

New SABR Research Project:

New England and the Roots of Modern Base Ball

**(Boston SABR Chapter, Connecticut SABR Chapter, Rhode Island SABR Chapter,
Vermont SABR Chapter, and W. Mass SABR Chapter)**

Key survey questions for local communities --

- **When did the modern (“New York”) game arrive locally?**
- **Did it quickly supplant the Massachusetts Rules game? Why?**
- **What was the post-Civil-War “Base Ball Fever” period like?**
- **Was the lusty earlier game of wicket played in the area?**
- **Is there evidence of other ballgames (e.g, Fast Day games)?**
- **What early ballgames games attracted female players?**
- **Were some forms of ballplaying prohibited locally?**

Background: A large and untidy website, Protoball.org, was largely built by SABR headquarters staff and is now an open registry of currently-known data on USA baserunning games, including New England data. It focuses on pre-1870 ballplaying. This 5-chapter project will, in part, extend and amend its data on clubs, modern games, and base ball’s predecessor games. New England is likely the richest American source of such early data.

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NE chapter contacts: Karl Cicitto (Connecticut), Rick Harris (Rhode Island), Joanne Hulbert (Boston), Tom Wallace (Vermont)

Steering Group: Karl Cicitto (CT), Kyle DeCicco-Carey (New Bedford), Donna Halper (Quincy MA), Rick Harris (RI), Bill Lyons (Maine), Brian Sheehy (Essex County), Brian Turner (Central MA), and Larry McCray (Boston and Protoball.org). The steering group is overseeing the writing of practical tip-sheets on doing origins-era research for those who are new to the topic.

For more information, contact Larry McCray at Lmccray@mit.edu.

Notes on Early Ballplaying in New England:

Some Things We Know, and Some Things We Wish We Knew

[] Protoball.org lists about 500 early (pre-1871) clubs in New England. Many were found online in the “Spread of Base Ball” project led by SABR’s Origins Committee a few years ago.

[] Protoball.org has data from over 150 early New England ballgames played under the modern (New York) rules. Nearly 100 of these games occurred in MA.

[] Protoball’s Ballplaying Chronology includes about 400 entries in the 6 New England states, ranging from 1700 to 1864.

[] A search for “Massachusetts game” yields 50 hits on Protoball.

[] We have 21 reports of ballplaying being banned, or subject to fines, in all 6 NE states. Nearly half were found in MA locations.

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A Few Interesting Open Questions

What early games were played in your favorite New England town?

What ballgames were played by regiments in the Civil War?

Are there obvious patterns in the spread of the NY game within NE?

Was the rival “Massachusetts Game” played much outside of MA?

Was wicket played much outside of northwestern CT and central MA?

Did women or girls play games with a ball?

Did the “Base Ball Fever” of 1866-1870 penetrate all of New England?

Do we know of games brought NE to by non-British immigrants?