

CONTENTS

Foreword ix

Acknowledgments xvii

Introduction: A Baseball Diamond at Madison Square xxi

Part I. A Legendary Life

1. Alexander Joy Cartwright Jr. and Nineteenth-Century
New York 3
2. The Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York 12
3. The Rush for Gold 23
4. The Allure of Paradise 44
5. An American in Kamehameha's Kingdom 55
6. America's National Pastime in Hawaii 73
7. Cartwright and the Monarchy in the 1860s and 1870s 81
8. Annexation and the Hawaiian League 101
9. Spalding Comes to Hawaii 124
10. The Death of Cartwright, a King, and a Kingdom 132

Part 2. The Mythography of a Man

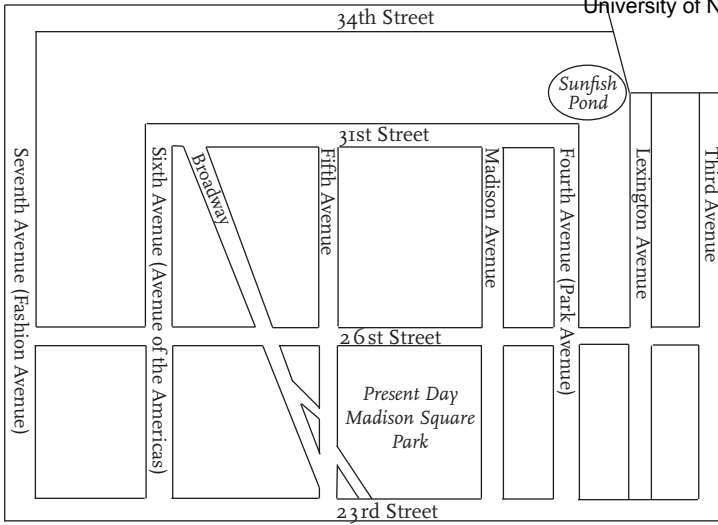
- 11. “Dear Old Knickerbockers” 143
 - 12. “Baseball on Murray Hill” 161
 - 13. “On Mountain and Prairie” 179
 - 14. “On the Sunny Plains of Hawaii nei” 193
 - 15. Baseball and the “Family Lare” 209
- Conclusion: Alexander Cartwright, Father of Modern
Baseball* 225
- Notes 233
- Bibliography 251
- Index 257

INTRODUCTION

A Baseball Diamond at Madison Square

Staring into the intersection of Twenty-seventh Street and Park Avenue in New York City, I hope to see an ethereal image of men in their early twenties sporting muttonchop whiskers and wearing long-sleeved white bib shirts tucked into pin-striped pants with suspenders to hold them up. I watch and concentrate. At least in my mind's eye I can see the men gather about the dirt, while one steps off the parameters of their playing field. Madison Square Park once extended to this corner and beyond between 1814 and 1845.¹ Park Avenue, in its previous incarnation, was Fourth Avenue. I imagine one lanky gentlemen square up to pitch while his fellow fielders shuffle in anticipation and the batter waves a wooden stick, eager for the ball.

In reality, yellow taxi cabs zoom through the streets around me, and people, some still wearing winter coats against the cool morning of early spring, walk in every direction. No one is playing games. The New York Life Building, with its pointed golden



Madison Square Park, adapted from Berman, *Madison Square*. This diagram shows Madison Square Park in three phases: 1) In 1807 its boundaries stretched from Twenty-third to Thirty-fourth streets and from Seventh to Third avenues. 2) In 1814 its boundaries fell between Twenty-third and Thirty-first streets and between Sixth and Park avenues. 3) In 1845 and up to the present day, the park extends from Twenty-third to Twenty-sixth streets and from Fifth Avenue to Madison Avenue. Murray Hill (since leveled) was located at what is today Park Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street, though the district encompasses a much broader area that includes Lexington Avenue to somewhere between Madison and Fifth avenues (approximately). Sunfish Pond no longer exists.

dome and neogothic architecture, occupies an entire city block, with Park Avenue on one side and Madison Avenue on the other. Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh streets encase it on the other sides. The imposing building has stood on this site since it was completed in 1928. In 1837, the site was occupied by the Union Depot of the New York and Harlem Railroad Company.

The harsh shrill of a police siren echoes between the high-rise buildings as the car speeds down Park Avenue. The sight and sound prompt me to turn in its direction. I walk down Park

INTRODUCTION

Avenue, but by the time I reach Twenty-sixth Street, the sound of the emergency is long gone. Walking west on Twenty-sixth brings me to the corner of the current Madison Square Park. Just beyond the park I can see the famed Flatiron Building, completed in 1902, with its narrow end pointing in my direction.

In the northeast corner of the park is a colorful playground where the laughter and shouts of children mingle with the traffic noise around me. A park bench seems to be waiting, so I stop and rest. From this vantage, I look up between the still winter-bare tree branches at the tall buildings. It may be early spring, but a small bite of leftover crisp winter cold pierces through the morning sun, which casts fresh rays across the massive buildings that envelop the park.

Madison Square Park is surrounded by historical structures. From early childhood, I have been fascinated by historical landmarks and the stories behind them. Not to be confused with present-day Madison Square Garden, this six-acre public park in lower Manhattan was named after James Madison, fourth president of the United States. During the 1830s and 1840s, it was here, and in green spaces like it in other East Coast cities, that the game of baseball developed into the form we know today.

A child's scream interrupts my thoughts. I look to the playground with concern, but giggles replace the frantic shriek, and I shake my head with relief that no one was hurt. It was just play.

My father, a first-generation Italian American, instilled in me an interest in the past. My Italian grandparents came to America via Ellis Island in New York in the early 1900s, and my second-generation German American mother's roots were in rural

INTRODUCTION

Wisconsin. My parents met and married in Southern California where they raised their family of three children—I was the eldest, followed by a brother and sister.

When I was ten years old, our family took a two-month cross-country trip from the West Coast to the East Coast, visiting nearly every major historical site along the way—most of them made famous during the nineteenth century. What could have been the most boring trip imaginable became, through my father's influence, a key childhood experience that led to my fascination with American history. For example, after learning about the California Gold Rush in school, history came alive for me when we visited Sutter's Mill, where gold was first discovered in 1848. A few years later, I saw the original gold rush diary of Charles Glass Gray when our family visited the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, where it was on display.

Not all our family trips were devoted to history. Each summer we went to Disneyland, and another destination was Anaheim Stadium, home of the new Angels baseball team (new to Anaheim, anyway). However, what stayed with me, and still fills my senses with awe, is imagining the history of a place arising out of a modern scene before me, just as right now, I am imagining the nineteenth-century birth of baseball occurring in a New York City park where children play on slides and swings, making up their own games and their own rules.

Just beyond the northwest tip of the park is the location where Delmonico's Restaurant once stood in the 1800s. Mark Twain often dined there. All the corner contains now is another tall building reaching for the clouds, yet in my mind I see Delmonico's as it might have been in 1889, during a banquet held to

INTRODUCTION

honor the return of Albert Spalding's Chicago White Stockings baseball team from their world tour, which included a stop in Honolulu. A crowd of three hundred joined the occasion, including Mark Twain, who at one point rose to address the group and reminisced of his own Hawaii visit years earlier:

I have been in the Sandwich Islands—twenty-three years ago—that peaceful land, that beautiful land, that far-off home of solitude, and soft idleness, and repose, and dreams, where life is one long slumberous Sabbath, the climate one long summer day, and the good that die experience no change, for they but fall asleep in one heaven and wake up in another. And these boys have played baseball there!—Baseball, which is the very symbol, the outward and visible expression, of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the living, tearing, booming nineteenth, the mightiest of all the centuries!

Twain obviously did not realize at this point that the young men did not have the opportunity to actually play baseball in Hawaii. He went on to remark about the islanders and their ways, and ended his speech trying to capture the strong memories that permanently inhabited his soul:

No alien land in all the earth has any deep, strong charm for me but that one; no other land could so longingly and so beseechingly haunt me, sleeping and waking, through half a lifetime, as that one has done. Other things leave me, but it abides; other things change, but it remains the same. For me its balmy airs are always blowing, its

INTRODUCTION

summer seas flashing in the sun; the pulsing of its surf is in my ear; I can see its garlanded crags, its leaping cascades, its plummy palms drowsing by the shore, its remote summits floating like islands above the cloud-rack; I can feel the spirit of its woody solitudes, I hear the splashing of the brooks; in my nostrils still lives the breath of flowers that perished twenty years ago.²

Twain spoke to this crowd in New York as passionately about the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) as he did about the game of baseball. New York, Hawaii, and baseball? Do they belong together? One man embodies this seemingly strange combination: Alexander Cartwright. Long considered the founder of modern baseball, Cartwright has deep connections with all three, and any story of his life needs to travel to these places, bringing them to life as they were in the best way we can today.

Alexander Joy Cartwright Jr. was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1938 in Cooperstown, New York. In Honolulu, Hawaii, a street as well as a park are named for him, and each year his gravesite is visited by hundreds of baseball fans, both locals and tourists. They leave baseball mementos and notes thanking him for the sport. Since at least the 1930s, his reputation as the primary founder of modern baseball has seemed solid and accepted, and his accomplishments are of mythic proportions.

As the Hall of Fame and history books tell it, the legend goes like this: Cartwright drafted modern baseball's first rules in 1845; he designed the baseball diamond, set the distance between

INTRODUCTION

the bases, and established the nine-inning, nine-player game, among other things. Also in 1845, he organized the first baseball club, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York, who played the first match game. When Cartwright joined the California Gold Rush in 1849, he became the “Johnny Appleseed” of baseball, teaching and playing the game at every stop along the way, thus spreading it across the continent and creating a truly national sport. Lastly, after Cartwright settled in Hawaii, he introduced and instituted baseball throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

That’s what we have been told. As for Alexander Cartwright’s later life in Hawaii, not much has been revealed. Baseball, clearly, was the main focus of his life, and his baseball accomplishments alone are enough legacy for any person. The one published book-length biography of Cartwright—*The Man Who Invented Baseball*, by Harold Peterson (1973)—provided a broad description of early baseball and an overview of Cartwright’s life from New York to Hawaii, but Peterson did not elaborate on Cartwright’s life *in* Hawaii. Still, Peterson’s work immediately became the primary reference about Cartwright for most baseball historians, researchers, presenters, and writers.

Initially, my goal was simply to write the first full biography of Alexander Cartwright, which had never been done before. It would include both his early baseball accomplishments and his later time in Hawaii, which in fact constituted the bulk of his life. I felt that a fuller account of Cartwright and of the times in which he lived, especially in Hawaii, would provide a better understanding of the man, of baseball, and of America during the nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

My nearly eight years of researching Cartwright led me to places such as New York, Hawaii, Washington DC, and Independence, Missouri. I also made numerous connections with archivists, writers, collectors, and researchers all over the world via the Internet. I have experienced the fervor of many individuals, both male and female, whose interest in Cartwright and curiosity about his life equaled mine. Yet the more I researched, the more I came to realize that many aspects of baseball's history typically attributed to Cartwright are *not* verifiable. In case after case, direct evidence and primary sources are lacking. How could this be?

In fact, Harold Peterson did not provide citations for his research, and he died an untimely death shortly after publication of *The Man Who Invented Baseball*. Since then, verifying Peterson's research has been difficult at best. Similarly, I found that most historical and other accounts of Cartwright and baseball's creation are nearly impossible to confirm. And the more research I did, the more I found conflicting or competing versions of events. Eventually, I couldn't help but ask: Could it be that the most basic tenets of baseball history regarding Alexander Cartwright are not based on actual evidence but instead have become more of a legendary story that was created after the fact? Are Cartwright's baseball accomplishments actually more myth than reality?

As this was happening, I was also finding that Cartwright's life in Hawaii was far more compelling and interesting, and even quite important, than most people realized. Cartwright arrived in Hawaii in 1849, as the nation was just opening its society to foreigners, and he became a highly respected, successful

INTRODUCTION

businessman in Honolulu. He enjoyed close, at times intimate, relations with the Hawaiian monarchy while also becoming a member of the annexation movement that would overthrow the monarchy and bring Hawaii into the fold of the United States. While there are still significant gaps in the record of his later life, Cartwright's legacy in Hawaii is by comparison richly documented, certainly more so than his early life in New York.

To do justice to the complexity of Alexander Cartwright's life and legacy, and to tell his story in the fullest possible way, I have divided this book into two parts, each with a different focus.

Part I tells the whole story of Cartwright's amazing life, from his birth in Manhattan to his death in Honolulu, creating as full a biographical portrait as is possible to date. This includes what will be, for some, familiar territory: Cartwright's years in New York as a volunteer fireman, bank clerk, and bookseller, and of course his time with the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York. We will then follow Cartwright across the country during the 1849 Gold Rush and on to Hawaii, where we will get to know the Alexander Cartwright very few have met: the one who became a financial advisor to a queen, a leader of Honolulu society, and a colleague of Lorrin Thurston, Sanford Dole, and other members of Hawaii's annexation movement.

Throughout part I, Cartwright's involvement with baseball is described, but the evidence, or lack thereof, shows that it played a much smaller role throughout his life than most realize, and many times, there is controversy over the exact nature of what he did or did not do. So as not to interrupt the narrative flow of Cartwright's full biography in part I, when it comes to baseball,

INTRODUCTION

I describe only what the existing documents and research I have been able to uncover reveal as verifiably true.

The chapter titles for part 2 come from Cartwright's 1865 letter to Charles DeBost, which is the only existing document we have thus far in Cartwright's own hand that references baseball. Each title pertains to segments from that letter that represent Cartwright's involvement with baseball and from the time periods of his life in which they correspond.

In part 2, I focus specifically on Cartwright and baseball's founding: I dissect each significant aspect of Cartwright's legacy—examining the documentation that exists, how reliable the evidence is, and what it reveals, as well as bringing up any competing claims. At times, the lack of documentation is itself significant, both because it calls into question particular claims made for Cartwright and also because it has provided an open space for speculation and mythmaking.

In part 2, I also examine what has been written by previous baseball historians—such as Charles Peeverly, Alfred Spink, Harold Peterson, and others—and I provide new information and research that in some cases may not have been seen before by those reading this work. Sometimes, the state of the evidence is completely contrary to the commonly held beliefs about Cartwright's baseball accomplishments.

For example, in *The Man Who Invented Baseball*, Peterson mentions in passing that there are a few transcriptions of Alexander Cartwright's gold rush diary, which he said characterizes Cartwright as the "Johnny Appleseed of baseball." What he does not emphasize or make clear is that the earliest and *perhaps* most authentic transcription doesn't mention baseball at all,

INTRODUCTION

and that the other transcriptions (those that *do* mention baseball) were typed by a family member who included his own remembrances of the stories his grandfather had told woven into the text. This family member was also at the time advocating for his ancestor in hopes of gaining recognition during the development of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

As the title of part 2 indicates, I believe that in significant ways, Cartwright's fame as the "founder" of modern baseball is based on *some* elements of myth *as well as* reality. At times, baseball fans and historians have taken a kernel of truth about Cartwright and sown a field of dreams. I think that the reasons any mythic portions developed are quite complex—Cartwright's story evolved over time, in different contexts and involving many people with sometimes unrelated agendas.

One reason this happened may be much like the game of "telephone." One person begins by whispering a phrase to the next person in a circle, and each person passes it along in secret until it reaches the last person, who announces to the group what he or she has heard. More often than not, the final phrase is quite different from the original one, which is what makes the game amusing.

Over and over, in the several books I've collected and reviewed for conducting my research, I found that some writers and historians published what they believed to be true based on another writer's public declaration. What is disturbing is that because of this, certain stories have come to be treated as established "facts" without citation of primary sources. But what about the first source in the chain? Is that story based on an eyewitness

INTRODUCTION

account or can the research be corroborated with documentation? Or, are such accounts believed regardless, possibly based on their authors' stature as historians or journalists? When it comes to baseball's founding, the early historians rarely named their sources, making it almost impossible to know who they talked to and why they made the claims they did—and also, most important, making it extremely difficult to verify the information today. Despite this, later historians often repeated the accepted version of baseball's founding as if it were true, without, seemingly, verifying it for themselves.

When Hawaiians sit down to chat with one another, they call it “talking story.” To “talk story” isn't merely to describe the events of your day to your friends, it is to make a story out of them, one that captivates the imagination and evokes the truth of the teller's emotional experiences. In the process, some of the actual facts or events might become exaggerated, but as in the game of telephone, this is part of the fun. It's not done intentionally to mislead but to entertain and provide a more satisfying “true” story. This, I think, is part of how the Cartwright story or any elements of myth develop: over time, the story of Cartwright founding baseball was gradually elaborated into a satisfying, entertaining tale that had the ring of truth.

In addition, some in this particular game of telephone seem to have their own reasons for telling the story the way they did. As the “national pastime,” baseball is tied to America's national identity, and at one time it served the purpose of baseball's promoters to create a history of the sport that was fully American and clearly linked to a particular individual and a moment in time.

INTRODUCTION

On a more exclusive level, some descendants of Alexander Cartwright have conveyed their ancestor's baseball legacy through the years based mainly on oral history and family stories that were passed down through the generations. And this, of course, leads us back to Alexander Cartwright himself. What did he say when he "talked story" about baseball, and how much mythmaking was involved when he described his role to his friends, his children, and his grandchildren? Mythmaking is something we *all* do, of course, and not necessarily in a deliberate manner to omit any truth. With Alexander Cartwright, there are some things we may never know, because as yet, no written documentation has been found in which Cartwright tells his version of baseball's founding in his own words.

Separating and distinguishing personal and cultural myths from actual fact is one of the purposes, and joys, of biography. As the historian and biographer Shirley A. Leckie writes, "For without historians' insights, the public will formulate its views on the basis of myth." She states as well: "We also value biography as a way of encountering the personal myths of others, so that we might reflect on our own personal mythmaking and perhaps achieve a deeper understanding of ourselves through others."³

Yet the quote of Leckie's I like best, and the one that seems particularly important for this examination of Cartwright's legacy, is the following: "Many have little understanding that both history and biography are the result of constant interpretation and reinterpretations based on new questions and concerns that arise in every decade and generation."⁴

Many, many popular "myths" that circulate through American

INTRODUCTION

culture continue to be accepted as truth despite the sometimes heated debates of historians. Was Paul Revere the *only* “midnight rider” who warned townsfolk about the British coming, or were there others who joined in the effort? Was John Wilkes Booth solely responsible for Lincoln’s assassination, or was it a conspiracy? Is Henry Chadwick’s claim true that baseball was derived from the British game of rounders—or did baseball spring fully formed from the mind of Alexander Cartwright? In time, we may discover sufficient documentation to decide on all these issues, while others may never be resolved. However, when we lack documentation, the interpretation of history is open to anyone, and mythmaking can run rampant. Yet, as Leckie says, it behooves all of us to recognize when we are mythmaking and when we are not, so that we don’t come to mistake our myths for reality.