

# A Critical Examination of a Source on Early Ontario Baseball: The Reminiscence of Adam E. Ford\*

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As several historians have substantiated, a variety of simple ball, bat and base games were played in America during the Colonial and Young Republic Periods.\* Referred to by various names, including *rounders*, *one old cat*, *two old cat*, *townball*, and *base ball*, these games were popular among youth. Their informal rules structure, modified at times to fit local conditions, was passed down through generations of ball players by an oral tradition. *Pre-modern* in nature, early ball play was unorganized, possessed little spectatorship, and received little or no attention in existing newspapers.<sup>2</sup>

Baseball entered its early *modern* period during the 1840s; we know that the New York Knickerbockers formally organized a baseball club in 1845, printed a constitution, and, by 1846, they played the game under a set of rules drawn up by Alexander Cartwright. Since then, the saga of baseball's history has been richly documented. Less known and much less understood, particularly after the discredited Mills Commission Report of 1907,<sup>3</sup> are the events before the

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1. Robert W. Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop: The Origins of Ball Games* (New York, 1947); Jennie Holliman, *American Sports: 1785-1835* (Durham, 1931); David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball: From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System* (Norman, 1966); Harold Seymour, *Baseball. The Early Years* (New York, 1960); and Carl Witke, "Baseball in Its Adolescence," *The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 61 (April 1952): 111-12.

2. Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-1870* (Urbana, 1986), pp. 3-11. According to Adelman, these three traits, in part, characterize a *pre-modern* ideal sport type.

3. Although the Knickerbockers played together informally as early as 1842, club organization and rules codification did not take place until 1845. See *ibid.*, pp. 121-122. On the Mills Commission see Frank G. Menke, *The Encyclopedia of Sports*, 4th Revised Edition (New York, 1969), pp. 49-50. Although others (Seymour and Voigt, for example) have treated the Mills Commission episode, the reader will find Manke's treatment to be the most condensed and concise.

1840s, the period Robert Henderson has termed baseball's *adolescence* in North America.

From time to time historians uncover evidence of how baseball was played before 1840 as documented in the reminiscences of men who played during their youth.<sup>4</sup> Taken collectively, sources of this nature confirm that far from existing in a vacuum, or springing from Abner Doubleday's immaculate conception, baseball flourished prior to 1840, providing a fundamental basis for the sport's *modern* development as America's national pastime. Few reminiscences, however, render a total picture of the events they describe. Many, for example, do not cite specific dates or places of baseball play. Others do not identify the players involved or the circumstances surrounding the game. Finally, most of them ignore human emotions and the feeling of exhilaration felt by people involved in the competition. Such reminiscences are rarely examined critically as source documents. They do not receive the same scrutiny, for instance, that normally would be given to political documents and the like. In this respect, baseball reminiscences are often taken at face value. Perhaps this is because the image of "what happened" in baseball prior to the 1840s is so opaque.

The following analysis examines baseball's earliest history in Ontario based on one man's reminiscence of a game played during his childhood in the late 1830s. On May 5, 1886 the editors of *Sporting Life* published a rather lengthy letter from one Dr. Ford of Denver, Colorado under the heading: "A game long ago which closely resembled our present National Game."<sup>5</sup> Ford's reminiscence, transcribed in Appendix A, lucidly describes the particular regional version of baseball played by Oxford County inhabitants on Militia Muster Day in 1838. Perhaps more importantly, it offers insights into one player's reaction to baseball's development from a local communal game to a sport with trans-regional codified rules.

Historians have neither subjected Ford's reminiscence to detailed critical examination, nor have they analysed Ford's authority in the matter. The letter's contents have nevertheless been accepted by some at face value. A small portion of Ford's *Sporting Life* letter, reprinted in the *Ingersoll Chronicle* on May 20, 1886, is the basic source for a display in the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame documenting early Canadian baseball. Beachville, Ontario has used the *Chronicle's* partial reprint of Ford's letter to support an attempt to have the site of the game described by Ford designated *historic* by Ontario's Historic Sites and Monuments Board. Further, two modest baseball histories, William Humber's *Cheering for the Home Team* and Irving Leitner's *Baseball: Dia-*

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4. For discussions of published reminiscences see: Holliman, *American Sports*, 65-67; Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop*, pp. 132-160; and Menke, *Encyclopedia of Sport*, p. 51.

5. *Sporting Life*, 5 May 1886. The 20 May 1886 edition of the *Ingersoll Chronicle* reprinted roughly one third of Ford's letter. The *Chronicle*, however, included neither Ford's playing field diagram nor his account of the game rules. Local historians, long familiar with the reprinted version of Ford's letter, were, until recently, unaware of the letter's entire contents as published in *Sporting Life*. Ford had never been identified as being a former area resident. Furthermore, the fact that this letter on Oxford County baseball had originated from Denver, Colorado had never been questioned or accounted for.



Figure 1. An early baseball authority. Some time after the sensational events of 1878-79 prompted him to leave St. Mary's, Adam Enoch Ford sat for this photograph in a Denver Studio. (Photo Credit: St. Mary's District Museum, ph # 1149)

*mond in the Rough*, use Ford's reminiscence with neither serious investigation nor apparent reservation.<sup>6</sup>

The letter published in *Sporting Life* presents a detailed account of baseball play during the days of Adam Ford's youth near Beachville, Ontario. It also provides glimpses into baseball activity occurring well before Ford's own time. Drawn from his memory, which sources suggest was keen until the day he died,<sup>7</sup> Ford's reminiscence provides much information which our own research verifies. Superimposing Ford's reminiscence on known events in the history of Oxford County, and further, on baseball history itself, there can be little doubt regarding the validity of the circumstances described by him. Before commenting on Ford's letter and its contents, his credibility as a reliable source must be established. To accomplish this, we have traced Ford's life and career by drawing on a variety of sources, including newspapers, genealogies, obituaries, gazetteers and directories, and various secondary works.

Adam Enoch Ford was born on his father's farm in Zorra Township, Oxford County, Ontario in 1831. In his boyhood he developed an avid interest in the sports played in and around his locale, including cricket, baseball, curling, and shooting. He entered McGill University in 1848, and eventually graduated with a medical degree in 1855.<sup>8</sup> Like other Beachville residents intent on improving their economic prospects, Ford moved to the newly settled village of St. Marys

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6. By relying on local sources only, Humber's *Cheering for the Home Team: The Story of Baseball in Canada* (Erin, 1983) neglected to refer to the primary source as it was originally published in *Sporting Life*. American scholars, by contrast, are aware of the original *Sporting Life* letter since a copy of it is found in the scrapbook collection of Henry Chadwick. See, for example, Irving A. Leitner, *Baseball: Diamond in the Rough* (New York, 1972), p. 27. Leitner errs in accepting the date of the source to be 1887, one year later than its actual publication. To date, no baseball scholar has identified who Dr. Ford was, or the nature of his authority regarding early Ontario baseball.

7. *Annual of the Ontario Curling Association for 1906-1907* (v. 32), pp. 29-30. In their obituary announcement of Ford's passing, the editors commented on his curling reminiscences published in the *Annual* up to the time of his death. According to the *Annual*: "there were few, if any, better after dinner speakers in the province. . . [Ford] had a combination of talents granted to but a few-and carried them all, *bright and alert*, to a green old age." Emphasis ours.

8. Bernie McLay, "The Cruttendon Family," Unpublished Genealogical Manuscript (St. Marys Museum, St. Marys, Ontario), pp. 21-42. According to family historians, Ford was 46 years of age in 1878 when accused of Robert Guest's murder, and 75 years old at his death in 1906. This would place his birthdate as occurring sometime in 1831, making him 7 or 8 years old at the time of the 1838 baseball game he recounted. Ford's obituary in the *Denver Post* (18 May 1906), on the other hand, cites him as being "more than 80." This would make him at least 12 years old at the time of the game. Owing to a number of inaccuracies in the *Post*'s reporting of Ford's life (stating, for instance, that his body would be shipped to London, England rather than to London, Ontario) we are inclined to accept the 1831 birthdate as being correct. Several items, of which family authority is foremost, lead us to this conclusion. And, we know Ford departed Ontario for medical school in 1849. His being 18 years old at that time is more plausible than his being 23 years old. Manuscript census returns for Ingersoll and Woodstock medical students in 1851 and 1861 confirm this point. We also know, by Ford's own admission, that he did not play in the game in question-probably because he was too young. Ford claimed: "When I got older, I played myself." And finally, the birthdates of several of Ford's peers whom he identifies as having played the Cartwright New York game with him sometime after 1850, are known. Both Henry Cruttendon (whose sister Ford married in 1857) and Neil McTaggart are listed on the 1851 manuscript census as being 18 and 19, respectively, making their birthdates sometime in 1832-1833. We acknowledge that Ford was of a "tender age" at the time of the 1838 contest, probably seven or eight years of age. On this matter we argue three things. firstly, Ford's published curling reminiscences have been corroborated through extensive newspaper research in which dates, events, and people involved in various matches have been proven to be accurate. Secondly, we are informed by sources that Ford had uncanny abilities of recall. If his love of sport was as passionate as he tells us it was, and as his actions proved, we find it quite likely that he would tend to remember the events described. Finally, our own powers of recollection regarding memorable events that occurred when we were so young inclines us to believe Ford. See also, *Annual Report of the OCA, 1906-1907* (v. 32), p. 29.

in adjacent Perth County.<sup>9</sup> In St. Marys he established a medical practice and became active in community civic and sport affairs. Socially and financially prominent by virtue of marriage and personal initiative, Ford's record of sport participation and organizational leadership characterize a man of zeal and dedication.<sup>10</sup> In 1864 Ford chaired the annual May 24th festivities, a day typically celebrated in Ontario with community sporting events.<sup>11</sup> He sat on the board of directors of the St. Marys Driving Park Association in 1871, a position he held for some five years; and in 1879 he sat on the managing committee of the local lacrosse club. A neophyte teenage curler in the 1840s, Ford eventually rose to the presidency of the St. Marys Curling Club in 1874. Histories of the Ontario Curling Association identify him as a dynamic force behind the organization's creation in 1874-75. Ford's description of curling matches played in 1848, 1860 and 1878, published in several early twentieth century volumes of the *Ontario Curling Association Annual*, are well known to historians of curling. They provide evidence of Ford's astute powers of observation and recall. As well, they reflect his keen love of sport.<sup>12</sup>

We know from Ford's reminiscence that he possessed a sharp interest in baseball played during the days of his youth. He continued his interest in baseball throughout his lifetime. During the 1870s, when organized baseball spread throughout Ontario, Ford became active in club formation and administration.<sup>13</sup> In 1876 local sportsmen elected him president of both the St. Marys Young Actives, a club composed of community youth, and the town's senior baseball organization, the Beaver Baseball Club. Ford's involvement as director of the local Driving Park Association enabled the Beaver Club to use the track's commodious infield for practice and contests.<sup>14</sup>

Public scandal, erupting from Ford's careless use of alcohol, his alleged involvement with "another woman," and a sensational murder inquest, prompt-

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9. On the community see L. W. Wilson, and L. R. Pfaff, *Early St. Marys* (St. Marys, 1981); *Historical Atlas of Perth County* (Toronto, 1879); and William Johnston, *History of Perth County, 1825-1902* (Stratford, 1903), p. 411. Ford's name is recorded in *The County of Perth Gazetteer and General Business Directory* (Ingersoll, 1863); *The Counties of Perth and Waterloo Gazetteer and General Business Directory for 1870-1871* (Toronto, 1869); and *The Perth County Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1878-1879* (Brantford, 1878).

10. According to issues of the St. Marys *Argus* dated between 20 August 1857 and 16 January 1879, Ford's sport involvement accelerated after 1864. It included membership in the local cricket and curling clubs, the driving park association; and an affiliation with the management of local baseball and lacrosse clubs.

11. *Argus*, 12 May 1864. On early May 24th celebrations see Henry Roxborough, *One Hundred Nor Our* (Toronto, 1966), pp. 165-172.

12. *Argus*, 5 May 1871, 1 May 1879; Adam E. Ford, "Recollections of an Old Time Curler," *Annual Report of the OCA, 1903-1904* (vol. 29), p. 5. Ford's Presidency of the St. Marys Curling Club is announced in the *Argus*, 1 October 1874; John A. Stevenson, *Curling in Ontario, 1846-1946* (Toronto, 1950); Lachlan MacTavish, "How the Ontario Curling Association Nearly Never Was: A Footnote in History," *OCA 1975 Annual*, pp. 115-119; *Annual Report of the OCA, 1903-1904* (vol. 29), pp. 5-10; 1905 (vol. 30), pp. 7-10; 1905-1906 (vol. 31), pp. 33-38. For examples of Ford's love of sport, see, *Annual Report of the OCA, 1905*, p. 12.

13. Baseball games appear not to have been reported in the *Argus* prior to 1871. However, clubs did exist in the town prior to that date. On 21 June 1860 the *Argus* lamented the fact that St. Mary's had allowed other communities to get "a head start" on them in club formation for the season; and the London *Advertiser* reported that the Beaver Baseball Club competed in a London baseball tournament in 1868.

14. *Argus*, 13 April 1876. The Beaver Baseball Club included some fifty members, each of whom paid a one dollar fee to join. By making the Driving Park its permanent playing field the Beaver Club took advantage of the fenced grounds in order to charge admission to the games.

ed him to move to Denver, Colorado sometime in 1880.<sup>15</sup> There, he established a medical practice and continued his energetic sport involvement. He founded Denver's "first" curling club and, in late 1881, organized the "first" curling bonspiel to occur west of the Missouri River. Ford died on May 17, 1906, his last years wrought by drug and alcohol dependence and the care of his hopelessly morphine-addicted son. A man of considerable means at one point in his life, he died destitute.<sup>16</sup>

But, enough of Ford himself, now to his *Sporting Life* reminiscence. Various sources validate the time and place of the game described in Ford's letter. The 4th of June 1838 was indeed a holiday, as stipulated by *Statute* in 1793 which declared George III's birthday to be the Province's annual Militia Muster Day.<sup>17</sup> Ford understandably supposed the date to be George IV's birthday, because George IV reigned just before Ford's birth. In fact, Victoria ascended to the British throne just a year before the events described in the letter. Queen Victoria's birthday, however, was not yet the national holiday it would later become. Ford's recall that the day featured sport is no doubt correct; this was a common experience since the militia days of Colonial America and early Ontario. Finally, nineteenth century maps of Beachville indicate the site of Enoch Burdick's shops mentioned by Ford.<sup>18</sup>

Primary sources lend strong support to Ford's description of the game being watched by a detachment of Scottish volunteers from Zorra. That particular military detachment was undoubtedly the 3rd Oxford Regiment under the command of Colonel J. Barwick. In a letter to one Captain Gibson written in June 1838, Colonel A. W. Light, commander of the 2nd Oxford Regiment, stated his intentions to muster the Woodstock-Ingersoll regiments in order to deal with what remained of the rebel threat in Oxford County around Dereham and Norwich.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the people mentioned in Ford's letter, a study of genealogical, obituary and tombstone evidence confirms that most of them lived in Oxford County and were between 15 and 24 years old at the time of the baseball game.

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15. In 1878 Robert Guest, the secretary of the St. Marys Temperance Association died mysteriously after drinking in Ford's office late one night. A coroner's inquest held behind closed doors resulted in Ford never having been brought to trial for murder. Regardless, all of St. Marys was thoroughly scandalized. See *London Advertiser*, 8 June 1878; *Argus*, 6, 13, 20 June, 27 July, 19 September 1878, and 13 March 1879. The exact date of Ford's move to Denver is unknown, although he is, however, listed in the 1880 membership list of the St. Marys Curling Club.

16. *Annual Report of the OCA, 1905-1906*. p. 33; McLay, "Cruttendon Family," p. 34. The headline of Ford's obituary in the *Denver Post*, 18 May 1906, reads: "Once Wealthy, Dr. Ford Dies Alone in Want. His son, a Yale Man, is a morphine fiend and fails to get physician. Work of drink and drugs—a pioneer of state once worth half a million dollars, his career closes in pitiful poverty."

17. *Statutes of Upper Canada*, 33 George III ch. 1, 1793 (passed 9 July 1793), "An Act for the Better Regulation of the Militia in this Province." Amended by 48 George III ch. 1 (16 March 1808). and 1 Victoria ch. 8 (6 March 1838).

18. Marjorie E. Cropp, "Beachville, the Birthplace of Oxford," *Western Ontario Historical Nuggets*, No. 14 (1967 reprint, Beachville Centennial Committee), pp. 18, 32. According to the author, Militia Day activity was evident in the Beachville area in the early 1820s.

19. Thomas S. Shenston, *The Oxford Gazetteer* (Ingersoll, 1852). p. 106. See also Herbert Milnes, *The Story of the Oxford Rifles* (Woodstock, 1974). On the correspondence, see Cropp, "Beachville," p. 22; on the rebellion, see Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-1838: The Duncombe Revolt and After* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 132-148; and Brian Dawe, *Old Oxford is Wide Awake: Pioneer Settlers and Politicians in Oxford County, 1793-1853* (Woodstock, 1980), pp. 43-61.

The Karns, represented by family branches in both Beachville and Zorra Township, contributed four members to the baseball match. They were: Adam (age 16 in 1838), Peter (16), Harry (16), and Daniel (18). William Dodge was 15 years old at the time.<sup>20</sup> No birthdate is known for Reuben Martin, but his gravestone, on which no vital events are etched, is located in the Beachville cemetery. Nathaniel McNames, born in 1814, was 24 years old when he played in the game. George Burdick may have been related to Enoch Burdick, the owner of the pasture site used for the playing field.<sup>21</sup> William Ford appears to be Adam's brother. He migrated to St. Marys in 1845 where he became a prominent civic leader.\*\* Of "Old Ned" Dolson, I. Van Alstine, William Hutchinson, and of Abel and John Williams, no vital records exist. Their family names, however, are recorded in the area.<sup>23</sup> These findings validate Ford's reminiscence on the point relating to the players involved in the June 4th contest.

Of major interest to historians of sport, of course, is Ford's commentary on the playing field of his youth. At first glance Ford's diagram, which he included in his letter (see Appendix A), appears quite similar to the square baseball configurations known to be in vogue in both New York and Massachusetts in 1842 and 1845, respectively. On further examination, however, aspects of Ford's plan can be clearly identified with Cartwright's 1845 infield design. Both Ford's and Cartwright's field designs possess two features which distinguish them from the early New York and Massachusetts playing fields. The first feature involved territory for fair and foul struck balls, or, as Ford described them, "fair hit" and "no hit."<sup>24</sup> Such a concept proved to be an important innovation in removing baseball from its heritage of cricket influence. The second feature relates to a common striker's stone and home base. Both innovations have ordinarily been attributed to Cartwright. Ford's account of them, of course, predates Cartwright's ideas by seven years. Could knowledge of the "Canadian game" have prompted Cartwright? Or, did Cartwright simply synthesize the rules of a number of games known to him?

Although all four illustrated schemes (see Figure 2) differ in dimension and configuration, they demonstrate some similarities. All had strikers or knockers (batters), catchers, throwers or tossers (pitchers), fielders, base lines, and byes (bases). As in the Massachusetts and early New York games, a runner in Ford's game had an easy time getting to first base. After that he became the object of

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20. "Karn Family History," Unpublished Genealogical Manuscript, Oxford County Library, Woodstock, Ontario; "Tweedsmuir History, West Oxford Township" (Vol. 1). Unpublished Manuscript, Oxford County Library, "Genealogy of William Dodge;" p. A107.

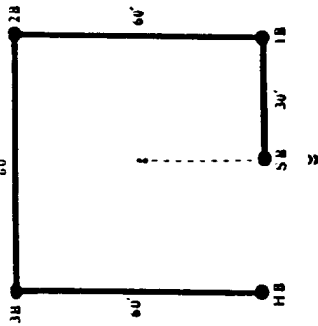
21. "Ye Olde Museum," Beachville, Ontario; *Oxford Gazetteer* (1852), p. 159. Martin is recorded in the 1825 County Assessment Rolls. Nathaniel McNames died on 15 August 1870 at 56 years of age. Enoch Burdick is listed on The 1812 Oxford County Assessment Roll.

22. McLay, "Cruttenon Family," especially Pfaff's addendum, pp. 6-7. See also, *Historical Atlas of Perth County*, p. x.

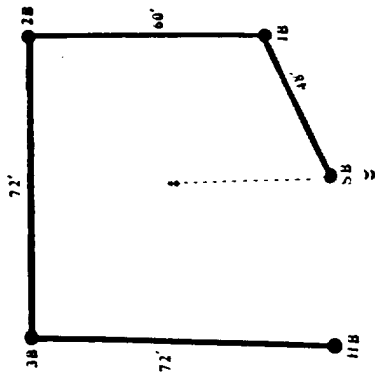
23. The 1812 Oxford County Assessment Rolls; Oxford County and Woodstock Public Library Name Indexes; *History of Zorra and Embro: Pioneer Sketches of 60 Years Ago* (Embro, 1909).

24. The concept of a "foul ball" (or "no hit") may well have evolved because of the topography of local fields used for ball-playing. Players possibly used "foul" territory to prevent natural or man-made obstacles from interfering with play. The authors wish to thank Thomas Heitz, Librarian, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, for his cogent observations and suggestions on the matter of early playing fields.

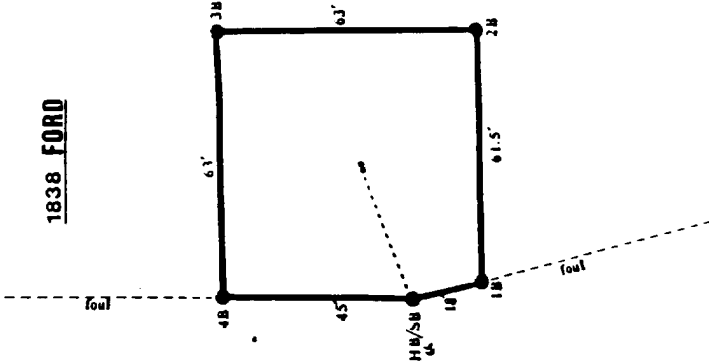
1845 MASSACHUSETTS



1842 NEW YORK



1838 FORD



1845/6 CARTWRIGHT

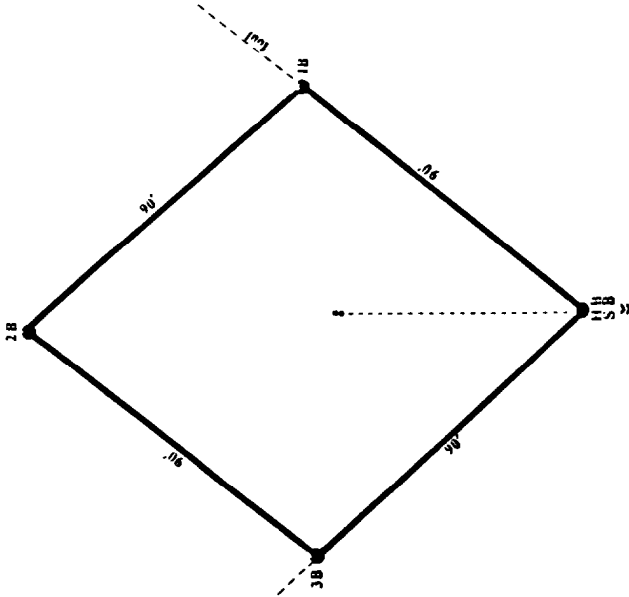


Figure 2. Early Baseball Field Configurations

much fun and excitement as he made his way around the bases dodging balls thrown at him while he was in the act of running. The practice of soaking, *burning*, or *plugging* was commonplace until the Cartwright game replaced the maneuver with the less lusty practice of tagging the baserunner.

Ford's comment on the type and manufacture of the equipment used during his youth is noteworthy. As might be surmised, the players used rudimentary, locally-made items. Though only speculation, Edward McNames, the shoemaker who fashioned the playing ball, may have been the father or an adult relative of Zorra player Nathaniel McNames. The description of how McNames handcrafted the ball is consistent with the home manufacturer techniques documented elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> India rubber did not become an ingredient in the manufacture of baseballs until the late 1840s.

The most valuable commentary in Ford's letter pertains to the playing rules in vogue for the 1838 contest. In Table 1 we compare Ford's rules with those published in William Clarke, *The Boy's Own Book* (1829) and Robin Carver, *The Book of Sports* (1834) since neither the Massachusetts nor the early New York rules had been published at the time of Ford's 1838 game. As the Figure indicates, Ford's rules show a number of similarities to Clarke's and Carver's rules; particularly in the matters of *three strikes/hand out* and plugging. Yet several key rules made Ford's game more closely resemble Cartwright's game, notably, limiting the duration of a game, the use of first bound catches, and the practice of putting a side out by three hands out. Beyond this, Ford's and Cartwright's games differed from Clarke's and Carver's games in their use of bags instead of stakes or posts for bases, and in the counter-clockwise, rather than clockwise, direction that runners ran the bases.<sup>26</sup> Of thirteen original Knickerbocker rules, only the rule disallowing the ball to be thrown directly at the baserunners appears to be completely at odds with the nature of the Canadian game described by Ford. His description of a "fair hit" and a "no hit" (fair and foul balls) predates the Cartwright rule which states that: "a ball knocked outside the range of the first and third base is foul." As Henderson has noted, Robin Carver chose to omit the "foul-out" rule when he freely copied Clarke's earlier rules structure in his own book.<sup>27</sup> Both the 1845 Massachusetts game and the 1842 New York game followed Carver's lead in this matter.

Ford's letter also addresses the internal dynamics of the game. On the relationship between the pitcher and the batter, Ford alludes to a "rule of honor" which abrogated the need for externally imposed authority in the form of umpires. Mutual consensus, informed by an oral tradition maintained by local "old-timers," provided the basis for agreement on the duration of the game and the number of players involved.<sup>28</sup> Such consensus called for a contest of six or

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25. See, for instance, Douglas Wallop, *Baseball: An Informal History* (New York, 1969), pp. 34-35; and Menke, *Encyclopedia of Sports*, pp. 50-51.

26. Marvin Eyer, "Origins of Some Modern Sports" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1956), p. 46. The 1839 London edition of *The Boy's Book of Sports* instructed players to run in a counter-clockwise direction.

27. Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop*, pp. 155-156.

28. These "old timers" had lived in the area of Beachville for decades. Silas Williams, for example, is listed on the 1812 and 1822 Oxford and Zorra Assessment Rolls.

TABLE 1  
A Comparison of Ford's Rules with Ball Rules Published Before 1846

Type of Rule <sup>1</sup>	1829	1834	1838	1846
	<i>Boy's Own Book</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Book of Sports</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>Ford</i>	<i>Cartwright</i>
baseline distance	36-60 ft.	36-60 ft.	63 ft.	90 ft.
length of game	unknown	unknown	6-9 innings/ or 21 runs	21 counts/ or aces <sup>4</sup>
pitching delivery restrictions	yes	yes	unknown <sup>5</sup>	yes
struck ball fair/foul distinction	yes	no	yes	yes
3 strikes/hand out	yes	yes	yes	yes
out on fly/first bound	fly (bound unknown)	fly (bound unknown)	yes	yes
plugging prohibited	no	no	no	yes
baserunner interference prohibited	unknown	unknown	unknown	yes
3 hands out/side out	no	no	yes	yes
batting in order	yes	yes	unknown	yes
no advance on foul	yes	no	yes	yes
runner not out on pitcher's balk	unknown	unknown	unknown	yes
one base on ball bounding out of field	unknown	unknown	unknown	

<sup>1</sup> Derived from Rules #4, #8-16, and #18-20 of the Knickerbocker Baseball Club, September 23, 1845 as reprinted in Robert W. Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop* (New York, 1947). pp. 163-165.

<sup>2</sup> William Clarke, *The Boy's Own Book* (London and Boston, 1829), rules for the game of "rounders" as reprinted in Henderson, pp. 156-157 Clarke's playing field was diamond-shaped.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Carver, *The Book of sports* (Boston, 1834), rules for the game of "base" or "goal" ball as reprinted in Henderson, pp. 156-157. Carver's playing field was diamond-shaped.

<sup>4</sup> At the conclusion each side was given an equal number of hands at bat. According to Melvin Adelman, when the National Association of Baseball players decided to change this Knickerbocker rule in favor of innings, they initially proposed a seven innings game, although the nine innings game eventually prevailed. See Adelman, *Sporting Time*, p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Ford's allusion to "fair" and "unfair" balls as well as his description of the strategic points that the thrower aimed at are, in fact, restrictions that were placed on pitching.

nine innings. Team composition ranged from seven to twelve players per side. That the numbers involved in the game would vary according to the number of players available made perfect sense, as long as both sides were equal.

Continuity between past and present as described by Ford, extended beyond mere playing rules. The fame and physical prowess of former athletes, "Old" Ned Dolson, for example, were etched into the local baseball tradition. However, as Ford recounts, the local game experienced some changes as Cart-

wright's New York game penetrated Southwestern Ontario, encroaching upon the old tradition of play. The difference between the two (the "old" local game and the "new" Cartwright game) so impressed Ford he felt playing the "new" game comparable to having taken "an overland trip to the moon." The action of fielders chasing the new ball particularly captured his attention. He thought it quite humorous. To him, fielders pursuing the rubberized ball around the outfield resembled the frenzied activity of "dogs hunting sheep."

In all likelihood, Ford returned home to Zorra from McGill University during his summer holidays; we thus surmise that Oxford County experimented with Cartwright's game no earlier than 1849—four years after its codification in New York City. His comment on skills demanded of players of the Cartwright game is noteworthy. The game's quickened pace would indeed seem "out of this world" to players unaccustomed to chasing "lively balls." The changing technology of ball manufacture, in time, demanded better groomed playing fields and more deceptive pitching techniques if fielders were to cope with the edge given to batters. As well, the batter's advantage of being able to hit the ball more sharply eventually resulted in the evolution of the fielding glove. Then too, equidistant and longer reaches (90 feet) between bases, together with the removal of plugging from the game, shifted the focus of field action from the baselines to the bases themselves. Finally, impartial arbiters (umpires) of fair and unfair pitched balls were essential when "trickey pitching" increasingly became a defensive strategy. Local codes of honor between tosser and batter no longer sufficed.

Despite early experimentation with Cartwright's game, Oxford County inhabitants persisted with their regional variation of baseball for over a decade. Familiarity, underscored by local tradition and derived local cultural meanings of the game, it seems, left little room for change. In 1860 matches between Beachville's sister communities Ingersoll and Woodstock involved eleven, rather than nine, players, and used four, rather than three, bases.<sup>29</sup> This prompted the *New York Clipper* to refer to the type of baseball played in the region as being the "Canadian Game"—something understood to be quite distinct from the game then popularly played in New York and its environs.<sup>30</sup>

This situation, however, did not last long. The advent of telegraphic communications and, by the mid-1850s, the development of railway networks in Southwestern Ontario expanded the world of heretofore isolated inland commu-

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29. *New York Clipper*, 18 August 1860. Players in the Ingersoll *Rough and Ready Club* and the Woodstock Young *Canadian Club* fielded the following positions: pitcher, catcher, 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base, 4th base, left field, center field, right field, shortstop, and backstop. On the basis of lineup alone we cannot determine whether or not these two teams were, in fact, playing Ford's game. Yet Humber, *Cheering For the Home Team*, p. 28, believes that the reports of baseball published in the *Clipper* for games played in and around Hamilton during the early 1860s involved something more akin to the Massachusetts than the Cartwright game. Humber, of course, did not have detailed information on Ford's game at the time his book was published. Without any direct knowledge of the Hamilton playing field configuration, we cannot know whether Ford's game was played throughout Southwestern Ontario or if it was peculiar to Oxford County or just in Beachville's immediate vicinity. Quite possibly the Hamilton area had its own local version of baseball which more closely resembled the Massachusetts game than the game described by Ford. If so, Woodstock and other communities probably played Hamilton's version of the game when visiting Hamilton.

30. Humber, *Cheering For the Home Team*, p. 15.

nities. Furthermore, special sporting club railway rates also helped baseball to spread beyond local boundaries.<sup>31</sup> When this happened, mutually agreeable, transregional, and readily available written rules for the game became essential in order for clubs to compete fairly amongst themselves. Oral tradition stemming from the collective memory of local inhabitants could then no longer be the arbiter of rules. The Cartwright game, formulated in New York, and popularized through its sporting press, provided such a standardized product.

No direct evidence pinpoints or explains exactly why local inhabitants chose to eventually replace their own regional baseball variation with the Cartwright scheme. Apparently the local press never debated the matter.<sup>32</sup> We know, however, that baseball in Ontario lacked protectionist agencies (for example, a sporting press; a “national” baseball association; or a tradition of baseball played in educational institutions) which might have retained the Canadian game in the face of encroaching American models in the early 1860s.<sup>33</sup>

The paucity of direct evidence notwithstanding, Oxford County baseball players, like those in Ingersoll and Woodstock, likely adopted the Cartwright game in order to compete against teams from other parts of the province and from neighboring American states.<sup>34</sup> In June 1861, Woodstock’s *Young Canadian Club* played what the *Clipper* reported to be “the first match that has ever been played [in Woodstock] on the New York system.”<sup>35</sup> In so adopting the Cartwright game, they followed the lead of the Toronto *Young Canadian Club* and the Hamilton *Young Americans* who, in 1859, reportedly played the first interurban match in Ontario using Cartwright’s rules.<sup>36</sup> Within a year of embracing the Cartwright game Woodstonians adopted the “catch on the fly” rule, an innovation promoted by the Knickerbockers and the New York sporting press, but which had not yet been authorized by the American National Association of Baseball Players.<sup>37</sup>

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31. On the relation between railway excursions and sport development see Trevor Williams, “Cheap Rates, Special Trains, and Canadian Sport in the 1850’s” *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (December, 1981): 84-93.

32. We have searched every available issue of the Ingersoll Chronicle; the Woodstock *British American, Herald, and Sentinel*; and the *St. Marys Journal and Argus* between 1848 and 1865 in regard to this matter. No mention of the merits of one game over the other can be found. We also investigated selected issues of the Hamilton Times and *Spectator*, and the Guelph *Evening Mercury* and still found no evidence of debate.

33. In fact, when Woodstock’s *Young Canadians* hosted a meeting in August 1864 to promote a Canadian “national” baseball association it relied heavily on the American model of the NABBP. One month later the newly-formed Canadian Baseball Association met again in Hamilton during the provincial Exhibition. There, all present apparently agreed to adopt the rule structure of the NABBP and compete along interurban lines using a challenge match system. On the Woodstock convention see: Hamilton Times, 24 August 1864; Ingersoll *Chronicle*, 26 August 1864; and the *Clipper*, 14 September 1864. On the Hamilton Convention see: Hamilton *Spectator*, 11 and 24 August 1864; 29 September 1864; 31 March 1903 and *Times*, 15 August 1903; and Ingersoll *Chronicle*, 7 October 1864.

34. In 1864 Woodstock’s *Young Canadian Club* inaugurated Canadian/American international competition by challenging the Brooklyn Atlantics, then reigning American champions, to a match game as the champions passed through Rochester, New York while on tour. *Clipper*, 4 September 1864 and 1 October 1864. By the end of the decade baseball tournaments and tours had brought many teams from Ontario, New York and Michigan to both sides of the border for competition.

35. *Clipper*, 22 June 1861.

36. This match occurred, of course, within a year of the NABBP’s formation. Peter Leslie Lindsay, “A History of Sport in Canada, 1807-1867,” (Ph.D. diss. University of Alberta, 1969), p. 79.

37. *Clipper*, 10 May 1862. On the controversy over the “catch on the fly rule” see Adelman, *Sporting Time*, p. 127.

The adoption of Cartwright's game throughout Ontario, though signalling baseball's rising popularity as an interurban sport, paradoxically rendered the fame and heroism of "old-timers" who had played old regional variations of baseball, incongruous. Their past exploits did not relate to the new game. Yet, cognizant of their strong local baseball traditions, ball players in many Ontario communities embarked on establishing new heroic traditions based upon the prowess of contemporary players involved in the new game.

The question remains: How credible is Adam Ford's letter relative to the early history of baseball? A thorough investigation of Ford himself, his sport involvement, and the context of his times, all suggest that his reminiscence is valuable. Ford was fifty-five years old when he penned his letter to *Sporting Life* in April 1886. Two decades later he continued to provide reminiscences of this nature, especially on the sport of curling. In many ways Ford typified an active breed of middle class nineteenth century sportsmen in Ontario. He was an avid, dedicated, and versatile sport participant and promoter. He helped to organize, administer and popularize sport clubs and teams in a period when few existed in small Ontario communities. Well after his own playing career, he fondly remembered the games of his youth.

Ford's letter leaves strong implications for our broader understanding of the process of sport change, especially as it occurred in the nineteenth century. It clearly demonstrates the existence of a long-lived local, communal tradition of baseball played in one small Ontario community. It further reflects the nature of change to that baseball tradition, and emphasizes continuity in the context of change. Few reminiscences thoughtfully consider this matter. Baseball played in Ford's youth obviously drew from a tradition existing long before his own time. To that tradition, mutually accepted changes were made which resulted in a modified form of contest. Baseball continues to change to this day; but always within the context of that which has come before. For this reason, the significance of Adam E. Ford's reminiscence extends far beyond a mere baseball game played in Ontario on a June day in 1838.

## Appendix A

*A Verbatim Transcription of Ford's Letter to Sporting Life  
Published 5 May 1886*

A Game of Long-ago Which Closely Resembled Our Present National Game. Denver, Col., April 26. Editor *Sporting Life*.

The 4th of June, 1838 was a holiday in Canada, for the Rebellion of 1837 had been closed by the victory of the government over the rebels, and the birthday of His Majesty George the Fourth was set apart for general rejoicing. The chief event at the village of Beachville in the County of Oxford, was a baseball match between the Beachville Club and the Zorras, a club hailing from the township of Zorra and North Oxford.

The game was played in a nice smooth pasture field just back of Enoch Burdick's shops; I well remember a company of Scotch volunteers from Zorra halting as they passed the grounds to take a look at the game. I remember seeing Geo. Burdick, Reuben Martin, Adam Karn, Wm. Hutchinson, I. Van Alstine, and, I think, Peter Karn and some others. I remember also that there were in the Zorras "Old Ned" Dolson, Nathaniel McNames, Abel and John Williams, Harry and Daniel Karn, and, I think, Wm. Ford and William Dodge. Were it not for taking up too much of your valuable space I could give you the names of many others who were there and incidents to confirm the accuracy of the day and the game. The ball was made of double and twisted woolen yarn, a little smaller than the regulation ball of today and covered with good honest calf skin, sewed with waxed ends by Edward McNames, a shoemaker.

The infield was a square, the base lines of which were twenty-four yards long, on which were placed five bags, thus [see Figure 3].

The distance from the thrower to the catcher was eighteen yards; the catcher standing three yards behind the home bye. From the home bye, or "knocker's" stone, to the first bye was six yards. The club (we had bats in cricket but we never used bats in playing base ball) was generally made of the best cedar, blocked out with an ax and finished on a shaving horse with a drawing knife. A Wagon spoke, or any nice straight stick would do.

We had fair and unfair balls. A fair ball was one thrown to the knocker at any height between the bend of his knee and the top of his head, near enough to him to be fairly within reach. All others were unfair. The strategic points for the thrower to aim at was to get near his elbow or between his club and his ear. When a man struck at a ball it was a strike, and if a man struck at the ball three times and missed it he was out if the ball was caught every time either on the fly or on the first bound. If he struck at the ball and it was not so caught by the catcher that strike did not count. If a struck ball went anywhere within lines

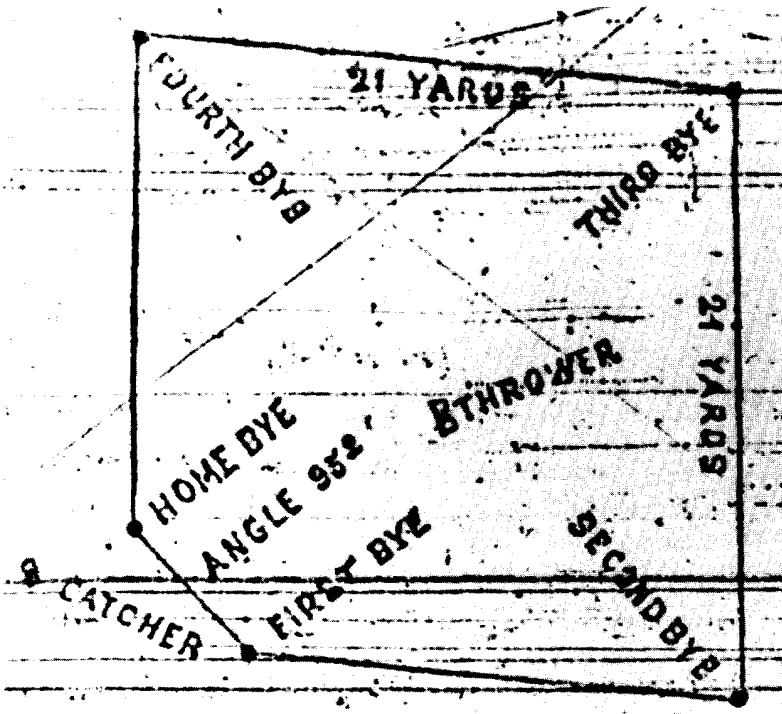


Figure 3. Ford's Baseball Field (1838).

drawn straight back between home and the fourth bye, and between home and the first bye extended into the field the striker had to run. If it went outside of that he could not, and every man on the byes must stay where he was until the ball was in the thrower's hands. Instead of calling foul the call was "no hit."

There was no rule to compel a man to strike at the ball except the rule of honor, but a man would be despised and guyed unmercifully if he would not hit at a[. . .] fair ball [. . .] he was out if the ball was caught either before it struck the ground or on the first bound. Every struck ball that went within the lines mentioned above was a fair hit, every one outside of them no hit, and what you now call a foul tip was called a tick. A tick and a catch will always fetch was the rule given strikers out on foul tips. The same rule applies to forced runs that we have now. The bases were the lines between the byes and a base runner was out if hit by the ball when he was off of his bye. Three men out and the side out. And both sides out constituted a complete inning. The number of innings to be played was always a matter of agreement, but it was generally 6 to 9 innings, 7 being most frequently played and when no number was agreed upon seven was supposed to be the number. The old plan which Silas Williams and Ned Dolson (these were greyheaded men then) said was the only right way to play ball, for it was the way they used to play when they were boys, was to play away until one

side made 18, or 21, and the team getting that number first won the game. A tally, of course, was a run. The tallies were always kept by cutting notches on the edge of a stick when the base runners came in. There was no set number of men to be played on each side, but the sides must be equal. The number of men on each side was a matter of agreement when the match was made. I have frequently seen games played with seven men on each side, and I never saw more than 12. They all fetched.

The object in having the first bye so near the home was to get runners on the base lines, so as to have the fun of putting them out or enjoying the mistakes of the fielders when some fleet footed fellow would dodge the ball and come in home. When I got older, I played myself, for the game never died out. I well remember when some fellows down at or near New York got up the game of base ball that had a "pitcher" and "[. . .] 's" etc., and was played with a ball hard as a stick. India rubber had come into use, and they put so much into the balls to make them lively that when the ball was tossed to you like a girl playing "one-old-cat" you could knock it so far that the fielders would be chasing it yet, like dogs hunting sheep, after you had gone clear around and scored your tally. Neil McTaggart, Henry Cruttenden, Gordon Cook, Henry Taylor, James Piper, Almon Burch, Wm. Harrington and others told me of it when I came home from university. We, with "alot of good fellows more" went out and played it one day. The next day we felt as if we had been on an overland trip to the moon. I could give you pages of incidentals but space forbids. One word as to the prowess in those early days. I heard Silas Williams tell Jonathan Thornton that old Ned Dolson could catch the ball right away from the front of the club if you didn't keep him back so far that he couldn't reach it. I have played from that day to this and I don't intend to quit as long as there is another boy on the ground.

Yours, Dr. Ford