

'Batter up' had early start

■ S.C. baseball teams may have taken field even before Civil War.

According to tradition, Confederate veterans learned to play baseball in Union prison camps. But some believe the first baseball game in South Carolina was played before the Civil War. The evidence is in old shipping bills that list balls, bats and gloves. The game was invented in 1845 by Alexander Cartwright (not Abner Doubleday).

The first baseball game in Rock Hill is thought to have taken place right after the Civil War. One of the first teams called itself the "Polka-Dots Baseball Team."

There were a number of clubs by the 1880s. The Yorkville Enquirer in 1886 reported a "lively-game" that took place on the Kings Mountain Military School's field between the cadets and the Heavy Batters of Yorkville in a "friendly crossing of bats." The paper said there was good playing on both sides, but the Cadet Nine were superior fielders. When the game was called for darkness, the score stood at 63-20.

Later in the summer the Heavy Batters lost a "match game" to the Lightweights by a score of 46-21.

And Rock Hill's Our Boys defeated the hapless Heavy Batters by a score of 44-3.

In July 1887, the Rock Hill Herald reported that John T. Roddey was "our champion baseballist," but that Roddey had "abandoned the game and is now in White Sulphur Springs, Va. trying to catch not a ball but a wife. I will say to Happy Cal Parish that if he will get up a team, now is the time to play Our Boys." But on Aug. 10, John T. Roddey was back and playing for the Charlotte nine against Columbia. The paper again labeled Roddey the best around.



Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

Such items as the one about Roddey indicate that baseball schedules were casual, probably not playing more than one game a

week. York's Light Weights won 18 games and lost none in 1886. Their season was over in September.

In the York County town of Sharon, baseball was a part of the 1889 Fourth of July celebration. About 1,000 people showed up for a picnic, followed by orations, followed by the baseball game. Hickory Grove made 20 runs in the first inning and defeated the inexperienced Sharon team 50 to 17 in a three-hour affair. There were no sour grapes, however. The victorious Hickory Grove boys were given beautiful bouquets by the "ladies of Sharon."

Railroad companies encouraged baseball matches by offering special excursion rates from one small town to another. Railroad men were great participants in the sport and, when too old to play, were often preferred as umpires. Their reputation for fairness became a badge of honor.

The language of baseball evolved gradually and was colorful from the beginning. An 1889 game between Clover and Yorkville was described this way: "On going to the bat the second round, the fifth

striker (batter) set the bad example and three outs were recorded in a row, leaving two men on bases . . . The Queen Citys took the bat, and J.B. Bell, the captain of the club, was the first striker. Sending a beautiful fly into centre field, he was soon watching the progress of the game from third base." The final score was 24 to 12, but the story didn't make clear which team won. Perhaps it didn't much matter for there is no evidence of serious record keeping.

In the 1890s, the first leagues were formed. Some of the early leagues were the Tin Pan League, the Southern Association, the Southeastern League and the South Atlantic League (better known as the Sally League). At the same time, nearly every cotton mill in the region sponsored baseball teams. Also, banks, mercantile stores and churches often sponsored teams and were likely to provide a brass band to go along with the team.

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Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop College. Her column appears Sundays.