

### **Why Cooperstown?**

From humble beginnings, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum has become one of the nation's most recognizable and popular educational institutions. The Museum is located in the pastoral village of Cooperstown in central New York State, nestled between the Catskill and Adirondack mountains, 70 miles west of Albany, the state capital.

Located on Main Street, the Baseball Hall of Fame officially opened its doors on June 12, 1939. Cooperstown represents a step back in time, with buildings dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and orange geraniums hanging from the classically-styled streetlights. More than 350,000 people travel to the village each year to pay tribute to our National Pastime by visiting the Hall of Fame, an institution which honors excellence, preserves history, and connects generations.

Visitors wonder why this small village of 2,200 inhabitants located in central New York State should be the home of Baseball's Exciting Showcase. The answer to this often-asked question involves a commission, a tattered baseball, a philanthropist and a centennial celebration.

### **The Mills Commission**

The Mills Commission was appointed in 1905 to determine the origin of the game of Baseball. The committee's formation was urged by Albert G. Spalding, one of the game's pioneers, following an article by Henry Chadwick, a famous early baseball writer, who contended that the sport evolved from the English game of rounders.

Seven prominent men comprised the commission, including Col. A.G. Mills of New York, who played baseball before and during the Civil War and was the fourth president of the National League (1882-1884); Hon. Morgan G. Bulkeley, former Governor and then U.S. Senator from Connecticut, who served as the National League's first president in 1876; the Hon. Arthur P. Gorman, U.S. Senator from Maryland, a former player and ex-president of the National Baseball Club of Washington; Nicholas E. Young of Washington, D.C., a longtime player who was the first secretary and later fifth president of the National League (1884-1902); Alfred J. Reach of Philadelphia and George Wright of Boston, both well-known businessmen and two of the most famous players of their day; and the president of the Amateur Athletic Union, James E. Sullivan of New York.

During its three-year study, the committee was deluged with communications on the subject. The testimony of Abner Graves, a mining engineer from Denver, in support of Abner Doubleday, figured prominently in the committee's inquiry. Both Graves and Doubleday had attended school together in Cooperstown. Doubleday later was appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating in 1842. Subsequently he served in the Mexican and Civil Wars. According to historical records, he fired the first gun shot as a captain for the Union at Fort Sumter, S.C.

In his letters to Spalding, Graves claimed to have been present when Doubleday made changes to the then popular game of "town ball." As Graves described the game, one player tossed the ball straight in the air, allowing another player to hit the ball with a four-inch flat bat. Some 20 to 50 players, scattered about the field, attempted to catch the ball before the batter could run to a goal 50 feet away.

According to Graves, Doubleday used a stick to mark out a diamond-shaped field in the dirt. His other refinements to the rudimentary game included limiting the number of players and adding four bases (hence the name, "base ball).

The committee's final report on December 30, 1907 stated in part that "the first scheme for playing baseball, according to the best evidence obtainable to date, was devised by Abner Doubleday at Cooperstown, N.Y. in 1839."

### **The Baseball**

The discovery of an old baseball in a dust-covered attic trunk in 1934 supported the committee's findings. The ball was located in a farmhouse in Fly Creek, a village about three miles from Cooperstown, where the baseball -- undersized, misshapen and obviously homemade -- was discovered. The stitched cover had been torn open, revealing stuffing of cloth instead of the wool and cotton yarn, which comprise the interior of the modern baseball. The ball soon became known as the "Doubleday Baseball."

### **The Philanthropist**

Soon after its discovery, the baseball was purchased for \$5 by Stephen C. Clark, a Cooperstown resident and philanthropist. Clark conceived the idea of displaying the baseball, along with such other baseball objects as could be obtained, in a room in the Village Club, which now houses the Cooperstown village offices. The small one-room exhibition attracted tremendous public interest. With the assistance of Alexander Cleland, who had been associated with Clark in other endeavors, support was sought for the establishment of a National Baseball Museum.

Ford Frick, then president of the National League, was especially enthusiastic. He obtained the backing of Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Baseball's first commissioner, and William Harridge, president of the American League. Contributions and historically significant baseball memorabilia soon poured in from all parts of the country as the word spread.

### **Baseball's Centennial**

Coincidentally, in 1935, plans were also being formulated for an appropriate celebration in Cooperstown to mark Baseball's upcoming 100th anniversary, which would take place four years later. Frick proposed that a Hall of Fame be established as part of the shrine to honor the game's immortals.

The cooperation of the Baseball Writers' Association of America was enlisted to select the playing greats who were to be so honored. The first election was conducted in January 1936 and five players were selected -- Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum was officially dedicated on June 12, 1939. The game's four ranking executives of the period -- Landis, Frick, Harridge and William G. Bramham, president of the National Association -- participated in the ribbon-cutting. Of the 25 immortals who had been elected to the Hall of Fame up to that point, eleven were still living and each journeyed to Cooperstown to attend the centennial celebration. A baseball postage stamp commemorating the occasion was placed on sale that day at the Cooperstown post office, with Postmaster General James A. Farley presiding.

### **New Research**

After the Commission reported its findings in 1908, many of the game's historians disputed Graves' accounts, noting that many of the innovations he attributed to Doubleday were already being practiced earlier in the 1830s. The discovery in 1999 of the original Mills Commission papers, long reported to have been burned, supports the view of many researchers that Baseball developed from, and along with, other bat-and-ball games earlier in the nineteenth century. One day, historians may determine that Abner Graves' testimony, covering a period when the widely-played game of town ball was undergoing rapid changes, captures that point in time when these changes to the game arrived in one typical American community and caused a minor revolution on the sandlot.

Nevertheless, such a finding will not diminish the Mills Commission's contribution to our National Pastime a century ago. By collecting the memories of many early fans and players while they were still living, the committee created a treasure trove of early baseball history that would otherwise have been lost. Moreover, by identifying a site for Baseball's origin, the Mills Commission initiated the process that ultimately established a home for the sport – the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

### **Evolution of the Museum and Library**

Since 1939, several significant physical changes have taken place at the Museum. Expansions in 1950 and 1980 added much more exhibit space, while the Hall of Fame Gallery was dedicated in 1958. In 1994, the original Library, which had opened in 1968, was renovated and connected to the Museum. In 2002, the Museum began a three-year renovation to create a safer environment for visitors, develop even better handicap accessible facilities, provide a smoother traffic flow through the Museum's galleries, better manage and control the climate for artifacts and provide a greater presence of interactive technology for visitors. The project is expected to conclude in spring 2005.

Representing all aspects of baseball – both on the field and in our culture – the Museum collections total 35,000 three-dimensional artifacts (including bats, balls, gloves, caps, helmets, uniforms, baseball shoes, trophies and awards), and 130,000 baseball cards. All artifacts in the Museum's collections have been donated.

Founded in 1939 as part of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library is by far the largest repository of baseball information in the world. The Library's mission is responsible for the acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination of all archival material related to the history of baseball and its impact on culture and society.

The Hall of Fame Library contains 2.6 million items, housed in climate-controlled areas and maintained by a professional staff using state-of-the-art techniques. The photo collection contains more than 500,000 historic images of players, teams, ballparks and other baseball subjects. In addition, the Library's film, video and recorded sound archive contains more than 10,000 hours of footage dating back to the early part of the century, including an extensive collection of Hollywood movies featuring baseball.

The Library is a public facility where numerous researchers and Museum visitors are served annually. While the majority of patrons are independent baseball fans conducting research, others utilizing the facilities in the past have included such esteemed authors as George Plimpton, Roger Kahn and George Will; officials from many major and minor league clubs; former big league players; writers from the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal*; television shows such as *Jeopardy*; and students of all ages. Whether it's simply answering a question or fielding a request from the White House for information for a presidential speech, the research departed answers approximately 60,000 research inquiries annually.

### **The Baseball Hall of Fame Today**

In August 2000, the board of directors of the Museum elected the founder's granddaughter, Jane Forbes Clark, chairman. The year before, Dale A. Petroskey became the Museum's fifth president. Under their leadership, the Museum has begun to build an endowment to ensure its long-term financial security and has continued to broaden its educational outreach. In 2002, *Baseball As America*, a national exhibition tour of select artifacts from the Museum, opened a four-year tour to much acclaim at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The exhibition is on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. through October 3, 2004. The tour will travel to 10 of America's most renowned museums before its conclusion in 2005. The national tour of *Baseball As America* is sponsored by Ernst & Young. Published by National Geographic, *Baseball As America: Seeing Ourselves Through Our National Game* is the official companion volume to the tour.

The Hall of Fame's educational programs extend the Museum's reach to children throughout the United States. *America Grows Inning by Inning* – an extensive series of thematic lessons – teaches core curriculum subjects using the game of baseball as a “hands-on” foundation for helping students better learn key concepts, based upon national academic standards. In addition to on-site school visits, the Museum delivers interactive programs into classrooms outside of Cooperstown via distance learning. Through partnerships with Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., and Project View in Schenectady, N.Y., one hour to half-day electronic field trips and videoconferences have been enjoyed by more than 60 million students nationwide in the last three years.

As part of its public programming for visitors of all ages, the Museum also offers an extensive year-round calendar of entertaining and informative events designed for families and scholars of the sport alike. From roundtable discussions with Hall of Fame members to *Sandlot Stories*, featuring staff and visiting experts highlighting the game's rich history, to gallery talks, treasure hunts, concerts, movies and plays, the Baseball Hall of Fame presents more than 300 special events each year.

Additionally, Hall of Fame Weekend, featuring the Induction Ceremony and scores of returning Hall of Fame members, highlights the schedule of events for the year. The annual Hall of Fame Game, featuring two major league teams in an exhibition contest at historic Doubleday Field, draws thousands for an afternoon game at the home of baseball.

From its embryonic stages, the Baseball Hall of Fame has become an international destination that chronicles the evolution of our National Pastime. From humble beginnings and a small collection of artifacts in the mid-1930s, the Hall of Fame has evolved into a cultural showcase, where people come to learn about the past, and soon discover that Baseball is the common thread of our national spirit.



