, the Knoxville's, and the Cumberland Junior Club, played many games that year. Further, three local Black baseball clubs, the Bright Eagle, the Baltimore, and the Lamar House Lightfoot, sparred against one another and the Independent City Club of Greeneville. Moreover, community games broke out on vacant lots and even in the middle of streets.<sup>44</sup>

From late winter through the summer of 1868, Fleming and others called for the Holstons to defend their state championships. By that time, new and dominant clubs had formed in Nashville, Memphis, and Chattanooga. Fleming even went so far as to entice representatives from clubs across the state to issue a formal challenge to the Holstons.<sup>45</sup> In late August, the Nashville Base Ball Club took the bait and challenged the Holstons to a championship

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<sup>42</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, December 4, 1867 (quote); *Knoxville Daily Herald*, November 30, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, December 3, 1867; *Knoxville Press and Messenger*, February 1, 1868; *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888; Morris, et al., *Base Ball Pioneers*, 315.

<sup>43</sup> *Knoxville Daily Herald*, December 8, 1867, March 10, April 4, 16, 1868; *Knoxville Press and Messenger*, February 8, 1868.

<sup>44</sup> *Knoxville Daily Herald*, December 5, 11, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, April 4, 26, October 17, November 8, 1868; *Knoxville Press and Messenger*, February 8, 1868; *Knoxville Whig*, June 17, 1868; *Maryville Republican*, June 27, 1868.

<sup>45</sup> *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, February 29, March 1, April 4, August 22, 1868; *Knoxville Press and Messenger*, February 8, June 25, 1868.

series for the 1868 state title. The Holstons promptly reorganized their club, elected James C. Williams captain, and accepted the offer to meet in Nashville in a month's time for the first match in a best of three series. Most of the original members opted not to play in favor of more than a half-dozen new recruits. Williams recruited veteran striker William Chamberlain of the Knoxville and Tully R. Cornick, a youthful, speedy baseballist who played for the East Tennessee University Club.<sup>46</sup>

Williams was eager to get his veterans loosened up and the raw recruits seasoned. The new Holstons' captain quickly arranged two matches in a span of five days against a group of local players. The first match was called after three innings due to rain with the local players in the lead 15 to 14. Fleming was not impressed with the play of the defending state champions and noted that it "looks especially bad for the Holstons." The rematch, however, favored the Holstons 44 to 10. After the game, Fleming commented: "Holston stock has consequently gone up in the market and we hope it will stay there." But during the next game, the Cumberland Club, a nine composed of "beardless boys," defeated the Holstons by a score of 32 to 26. Dismayed by the poor performance, Fleming wrote:

After this, the Holstons had better hang their bats on a willow tree, and if they feel that they must have exercise, they can probably find some kind hearted farmer who will give them a job at husking corn and pay them with the shucks which will be more than their services are worth, if they are no better at that than at playing ball. . . . [W]e will let them advertise for a job at half price. We always like to help the afflicted, down trodden, and oppressed, when in our power to do so.

Two days later, the Holstons redeemed themselves with a 66 to 42 victory over the Cumberland juniors. On September 10, the Holstons departed Knoxville bound for the tournament in Nashville. "The community will no doubt await the result with intense anxiety," wrote Fleming. "The reputation of the city is at stake."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, August 22, 1868; *Nashville Republican Banner*, August 25, 1868.

<sup>47</sup> *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, August 26, 1868 (first quote), August 30, 1868 (second quote), September 4, 1868 (third and fourth quotes), September 5, 1868, September 6, 1868, September 11, 1868 (fifth quote).

The Holstons opened their title defense on September 12, 1868, on the home grounds of the Nashville Club near Fort Houston, the location of today's "Music Row." A reporter for the *Nashville Republican Banner* estimated that nearly 2,000 spectators were on hand, despite the threatening weather. The Holstons started off poorly and after three innings were down by 10 runs. Wild throws, bad fielding, and weak hitting plagued their performance. The Holstons lost the first match by a score of 34 to 10. The team returned to Knoxville for a two-week break in the series to resolve their defensive woes. Williams scheduled another match with the junior Cumberlanders, but the Holstons lost the match 23 to 14. Disheartened, Fleming all but conceded defeat. He wrote glumly, "we should like to be able to say that our champions had done their best. They have not, however, and if they do not care enough for the honor to work as hard to keep it as they did to gain it, they deserve to lose it."<sup>48</sup>

Under a stormy sky, on September 24, the Holstons and Nashville Club met in Knoxville for a rematch at the Gay Street Base Ball Grounds. The crowd numbered about two thousand, including a large number of women who, according to one of Fleming's reporters, added both beauty and charm to the scene. The Holstons were up by 2 runs after 6 innings, but the Nashville Club scored 8 runs in the next inning just before a sudden storm with high winds and a driving rainstorm forced players and spectators from the field. Nashville led 27 to 19 at the time the game was halted. After the storm passed the field was saturated, but both teams wanted to continue the match as long as daylight allowed. The game resumed and the Holstons held their opponents to just 2 additional runs while they added 11 of their own. At the end of the eighth inning the Holstons led by a score of 30 to 29. The darkening skies, however, prevented the players from beginning the final inning. It was a gritty victory for the Knoxville team to even the series.<sup>49</sup>

The final match to decide the 1868 Tennessee state championship baseball club took place nearly two weeks later on a neutral ballfield in Chattanooga—the Union Base Ball Grounds. While no detailed report of the deciding championship match exists, a Nashville reporter claimed that huge sums of cash were wagered on the result,

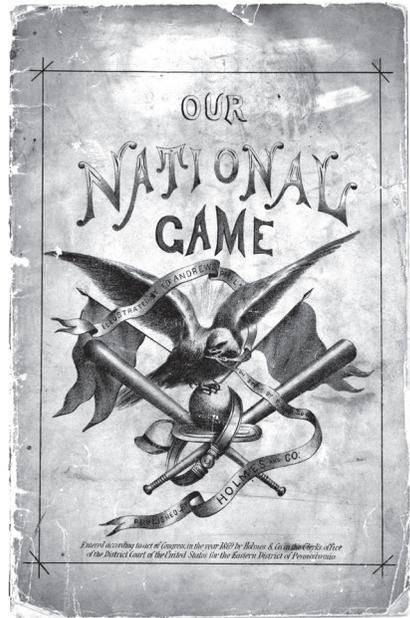
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<sup>48</sup> *Knoxville Press and Messenger*, September 24, 1868; *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, September 12, 15, 24, 25, 1868; *Nashville Republican Banner*, September 13, 14, 1868; *Knoxville Whig*, September 23, 1868; *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, September 14, 1868.

<sup>49</sup> *Knoxville Whig*, September 30, 1868; *Nashville Republican Banner*, September 26, October 2, 1868; *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, September 24, 25, 29, 1868; *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, September 14, 1868.



By the end of the 1860s, baseball had become known as the national game. It evolved from an amateur sport played by the local business class into a more professional endeavor. The success of the teams was more than just bragging rights, it meant financial gains for the owners and investors in each team. *Our National Game*, Ed Andrews, illustrator (Philadelphia, 1869), James Cummings Bookseller, New York, New York.



another sign of how gambling was becoming part of the national game. From the first pitch, the match was a close, fierce contest between two worthy combatants. At the close of the eighth inning, the score was the Holstons with 13 and the Nashville Club with 10. Williams then switched his pitcher out, a move that had failed in the first game, but worked in the second. The choice proved disastrous for the Holstons as the Nashville Club scored 11 runs. The Holstons responded with 5 runs, but it was not enough. The Nashville Club won the game 21 to 18 and clinched the 1868 state championship. “While we had hoped that the Holston boys would once more prove themselves the victors,” Fleming proclaimed, “we are sure that we ought not to congratulate them upon the riddance of such an expensive bauble as the Champion ball.” He closed his summary of the championship with the note that the Holstons intended to challenge the Nashville boys to a rematch at a future date to be determined. Fleming tried to strike a jovial, optimistic tone in the hope that the Knoxville’s players would prove their mettle and avenge the loss, but the Holstons never played another match. While no conclusive answer can be given as to why the Holstons disbanded following the 1868 season, a likely reason was that the players increasingly devoted more attention to their burgeoning professional prospects. Some, such as Chamberlain and Luttrell, were opening their wholesale drug and hardware businesses, and taking an active role in civic affairs. Others, such as Cornick and Williams, had graduated college and began practicing law.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Knoxville Daily Press and Herald, October 9, 10, 11, 1868; Chattanooga Daily Republican, October 7, 10, 1868; Nashville Republican Banner, October 12, 1868; Nashville Daily Press and Times, October 12, 1868.

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By the late 1860s, baseball in the South evolved from an amateur game to a more competitive and professional endeavor. It started as a gentleman's game played by an eclectic mix of dynamic, resourceful working professionals interested in camaraderie, socializing, and entertainment. But with the proliferation of baseball clubs across the United States, the competitive nature of the sport prevailed. The game appealed to people of all ages, classes, races, and genders. Initially there were integrated teams and games with Black and white players, but by the end of the nineteenth century, race divided the sport into separate leagues based on skin color. While there were some women's leagues, baseball was a male dominated sport with women largely confined to the stands as spectators.

The origins of Knoxville's first baseball clubs were indicative of the rapid transformation of an amateur club-based fraternal game into a modern, commercialized professional spectator sport. The Knoxvillees and Holstons began playing baseball according to its amateur era ethics; however, soon both clubs were poaching the best players from other teams to win. The Holstons left the ballfield for good just as baseball's first traveling clubs pushed the sport headfirst into a new, modern era. Teams such as the Gate City Club of Atlanta were among the last wave of amateur era clubs comprised of players with personal ties to the communities in which they and their fans resided. But close on their heels were the Cincinnati Red Stockings, a corporate picked team of professional players hired from all parts of the country with the sole purpose of making money for its owners. The Cincinnati Red Stockings' 1869 barnstorming tour of baseball's heartland, which went as far west as California and into the South, was the prologue for the first professional national baseball association (1871) and national baseball league (1876).<sup>51</sup>

Though the first iteration of the Holstons folded as the first signs of a professional baseball monopoly were beginning to emerge on the American sporting horizon, Knoxville's amateur baseball era persisted well into the 1870s. It continued in large part due to the democratization of the national game. More often than not, it was played by young and old alike, on vacant lots and, at times, in the streets of downtown Knoxville. While certainly not the grandest amateur

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<sup>51</sup> Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 84-150; Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, 140-50; Gilbert, *How Baseball Happened*, 313-52.



*William Chamberlain played for both the Knoxvillees and the Holstons. He owned a drug store company and later invested in a building that was built upon the original Gay Street Base Ball Grounds. William Chamberlain, ca. [1865], James Robinson Ogden Photograph Collection, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville.*

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baseball game to take place in Knoxville's history, perhaps the most fondly remembered and celebrated game was an 1869 match on the Gay Street Base Ball Grounds between the Knoxvillees and their Greeneville College Hill rivals. It was a close contest that

swung back and forth as the Knoxvillees headed to the plate down a single run in the bottom of the ninth. The first batter was quickly put out; however, the second batter made his base which brought the potential winning run to the plate. That striker was none other than Knoxville's founding father of baseball, Samuel B. Dow. Though Dow later contended that the Greeneville club was determined to pitch around him, it appeared that the Greeneville pitcher developed a case of unsteady hands and shaky nerves as his first three pitches went wide of the plate. Determined to take a swing on the next pitch, Dow stepped forward in the box. The pitch was low, but Dow caught it with the end of his bat and sent the ball screaming over the heads of the Greeneville scouts in the outfield. The ball rolled on seemingly forever in the direction of the railroad as Dow circled the bases and scored the winning run for the Knoxvillees. It would be one of the last baseball games to be played on the Gay Street Grounds and Dow, fittingly, had won it for Knoxville's first baseball club.<sup>52</sup>

As the Knoxvillees celebrated that victory, the McClung family was already in the process of selling a few of the lots on the south side of the Gay Street Base Ball Grounds. Within two years, the first building would be erected on the ballfield—a drug firm co-owned by Edward J. Sanford, Andrew J. Albers, and William Chamberlain,

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<sup>52</sup> *Knoxville Journal*, August 11, 1929.

who played several games for both the Knoxville and Holstons on that very ground. By 1884, Knoxville's captains of industry had covered over the Gay Street Base Ball Grounds with massive four and five-story brick storehouses that constituted the heart of the city's retail and wholesale district.

Knoxville's nineteenth century baseball players and enthusiasts found other places to play their sport. In the twentieth century and today, baseball has persevered alongside the popularity of college football each fall at nearby Neyland Stadium. At present, the city of Knoxville and Knox County are in talks with Randy Boyd (owner of Boyd Sports and the Tennessee Smokies minor league baseball team) to build a multi-use, publicly owned stadium at the intersection of East Jackson Avenue and Patton Street with the intention of bringing baseball back to Knoxville. The location of the proposed stadium is on the site where the Holstons played their home matches, which would link today's game with the city's first taste of baseball mania.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, September 24, 1871; *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, May 9, August 13, 1873. Boyd Sports has developed a website, Grand Slam Knox, that includes various articles (print and video) documenting the history of the project, <https://www.grandslamknox.com>.