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Mark E. Eberle

An article published by the *Kansas City Times* in 1927 recounted the colorful story of a game said to have been played in Kansas City, Missouri in 1866. The long history of baseball is full of entertaining anecdotes repeated through the years, and this particular tale from 1866 is one such story flavored with a bit of the Old West.¹

The newspaper article described the prowess of the first baseball team in Kansas City, Missouri—the 1866 Antelopes, “composed of young business men and lawyers.” The Antelopes “swept everything before them.” They challenged the Frontiers of Leavenworth, Kansas, defeating them 47–27 in Leavenworth and 45–30 in Kansas City (scores in the early games were much higher than in today’s game). Another team in Kansas City—the Hope club—was formed to give the Antelopes a worthy opponent on Saturday afternoons, and the two teams were equally matched. Then one Sunday, the Antelopes traveled to Atchison, Kansas, where they lost to the Pomeroyes. At the return game in Kansas City the following Saturday, when the Pomeroyes “saw the game going against them[,] they became rough and there was much wrangling, disputing and coarse epithets.” The umpire was pelted with an array of vegetables. After the Pomeroyes apologized, they were invited back to Kansas City to play the third and deciding game in their series on the following Saturday. To ensure no repeat of the trouble that marred the second game, the Antelopes reportedly convinced James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok to leave his poker game at Jake Forcade’s gambling saloon to umpire the final contest. According to the story, Hickok’s reputation was such that none of his decisions during the game was challenged. The hometown Antelopes won, 48–28, and reigned as the regional champions.²

It would be a great story, if it were true. However, the legend of Hickok’s service as an umpire in this instance is a myth given life by a newspaper article published 61 years after the supposed event. There are several problems with the story. For example, Hickok almost certainly was not in Kansas City at the time, based on Joseph Rosa’s assessment of his assignments with the military.³ In addition, Atchison had no baseball club in 1866. The town’s first team was organized the following year under the name Ad Astras, from the state motto, *Ad Astra per Aspera*.⁴ However, newspapers in 1866 do tell of events similar to those described in 1927, albeit with fewer embellishments and no mention of Hickok.

The First Base Ball Club in Kansas

Only a few months after fighting in the US Civil War ended, amateur “base ball” clubs were being organized in Kansas.* Long days during six-day workweeks and bans in some

* At the time, “base ball” was spelled as two words, and the initials BBC often followed the name of the base ball club, as in Frontier BBC.

cities on Sunday baseball meant that many workers had little opportunity to pursue the growing national pastime, though there were exceptions. Teams in baseball's earliest years were dominated by men who owned businesses or were employed in professions that allowed them to take time off to practice and play during the afternoon.⁵

The first club formally organized in Kansas was the Frontier Base Ball Club of Leavenworth. It was one of 90 dues-paying members of the National Association of Base-Ball Players (NABBP) recorded at their annual convention in New York held in December 1865.⁶ Founded in 1857, the NABBP was the first formal organization to govern baseball.

One of the Frontiers' members was William H. Coolidge, president of the club and captain of the team. In 1863, he had been a member of the Leavenworth Occidental Cricket Club. At the beginning of 1866, he owned and managed the local theater (opera house).⁷ William Parmelee, the club's vice president, owned a store that sold carpets, curtains, sewing machines, and other household items.⁸ Thomas Moonlight, a native of Scotland, had served as colonel of the Eleventh Kansas Volunteer Cavalry during the Civil War and briefly during the conflict with Plains Indians. However, his actions at Fort Laramie, Wyoming in the early summer of 1865 led to his being relieved of duty and mustered from the service. Returning to Leavenworth, he operated Moonlight's Bounty, Pension, and General War Claim Agency and later held several political offices.⁹

The Frontier BBC was organized in November 1865, and the members initially played practice games among themselves.¹⁰ Other clubs were organized in Leavenworth in 1866, which provided opportunities for friendly competition.¹¹ Practices and games were held on the Frontiers' baseball ground "on the prairie west of Cincinnati" on Osage Street, "just west of Judge Crozier's residence" (600 Osage Street).¹² As the baseball season progressed, the Frontiers demonstrated just how serious they were about participating in the sport by purchasing uniforms.

[The uniform] consists of an elegant blue cap, with white merino [wool] trimming; black leather belt, with the name of the Club in fancy letters upon it; blue pants, and white shirt with blue facing. This afternoon, the "boys" marched to their grounds in the western portion of the city, and presented a fine appearance.¹³

The "boys" on the Frontier BBC played a match on Wednesday, June 6, 1866. As was the custom at the time, nine players issued a challenge in the newspaper. In this case, the challengers were club members led by William Coolidge. The nine players who accepted the challenge included club members William Parmelee and Thomas Moonlight. The players were amateurs, but they still played for a prize. In early games, especially among amateur clubs, baseballs were a common prize awarded to the winning team. Baseballs were costly and not nearly as plentiful as they are today, so they had real value to a club. In this instance, the game was a means of determining which members would "present the Club with a new ball and set of Bases." Three of the best players among the Parmelee nine did not make the game, which apparently led to their defeat by 39 scores after five innings. Presumably, they purchased the club's new equipment.¹⁴

Three days later, on June 9, another challenge was presented and accepted. This time, it was a group outside the Frontier BBC that issued the challenge. Newspaper stories

referred to them initially as the Pioneer BBC, but some of the same players were members of a club later referred to as the Leavenworth BBC.* The two clubs played a series of games in July and August, all of which were won by the Frontiers.¹⁵ In August, the newly organized Griswold BBC challenged the Leavenworth BBC to a game featuring local players, but the results were not reported.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the Frontiers, with their attractive new uniforms, were looking elsewhere for competition. In October, they issued a challenge to “any club in Kansas, or the border counties of Missouri.” The arrangement was to be a “home and home match,” in which each team hosted the other for one game.¹⁷

There were few base ball clubs in Kansas in 1866 to accept the challenge from the Frontiers. The Blue Mont BBC was organized in Manhattan in September and played a game in November against a nine from the college (now Kansas State University). Blue Mont won, 38–21.¹⁸ There was also a University BBC at the State University (now the University of Kansas) in Lawrence, but the only newspaper report of a game was a contest among its members on a Thursday morning in November. If the nine innings were not completed before the “Union meeting at the Methodist church,” play was to be suspended until after the service.¹⁹ A club in Fort Scott, probably the Lincoln BBC, paid dues to the NABBP in December 1866, as the Frontier BBC had done the previous winter (neither club renewed their memberships).²⁰ None of these clubs, which were all organized late in the year, accepted the Frontiers’ challenge. That left only the clubs in Kansas City, about 30 miles southeast of Leavenworth along the Missouri River.

The First Base Ball Clubs in Kansas City

The first base ball club in Kansas City, Missouri apparently was the Antelope BBC, organized on July 28, 1866. The Antelopes initially played intramural games regularly on Tuesdays and Fridays. Their grounds were in McGee’s Addition, east of McGee Street (“back of the Metropolitan Block”)[†] in Kansas City.²¹

The other club in Kansas City, Missouri in 1866 was the Hope BBC. Their activities were mentioned in available newspapers much less frequently than those of the Antelopes, who supplied detailed information, including box scores for intramural games, to the *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*. The Hope BBC might have done the same in the *Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Kansas City, Missouri, 1864–1869), which is apparently unavailable in archives (except the June 10, 1866 issue).²² What little is known about the Hope BBC primarily comes from accounts of their games with other clubs. I found no record of when the Hope BBC was organized, but it was probably no later than August, because their first game against another club was September 7.²³ As with the other clubs, members of the Hope BBC would have participated in intramural games, but the location of their grounds is unknown.

* As the first city incorporated in Kansas, Leavenworth was referred to as the Pioneer City.

† The Metropolitan Block was row of business buildings on Grand Boulevard between 14th and 15th Streets (Shortridge 2012, pages 22–23). McGee Street is one block east of Grand. This puts the ballpark east of McGee Street between 14th and 15th Streets, which is currently occupied by the Sprint Center on the north side of Interstate Highway 670.

A third club in Kansas City was on the Kansas side of the border in what was then known as Wyandotte.* The Wyandott BBC was organized on September 1 at Captain Bruce's Tin Shop. Given their late start, their first games against other clubs were not played until late October. In 1867, the club moved their baseball ground "from the levee to the Huron place," a parcel of land that included the Huron Indian Cemetery (now the Wyandot National Burying Ground). The baseball diamond is gone, but a portion of the site is still a public greenspace (Huron Park).²⁴

As in Leavenworth, intramural games in Kansas City continued throughout the season, but matches among the clubs were eventually arranged through challenges in the newspapers. However, the clubs in Kansas City did not begin their matches against each other until September, about two months later than the clubs in Leavenworth.

On September 7, the Antelope BBC defeated the Hope BBC in a close contest, 31–30. The umpire for the game was T.A. Rix of the Frontier BBC, who "acted very promptly, and in a most gentlemanly manner."[†] The box score and other details were even submitted to the *New York Clipper*, which published baseball news from around the country.²⁵ The series of three games between the clubs ran through late October. The Hope BBC evened the series in game two (no score was found), which set up what was anticipated to be an exciting third game on the grounds of the Antelope club.²⁶ Unfortunately, the big game on October 23 did not meet expectations.

The weather that Tuesday was cold and breezy, but the players and spectators arrived at the appointed time to see the game that would decide the "championship of our city." Which team batted first was determined at game time; the home team did not automatically bat last. For the championship game, the Antelope BBC batted first and scored five runs. The Hope BBC managed only a single run in their half of the inning. It was at this point that the event took an unpleasant turn. As the clubs were preparing to start the second inning, the Hope captain asked to use a new pitcher, claiming that the person who pitched in the first inning was ill. The rules of the game allowed this only if the captain of the Antelopes consented, which he did. As the Hope players took the field, it was obvious that other changes were being made among the position players. The captain of the Antelopes objected to these additional changes, but the Hope BBC refused to play unless all of the changes were allowed. With their opponents refusing to continue the game, the Antelope BBC was allowed to claim victory by forfeit.²⁷ It was not a satisfying manner in which to win the baseball championship of Kansas City, Missouri, but the Antelopes were the champions nonetheless.

There are no reports of games between the Antelope BBC and the Wyandott BBC. However, the Hope BBC did play a pair of games against the Wyandotts, a home and home series. The result of the first game is unknown. Given their record in games against other clubs that autumn, it seems likely that the Wyandott BBC lost, but this is speculation. In the return game on November 19, the Hope BBC won easily, 61–10.²⁸

* The spellings of Wyandotte and Wyandott, with and without the "e," were used interchangeably for the county and city names at the time.

† The Antelopes also had a player named Rix, perhaps a relative of the umpire from the Frontiers.

As the clubs in the Kansas City area sorted their relative positions in the local baseball hierarchy, the challenge from the Frontier BBC was published in October. Intercity baseball was about to expand beyond the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers.

Leavenworth vs. Kansas City

The first club to accept the challenge from the Frontier BBC was the Hope BBC. Given that a member of the Frontiers had umpired the first game between the Hopes and Antelopes, members of all three clubs were familiar with their counterparts. On October 17, the secretary of the Hope BBC, Thomas McLane, published a response to the Frontiers' challenge, which "we, at a regular meeting of the Hope Club, concluded to accept."²⁹ On October 20, the *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin* informed its readers it would publish details of the home and home match, "as soon as preliminaries are arranged." Yet, no games between the two clubs were reported in Leavenworth newspapers, which had diligently published such information all year. It was less than a week later that the Hope BBC walked off the field in their championship game against the Antelope BBC. Perhaps that made the Frontiers leery of scheduling their own match with the Hope club.

The Wyandott BBC also accepted the challenge from the Frontier BBC. The first intercity game between Kansas teams was played in Leavenworth on Thursday, October 25. The train from Kansas City was delayed, so the game did not begin until almost 4:00 in the afternoon. Consequently, only five innings were played, with the Wyandotts batting last. They were still a relatively new team, and half of their first nine were unable to make the trip. Thus, it is not surprising that they were shutout in the first game, 53–0. At the time, being shutout in an inning or a game was referred as a whitewash.³⁰

The second game between the Wyandott and Frontier clubs was played in Wyandotte, presumably on the levee grounds. The Frontiers took an early train to Kansas City on Friday, November 2, and played that same morning. The score was again one sided but not a whitewash. The Frontiers won, 78–17. However, their day was not done. That same afternoon, they traveled across the border into Kansas City, Missouri for another game.³¹

The Antelope BBC had also accepted the challenge of the Frontier BBC to play a home and home series, beginning with a game east of McGee Street in Kansas City on the afternoon of November 2. While inclement weather in November might be expected to interfere with baseball games in Kansas City, it was not a problem in 1866. "The storms of early autumn having passed[,] the Indian Summer, with all its mellowed splendor, is upon us." The Frontiers enjoyed the fair weather with a 67–37 victory over the Antelopes. Thomas S. Cunningham of the Wyandott BBC was the umpire. "The [Leavenworth] boys speak in the highest terms of the hospitable treatment received at the hands of both [the Wyandott and Antelope] Clubs, nothing being wanted to make their visit one that will never be forgotten."³²

These base ball clubs were clubs in the truest sense, befitting a membership made up of the pillars of the community. They elected officers, they formally published challenges and replies for games, and they participated in activities other than ballgames during these

intercity events.³³ The *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce* described the events that followed the defeat of their hometown Antelopes.

At the close of the game the ball was presented by Capt. Rix and responded to by Capt. Coolidge by a brief but pointed speech, in which he complimented the Antelopes in the highest terms for their skill and determined disposition. ... At 7 o'clock the Frontiers and a number of the Wyandott club were escorted to the Union Hotel Dining Rooms, where a sumptuous repast was served, to which all did ample justice. After which, wine was produced, toasts drunk and responded to, speeches made and a general good time followed until train time, when the visitors [were] escorted to the depot and started on their "home run," apparently well pleased with the day's entertainment.³⁴

Friday was a long but rewarding day for the Frontier BBC—traveling south by train in the morning, winning the first intercity baseball game in Kansas before lunch, traveling east across the river into Missouri, winning their second intercity game that afternoon against the top club in Kansas City, enjoying an evening of food and wine, and returning north by train to Leavenworth. Of course, there was still a return game to be played in Leavenworth.

The second game between the Frontiers and Antelopes was scheduled for the following Friday, November 9, but it was postponed because of the "inauspicious state of the weather." A weather front apparently passed through quickly, and the delay lasted only a week. The brief delay actually gave both clubs a "better opportunity of preparing themselves for the contest."³⁵ Members of the Frontier club met the "extra" train with the party from Kansas City and escorted their guests to lunch at Cuenin's. The game on the Cincinnati grounds was called at 2:00, and by late afternoon, the nine-inning contest had ended. The *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin* summarized the results. "It was the opinion of those present, also the decision of the umpire, that the 'Antelopes' were a little too fast for the 'Frontiers,' this time." The Antelope BBC won the second game, 47–24.³⁶ A box score for the game is shown on the next page.

As in Kansas City, the hosts lost the game but treated their opponents to dinner and other festivities. Captain Coolidge of the Frontiers made a speech and presented Captain Rix of the Antelopes with "the trophy—a handsome ball." Captain Rix responded with a speech of appreciation, and the clubs headed back to Cuenin's for supper. As described by the Kansas City reporter, "Again the 'Frontiers' *did their guests proud*, by inviting them to a table that fairly groaned with the good things thereon." The features of the supper included quail, prairie-chicken, wine, and several speeches. After the feast, the members of both clubs and their guests walked to the Opera House to watch the musical drama *Daughter of the Regiment* at the invitation of the theater manager, George D. Chaplin. Chaplin was a former actor who took over management of the Opera House from William Coolidge, captain of the Frontier BBC. "At the close of the performance, Mr. Chaplin was called out, and very dexterously, but graciously, avoided a speech."³⁷

This collegial atmosphere associated with the series between the Frontier and Antelope clubs was not threatened during the coming weeks. Although the series was tied at one game apiece, no third game was scheduled. The 1866 season had ended in a tie.

The score of the two Clubs stand as follows :

ANTELOPES. O. R.		FRONTIER O. R.	
Daniels, c.....	0 ..9	Teets.....	5 ..2
Rix, p.....	4 ..6	Carsey.....	3 ..3
Holmes, s.....	4 ..4	Parmalee.....	3 ..1
Cass, 1 b.....	2 ..5	Coolidge.....	3 ..3
Green, 2 b.....	5 ..3	Moonlight.....	3 ..3
Cooper 3 b.....	4 ..5	U Creighton.....	3 ..4
Toler 4 f.....	0 ..7	McCahon.....	3 ..3
Wood, c f.....	4 ..4	J. Creighton.....	2 ..2
Prindle, r f.....	4 ..5	Rice.....	2 ..2
	27 47		27 24

**Fly Catches—Frontier—Teets 5 ;
Carsey 2 ; Moonlight 1 ; J. Creighton 1 ;
Antelopes—Daniels 10 ; Rix 2 ;
Holmes 1 ; Green 3 ; Cooper 1 ; Toler
1 ; Prindle 1. Total 19.
Whitewashes—Frontier 4.
INNINGS.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Frontier 0, 0, 0, 6, 2, 3, 0, 7, 6—24
Antelope, 1, 4, 4, 7, 7, 6, 4, 11, 3—47.**

Antelope BBC vs. Frontier BBC, November 16, 1886 (*Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 18 November 1886, page 3). The early box score was similar to those used in cricket. It lists the players, along with the number of outs (O) and runs (R) each player made. Fly catches were tallied because they were challenging to make without gloves (a line of text seems to be missing for the Frontier BBC fly catches). The line score at the bottom indicates which four innings were whitewashes (0 runs) for the Frontier BBC.

Post Script

When compared with the tale surrounding Wild Bill Hickok's alleged role as an umpire in Kansas City in 1866, the facts of that baseball season are notably different. As the Hickok tale mentioned, the Frontiers and Antelopes did play a home and home series, but not on Saturdays. In addition, each team won the contest on their opponent's grounds; the Frontiers were not defeated in both games. There was no team in Atchison to challenge for the championship. The umpires—who were members of the base ball clubs—were not pelted with vegetables or epithets. The Frontier BBC could claim the championship of Kansas, having twice defeated the only club in the state to accept their challenge, the Wyandott BBC. The Antelope BBC could claim the championship of Kansas City, having won two of their three games with the Hope BBC. The question of who was the champion of the Missouri Valley remained unanswered when the Frontiers and Antelopes chose to play only two games, leaving the series tied and the players well fed.

The Frontier BBC and the Antelope BBC both reorganized in 1867, and they were joined by several new clubs in the region. Instead of playing each other for the regional championship, a more formal arrangement for the championship of Kansas was organized at the state fair held in Lawrence. A silver baseball was offered as the prize, a traveling trophy that was never surrendered by the Kaw Valley BBC of Lawrence. The silver trophy and its case are now housed in the collection of the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka (<http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/221667>). The Wyandott BBC competed with a local

cricket club and a team of railroad employees for the championship of Wyandotte. The victorious railroad employees earned those bragging rights.³⁸

The Antelope BBC reorganized for the 1867 season on April 10, and they held their first practice the following Friday. However, coverage in the *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce* was not as extensive as during 1866. Most of the club's games were again intramural, but they apparently were not as regular as the weekly Tuesday and Friday games the previous year.³⁹ In mid-June, the *Daily Journal of Commerce* offered encouragement to their Antelopes, but the commentary also expressed the writer's disappointment in how the season had progressed to that point.

Who said the Antelopes were all dead, and that base ball sport in our town was at a low ebb? Not a bit of it. The Antelopes still live and not only have their being, but an interesting game occasionally. ... Other towns in our vicinity are interested in this great game, and by their exertions put the young men of our town somewhat in the shade. This should not be, and we hope that from this time the Antelopes will exert themselves and put a nine in the field that will compete with any on the frontier.⁴⁰

As in Wyandotte, Kansas City had at least “three well-organized clubs” that summer: the Antelope BBC, Hector BBC, and Pacific BBC. No reports of games between the Pacifics and the other clubs were found. The Hector replaced the Hope BBC (Thomas McLean was the secretary of both clubs). They played the Antelopes at least twice (July 20 and August 2). The Hector won both times. Between these two games, the *Daily Journal of Commerce* published a challenge on July 24 from the Frontier BBC and, without mentioning a specific club, urged “our boys” to answer the challenge for a home and home match, but it was not to be.⁴¹

No repeat of the celebrated contests between the Frontier BBC and Antelope BBC of November 1866 was forthcoming. Both clubs continued to play the next few years as the number of teams increased, including the first African American clubs in 1868. However, the nature of the game began to change as gentlemen's clubs quickly gave way to town teams of the best local players. These town teams were occasionally augmented by out-of-town ringers, especially pitchers and catchers after the rules allowed overhand pitching.⁴² Yet, 1866 was still a grand inaugural season for intercity baseball in Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, all myths aside.

Acknowledgements

I accessed newspapers online through Newspapers.com, Newspaper Archive, Genealogy Bank, the State Historical Society of Missouri Digital Newspaper Project (<https://shsmo.org/newspaper/mdnp/>), and the University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (<https://digital.library.illinois.edu/collections/4f495de0-b7e2-0133-1d02-0050569601ca-4>). Laura Darnell, Director of the Leavenworth County Historical Society, provided the address of Judge Robert Crozier's home, which helps to identify the approximate location of the grounds of the Frontier BBC in “Cincinnati.”

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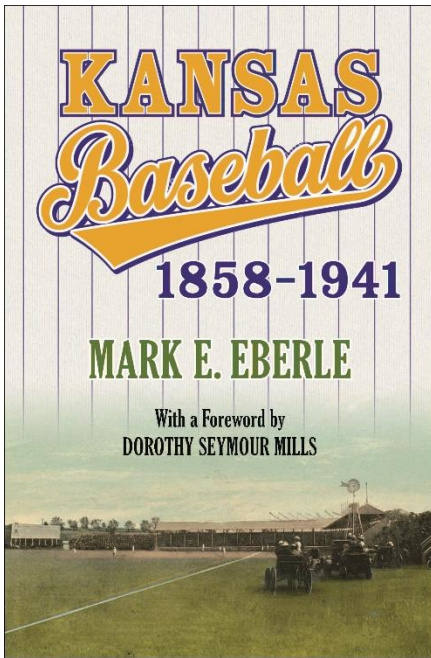
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- ³² *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 31 October 1866, p 3; 4 November 1866, p 3. ♦ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 4 November 1866, p 4. ♦ *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, 3 November 1866, p 3. ♦ *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, 10 November 1866, p 3.
- ³³ Eberle (2017).
- ³⁴ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 4 November 1866, p 3.
- ³⁵ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 9 November 1866, p 4. ♦ *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, 8 November 1866, p 3; 13 November 1866, p 3.
- ³⁶ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 17 November 1866, p 3; 18 November 1866, p 3. ♦ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 17 November 1866, p 4. ♦ *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, 17 November 1866, p 3.
- ³⁷ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 17 November 1866, p 3; 18 November 1866, p 3. ♦ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 17 November 1866, p 4. ♦ *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, 17 November 1866, p 3; 31 December 1866, p 2.
- ³⁸ Eberle (2017).
- ³⁹ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 11 April 1867, p 3; 13 April 1867, p 3; 26 June 1867, p 4; 29 June 1867, p 4; 4 July 1867, p 4.
- ⁴⁰ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 19 June 1867, p 4.
- ⁴¹ *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, 19 July 1867, p 4; 20 July 1867, p 4; 24 July 1867, p 4; 3 August 1867, p 4; 7 August 1867, p 4.
- ⁴² *Kansas Daily Tribune*, 23 June 1868, p 3; 7 July 1868, p 3; 10 July 1868, p 3. ♦ *Lawrence Daily Republican*, 9 July 1868, p 3. ♦ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 9 July 1868, p 4. ♦ Eberle (2017).



You can learn more about the early history of baseball as played by local teams in Kansas in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of nine towns still playing baseball in the state’s oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.