

# Mount Clemens Public Library

## Local History Sketches

### Baseball in Mount Clemens

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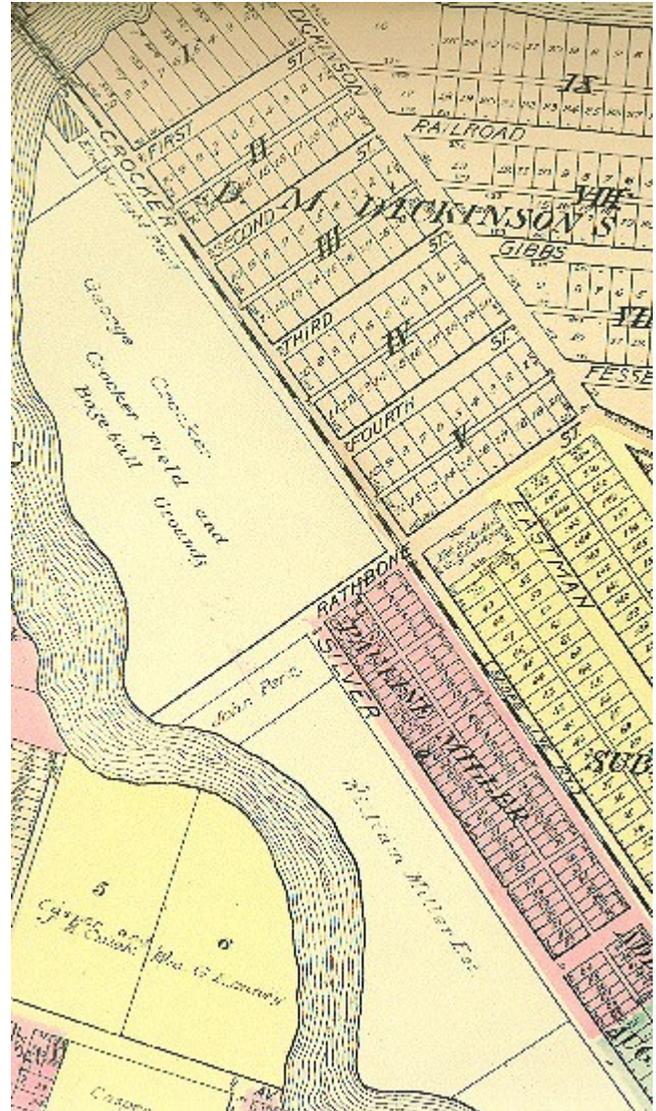
According to Judge William Horton, writing for the *Mount Clemens Daily Leader* in 1928, Mount Clemens had an amateur baseball club as early as 1865, when some returning Civil War veterans formed a team called the Regulars. Baseball was just beginning to gain popularity in the eastern United States after the war; the National League would not be founded until 1876, but interest was already alive in Mount Clemens.

Judge Horton recounted that the best-known early baseball team in Mount Clemens was the Resolute, which played during the early 1880s. He reports the following members of the team: Bert Heath, first base; Bart Hubbard, second base; Charlie Fitch, third base; Birney Babcock, short-stop; Fred Avery, Frank Phillips, Harry Tucker, fielders; Oscar Lungerhausen, Harry Morgan, pitchers; and "Ik" Sackett, catcher.

Mount Clemens' first official baseball park facility was constructed in 1896, but not without some controversy. While baseball was welcome in the Bath City, baseball played on Sunday was not. Organizers wanted to promote league-level play featuring out-of-state teams, but were not inclined to eschew Sunday play, as required by the state laws then in effect. The citizens of Mount Clemens, rallied by the local clergy under the leadership of the Rev. George N. Kennedy, presented the following resolution to city and county authorities:

**...that the best interests of this community demand and insist upon a peaceful and respectable Sunday, and that we discountenance any innovation thereon by the introduction or practice of public games or entertainments inconsistent with the proper observance of the Christian Sabbath.**

With Mount Clemens opting out, organizers established their ballpark on the farm of John R. Trufant, just across the Clinton River in Clinton Township. Trufant rented approximately 5 acres of



land for the construction of the Mount Clemens Athletic Park. The property was fenced and leveled, and a grandstand with a capacity of 800 spectators was erected. Bleacher seats would accommodate an additional 800 fans. Refreshment stands and toilets were located under the grandstand. The opening game was held on May 20, 1896, with the Pagoda Band providing festive music. The contest featured the Athletics of Detroit against the local Mount Clemens club under the management of Walter "Dad" Trombly. Five hundred fans watched the local boys defeated by the Detroit team, 18 to 8.

Mother Nature presented the first opportunity to introduce Sunday baseball at the park. The Mount Clemens area was struck by a deadly tornado on May 26, 1896, and the relief effort was promptly aided when the baseball organizers offered a charity game on Sunday afternoon to raise funds for the storm victims. Charitable events were exempt from the state law prohibiting Sunday amusements.

The backers of the baseball park were ultimately unsuccessful in breaking down local resistance, however. Additional games were scheduled on the Sabbath, but attendance was poor, and on July 31, 1896, the *Mount Clemens Monitor* proclaimed from its front page:

***The Monitor ventures the prediction that no more Sunday league games will be attempted at Mt. Clemens. The failure of Sunday put the whole crowd at odds, and there is no prospect that they will come together again. The privileges, lease, and fixtures of Athletic Park have been disposed of to F. D. Nelson, of Butte., Mont. ... The local games of ball and other attractions will go right along.***

According to Judge Horton's account, baseball continued at the Mount Clemens Athletic Park until Sunday baseball was offered in Detroit. Detroit Creamery Company acquired the Trufant farm in 1905 and dismantled the ball field.



*Baseball game at Crocker Field, ca. 1910*

By that time, however, Mount Clemens had its own baseball field within the city limits. Located east of the Clinton River, it was known as Crocker Field, and this time, it was hosting league-level play. Crocker Field was established in the spring of 1903, and at first was used by a variety of local amateur teams. In 1904 a move was made to assemble a skilled team to represent the Bath City in league play, and a grandstand was added to Crocker Field to encourage attendance.

Mount Clemens made a strong showing under the leadership of Walter "Dad" Trombly in

1904 and 1905, and interest in the game increased with every victory. In 1906 the team, known now as the Bathers, participated in the Southern Michigan League. Mount Clemens emerged after a hard-fought season as league champion. The Bathers suffered a reversal of fortune in 1907 and lost out to arch-rival Tecumseh, then dropped out of league play for the next four seasons.

Baseball returned to Mount Clemens in 1912 when the Class D Border League was formed. Walter Trombley, and later, Richie LaPointe, were the managers of the Bather team. The league was not a financial success and fizzled in 1913.

The last attempt at league play came in 1914, when the Lansing team in the Southern Michigan League moved to Mount Clemens. Lackluster play and a poor finish doomed the Mount Clemens club, and the league went on without them in 1915.

No further interest in organized baseball was shown in Mount Clemens until 2001, when city officials considered a proposal from Mid-America Sports of Libertyville, Illinois, to bring a minor league franchise to Mount Clemens. Disagreements about the location and funding of the proposed stadium stalled the project, however.

*For further information about organized baseball in Mount Clemens, we recommend:*

- "For a Decent Sunday : A Great Rally of the Good People of Mt. Clemens Protesting Against Sunday Desecration," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, March 20, 1896.
- "The New Ball Park," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, April 17, 1896.
- "Sunday Baseball," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 1, 1896.
- "Mt. Clemens Athletic Park," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 15, 1896.
- "The Ball Grounds," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 29, 1903.
- "Mt. Clemens - Pennant Bearer," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, September 28, 1906.
- Horton, William E. "First Ball Team Formed in Mt. Clemens in 1865," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, June 29, 1928.
- Marentette, Charles. "Famed Local 9 Outdrew Tigers in 1905," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, October 4, 1935.
- Okkonen, Marc. *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan: Adrian to Ypsilanti*. Lansing, Mich. : Thunder Bay Press, c1997., pp.130-131.
- Feighan, Maureen and Edward L. Cardenas. "[Mt. Clemens Stadium Put on Hold](#)," *Detroit News*, April 27, 2002.
- Hotts, Mitch. "New Pitch for Baseball in Downtown Mount Clemens," *Macomb Daily*, April 2, 2003.