

Some Tips¹ on Finding Early Ballgames and Ballclubs

This guide attempts to help new researchers learn how to find information on early base ball clubs and games in particular areas. It includes some practical advice from some of our most productive current origins researchers. Most of the numerous recent finds have come from digital searches of period newspapers. Note²

Tip 1: Befriend a local hands-on search specialist!

Many participants will be attempting to find very early ballplaying data for their hometowns or other areas of special interest. They may find important practical advice from their municipal or educational libraries. Reference librarians are commonly patient and thoughtful suppliers of useful search advice, and may also know of special collections or local search aids. If so, tell them thanks from the Protoball Project!

Tip 2: Try some internet sites that earlier origins diggers have found useful!

¹ **We asked a brain bank of our most wizened Search Wizards for some savvy help here. Their tips are sprinkled below. And Jeff Kittel's list of things he wishes he'd known when he started is in the Appendix at the end of this shortish document.**

² **About microfilm. Search Wizard R.H. writes: For smaller localities, it is sheer dumb luck to find the local newspapers online. More generally you need to search them the old-fashioned way, by looking at microfilm. Where to find the microfilm? In addition to the local library, I would check the local historical society. Next after that, many states have state archives and/or state libraries for this kind of thing. Academic libraries tend not to be the best sources of newspaper microfilm, but this isn't an absolute rule, so look there as well. The local public library may or may not be able to get microfilm through interlibrary loan (ILL) assuming they have a microfilm reader. Make friends with the person who handles ILL. Make sure that the microfilm you want exists before you request it, so as to maintain credibility.**

21 Below is a tabulation of several online search sites that have proven productive to
22 earlier origins researchers, and that includes practical insights from several
23 accomplished diggers. The sites are arranged in the general order of their reported
24 utility to making new finds – Those seen as the best bets are listed toward the top of
25 each subcategory.

26 This is just an initial list – it's only version 1.1. We hope to continually improve it and
27 to organize a version 2.0 in a few weeks. Please send us information from your own
28 experience to help us assemble a more complete and error-free update.

29

30 *Special thanks* to Search Wizards John Thorn, Chris Ryland, Jeff Kittel, and Richard
31 Hershberger for major contributions to this initial document.

32

33

34

Version 1.1, 3/9/2014

35

On-line Search Sites³

36 **A. Broad Base Ball Coverage – free** *Note*⁴

37 ☐ Chronicling America (1836-1922) <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

38 ☐ UPenn's Guide to US newspapers

39 <http://guides.library.upenn.edu/historicalnewspapersonline> *Note*⁵

40 ☐ Sporting Life digital collections (1883-present) <http://search.la84.org/> *Note*⁶

41 ☐ Paper of Record (via SABR) <http://sabr.org/paperofrecord> *Notes*⁷

15³ *From Search Wizard J.K.: "Between UPenn, Chronicling America, the pay site GenealogyBank*
16 *and 19th Century US Newspapers, you can find most anything."*

17⁴ *Among the search veterans whom we consulted, the first two sites, Chronicling America and*
18 *UPenn, emerged as the best places to try first: about Chronicling American Search Wizard C.*
19 *R writes, "it's a great way to get started and start to learn what possibilities the digitized*
20 *newspapers have to offer."*

21⁵ *Search Wizards J. K. and B. A. suggest this site as one good place to start. From J.K.: "The*
22 *list is really good and covers pretty much everything I use."*

23⁶ *Click on "research"*

24

25

- 42[] Google Books <http://books.google.com> *Note*⁸
- 43[] Google Newspapers *Note*⁹ <http://news.google.com/newspapers>
- 44[] Online Historical Newspapers <http://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/>
- 45[] Illinois Digital Newspaper Collection [http://veridian.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?](http://veridian.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=p&p=home&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----)
- 46[a=p&p=home&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----](http://veridian.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=p&p=home&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----)
- 47[] NYTimes (1851 to 1923) <http://query.nytimes.com/search/query?srchst=p>
- 48[] Wikipedia online - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_newspaper_archives
- 49[] American Memory Project - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>
- 50[] Newspaper Cat Catalog of Digital Historical Newspapers <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/hnccoll>

51

52

53 **B. Top Pay Sites**¹⁰

- 54 [] Genealogybank.com *Note*¹¹ <http://genealogyback.com/gbank/>
- 55 [] Ancestry.com <http://ancestry.com>
- 56[] Newspaperarchive.com <http://newspaperarchive.com>

57

58 **C. Commercial Databases Available Via Some Libraries and Universities**

59 *Note*¹²

26⁷ *You'll need your SABR ID and password. Search Wizard B.A. notes that this site has mostly*

27 *Canadian and Mexican sources.*

28⁸ *Click on "More," then "Books"*

29⁹ *This site is, helpfully, organized by state*

30¹⁰ *Search Wizard B.A. notes that also, there's a British newspaper archive online (for pay) for*

31 *those researching British ballplaying.*

32¹¹ *Search wizard R. H. writes: This is by far the most useful pay site. It is the only one I*

33 *subscribe to.*

34¹² *Ask your favorite new librarian friend!*

35

36

60[] 19th Century US Newspapers <http://gdc.gale.com/products/19th-century-u.s.-newspapers/>

61[] Accessible Archives <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/preLog>

62[] African American Newspapers (Readex) (1827-1998) [http://www.readex.com/content/african-](http://www.readex.com/content/african-american-newspapers-1827-1998)
63[american-newspapers-1827-1998](http://www.readex.com/content/african-american-newspapers-1827-1998)

64[] America's Historical Newspapers (Readex) (1718-1876) <http://www.newsbank.com> **Note¹³**

65[] ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1812-2009)

66<http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>

67[] World Newspaper Archive [http://www.crl.edu/collaborative-digitization/world-newspaper-](http://www.crl.edu/collaborative-digitization/world-newspaper-archive)
68[archive](http://www.crl.edu/collaborative-digitization/world-newspaper-archive)

69

70 **D. Some Already- Known Regional and Local Sites**

71[] Fulton – New York State <http://fultonhistory.com/> **Note¹⁴**

72[] Brooklyn Eagle – NYC – [link inoperative 2/25/2014]

73[] Toronto Star – Canada - <http://thestar.pagesofthpast.ca/>

74[] Northern NYS – <http://nyhistoricnewspapers.org>

75[] NYS Hudson Valley – <http://news.hrvh.org>

76[] Suffolk County NYS - <http://www.live-library.com/historicnewspapers.org>

77[] PA Civil War era papers

78-[http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu/Default/Skins/civilwar/Client.asp?](http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu/Default/Skins/civilwar/Client.asp?skin=civilwar&AW=1393338664156&AppName=2)

79[skin=civilwar&AW=1393338664156&AppName=2](http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu/Default/Skins/civilwar/Client.asp?skin=civilwar&AW=1393338664156&AppName=2)

80 [] North Carolina <http://www.ncdcr.gov/archives/Home>

81[] Atlanta Historic Newspapers <http://atlnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/atlnewspapers/search>

82[] Index to Early Memphis Newspapers <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/mckibben/www/index.html>

83[] California Digital – <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>

84[] Idaho, Utah – <http://lib.byu.edu/digital/>

85[] Colorado - <http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

37¹³ Searches here may duplicate those of Genealogy Bank, above

38¹⁴ *Several Search Wizards report that the Fulton site can be hard to use.*

39

40

86[] **Historical Newspapers in Washington** <http://www.sos.wa.gov/history/newspapers.aspx>

87[] **Historic Oregon Newspapers** <http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/>

88[] **Nevada** – <http://206.194.194.211:2011/cdm/>

89[] **Western Canada** – <http://britishcolonist.ca/>

90

91

92**E. Iffy Sites – Evaluation for Local Origins Searches Needed!**

93

94[] **Hathi Trust Digital Library** <http://www.hathitrust.org/>

95[] **Internet Archive** <https://archive.org/>

96

97

98

99

100

101

102

103

104

105 E. Some Useful Search Strategies^{15 16}

106[1] To find the modern ("New York") game – try "base ball," "base-ball," "match
107game," "ball club," "game of ball"

108[2] To find accounts (and later reflections) on baserunning games that preceded
109modern base ball – try "play ball," "play at ball," "game of ball," "game of base,"
110"cricket," "game of wicket," "wicket game," "old-fashioned base," "round ball," "bat

43¹⁵ **Search Wizard C.R. writes:** When you search historic newspapers, you are almost always searching
44the optically scanned text, which was generated by a computer program. Because of the age and poor
45quality of most of these original sources, your search will never be any better than the faulty text that lies
46behind the image. Because of the magnitude of these errors, you may want to be creative at searching in
47order to outsmart them. For example, the words "base ball" are often indexed as "base hall," and a search
48for "base ball" on *Chronicling America* will also never discover the "bare hall match" played between the
49Jefferson and National base ball clubs in 1866. So despite the power of the advanced search discussed
50below, sometimes it is better to start out simple, in order to encounter as few errors as possible.

51

52Advanced Search. Most sites have an "advanced search" function that allows you to control your search
53and limit by newspaper or year. The examples below are not necessarily applicable to all sites, but most
54sites provide these functions in some form, either by filling out a form, or by entering a string of words.

55

561. Most sites will automatically search for results containing all the words entered in the search.

57Sometimes to be sure this is happening, you will need to combine words using the word "**AND** ." For
58example, **base AND ball**.

592. **OR** allows you to search for either one of two or more words, but not necessarily both. For example,
60**championship OR trophy** will bring you articles mentioning one or the other, but not necessarily both.

61Chronicling America's advanced search uses the phrase **any of the words** to refer to this kind of search.

623. String searching allows you to search for a phrase, using quotation marks. For example, "**base ball**
63**match**" will bring you articles that only contain those words in that order. Chronicling America and other
64sites allow you to enter the phrase in a text box for searching.

654. **NOT** allows you to remove a word from your search. For example, if your results are being cluttered by
66references to football championships, you can search for **championship NOT football**. Google search
67uses a minus sign for this: **championship -football**. Chronicling America does not appear to allow this
68kind of searching.

695. A **wild card** allows you to search for a missing word in a string. For example, the Google News Archive
70allows you to substitute an asterisk (*) for any word in a search. For example, searching for "**new * base**
71**ball club**" returns results including the New Haven Base Ball Club and the New Dominion Base Ball
72Club. Wild cards are common in commercial databases available through libraries.

736. **Proximity search** allows you to search for words near each other. For example, Chronicling America's
74Advanced Search allows you to enter words and then set them to be within 5, 10, 50, or a 100 words of
75each other. Some commercial databases, especially those available through libraries, will allow you to
76specify the number of words, using the **NEAR** command.

77¹⁶ **Search Wizard M. B. writes:** I would recommend that you pay attention to the form of the
78terms you find as you go further and further back in time. The more rural, the more unique and
79peculiar the successful search terms. What I would suggest is it is important to pay attention

80

111ball,” “bat and ball,” “goal ball,” “plugging,” “burning,” “soaking,” “town ball,”
112“rounders (rare in US),” “massachusetts game,” “bass ball, “baste ball.”¹⁷

113[3] Many, but not all, sites will helpfully look for exact strings of characters when put
114in quotation marks – thus, “base ball” will be more precise query than plain base ball,
115which may count as hits all the many “ball” cites and “base “sites, precious few with
116relevance to your favorite pastime.

117[4] Is your find *really* new? To determine if a particular club or game is already
118known, run a quick check by doing an “enhanced” search at
119<http://protoball.org/Special:EnhancedSearch>. And/or check the interactive map for
120your immediate area, to be found by repositioning the interactive map at
121http://protoball.org/Pre-pro_Baseball.

122[5] MLB Official Historian John Thorn, our Yoda, has generously offered to assist
123local groups if they get stuck or need advice. You can reach him at
124john.thorn@mlb.com.

125

126F. Local-Origins Bibliography

127We have begun compiling a sortable bibliography on local origins at
128[http://protoball.org/Local-Origins Bibliography](http://protoball.org/Local-Origins_Bibliography). Please add to this initial 95-item list.

129

130Don’t forget: send corrections and additions to Lmccray@mit.edu for Version 2.0 of
131this wee guide to origins-era searches.

132

133

134Appendix

82to the names and details within your find stories, and use those as your key search terms. I
83use all the terms listed here, and look at the common club names – Eagle, Pioneer,
84Knickerbocker, etc.

85¹⁷ Search wizard B.A. writes: I’ve had some luck with the search term “match game”--so long
86as you can exclude the word “billiards” from the search!

87

88

89

90

Things Jeff Kittel Wishes He'd Known at the Outset¹⁸

136[] **Start with a simple Google search. You never know what you're going to find. This also**
137**applies to any database or search engine you can get your hands on. Don't be afraid to look**
138**ten, twenty, fifty pages deep.**

139[] **You're looking for leads/clues - any piece of information that will lead you to what you're**
140**really looking for. The odds are that you're not going to find what you want immediately so**
141**embrace any piece of information that moves you closer to your goal. You never know when a**
142**random name, place or date will lead to another, more fruitful search.**

143[] **Be persistent. Don't give up. I've been looking for a specific piece of information for over a**
144**decade now and still haven't found it. That doesn't mean I'm going to quit. Believe that the**
145**information is there and that it's only a matter of time and effort before you find it.**

146[] **"Base ball" is two words, not one. Searching for "baseball" will not get you what you want.**
147**Also, searching for "town ball" will get you countless articles about town halls. Searching for**
148**"ball game" will get you countless articles about people getting scammed. Try variations of**
149**bat, ball, club, game, etc. Be creative. Different search engines are more responsive than**
150**others and what works with one will not necessarily work on the other.**

151[] **The Protoball Glossary of Games has a nice list of games that you can search for if you're**
152**looking for early bat and ball games in an area.**

153[] **Search the Protoball Chronology. It will give you an idea of what is already known about an**
154**area and source material that you should look at.**

155[] **Secondary historical sources are also a good place to start. You might find a history of a**
156**city, county or state that mentions early baseball. Read the footnotes and bibliographies. The**
157**bibliographies will give you other material to search that you may not be aware of and you**
158**never know what you'll find in a footnote. I found a reference to 18th century ball playing in**
159**St. Louis in a footnote in a book about French colonial agriculture. You just never know.**

160[] **Memoirs, biographies, diaries, collections of letters can be tedious to go through but also**
161**fruitful. If you can find searchable, electronic copies, that certainly makes it easier. A lot of**
162**state historical society websites have these collections.**

163[] **Google books is a great resource. Searching free Google ebooks will weed out newer books**
164**that you can't access, leaving you with a lot of 19th century books that are fully accessible.**

165[] **Try searching "history [the city or state you're looking at] base ball [or game, club, etc.]"**
166**Something like "Illinois history town ball" turns up all kinds of good stuff.**

167[] **Local genealogical sites can also be fruitful. There are many that have a great wealth of**
168**searchable information and, even if they don't, they can point you to places that do**

91¹⁸ ***Email to the Protoball Project, March 8, 2014.***

169[] **Local historical societies and history museums usually have archives that you can go**
170**through, as well as staff that will help you find what you're looking for. Stop by and see what**
171**they have.**

172[] **Search all of the free online newspaper databases that you can find. This is where all of the**
173**meat is going to be and where you're going to find the primary source evidence you're looking**
174**for. But be aware of the history of newspapers in the area you're looking at and when they**
175**started publishing. They may not cover the time frame you need or want. Also, be aware of**
176**the fact that they may not be covering sporting activities. Some did, some didn't. Some**
177**started doing it later than others.**

178[] **Your local library may have an archivist or researcher on staff. Talk to them. Your library**
179**probably offers public access to databases that individuals don't have. ProQuest, 19th**
180**Century Newspapers, and that kind of cool stuff is usually accessible at a local library or**
181**online if you have a library card. Also, don't be scared of the microfilm. Sometimes you have**
182**to get your hands dirty and to do this the old fashioned way.**

183[] **If all of this fails to work and you don't find what you're looking for, start over. Don't be**
184**afraid to do through a database again and again. You may have missed something. Redefined**
185**search terms may turn something up. Blind random luck may strike. Just don't quit. Find**
186**better sources.**

187[] **Never be afraid to ask for help. There is always somebody out there smarter than us who**
188**knows more. And usually they're nice folks who like to help with stuff like this.**

189[] **"Take good notes and document where you found every piece of information" is something I**
190**wish someone had told me ten years ago.**

191