

THE ABNER DOUBLEDAY MYTH

Who Invented Baseball?

In 1905, Abraham G. Mills was appointed to head a commission to discover who invented baseball after a dispute between Henry Chadwick and Albert Spalding. The British-born Chadwick, contended that the game evolved from the English game of Rounders. Spalding claimed it was invented in America, by an American. Noted as one of the great pitchers of the 1870s, Albert Goodwill Spalding (1850–1915) made his mark as Baseball's foremost promoter, entrepreneur and executive. After William Hulbert's death, Spalding succeeded his lifelong friend as president of both the Chicago White Stockings and the National League of Professional Ball Clubs. In 1876, he and his brother started a line of sporting goods that was so successful that it continues to flourish today. Twelve years later, Spalding took his players on a worldwide tour to spread the gospel of Baseball and in 1911 created a huge campaign to have it declared the national pastime. When the Players' League started up in reaction to the NL's unfair "reserve clause," Spalding launched an all-out war to crush his rivals. His inevitable victory confirmed that he was one of the country's most brilliant, powerful and ruthless moguls.

An avid promoter of Baseball throughout his life, Henry Chadwick (1824–1908) became the game's chief journalistic voice and its moral conscience during the game's early years. He launched one of the first baseball newspaper columns, covering games between the Knickerbockers and their foes, wrote and edited the most popular players' manual, and recorded statistical information as a way to evaluate athletic performance. When drinking and gambling threatened to undermine the sport's popularity, Chadwick spoke out vehemently against crooked dealings and helped to restore integrity and fair play.

The "Mills Commission," appointed by Spalding, consisted of the following members; Chairman Abraham G. Mills (National League President from 1882 to 1884); Morgan G. Bulkeley (the National League's first president in 1876); Arthur P. Gorman (a former player and ex-president of the Washington Base Ball Club); Nicholas E. Young, (the first secretary of the National League and its fifth president, 1884 to 1902); Alfred J. Reach (former Philadelphia Athletics player, 1871 to 1875 and owner of Reach Sporting Goods); and George Wright, (former player with the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings and National Association and National League player from 1871 to 1882, and founder of the Wright and Ditson Sporting Goods Company); and James E. Sullivan (president of the Amateur Athletic Union).

The commission based their final decision almost exclusively on the testimony of 71-year-old Abner Graves, from Denver, Colorado. After reading a 'call for people who had knowledge of the beginnings of the game' in the April 3, 1905, edition of the *Beacon Journal* in Akron, Ohio, Graves fabricated his story of 1839, Abner Doubleday (1819–1893; Major General of the U.S. Army and Civil War hero), and Cooperstown, where Graves had attended school with Doubleday. He claimed to recall seeing drawings of a field in the dirt and on paper by Doubleday. Graves sent his story to the *Beacon Journal* and it was published with the title "*Abner Doubleday Invented Baseball.*"

The Mills Commission had the story that they were searching for. No one from the commission ever corresponded, interviewed or met with Graves. It was not important to the Mills Commission that Abner Graves was five years old in 1839 or that Doubleday was enrolled in the military academy at West Point in 1839 and not in Cooperstown, NY. The Mills Commission had found their American to base the beginnings of the game on. Although no one from the Mills Commission ever did, there were reasons to question Graves' credentials. A few years after he delivered Doubleday to the world, he killed his wife and spent his final days in an asylum.

The final report was issued on December 30, 1907, claiming that Abner Doubleday had invented Baseball. Graves was not mentioned by name in the report, and at the time the country was still naive as to the actual origins of the game. Abner Doubleday never claimed to have "invented" the game and he never mentioned Baseball in any of his extensive diaries. Although a statue of him stands on the site of the Battle of Gettysburg, he is not enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

In 1934 an old and fragile baseball was discovered in the attic of a farmhouse in Fly Creek, NY, about three miles from Cooperstown. It was purchased for \$5.00 by Stephan C. Clark, a Cooperstown, New York resident. He had gained considerable wealth due to his association with the Singer Sewing Machine Company and he had the original idea to display the ball along with other baseball items. The ball was believed to have once belonged to Abner Graves(!). It was therefore assumed that Doubleday himself must have at some time actually touched the "magic" ball, and it became known as the "Doubleday Baseball."

The building that Clark chose to house his collection is now the Cooperstown Village Offices. The exhibit was a tremendous success. He soon received the backing of the National and American League presidents, Ford Frick and William Harridge as well as the Commissioner of Baseball, Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Clark began to receive numerous items as the news spread. Frick proposed that Cooperstown house the "Hall of Fame." The first group was elected in January of 1936 and the Cooperstown, N.Y. building was dedicated on June 12, 1939, to mark "Baseball's (dubious) Centennial Year."

Source: <http://www.19cbaseball.com/game-2.html>

1. What 2 people are arguing over the origins of baseball?
2. What is suspicious or maybe biased about the committee formed to investigate the beginnings of baseball?
3. What does Albert S. have to gain with baseball being more popular and being purely American?
4. How did poor journalism contribute to this myth?
5. Why is Graves not credible or a good source?
6. Discuss the Hall of Fame and how it came to be (or why Cooperstown?):