

ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck
City Historian

Vol. LXIV

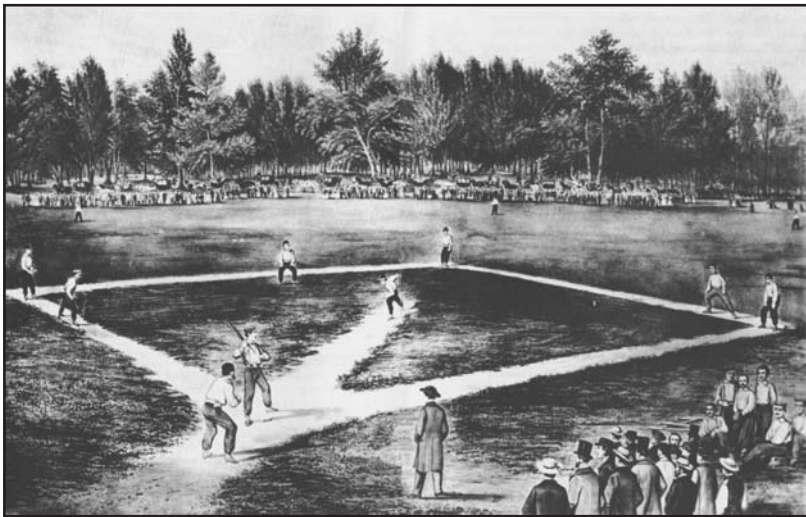
Fall 2002

No.4

BASEBALL IN THE 19TH CENTURY PART V

1877 – Rochester's First Year of Professional Baseball

by Priscilla Astifan





Above: Knotholes and rooftops were at a premium when the Baseball Owners built fences around the fields to increase sales of tickets.

From files of the author.

Cover photo: Before stadiums were built players held games in squares, parks and meadows. The game became very popular after the Civil War.

ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by Rochester Public Library. Address correspondence to City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604.

Visit ROCHESTER HISTORY online at www.libraryweb.org

Subscriptions to the quarterly Rochester History are \$8.00 per year by mail. Foreign subscriptions \$12.00 per year, \$4.00 per copy back issue.

PRESSTEK-4

© ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY 2002 US ISSN 0035-7413

1877 Rochester's First Year of Professional Baseball

During the winter of 1877, plans made the previous fall were turned into action to ensure that Rochester would have its first season of professional baseball. On February 19, George Brackett, who had organized the Syracuse Stars and was hired to manage the new Rochester club, arrived in Rochester from Lynn, Massachusetts.

At the same time, delegates from Rochester were participating in larger baseball plans. On February 20, Ned Pond was among baseball men from a number of U.S. and Canadian cities who met at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to form the International Association of Professional Base Ball Players, an opportunity for the many clubs that were not invited to join the National League. Although the International Association never enjoyed the same status as the National League, it became a formidable foe for League teams.

With only a few minor alterations, the International Association adopted the constitution and by-laws of the National League. Elected officials included Ned Pond, who served as an officer on the Judiciary Committee. Unlike the National League, which had invited only a few pre-selected clubs to join, the International Association was open to any club willing to pay the \$10 entry fee, plus an additional \$15 if they wished to compete for the International Association championship. Admission fees for Association contests were set at 25 cents. Visiting clubs were guaranteed seventy-five dollars, plus half of the gate receipts when they exceeded that amount.

Less than three weeks later, on March 14, members and friends of the Rochester Base Ball Association met at the Brackett House to finalize preparations. A salaried team was nearly hired, and they formed committees to draw up by-laws, sell stock subscriptions, select uniforms, and choose and prepare grounds and arrange for them to be properly enclosed and graded. There was every reason to believe that in the year 1877 Rochester would have a team it could boast of.

On March 24, players and their prospective starting positions were announced in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*. Ned Pond, who played with the amateur Rochester in 1876, was the only Rochester native. The others had previously played for a variety of professional or semi-professional clubs in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Columbus, Ohio; Memphis, Tennessee; and Auburn and Syracuse, New York. The

players began to arrive the first week in April, and they practiced daily in the arsenal(now Geva Theatre) until the weather permitted outdoor exercise at the High Street, House of Refuge, or University of Rochester grounds until a permanent field was completed.

On March 26, the *Democrat* announced that the officers of the Rochester Base Ball Association had selected a stadium site at the corner of Union and Scio Streets. Convenient to the street car line, it consisted of vacant land formerly used for the traveling circus and other events. Stands for spectators and other appropriate accommodations would be constructed and ready when the season formally opened on May 1.

Starting Rochesters' Heights and Weights

PLAYER NAME	HEIGHT	WEIGHT
Brady	6' (illegible)	165
	5'10 1/2"	172
Luff	5'11"	175
Shattuck	5'6 1/2"	158 (approx.)
Pond	5'11	178
Tipper	5'5 1/2"	148
Madden	5'6 1/2"	150
Caskin	5'9 1/2"	154
Butler	5'9	155
Purroy	5'10"	164 (approx.)

On April 19, 1877, The Union and Advertiser published the height and weight statistics of the starting lineup of the Rochesters

Enthusiasm continued to build. Manager Brackett patiently answered many questions from the public and large crowds gathered daily to watch the Rochesters practice and to offer some amusing speculations. On the sunny and pleasant Sunday afternoon of April 30, 1877, hundreds who wished to take a "somber religious stroll," walked out to view the new base ball grounds. The following day the team wore their newly acquired uniforms to oppose the 1876 Rochesters at a practice game. The uniforms were made of white flannel trimmed in blue with "Rochester" embroidered across the breast. Players, who were responsible for their upkeep, were cautioned to keep them clean. Included were belts, russet shoes and matching caps.

A tentative schedule for the beginning of the season was announced by manager Brackett. The Rochesters would compete for the International Association championship with four other U.S. teams: the Alleghenies of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the Buckeyes of Columbus, Ohio; the Live Oak of Lynn, Massachusetts; the Manchesters of Manchester, New Hampshire; and two Canadian teams, the Maple Leafs of Guelph, Ontario, and the Tecumsehs of London, Ontario. But competition also included an amusing mix of exhibition games with National League teams, clubs from the League Alliance, which was a small satellite affiliate of the National League, and several independent local or regional clubs.

The inaugural game of professional Rochester baseball at the city's first permanent ball park took place on the afternoon of Thursday, May 3, 1877 against the National League Hartfords of Brooklyn.¹ The *Democrat* and the *Rochester Union and Advertiser* justified the 6-1 loss as the result of nervous and over-anxious players trying to prove themselves to the public during their first outside game against a more experienced team. The *Rochester Evening Express*, whose reporters noted weaknesses similar to the 1876 amateur team, took a more critical approach and suggested some position changes. The managers and shareholders of the Rochester Base Ball Association, who had regular salaries to pay, and other regular expenses to meet, were more concerned about the significant shortfall in gate receipts. Only about half of the two thousand spectators who watched the game had actually paid to see it. The other half managed to avoid the twenty-five cent fee by posting themselves in surrounding tree branches, on the rooftops of nearby houses or barns; anything that would elevate them high enough above the surrounding fence for a favorable view of the game. These nonpaying "deadbeats" created a serious shortfall in needed revenues.

By the time the Rochesters enjoyed their first victory when they beat the Crickets of Binghamton on May 9, the "dead beat" problem had been partially solved. The City Fire Marshall and Wooden Building Commissioner were enlisted to declare the large rooftop gatherings unsafe. A few enterprising individuals still managed to rent out rooftop space at five or ten cents per person, but the practice was largely eliminated. Income was also improved by extending the height of the surrounding fence and enclosing open lots west of the grounds so that wagons and horse buses or carryalls, could no longer park there to give their occupants a free view.

Stadium improvements included an additional grand stand to accommodate more ladies and reporters and scorers above the east side catcher's fence. Each reporter had a wire fence built around his head to ward

off foul tips. A telegraph instrument allowing inning-by-inning scores to be sent to the Western Union Telegraph office in Reynolds Arcade and other downtown sites was also added.

Other encouraging wins followed the Binghamton victory. These included back-to-back 5-4 and 7-1 wins from the Eries of Pennsylvania on May 10 and 11, a 2-0 “white wash” of the “the famous and invincible” Alleghenies of Pittsburgh on May 12, and a “waterloo” 7-0 win with the Live Oaks of Lynn, Massachusetts on May 15. Public confidence soared, and additional shares of Rochester Base Ball Association stock were sold. Young boys prompted their mothers to make them baseball outfits from old overalls and older boys had to be strongly persuaded to lay down their bats and balls long enough to attend school. A larger than ever variety of industrial, trade, civic and religious organizations or neighborhood teams formed. Baseball spelling matches became fashionable. A skeptical businessman who had been coaxed to a Rochester game by a group of ladies needing an escort, caught a hopeless case of “base ball fever.”



The Resolutes, Vassar College's first baseball "Nine," circa 1876. The women's suffrage movement, the establishment of women's colleges, the invention of the safety bicycle, technological advancements, and changing medical attitudes toward women's health and fashion, encouraged more women to participate in baseball in the coming decades. (Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball* (The Forgotten History, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, Connecticut, 1994)

Grown women wore earrings shaped like baseball bats and young girls improvised their clothing to imitate the Rochesters' uniforms. Women were still valued for bringing encouragement and refinement to the game, whether they watched it or played it themselves. It was still customary for an admiring lady to "send down" flowers to a player who had just made an impressive play, and the *Express* commended women for their intelligent and unbiased remarks about the game. On April 27th, a *Lockport Union* reprint in the *Democrat* praised the genteel conduct witnessed during a game of "young lady" pupils at the Clifton Springs College. "It is positively asserted that not an oath, not a quarrelsome word, not a call for a "chaw" of tobacco, was heard during the game."² On June 9 the *Democrat* reported that a women's team was being organized in one of the wards of the city.³

The Rochesters planned to begin their first extended tour in May, but reconsidered after they received a number of offers to "cross bats" with several excellent teams on tour who wished to stop in Rochester during May and June. On May 18, however, they played their first away game in Geneseo, against the Livingstons. The day long event began at 9:00 a.m. with a railroad excursion through the blossoming orchards of the Genesee Valley. One railroad car and part of another were filled with a jubilant crowd. Included were "directors and umpires and scores of professional lovers of the game and friends of athletic sports in general." There were also businessmen who hoped to "hit two balls with one bat" by combining business and pleasure.⁴

The package included carriage transportation, a sight seeing stroll through Geneseo, and a lavish dinner at the American Hotel. Although the game was a 14 - 4 victory for the Rochesters, it was marred by a gale wind that caused many errors and forced the ladies in the grand stand to sit on each other's dresses to keep from blowing away.

The continuing progression of scientific baseball was celebrated throughout the nation that spring. Never before had so many "crack clubs" and good players contributed to the excitement and suspense of the season. There were yet no manufactured padded gloves; and baseball players, who could readily be identified by their broken noses, missing teeth and fingers, broken knuckles and blackened eyes, continued to play with bare hands. At best some may have worn thin leather gloves and perhaps some kind of improvised padding. However, the evolution of protective equipment began that spring with the professional debut of the first protective face mask for catchers.

"We shall soon behold the spectacle of a player stalking the bases with stove funnels on his legs and boiler iron riveted across his chest," a slightly sarcastic statement from the *Providence Dispatch*, reprinted in the *Express* on May 16, proclaimed.⁵

But old problems that haunted the game since baseball became a nationally organized sport in 1858, persisted. The by-laws of the game's governing organizations stated intentions to clean up the game and make it better regulated and more reputable. Yet game throwing accusations and incidents apparently grew as individual gambling, which in turn encouraged professional pool selling, remained a major incentive to attend ball games. Players "kicked and chinned" (verbal abuse called chin music) at the decision of umpires, who in 1877, were still unsalaried, and often uninformed of the latest rule changes, lazy, or bribed by professional gambling leaders. Sometimes players quit the game and walked off the field following an unfavorable call.

On May 19 a game between the Rochesters and the visiting Philadelphia Athletics ended in a Rochester walkout following a heated "row" over an umpire's decision. Soon afterward, a similar dispute abruptly ended a game between the Crickets and Auburns at Binghamton. Fan behavior continued to erode, and the press admonished some of the spectators for hooting, howling, and cussing during bad plays. They should offer words of encouragement instead, they suggested. Ball players can be quite sensitive, they added.

When Rochester was shut out 7-0 in Auburn on May 26, the loss was blamed on a lack of hitting. The Rochesters simply couldn't hit the pitching of Auburn's Critchley, who gave up only three base hits. An evaluation of team and individual performances followed the game, and public confidence tumbled. Three good players were praised: Brady, Tipper, and catcher, Ed Caskin, who quickly became a public favorite for his quiet and gentlemanly behavior, reliability, and strict attention to duty. Caskin's quick strong throwing made base stealing impossible, and he could stand up to the fierce pitching of Charles Purroy with scarcely any effort. Purroy was an excellent pitcher at times but careless at others, especially when he opposed an inferior club.

Position changes for the Rochesters were made, and on May 29, the *Express* announced they would be in place for that afternoon's game against the visiting Maple Leafs of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Simmons, who played right or center field, moved to first base; Luff from short stop to center field, and Shattuck from right field to short stop. An encouraging 4 to 1 win from one of the best in North America, followed.

Public confidence and Rochester baseball stock rose again. More impressive victories followed as the Rochesters won two out of three championship games with the visiting International Association Columbus, Ohio Buckeyes, on May 31 and on June 4.

But the fifth shutout of the season, with the visiting Tecumsehs of

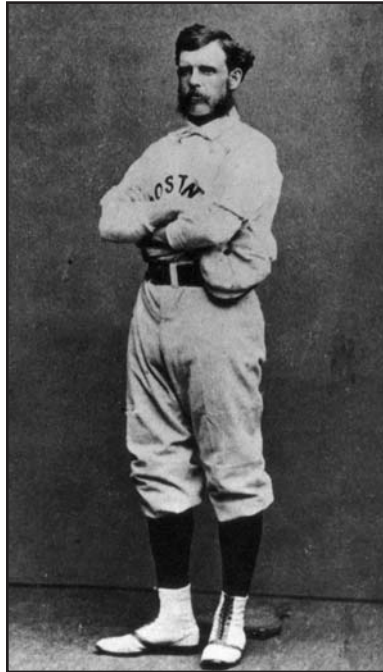
London, Ontario, on June 7, brought more public dissatisfaction. It also caused a closer look at the increasingly suspicious pitching of Charles Purroy. On June 8 and 9, the *Express* and the *Democrat* both analyzed the game's "remarkable features." *Express* reporters noted that Purroy had let Tecumseh runners lead off too far at first; or he had pitched too slowly to allow any earthly catcher to throw a runner out at second.⁶ According to the *Democrat*, those who watched the game closely felt



The London Tecumsehs were named after the legendary Shawnee chief who became a Canadian hero after his significant role in the War of 1812, and therefore, a Rochester newspaper referred to him as the "famous taker of scalps." However, Tecumseh's biographers reveal the impressive humanity and integrity of the great leader who defended his people's vanishing way of life.

they saw a decided change in his pitching in the 4th inning, when Tecumseh batters, who were unable to hit the ball before, suddenly pounded it wherever they pleased: right into Rochester's weak spots.⁷

Had Charles Purroy switched unsuccessfully to another of his different styles? Had he become exhausted or indifferent? Or, as many now believed, did he actually allow the other team to win? The *Express* mentioned an accumulation of discrepancies between the recorded scores of newspaper reporters and the team scorer, who made Purroy look better by deliberately citing his catcher and other players with errors they obvi-



By 1877, Harry Wright, who managed the Boston Red Caps, had earned national acclaim for his revolutionary methods of promoting physical fitness, consistent practice and team cooperation. Known for his high integrity, he never swore and seldom raised his voice as he set high standards for his players and trained them accordingly. (Baseball's First Stars, The Society for American baseball Research, Cleveland, Ohio)

ously hadn't made in order to shift the blame. No one could judge Purroy's dishonesty for certain and few wanted to believe that a Rochester player would deliberately do less than his best to win. But many agreed that this kind of inconsistency had become too marked, too frequent, and too disastrous. Though his dishonesty couldn't be proved, Charles Purroy was temporarily suspended following a meeting of the Rochester Base Ball Association directors in June.

Overall team performance was questioned as well. The players are all liberally paid, but seem to forget their duties as they make 12 to 20 errors each game, the *Union* claimed. The *Democrat* suggested strict disciplinary practices such as those enforced by successful Boston Red Caps manager Harry Wright. These included a nightly curfew and roll call, and abstinence from alcohol. "Of all athletic games in the world, base ball imperatively demands a clear head and responsive muscles, and steady nerves," the *Democrat* proclaimed on June 9.⁸

Two more losses, including another shutout with the visiting Memphis Reds, champions of the South, on June 8 and 9, were caused by weak batting and fielding as well as the disorganized and demoralized state of the Rochesters, who lacked a regular pitcher after Purroy's release.

Public confidence rallied a bit when the famed Indianapolis Blues, a League Alliance team, appeared for a two game series on June 11 and 12. The Rochesters lost the first game 4-1 and the second 5-3, yet they held up remarkably well against a team that had defeated a majority of National League clubs and caused most of the other professional clubs in the nation to look weak. Ed Nolan, serving as the Blue's ace pitcher, continued to be a nationally renowned master of deceptive pitching strategy. But the *Express* rejoiced that Rochester pitcher Jack Madden, who combined a rising curve with a swift delivery, was also becoming an effective "puzzler."

Concerns other than team performance also continued to challenge



Ed "The Only" Nolan, who quickly became known as one of the fastest pitchers of his day, began his professional career in 1875 with the Columbus, Ohio Buckeyes. The 1877 season may have been Nolan's best. One report suggests that he threw 32 shutouts for the Indianapolis Dark Blues that year. Nolan received his enduring nickname in 1875 when he was 17 and the only boy to pitch against men as top amateur teams opposed each other. (Baseball's First Stars, The society for American Baseball Research, Cleveland, Ohio, 1996).

the Rochester Base Ball Association directors. Men who were not escorting ladies, and therefore not authorized to sit in the grand stands, invaded them and also crowded out reporters. They offended the ladies by smoking cigars, passing around beer, and using language more appropriate for a bar room. The cigars prompted at least one woman to make an appeal in the *Democrat* for a smoke free section.⁹

On June 13 the National League St. Louis Browns, who were booked for an exhibition game in Rochester, failed to appear. They disappointed the huge crowd waiting for them at the stadium gates and left the Rochester Base Ball Association with unrewarded advertising expenses. An indignant public blamed Manager Brackett. But when details of correspondence between Brackett and the St. Louis club's manager were published in the *Democrat*, they revealed the team had been sent to Ithaca instead. No explanation was offered, however. Several days later, the National League Cincinnati Red Stockings, telegraphed and cancelled an exhibition game in Rochester because of financial trouble.

Despite their concerns, the Rochesterers, who had the most wins to date, took an early lead in the International Association pennant race. Two other teams, the Alleghenies of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Tecumsehs of London, Ontario, had fewer losses with two apiece. But these didn't count because only wins were tallied. Rochester also managed an impressive 7th place in a national standing that included over 40 clubs which played regularly as members of the National League, League Alliance or International Association organizations.

On June 15 the Rochesterers suffered a discouraging 15-2 loss with the National League Chicago White Stockings at a home exhibition game. Though they were low in the National League standings, the "Chicagos" were feared for their heavy batting. All three Rochester "change" pitchers proved useless as Chicago batters hit the ball directly into the home team's weakest spots in the field. The defeat seemed more demoralizing after the White Stockings defeated the Stars in Syracuse the following day. Yet it was hoped the Rochesterers would do better when their vacant positions were filled and players who were ineffective in their current positions could be replaced.

In 1877 formal farm systems for cultivating baseball players were still decades away. Replacements usually came from newly released or unemployed professionals or by enticing players currently employed with non-League or League Alliance teams. International Association regulations required only that a player have an authorized release from his present team before he could be hired by another. Many ball players were therefore free agents who could be persuaded to break their current contracts whenever a better offer appeared.

On June 13, an article from the *Auburn Advertiser*, reprinted in Rochester newspapers, detailed a desperate attempt by Rochester baseball officials to entice some of Auburn's best players to emigrate to Rochester to "bolster the fallen fortunes of the Flour City representatives." The Auburn paper claimed that on Sunday evening, "emissaries" from Rochester descended upon Auburn and routed manager Arnold out of bed at midnight to persuade him to release four of his best players. Incentives included several hundred dollars of bonus pay and large salaries for the remainder of season.¹⁰ The following day, the *Democrat* claimed the Auburn paper had greatly exaggerated a legitimate attempt to engage Auburn players.¹¹ No further mention was made of the event and two new players, Waite and Junkins, from more distant cities, were hired. Junkins formerly played for the Standard Club of Wheeling, West Virginia.

On June 22, the *Express*, which seemed to feel the Rochester Base Ball Association directors might have succumbed to pressure from professional gamblers, announced that Charles Purroy had been re-engaged. The result seemed favorable at first. On June 22, the Rochesters won a game with the visiting Philadelphia team, 11-2. A 7-0 Rochester shutout with the visiting Livingstons of Geneseo followed on the 23rd, and on June 25 the Rochesters won their fourth and final International Association championship game with the visiting Columbus, Ohio Buckeyes. Two victories with the Hornells of Hornellsville, New York followed on the 27th and 28th of June, 1877.

The club was worth having after all, the *Democrat* proclaimed after the Rochesters went on to remedy their former disastrous defeat with the Auburns by beating them 6-4 in front of one of the largest home crowds of the season. Everybody in the stadium smiled, from the boys in the saloon to the ladies in the grandstand. "The smile grew wider with each inning until it reached the telegraph man and smiled down over the wires to the various bulletin boards."¹²

The glow didn't last, however. The Rochesters went on the road to suffer defeats with the Maple Leafs at Guelph, Ontario, on June 30 and July 2. Charles Purroy was too sea sick from the rough steamboat crossing over Lake Ontario to pitch, and the performance of other team members was affected. The game was also marred by a fist fight between Maple Leaf player Smith and Rochester player Brady in the 9th inning. The losses caused Rochester to slip to second place, behind the London Tecumsehs, in the International Association standings. The Rochesters suffered their third consecutive loss to the Maple Leafs during an exhibition game at Lockport on July 3, and on July 5, they lost at home to the visiting Syracuse Stars.

Last minute cancellations from out-of-town teams continued to challenge the Rochester Base Ball Association directors. On July 9 the Livingstons of Geneseo caught “a freight on the fly” to Rochester to fill in for the Chelseas of Brooklyn who suddenly telegraphed their cancellation. The reason they gave was their pitcher and catcher had left them. The Manchesters, who were in third place in the International Association, booked to play in Rochester on the 10th, also cancelled suddenly because of a team quarrel.

A four game series with Auburn was scheduled during the week of July 11, with two games at home and two away. Each team would enter the series with one win against the other. The first game, a 6-5 defeat for Rochester, was described as listless, and the old questions surrounded Purroy’s pitching. Had he simply been ineffective or had he successfully thrown the game? A new angle appeared when the Rochesters defeated the Auburns the following day. This time it appeared the Auburns didn’t wish to win, and game throwing or “hippodroming” was suspected.

Gambling on games, in spite of those who opposed it, dated back to the earliest days of organized baseball. Yet it was apparently becoming more influential, if not more prevalent, during the 1877 season as local newspapers printed more reports of gambling nation wide.

“Base ball is becoming a base fraud,” an editorial in the *New York Mail*, reprinted in the *Express* on August 11, claimed. The “so called national game” is so tainted with charges of “jockeying and dishonesty” it would disgrace an average gambling house. “If our present season continues as it has begun it will mark the end of professional baseball.”¹³ Rochester newspapers agreed that crooked playing was causing the public to lose confidence. Whether the earlier suspension of Charles Purroy had been justified or not, it had caused attendance to drop off at an alarming rate.

In mid-July, Rochester team manager George Brackett, who felt he had lost control of the team, resigned. Although Brackett’s resignation wouldn’t become effective until August 1, team captain Joe Simmons took over on July 13 as the Rochesters left on an extensive eastern tour. Games in Auburn, New York, and New Bedford, Lynn and Lowell, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island were scheduled; also a game with the Harvard College nine in Boston. The Rochesters returned home on July 25 after losing both games with Auburn and others in New Bedford and Lowell. But they tallied International Association championship wins with the Live Oaks in Lynn, and another victory from the Pittsfield, Massachusetts team. The Providence game was rained out, and no report of the Harvard game appeared.

Two home games with the Crickets of Binghamton were played on July 27 and 28. The first game was postponed because of heavy rain, and the Rochesters lost the second game 7 to 1. A few days later it was announced that local businessman and Rochester Base Ball Association director, Fred Alling, had become the team manager. Joe Simmons served as his assistant. The *Express*, which felt that a stricter manager, "one who could and would be severe" had been needed for some time now, applauded the change.¹⁴ Two new players, Burkalow, a pitcher, and Kennedy, a catcher, were acquired from the disbanded Memphis Reds. Charles Purroy played in right or center field and served as a change pitcher.

Encouragement followed after a well-earned home victory with Syracuse on August 1. The Rochesters, who remained scoreless until the bottom of the 7th inning, rallied and won the game 7-3 in the tenth. The exciting game also gave Rochester fans their first chance to view the new catcher's mask, worn by Syracuse catcher Pete Hotaling, who was hooted at by small boys and other inconsiderate fans. Rochester catcher Hayes soon wore one, and though the mask distracted him during high over-the-shoulder flies, it gave him comfort while close to the striker. It proved its worth when Hayes suffered only a cut lip during an incident that undoubtedly would have caused a broken jaw if he had played bare faced.

Travel fatigue contributed to an 8-4 defeat in London, Ontario on August 1. The Rochesters had spent the previous night and part of the morning of the game sitting up in the seats of their railroad car. But a 4-2 ninth inning victory, with only four errors, followed on August 2. The team was congratulated for getting down to business and for winning their second notable victory from two of the best teams in existence in less than a week. The following day the Rochesters traveled to Buffalo to play the newly organized Buffalo team and to continue a friendly rivalry that dated back to the earliest days of nationally organized baseball. The game, which was well contested by both sides, remained scoreless through the 10th inning, when it had to be called to allow the Rochesters to catch their homebound train. A second game with Buffalo, played in Rochester on August 6, resulted in a 9-0 win.

A Rochester shutout with the Buffalo team, who hadn't yet reached their stride, offered little reassurance after a disastrous 11-1 defeat in Syracuse the previous day. The *Express* admonished the Rochesters for "no batting" and "an almost unlimited amount of muffing."¹⁵ Too many errors were also blamed for a subsequent 8-4 loss at Binghamton on August 9. The following day, however, the Rochesters managed a 4-1 win from the Wilkes Barres in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

On August 10 the *Express* announced that Charles Purroy had been permanently released following a quarrel with assistant manager Simmons. Four days later the paper announced that Fred Alling, who managed the Rochesters for less than two weeks, resigned. Alling claimed that conflicting business needs were the reason, and left with the reassurance that if reforms he inaugurated were sustained and strengthened, it should soon be evident in the teams' performance.

When Joe Simmons took over as team manager, the *Express* claimed his hardest task was to teach one or two of the Rochesters they couldn't drink whisky and play ball. The entire team was admonished for losing in spite of the good salaries they earned, and named "the great unrelia-ables" as they seemed to lose every other game; unable to win two games in succession.

On August 11, the Rochesters won a sharp, well-contested shutout with the visiting International Association Manchesters, a strong nine, according to the *Express*. But three days later on August 14, they were clobbered by the visiting Hornells, 16-5. After lightning struck and toppled a portion of the stadium fence that night, the *Express* commented that they thought the Rochesters had been struck instead.

The every other game pattern continued as Rochester beat the visiting National League Louisville Grays 9-1 the following day. But was it a legitimate win? The *Advertiser* claimed that some who witnessed the listless playing of the Grays felt they had given the game to Rochester. The *Express*, however, felt that a better explanation was the absence of Louisville's regular pitching and catching duo. Snyder, their formidable catcher, had been battered during a fist fight in Buffalo the previous day, and he was being saved for an upcoming League championship game in Boston. Devlin, the Gray's ace pitcher, couldn't catch Lafferty, who substituted for Snyder. When rain prevented a second game with Louisville as well as a game with Syracuse, the *Express* claimed it was just what the "bunged up" Rochesters needed in order to rest and heal their hands.

As the season advanced, sore hands increasingly became a problem for all professional baseball players. Players' determination in spite of them is amazing. When the Rochesters played their fourth and final championship game with the Tecumsehs at home on August 17, the hands of Powers, the Tecumseh's catcher, were so sore he flinched every time he caught a ball and could barely hang on to the "hot ones." In spite of hissing and booing from a group of unruly fans, Powers bravely finished the thirteen-inning game without an error. The Rochesters lost the game, 4-2, and also a second game with the Tecumsehs on the following day. A third consecutive Rochesters defeat, with Syracuse on August 23, followed.

Two new players, Sullivan, a pitcher, and Dixon a short stop, were hired to bolster the Rochester roster. Both had formerly played with the London, Ontario Maple Leafs. Jack Madden, who had been serving as a substitute was released. Brady was appointed by Joe Simmons to act as team captain. The Rochesters rejoiced in a well contested 2-0 shutout win with the Indianapolis Blues at home on August 25. Hope faltered again after another 3-2 defeat with Auburn on August 27, but was revived after a 6-0 shutout win with the Auburns the following day. A loss with the visiting National League Chicago team on the 29th was blamed on a fatal 9th inning error which allowed the scoreless White Stockings to rally and win in the 10th inning. The month ended on the 30th with a 17-2 “walkaway win” against the Cayugas at Port Byron, New York and another an 8-2 loss to the Auburns at Auburn on the 31st.

September began with two shutout wins for Rochester: 3-0 with Buffalo on the 2nd , 2-0 with Dansville on the 3rd, and an 8-5 victory with the visiting National League Cincinnati Red Stockings, who made their first appearance of the season in Rochester on the 4th. The Rochesters didn't feel much like crowing, however. The “Cincinnati” had simply “outmuffed” the local team, though they were somewhat disorganized after Cummings, their regular pitcher was released.¹⁶



The Indianapolis Dark Blues

The 1877 Indianapolis Dark Blues were members of the League Alliance Association. Ed “The Only” Nolan, their nationally famous pitcher appears second from the left in the back row. (David Nemece, *The Great Encyclopedia of 19th Century Baseball*, Donald I. Fine Books, New York, New York)

Although the Rochesters defeated Indianapolis during their August visit, the Blues September 5 visit resulted in a 2-2 tie. Ed Nolan, who was “rattled” during the first part of the game, allowed Rochester their only runs, but settled down in the second half. Nolan’s actions may have been deliberately dishonest, however. Two days after the game, the *Express* mentioned that the outcomes of suspicious Indianapolis games that week had probably been influenced by the presence of Bob Smith, a notorious gambler who had traveled with the team and enticed Nolan and others to throw games.¹⁷

On September 7, the *Express* announced that the Rochesters had left on their tour to “Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and other places.” They played their last two International Association championship games with the Alleghenies in Pittsburgh the following day, and the outcome would have a decided effect on the championship. If the Alleghenies won the majority of games, they would probably become the league champions. If not, the honor would go to the Tecumsehs of London, Ontario. The first game, scheduled for the 7th, was rained out. A 3-2 defeat against the Alleghenies on the 8th, was blamed on an unjust ruling of the umpire. After the Rochesters won the second game 6-1 with only five fielding errors, the team congratulated themselves for evening up the win/loss record with their most formidable International Association antagonists.

A game in Cincinnati on September 9 was called because of rain when Rochester was ahead 3-0. Rochester’s three-game stop in Columbus, Ohio, where they opposed the Buckeyes, resulted in a 1-1 tie, a 3-1 (both games played on the 12th), and a 12-3 loss on the 13th. A 4-1 defeat at Buffalo the following day, was blamed on travel fatigue.

The Rochesters “gained a victory from the jaws of defeat” at Binghamton on the 15th when Purcell, the Crickets’ pitcher, appeared to “lose his head” in the 9th inning and allowed the scoreless Rochesters to pound base hits in rapid succession and bring in the winning runs.¹⁸ Some viewers might have been suspicious. However, the *Union* and the *Express* credited good fielding as well as an extraordinary piece of good luck. Luck was a factor too in a 3-1 home win against Buffalo on September 18th.

Home games were played with Fall River, Massachusetts on September 19th, Buffalo on the 20th, the Tecumsehs on the 21st, and two away games with Buffalo on the 24th and 25th. The results were two wins with Buffalo and the Tecumsehs, a loss with Fall River, and a tie with Buffalo.

On September 26 the Rochesters left on what was scheduled as a week long tour. After losing two games with the Crickets at

Binghamton, however, they returned home to rest their sore hands and ailing limbs for the upcoming state championship tournament which would be hosted by the Rochester Base Ball Association here in October.

The grand event, which began on the first day of October, consisted of a playoff series among the Auburn, Binghamton, Rochester, and Syracuse teams. The first game, during which Rochester opposed Auburn, had to be called on the account of darkness and ended with a 0-0 tie in 11 innings. After the second game, between Syracuse and Binghamton, resulted in another, 10-10 tie after 9 innings, some were beginning to think the tournament was “a put up job.” But the *Express* felt that evenly matched rivals were the reason.

After the third game, Rochester fans rejoiced when their team gained a well played 5-3 victory from the Syracuse Stars, who had gained a nation-wide reputation for beating National League teams. During the fourth game, Binghamton defeated Auburn 8-1 and moved on to defeat Rochester 5-4 in the fifth game. The Stars apparently became the tournament champions when they defeated Auburn 8-2 in the 6th and final game.

As the 1877 season drew to a close, some who had long doubted the reality of the curve ball became believers. On October 6, Critchley, who



The Syracuse Stars, often referred to as the “Twinklers,” gained a reputation for beating National League teams. (The Empire State of Baseball, The Society for American Baseball Research, Northeast Commercial Printing, Albany, NY, 1989)

pitched for the visiting Auburn team, led a very skeptical gentleman into the yard at Congress Hall to show him that a baseball really could be made to curve considerably. The skeptic was stationed behind the batter, and Critchley threw several balls. After the doubter witnessed how greatly they varied from a straight line, he was converted immediately. A written endorsement was printed in the *Advertiser* less than two weeks later. Professor Lewis Swift, the renowned local astronomer, claimed that after “so many keen-eyed observers asserted they had seen it repeatedly done,” he investigated the matter himself and soon saw that it was not only possible, but “in accordance with the plainest principles of phisosophy.”

Although the official International Association season would remain open through October 31st, the pennant race had ended. The winner did not become official until adjustments were made for games with the disbanded Buckeyes and Live Oaks and the final results were tallied. Yet it was certain that the first place Tecumsehs of London, who had won their final game with the Alleghenies would fly the International Association championship flag during the 1878 season. A reprint from *The New York Clipper*, appeared in the *Express* on October 12, heralding the great success of the team which had also won the Canadian national championship.

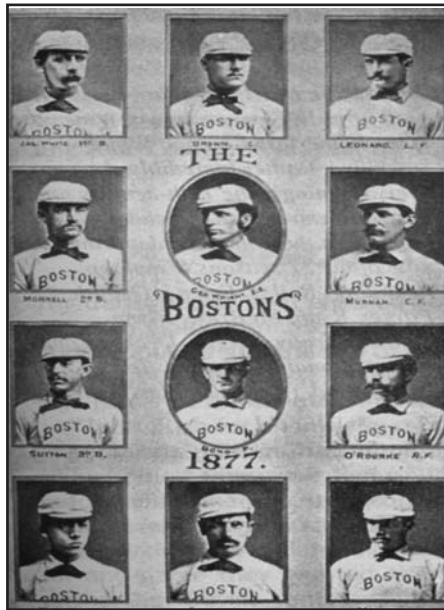
*In the games for the International championship nothing could have happened for the advancement of the popularity of baseball in Canada for one thing, or to give a new impetus to the International Association Pennant race of 1878 for another, than the success of the Canada Tecumsehs in winning the International Association championship, as they have done.*²⁰

On October 10, the Rochesters once again played the Brooklyn Hartfords, whom they had opposed during their inaugural game on May 3. The Rochesters were sharper contenders this time, and the game remained scoreless after six innings. When darkness caused the game to be called in the bottom of the 7th inning, the Hartfords had scored one run and placed a man on third. According to the governing International Association rule, the Hartfords were awarded the win, and Rochester fans were left to ponder what might have been had the game gone the full nine innings.

The following day, however, the home town team was “cleanly” defeated 4 to 1. The Rochesters began the game well with a run in the second inning, but were unable to score again. Meanwhile, the Hartfords made two runs in the sixth inning and two in the 8th.

Rochester was scheduled to play two exhibition games with the visit-

ing Boston Red Caps on October 11 and 12. But rain and muddy ground made play impossible and robbed hopeful spectators of their chance to see the champions of the United States perform. The Rochesters then boarded a train for Buffalo, where they won a game on the 15th, 8-4. “The base ball season is ending in a blaze of glory for the Rochesters,” the *Advertiser* proclaimed after a “short and brilliant” one hour and forty minute game with only one error game on the 16th. “Such play as they did yesterday would probably on the average defeat any club in the country.”



Although the Boston Red Caps won the 1877 national championship, it had not been entirely on the merit of their playing. By mid-November Rochester newspapers were printing news about the great National League scandal of the season.

After the mysterious collapse of the St. Louis Grays toward the end of the 1877 season, club officials were compelled to investigate rumors that pitcher Jim Devlin and other team members, bribed by Eastern gamblers, had thrown the pennant to Boston. As a result, National League president William Hulbert quickly expelled four Louisville players for life. They included Al Nichols, who had been a substitute player, center fielder George Hall, pitcher Jim Devlin, and third baseman Bill Craver. (David Nemic, *The Great Encyclopedia of 19th Century Baseball*, Donald I. Fine Books, NY, NY, 1997)

A listing in the *Express* on October 15, indicated the Rochesters had played 94 games with regularly organized clubs that season. (Games with city picked nines were excluded.) They had won 43 games, lost 47 and tied four. It wasn't a brilliant record, the *Express* surmised. Yet it was fair enough for a team during their inaugural year as professionals. In spite of numerous trials, Rochester's first professional team survived, while corruption and financial concerns caused many others nationwide, to fail that year. Already, the Rochester Base Ball Association was making plans for the next season, and most of the players who had finished the season in 1877 had already been hired for 1878.

On October 31st, the individual contracts of the Rochesters expired and the majority of them left for their winter homes: Brady to Hartford, Connecticut; Burkalow to Newport, Kentucky; Caskin to Danverse, Massachusetts; Junkins to Bridgeport, West Virginia; Kennedy to Brooklyn, New York; Luf to Philadelphia; Shattuck to Grafton, Massachusetts, and Sullivan to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Three players remained in Rochester. Joe Simmons purchased the billiard rooms of Twitchell & Kimball, on the corner of Main and Water Streets, and Dixon managed a saloon on Clinton Avenue. Tipper, who married a Rochester girl in November, made his home in Rochester. Reporters from the *Express* extended their gratitude for the courtesies the team showed them and offered best wishes for their future welfare.

As Rochester's first season of professional baseball moved on toward fireside reflections and history, the *Union and Advertiser* offered a prophetic statement about the future of the game:

"The ball mania is getting so bad that every city will soon have a mammoth structure like the Roman Colloseum to play in. This will be illuminated by electric lights so that games can be played nights, thus overcoming a serious objection at present existing."

Indeed, as baseball grew more scientific, sophisticated, and competitive in the following decades, ball parks evolved to meet the increasing demands of the game, its fans, promoters and financial sponsors. In Rochester the Union Street stadium yielded to a succession of Rochester ball parks: Culver Field in 1886, Riverside Park, which served from 1895-1897 until Culver Field was rebuilt after a fire, the Baseball Park at Bay Street stadium in 1908, Red Wing (later renamed Silver) Stadium in 1929 and Frontier Field in 1997. As primitive as it was by later standards, however, the Union Street ball park had housed the beginning of a rich baseball legacy which endures 125 years later as the highest level of minor league baseball and wholesome, affordable family entertainment.

Endnotes

1. An article in the *Rochester Evening Express* on Thursday, May 3, 1877, stated that the new professional nine had played their first outside game the previous day. Both the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* and the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, however, indicate the inaugural game was played on May 3, 1877.
2. *Democrat & Chronicle*, April 27, 1877, p. 4. Col. 2.
3. IBID, June 24, 1877, p.5, Co 1.2
4. *Democrat & Chronicle* May, 19, 1877, p. 4, col. 2.
5. *Evening Express* May 16, 1877, p. 2, col. 1.
6. IBID June 9, 1877.
7. *Democrat & Chronicle* June 8, 1877, p. 4, col. 2.
8. IBID June 9, 1877, p. 5, col. 3.
9. IBID May 15, 1877, p. 4, col. 1.
10. *Union and Advertiser* June 13, 1877, p. 2. Col. 6.
11. *Democrat & Chronicle* June 14, 1877, p.2, col. 3.
12. IBID, June 30, 1877, p. 4, col. 5.
13. *Evening Express*, August 11, 1877, p. 2, col.1.
14. IBID August 1, 1877, p. 2, col. 1.
15. IBID August 6, 1877, p. 2, col.1.
16. IBID September 5, 1877, p. 2, col. 3.
17. IBID September 8, 1877, p. 2, col. 3.
18. IBID September 17, 1877, p. 2, col. 4.
19. *Union & Advertiser* October 19, 1877.
20. *Evening Express*, October 12, 1877, p. 2, col.5.
21. *Union & Advertiser* October 17, 1877, p. 2, col. 3.
22. IBID November 13, 1877, p. 2, col.1.

Priscilla Astifan is a freelance writer from Webster, New York. She is writing a book on baseball.

Before The Red Wings

A succession of professional teams followed the 1877 Rochesters before the modern Red Wings were established in 1928. Rochester teams were known as the Hop Bitters, Rochesters, Brownies, Bronchos, Beau Brummels, Hustlers, Colts, and the Tribe.

In 1927 the Tribe benefited from baseball's newly created farm system, a network of minor league teams implemented by St. Louis Cardinals manager, Branch Rickey, to home-grow the talent his cash-poor organization couldn't afford to buy. That same year Rickey and Cardinals owner, Sam Breadon, impressed with Rochester's recent economic and population boom, decided to move their highest ranking minor league affiliate from Syracuse to Rochester.

The St. Louis Cardinals bought the financially troubled Tribe from owner Sam Weidrik and offered to replace the aging Base Ball Park at Bay Street, at their expense, with a new stadium that became the envy of minor and major-league communities alike. The team was renamed the Rochester Red Wings in 1928, and on May 2, 1929. Red Wing Stadium (renamed Silver in 1968 for Morrie Silver) opened on May 2, 1929.

The Red Wings have continued as a Triple-A minor league affiliate since then, becoming community owned after they were purchased by a group of shareholders, led by local businessman Morrie Silver, in 1958. The Red Wings became affiliated with the Baltimore Orioles in 1961 and remained with the Orioles through 2002 for the longest running franchise in Triple-A baseball history. The Red Wings will begin their 2003 season as Triple-A affiliates of the Minnesota Twins franchise.