

# Cricket, Clubs and Class in Philadelphia, 1850-1880

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English textile workers introduced Philadelphians to cricket during the 1830s. Shortly thereafter, youth in Germantown, led by William Rotch Wister, began playing the game on a regular basis. Cricket received an added boost during the 1840s when Wister enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania and organized a cricket club there. Upon graduation, he founded the Philadelphia Cricket Club in 1854. The club attracted Philadelphia's emerging bourgeoisie as fourteen of its twenty charter members were from that class. During the 1850s, both blue collar and white collar workers participated in cricket, but after the Civil War, the middle-class in the business and professional ranks tended to dominate cricket.

The middle class gravitated toward cricket because the game fit in well with bourgeois ideology of moulding gentlemen through obedience, discipline, and industriousness. These attributes formed character in youth, a necessary ingredient for adulthood success. It also served as a rite of passage for adolescents by enabling them to demonstrate their manhood through displays of strength, vigor, and virility. Perhaps most importantly, cricket cultivated self-confidence, self-reliance, and independence which prepared young adults for the uncertainties of the business or professional world.

While occupational success was one measure of prestige in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, perhaps the highest indicator of one's status in society was proper social club affiliation. In mid-Victorian Philadelphia, there were two exclusive social clubs—the Philadelphia and the Rittenhouse. Both attracted aspiring businessmen and professionals, though admission to the Philadelphia was extremely difficult because its admission policy was based largely on ascription (i.e. heredity which guaranteed the sons of members automatic admission upon reaching age 23). The younger Rittenhouse Club, *nouveau riche* in orientation, admitted members on the basis of occupational and social achievement.

In order to show the relationship between the cricket and social clubs, the investigator compared the ages at which members joined both types of clubs. He found that members tended to join cricket clubs during their teens and twenties and social clubs during their thirties and forties. These findings support the hypothesis that cricket served as a socializing agent to prepare middle-class youth for adulthood. Bourgeois parents, thus, introduced their sons to cricket during their teenage years and joined cricket clubs themselves to give their offspring ample opportunities to participate in the sport. Then, their sons, upon securing employment in the business or professional world, strived to advance their social position by seeking admission to one of the city's two exclusive social clubs.