ISSUE #2 -- THE GROUNDS

VERSION 1.0 – From Discussion of September 10 through September 18, 2014: Compiled by Marty Payne

The purpose of the discussion was to learn more about where early baseball was played and the conditions under which it was played. The discussion covered from the late 1850's through about 1880, but the bulk of the information seems to focus on the Base Ball Fever seasons post- Civil War. Among the questions posed and later articulated included:

- Where were the grounds these clubs played on located?
- How were the grounds provided? Were they public facilities? Open spaces? Were they privately sponsored? Were they rented?
- Are there physical descriptions of the grounds?
- When and where do we find enclosed grounds? Grandstands? Gates?
- What is the quality of the grounds? When and Where do we find an expectation for the condition of the playing surface? The level? Size? Infield? Fences? Or any other physical standard?
- Are some grounds found near transportation depots?

While none of these questions were definitively answered, we have compiled and compared valuable data. What is provided from the research in these reports give us a start on the early grounds as far as where, when, and how, along with sparse yet teasing physical descriptions of surfaces and amenities.

References in these reports to things like the health resorts, city park movements, fairgrounds, and some instances grounds being near transportation points, all help put baseball in context with the larger picture of what is going on in American Culture at this time.

The discussion began with *Marty Payne's* 9/10 posting:

The Grounds
Eastern Shore of Maryland
Town populations 1,000-2,200
1867-1885

There are three sources for playing grounds in the newspapers of this rural area. Some early grounds were provided by prominent men of the community. In 1867 it was Dr. Earle in Easton, and Dr. Taymine in Galena. In 1870 Wm. Harrison provided a field at his Canton Farms in St. Michaels, and as late as 1880 Commodore Feiberger provided space in Easton. All were located just outside of town. In the early years honorary members and sponsors were sometimes listed, so they may have been early enthusiasts and sponsors.

Another venue were rented grounds. Again, they were usually on the edge or just outside of town. It appears that the team, or its sponsors, rented the lot and were responsible for the expenses of building and maintenance. They might be referred to by name, such as Todd's lot or Bayly's lot, or simply as the lot behind Mr. Councell's house.

As early as 1871, a team from the Trappe District was using the public facility of the Hambleton Fairgrounds. By 1885 an Easton paper lamented that the town should provide the grounds, "there is hardly a town in the country that does not do that." By the mid 1880's Easton was playing at the Idlewild Fair grounds, and Cambridge at The Driving Park. At these public facilities the town teams arranged their games around horse racing, target shooting, County Fairs, and bicycle racing. Again, these places were located at the edge of town.

All of these venues are easily findable by contemporary description of location. What is lacking is detailed physical description. But there are some tantalizing clues. As early as the fever season of 1867 admission was being charged. In 1873 Salisbury noted a grandstand shaded by "magnificent oaks," and due to expenses admission was to be collected at the "lower gate." In 1884 Eason's grounds were said to be "nicely fitted," with admission of 15c and extra 10c for the grandstands. A game at Todd's Park in Cambridge drew 1,000 people. Games in Federalsburg and Salisbury respectively drew 1,000 and 2,000. Such crowds were not frequent, but not unheard of. This limited data suggests that that even in these rural towns, one was likely to find enclosed grounds, and at an early point, grandstand seating. What is missing is reliable descriptions of the playing surface itself, other than the occasional complaints of holes, hills, size, sandy conditions and such from sore losers.

Marty

93 94 9/14/14 Second Posting from Marty Payne 95 96 Most of the grounds on the Eastern Shore of Maryland were just outside of town. 97 and in these small communities, in easy walking distance. Did proximity to 98 transportation centers influence where? The previously mentioned field at 99 Commodore Feiberger's on Point Road was close to Easton's port so accessible to 100 teams coming from other towns by steam boat. Canton Farms in St. Michaels lay 101 near the railroad on the east and about 200 yards from the town port to the east. 102 Yet the locations of other grounds do not seem to emphasize proximity to 103 transportation as a priority, even though in small towns they were bound to be fairly 104 close. 105 106 107 Physical description of the grounds was rare enough, but an actual description of the playing surface is even more rare. At a game between Cambridge and 108 109 Seaford, De. in 1873 the Delaware Club climbed in a wagon at the train depot while the visiting Cambridge Club, ..."'drove shank's mare.' We walked for some time 110 around vacant lots, leaping mud puddles, until we were brought to a dead halt 111 112 upon a pile of sand surrounded by cockle and prickly pears." This was the playing grounds. The grounds appear to be reasonably close enough to the train station 113 that it could be walked, but is it an accurate description of the playing surface, or is 114 it the exaggeration of sore losers? 115 116 Marty 117 118 119 9/11/14 -- Bruce Allardice responded with a brief listing of locations giving us a 120 glimpse of Chicago and much of the South. 121 122 All: 123 124 125 As to playing grounds: in the larger cities there generally were open public spaces. The modern "city park" movement had just begun, and most cities did not have a 126 formal park system. In the smaller towns, the players found any available open 127 128 field. In rural county seats, the game was often staged at the county fair grounds. 129 To get more specific: 130 131 Chicago--the first playing grounds were the site of the Cricket Club, just west of the 132 modern "loop." The White Stockings soon were playing at the Dexter Race Track. 133 New Orleans--Delachaise park. Metairie Race Track. 134 Charleston, SC--the grounds of the Citadel military academy. 135 Augusta--first games played on the grounds of the Augusta Arsenal. 136 137 Nashville--state fair grounds Savannah--the "commons", about where Forsyth Park now is. 138

Little Rock--the US army Arsenal. The grounds of St. John's College. 139 140 Memphis--numerous open grounds. Fort Pickering. 141 Hope this helps, 142 143 **Bruce Allardice** 144 145 9/11/14 146 #1 147 148 Jeff Kittel's report on St. Louis and Missouri is offered below and later deals with 149 cross river Kansas City, and then follows up by directly addressing the questions 150 offered earlier. 151 152 St. Louis certainly fits what Bruce mentioned. The earliest grounds, through the 153 war years, were public spaces and city parks. The park system in StL developed 154 155 over the course of the 1840s and parks were first established in the late 40s/early 50s. 156 157 158 The earliest grounds that I find in the source material is Gamble Lawn, which was located near Carr and Twentieth St., where Desoto Park is today. In 1858, it was 159 being used as a cricket grounds and there was also horse-racing on the grounds. 160 The earliest reference I have to baseball being played there comes from 1860. It 161 was probably the most used baseball ground in StL through the Civil War. 162 There were several early grounds in that same general area. Carr Square was 163 used by the Morning Star Club in the late 1850s and early 1860s and was only a 164 couple blocks east of the Gamble Addition, where Gamble Lawn was located. The 165 Laclede Grounds, which appears in the source material for the first time in 1860. 166 was about five blocks west of Gamble Lawn. 167 168 This was a residential area that had just been built up in 1850s and was really on 169 the outskirts of town. Most of the population of StL was living east of 18th street 170 and while the population was growing and pushing westward, we find most of the 171 early baseball grounds north, south, and west of the city center in areas that were 172 either undeveloped or was just beginning to be developed. 173 174 Lafayette Park was established in 1851, southwest of the city center and may have 175 been used as a baseball grounds as early as 1859. The St. Louis Fairgrounds was 176 177 at the extreme north end of the city and was established in 1856 for use by the St. Louis Agricultural and Mechanical Association, who held an annual fair at the site. 178 The first known match game in StL history was held at the Fairgrounds in 1860. 179 Both Lafayette Park and the Fairgrounds were popular locations for ball games 180 until about August of 1861, when both locations were occupied by Union troops. 181 The ball clubs would get Lafayette Park back in 1863 but the Fairgrounds were 182 183 occupied throughout the war.

One thing I've noticed is that both Carr Place and Lafayette Park were used by

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clubs whose members lived in the general area. Most of the members of the Morning Star Club, who played at Carr Place, lived within three blocks of the grounds. Three members of the Cyclone Club, who played at Lafayette Park, lived across the street from the park and the father of one of the club members was on the Board of Improvements of Lafayette Park.

Also, I'd note that StL had a great deal of open ground surrounding the city. This was land that was in the process of being developed but it had been mostly used for farming and grazing animals. The entire point of the development of the park system was to preserve some of this once common land for public use before it disappeared. All of the baseball grounds in StL, in the era that we're talking about, were built in these areas. There was nothing in the city center and really nothing east of 18th street.

Jeff

9/12/14 (*Jeff Kittel, cont.*)

Some more information on early baseball grounds in Missouri:

The earliest reference to ball grounds in Kansas City that I have in my notes comes from July 1866. It states that the Antelope Club, which appears to be the earliest known club in KC, was to play a game "on their grounds in the Addition, east of McGee street." These grounds were located in what was known as McGee's Addition, which was developed in the second half of the 1850s and was the first addition to the original layout of the city. To the best of my knowledge the McGee Addition was south of 12th street to about 20th street and between Main and Holmes St. For those familiar with KC, the Sprint Center is located in the Addition. The area was described in one history of the city as "the most level and unbroken ground in or about the city..."

I'm not sure if this tells us anything but it's interesting that the earliest grounds in both St. Louis and KC were on what would have been the outskirts of town and in areas that were newly developed or in the process of being developed. StL had a population of about 160,000 people in 1860 and most of them were living between the Mississippi River and 18th street. The city was rather densely populated and there wasn't much open space in that area to play baseball. They found that area outside of the city or in the less populated parts of town. KC was a much smaller town in 1860 - with only about 4500 people. I'm not nearly as familiar with the history of KC as I am with StL but I believe, again, that most of the population was living down by the river until the McGee Addition expanded the city southward.

Excluding StL, I've identified about fifty cities in Missouri that had ball clubs by 1870 and there are very few references in my notes that mention baseball grounds. I think it's around ten specific references to "grounds" from about sixty sources. This includes:

-a reference to the grounds of the Hesperian Club of St. Joseph, which were

- located "near the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad depot." 232
- 233 -a reference that states that the grounds of the Carthage (Mo.) Base Ball Club

were located "south of town." 234

235 -and a reference that locates the grounds of the Capitol Base Ball Club of Jefferson City "about a mile from town..." 236

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- A couple of other things I want to mention:
- -In 1858, it appears that both the Louisville BBC and the Eclipse BBC of Louisville, 239 KY, were playing games at the Cedar Hill Base Ball Grounds, which were located 240 241

on Kentucky Street, between Third and Fourth Streets. I don't think we have

anyone focusing on Kentucky, so I thought I'd just throw it out there.

-The first enclosed ballpark in StL was the Union Grounds, which opened in May of 1867, was located across Grand Avenue from St. Alphonsus Liquori Catholic Church, and was built by the Union BBC. The following year the Empire BBC built the Grand Avenue Grounds, on Grand Avenue (naturally). While most sources state that StL didn't have professional baseball until 1875, the existence of enclosed grounds, starting in 1867, would suggest otherwise.

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9/16/14 (*Jeff Kittel*, *cont.*)

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Is there early mention for other means of providing playing sites, such as privately furnished, or rented grounds?

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Leonard Matthews, the last president of the Cyclone Club of StL, in two different sources, mentions that the club used their own funds to get Lafayette Park "in order" and to "put the grounds in shape." He specifically mentions that the club spent \$600 dollars on their grounds in the antebellum period (the club was active from 1859 to 1861). That seems like a lot of money for the time and Matthews was guoted 30 odd years after the fact but there is some evidence to support his claims in the primary source material.

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In March of 1861, the Missouri Republican has several reports of the petitions of the Cyclones and the Commercial BBC, put to the St. Louis Common Council, asking for permission to use a specific part of Lafayette Park as a ball grounds and for "the right of leveling and smoothing" that area. Their request was granted and they were allowed to use the park as long as they made "the improvements necessary for the game at their own expense." In April, the Republican reported that the two clubs had "at considerable expense, fitted up their play ground in Lafayette Park..."

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So, in 1861 at least, the Cyclones and Commercials used their own funds to build a better baseball grounds in Lafayette Park, rather than just use any piece of available open land in St. Louis, of which there were many.

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-When and where do we find enclosed grounds? Grandstands? Gates? I mentioned earlier that the first enclosed grounds in StL was the Union Grounds, built on Grand Avenue in 1867. The Grand Avenue Grounds was built a year later.

-What is the quality of the grounds, and when and when do we find an expectation for the condition of the actual playing surface? Level? Size? Infield? Fences? Or any other physical standard?

On July of 1867, the Nationals of Washington came to St. Louis and played the Union and Empire Clubs. Both games were played at the enclosed Union Grounds. There is an article in The Ball Players Chronicle, dated August 1, 1867, that mentions the state of the field at the Union Grounds. It says that "The fact was, the grounds were entirely unsuited for a contest of the kind, not only from being too limited in extent, but also from the rough surface, good fielding being next to impossible." Somewhere there's a quote from George Wright, that I can't find at the moment, complaining about the heat in St. Louis and the terrible condition of the Union Grounds.

By the early 1880s, August Solari was using an eight ton roller to level out the field at the Grand Avenue Grounds and covering the infield with a tarp when it rained.

-Are some grounds located in relation to transportation depots?

By the time the Civil War broke out, StL had four streetcar lines, although technically they were horsecars, and I have two references that mention them. The first comes from an 1860 match between the Cyclones and the Commercials at Gamble Lawn: "Players will take the market street cars at a quarter after three o'clock and go to Twenty fourth or Twenty sixth street, thence south five blocks." The second reference is from April 1861 and mentions the Empire Club's first anniversary game, again played at Gamble Lawn: "As the Market street cars run to within two squares of the lawn, visitors will experience no difficulty in getting to the grounds."

Jon David Cash, writing in <u>Before They Were Cardinals</u>, also mentions the StL streetcar system: "Solari and the Empires had selected the site [of the Grand Avenue Grounds] because it was located near the Fair Grounds, where several streetcar lines converged." I know Jon and have a great deal of respect for his work so I have no doubt that he has some source upon which to base this assertion. Based upon his research, we can say that both the Fairgrounds and the Grand Avenue Grounds were located near the streetcar lines.

By the mid 1870s, there were two main baseball grounds in StL, the Grand Avenue Grounds and the Compton Avenue Grounds. The latter was actually closer to the city center than the former but didn't draw as well because it wasn't located on a streetcar line. Because of the streetcars, it was easier to get to the Grand Avenue Grounds than to the Compton Avenue Grounds. The Grand Avenue Grounds eventually became Sportsman's Park and professional baseball (of some kind) was played at the site from 1868 until 1966. Interestingly, the last streetcar line in StL ceased operation the same year the Cardinals moved downtown. There are

many reasons the Cards moved downtown but one of them was the decline of the 325 streetcar system, which made it much more difficult for people to get to old 326 327 ballpark. 328 - Jeff 329 330 331 332 9/14/14 333 This came from *Rick Harris* in Rhode Island 334 335 336 Time is of the essence for sure. I am attaching my most up-to-date Rhode Island teams and ball fields databases which I am not sure if I sent you older versions 337 before. 338 339 340 I. I'd be glad to look over whatever information your group comes up with for early ball field locations. I'm not sure my information will contribute much. 341 Not sure if I stated this to you previously, but here's my two cents on early ball field 342 locations in order of commonality. (This is between 1850 - 1920.) 343 344 1. Town Commons. 345 2. Public parks. 346 3. Floodplains. 347 348 4. Rail Road Grounds 5. Places of Amusements. (Amusement Parks, Trotter Parks, Horse Race Tracks, 349 Beaches, Cycledromes, Polo Grounds.) 350 6. Public Groves 351 7. Cow Pastures, Vacant Lots 352 353 354 II. Regarding early teams and ball fields I've searched several Providence, Woonsocket, Pascoag and Newport 355 newspapers back to 1850 as well as the Brown newspaper to the beginning of it's 356 existence. As you know prior to box scores appearing commonly in newspapers, 357 baseball mentions would be a 1 to 2 line pieces mixed in with town news. This 358 makes it very difficult to search for baseball games and ball fields. Although almost 359 360 always appearing on the front page, the type is very small and coverage is very inconsistent. It is easy to miss ballgame coverage. I still have a few papers go 361 through, however, what I have accomplished can be found in the two databases I 362 am attaching. 363 I will be glad to provide updates as I have them. 364 It does appear, as I stated earlier, Rhode Island simply did not provide news 365 coverage for baseball games prior to the 1860s. 366 367 III. I'm switching our email conversations to this G-mail account. It is much easier 368 to search for passed emails. I will still maintain my AOL account for it goes back 369 over 20 years and many of the research contacts are not transferable. 370

IV. I had a new book that came out on Newport baseball in June. "Newport

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Baseball History: America's Pastime in the City by the Sea". (History Press) I hope you get a chance to take look at it.

Good luck on the project. I will help whenever possible. I hope to see you in November at the next gathering.

Rick

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9/14/14 These were from *Chris Ryland* in Tennessee

Here's what I have on Tennessee, especially Nashville, in the late 1860s. There are very few specifics with regard to the size and character of the grounds.

Immediately after the war, when baseball was first seriously played in Nashville, there were very few public spaces available. The primary spot for spectator sports was an area known as "Sulphur Spring(s) Bottom," which was immediately north of downtown and not suitable for development. The first organized match I have for this spot took place in August of 1866 between the Flynn and Pontiac Clubs, but the spot was also used for informal play as well. Boxing matches, duels, and ballgames were held at the Sulphur Spring, and the grounds were also used for military drilling, preaching, and public baths. This area proved so popular for baseball that the iconic Sulphur Dell stadium was eventually built on this spot. Another spot just west of these springs was Judge's Spring, where the Rock City kept grounds in 1867,

Another public area in Nashville was the State Fairgrounds, which is now the site of Centennial Park, which as early as February 1871 hosted a match between the Morgans of Nashville and the Mutuals of Memphis. In Memphis in 1869, the Bluff City Club used the race track (roughly where the Liberty Bowl is now) for a match with the Southern Base Ball Club of New Orleans.

But in the absence of public grounds, there were several other options. In Nashville, the first was to cross the Cumberland River to the neighborhood known as Edgefield, which at the time was not within the Nashville city limits. Edgefield seems to have been a popular spot for baseball games relative to its population. For example the Rock City Club, formed by residents of Nashville, made their home grounds in Edgefield in the summer of 1866. One explanation for this popularity would be a relatively large amount of lowlying, flat, undeveloped land close to the population center. Another speculation on my part has to do with the Sunday laws. In Nashville, it was against the law to play games on Sundays for recreation. But being an unincorporated area of Davidson County until 1869, these ordinances would not have applied to Edgefield (Edgefield was annexed by Nashville in 1879). Clubs didn't play matches on Sundays, but perhaps a home grounds in Edgefield would have provided an extra opportunity for Sunday meetings and practice.

Another common location seems to have been military installations. Fort Gillem, now the site of Fisk University, has the honor of being the location of the first match game in Nashville history, in April of 1866 between the Cumberland and Rock City clubs. Fort Gillem was also the site of a heavily attended match that summer between the Cumberlands and the Louisville Club. Fort Houston, which was located on what is now Music Row, was adjacent to a large open ground which was also used for public executions. In January of 1866 hangings had been carried out here in front of a crowd of "thousands upon thousands," according to the local paper.

But by August of 1866, the Cumberland Club decided that Fort Gillem was too far to walk, and with the opening of the South Nashville Street Railroad, they changed their home grounds to a smaller area adjacent to the terminus of that line in downtown Nashville. The grounds in Clarksville, TN in 1868 were also next to the depot. The Stonewall Club of Edgefield played next to the "railroad station house" in 1867. The Rock City Club played their matches "in the flats to the right of the suspension bridge." The Stacey juvenile club played theirs "below the trestle work" near Sulphur Spring Bottom. It's reasonable that rail lines and stations made for easy access (and useful reference), but these areas also seemed to have a lot of open space around them.

Christopher Ryland

9/16/14 Chris Ryland, Tennessee

In my reply of the other night, I forgot to mention one of the more interesting early grounds in Nashville.

Throughout 1866 and 1867, base ball clubs were responsible for securing their own grounds, and there were no dedicated public ball fields in Nashville. But in October of 1867, there is a story in the Nashville Banner announcing that "Messrs. McGavock, Harding, Scovel and McFarland have kindly tendered to all the base ball clubs in Nashville, the use of the grounds opposite Mr. Cheatham's residence on the line of the North Nashville street Railroad. There is hardly a more suitable place the purpose around the city. The grounds are being cleared up by several of the ball clubs, assisted by the above named gentlemen. Seats for spectators will be arranged, and a match game played, Saturday afternoon." McGavock and Harding were two of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Nashville, so it's intriguing that these men should take such an interest in making sure that local ballplayers had adequate grounds. It's not clear from this story who specifically owned the land, or whether it was purchased for the purpose of the ball field. But it's an early indication of base ball as a community-oriented activity in Nashville, where the elite recognized the value of public base ball grounds.

Also, as an aside, a few months ago we had a discussion about the role of civic

pride in the growth of base ball. I've found a newspaper reference in May of 1867 calling for the establishment of an elite ball club in Nashville to replace the Cumberlands, who had disbanded after winning the 1866 state championship. The silver bat had been returned to the sponsor, and the newspaper reports a "movement" to field an all-star team of local players to compete in 1867.

Christopher Ryland

9/14/14

Larry McCray brought pre Civil War Massachusetts into the mix.

Folks -

For Massachusetts, Protoball has about 140 game and club entries from the 1850s on (including a good handful describing the Mass Game), and about 50 earlier predecessor games, played from 1621 to 1850.

I review them, but I don't have robust results to report. Some scattered points:

[] The Trimountain Club of Boston moved to play by New York rules, engaging a Portland ME club as opponent; it came by steamboat to play. At this 1858 game, "A space was enclosed so as to allow the game to proceed without hindrance, and the match was witnessed by a large number of people." No admission fee is mentioned.

[] One game is noted as having been played on a cricket ground, and another on a town common. A small number of others were played at "agricultural grounds" or the "agricultural society's grounds," and one in a "fair ground." Not being farm-raised, I don't understand what 1850s ag grounds were used for, or where they usually were located, or what features made them well-suited to base ball.

[] The 1621 Pilgrim stoolball game was played "in ye street, openly." Probably not a macadam street.

[] At the Mass Game "championships" in 1857, 1858, and 1859, crowds of 3000 and 5000 were estimated (Worcester's population in 1860 was about 25,000). Could a majority of them see anything? In 1857, the format was best-of-five games to 25 tallies. The later matches were switched to 100-tallies to win, and involved multi-day play to finish.

[] <u>Process:</u> I use a search string of <state:MA and ground%> to return MA-only data on both "ground" and "grounds." Less productive than "grounds" were the terms "spectator," "field," and "crowd." I got no useful yield from "gate,"

"grandstand," "watch," "attend," "course," or "location."

<u>Trivium:</u> There is a town of 1500 souls in Georgia called "Ball Ground." It's said to have been named for Indian games once played there, perhaps lacrosse-like games.

- Larry M

519 9/18/14

And we ended with *Richard Hershberger's* interesting, calculated description of a large crowd watching early baseball and the draw of spectator sports.

Larry asked if 3K-5K could actually see a game. What follows is strictly back-of-the-envelope stuff, but a modern professional ball field is very roughly a square about 300 feet on a side, for a perimeter of 1200 feet. A single line of spectators standing shoulder to shoulder would be what, about one person every two feet? So that is 600 people. So 3000 people would be five rows. If the front row is polite it will be seated, so that is only three back rows craning their necks to see. But then some will be in or atop carriages or in trees or on nearby roofs. So call that one row's worth. This gives us one row seated, one row standing behind them, one row standing offset by one foot and watching over the shoulders of the row in front of them, one row craning their necks and complaining about the people in front, and one row's worth watching from elevated positions. Three thousand more or less seeing the game seems plausible.

Of course the field I described is for the NY game. I'm not sure how large the outfield of the Mass game typically was. Also, the NY game has some positions obviously better than others, i.e. near home vs. the outfield. For the Mass game this is less true, so the crowd would be happier about spreading out evenly. Accounts of those massively attended championship games in the late 1860s make clear that most of them couldn't actually see much, and that was with some rudimentary elevated seating.

So why did the people go out to the ball park? Why do people attend football games today? If you want to see the game, you watch it on TV. If you want to see it with a crowd, you go to a bar. If you are at the game and want to see what is happening on the field, you watch the jumbotron: like watching in a bar, with more expensive. I'm sure those championship games in the 1860s were the same phenomenon.

By the 1870s the best grounds had some moderately serious seating accommodations, so the capacity for actual spectators was higher. Ironically, attendance declined at about the same time. C'est le jeu.

Richard Hershberger