

Abner Doubleday Strikes Out Again: The Origins of Baseball in Southeast Texas

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The paper focuses on the long held myth that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in 1839 in Cooperstown, New York. For some time, serious scholars have identified this claim as a fabrication mainly associated with A.G. Spalding. In Texas, however, there is an offshoot of the Doubleday myth which holds that the Civil War general introduced regulation baseball to the Lone Star State in 1867 while serving with the Union Army in Galveston.

The main body of the paper investigates this claim. By using newspaper accounts and some secondary sources, the author attempts to show how baseball actually started in the Southeast Texas area. The author concludes that it is highly unlikely that Doubleday introduced baseball to Texas in 1867. It is likely that baseball under the New York rules was played in Southeast Texas either just before the Civil War or almost certainly by 1866.

The remaining portion of the paper attempts to trace the development of baseball in Southeast Texas during the period 1867-1877. Early baseball in the Galveston-Houston area was amateur and in the beginning associated with important social celebrations. The players were mainly of the middle class as were the spectators. The game was in a rudimentary stage of development with high scores, numerous errors, weak pitching,

irregular playing surfaces, and erratic umpiring. By the early 1870s the game became much more democratic with numerous ethnic groups and people from all classes participating as players and spectators. With this development, semi-professional teams were organized and gambling became an important part of the sport. The popularity of baseball increased partly because of the improvement in transportation in Southeast Texas immediately after the Civil War. By 1877 the quality of play had improved but the local amateur teams were no match for the Major League teams which began to tour Texas on spring training tune-up tours beginning that year. In most areas, including the urban origins of the game in Southeast Texas, the pattern of development of baseball in the Galveston-Houston area paralleled the origins of the game in other regions of the country.