

Greenfield Climax Baseball Team and Early Baseball in Greenfield

had come to her death by the combined effects of poison and strangulation. It established as a motive for the murder the illicit relations which existed between the two. The theory of the state was that the woman had been enticed to that lonely spot and forced to take the poison. The defense contended that it was a case of suicide, the motive being unrequited love. The defense also introduced evidence to prove the insanity of the accused.

After a trial extending over a period of three weeks, the case went to the jury which returned a verdict of murder in the second degree. The decision was appealed and eventually reached the Supreme Court of Ohio which reversed the verdict on a technical point and ordered a retrial of the case. Pending the new trial, the state legislature passed a law permitting the court of common pleas to appoint, in such a case, a commission in lunacy. Application was immediately made by the defense for such a commission. After a protracted inquiry, the commission declared the prisoner insane and directed that he be confined to an asylum. He was afterwards discharged, went west and disappeared from view, leaving unanswered the question, "How did Mary Ann Lovell meet her death?"

As the years went by, C. H. Blackburn attained wealth and fame as a criminal lawyer. His fees were said to have aggregated more than a million dollars in a period when a million dollars represented great wealth. He spent freely and gave huge sums to many worthy causes. He died, a comparatively poor man, and was buried in the Greenfield Cemetery.

4.

The Old Climax Team

Ball games were popular in America long before the white man came. The Mayans built magnificent courts in Chichen Itza where they played a game which, in many of its essentials, resembled the modern game of basketball. When the early settlers arrived in Ohio they found the Indians playing a game of football which seems to have been a combination of soccer and rugby. A quaint survival of those early days is the account of a football game witnessed by a group of pioneers in 1798. It was played by two teams consisting of one hundred Indian bucks on one side and one hundred Indian squaws on the other. The squaws won the game.

From the earliest days Greenfield boys played a game of baseball, not the highly scientific game of today but an earlier version called *One Old Cat*. If no better ball was available they made their own ball out of string and twine. During the Civil War, baseball became a popular sport among the soldiers and, when the armies were demobilized, the soldiers brought back home with them a real love of the sport. Soon youngsters were playing the game on

every available sandlot. Baseball as we know it today began on the Fourth of July, 1867, when Cincinnati and Louisville inaugurated the *Union Cricket and Baseball Grounds* in Cincinnati, Cincinnati winning the game by a score of 60 to 24. This has been called "the starting gun for organized baseball." Cincinnati followed up its initial victory by winning the pennant in the newly organized *National League* in 1869.

In 1870 Greenfield boys organized the famous *Climax Baseball Team* which reached its heyday in 1874 and 1875. It wasn't a professional or semi-professional team. The boys played for the love of the sport, paying their own expenses, if necessary, and providing their own equipment. The catcher caught the game without a glove, a mask or a chest protector. All the members of the team played the game not only barehanded but in their stocking feet. It was a rough, tough game. In the early games, the pitcher used an underhand delivery as was the practice even in the professional games of that period. It was in a game with Washington C. H. that the overhand style of pitching was first employed by the Climax moundsman. It isn't recorded who pitched the first curved ball. The early games were played on the field behind the old Seminary building, now occupied by the American Pad & Textile Company's plant.

From an old photograph, yellowed with age, we learn the names of the members of this celebrated outfit: William "Button" Waddell, second base; Charles "June" Nelson, catcher; Samuel Dunlap, center field; Harry "Shucks" Waddell, right field; Bob Blackburn, third base; "Dud" Squier, left field; Charles Blackburn, pitcher; L. T. "Botzy" Kinkead, shortstop; Tom Southward, first base. A later recruit was William "Bunk" Cork whose admirers insisted that he could throw the ball farther than any living man, a distinction actually held today — officially — by a Greenfield boy, Don Grate. The last survivor of this celebrated team was Samuel Dunlap of West Lafayette, Indiana, who died in 1945 in his ninetyeth year. Mr. Dunlap always paid a special tribute to "June" Nelson who, according to Mr. Dunlap, was born several decades too soon: "If he were living today he would be drawing a salary equal to a railroad President's. He could run like a jackrabbit and throw a ball like a shot out of a gun."

The old Climax team was a real championship outfit. It took on all comers, suffering hardly a setback over a period of years. In one of its less successful years it won 19 out of 21 games. Having decisively disposed of the teams of all the surrounding towns and looking for new worlds to conquer, the team challenged the professional Cincinnati Red Sox but the management of the Reds, having no doubt learned about the prowess of the Climax outfit, refused to schedule a game. At least that is what everybody in Greenfield thought. We pay all honor to the old *Climax Baseball Team*, apparently the first team to represent Greenfield in competitive sports.

David King was given a baseball bat used by Earl Boyd on one of the early Greenfield baseball teams. Earl was the husband of Marjorie Boyd who lived next door to David and John King (Lee and Mavis) on Mirabeau Street.

According to F.R. Harris (*Hometown Chronicles*) in above graphic, the Climax team was formed in 1870, had its heyday in 1874 and 1875.

The bat was donated to the Greenfield Historical Society on April 2, 2014.

The following information was gathered concerning baseball in Greenfield to ascertain whether Earl was on the Climax Team or other Greenfield teams.

Below is some information from census records and information from Ancestry.com

Marjorie (Plyley) Boyd – born August, 1883; died 1963 (Section 1, Lot 58)

Margie married Earl C. Boyd in Highland Co. , Ohio, on Sept 21, 1912.

Earl C. Boyd – born 6/26/1875, died 2/14/1924 (Section 1 Lot 59)

Father was James Boyd, mother was Lucretia Chandler

Margie's Father: Allen Plyley

Margie's Mother: Celia Mitchell

1900 Census

Celia Plyley, head of household, age 53

Margie M. Plyley, daughter, age 17

Marcy C. Plyley, daughter, age 21

John Mitchel, son, age 30

1910 Census

Earl is listed as a boarder and Celia head of household.

1930 Census

Marjorie, age 46, widowed

Celia Plyley, head of household, age 82

Mary Plyley, daughter, age 50

Chester Mitchel, brother, age 70

1940 Census

Marjorie 57....widow, works at Pad Factory as small machine operator

living in Perry Township, Fayette Co.

lived there on farm in 1935.

Maude Pliley, 60..single, sister of Marjorie, works as folder at Pad Factory

John Mitchel, 70...half brother to Marjorie, born 1870...farm laborer

After compiling the above information, it was unclear if Earl Boyd could have played on the Greenfield Climax baseball team. The Climax team was started in 1870; Earl was born in 1875. So not knowing how long the Climax Baseball Team existed, we could not say for sure if Earl was on that particular team.

It was then discovered that F.R. Harris also wrote about early baseball in Greenfield. That section of *Hometown Chronicles* is shown below. In that section, Mr. Harris talks about baseball in Greenfield. Although he does not use the name of Climax Baseball, he does mention the "Town Team" and the creation of a team in 1899. In 1900 semi-professional teams were organized. The Greenfield team even played the Cincinnati Reds!

Many of the Greenfield baseball players were drafted into the Major and Minor baseball leagues. He mentions specifically that **Earl Boyd** went to the Minors. So what we know for sure is that Earl Boyd was one of the players in early Greenfield baseball.

top of the high tower. Beautiful women appear in front of various shows, skirt dancers weave through the mazes of the serpentine, Hillar the Great swallows eggs, the darkies sing coon songs and dance jigs, the barkers bark, the band plays, the crowd applauds, laughs and throws confetti, the enthusiasm is contagious and everybody is gay. The evening closes with the high wire bicycle riding act, the artist starts the perilous trip across the wire, first taking the precaution to light his bicycle lamp in conformity with the city ordinance. If one of Greenfield's high flyers should meet him on that dizzy height, the performer could not be held responsible for the result."

Every daring performer in a circus or carnival had his imitators among the small fry of Greenfield. After a few bumps and bruises most of the boys decided to try a less spectacular way of making a living. One Greenfield boy, however, far outstripped the daring performances he had seen performed by aerialists. Harvey Mills became the Marvelous Mills whose daring feats on the tight rope, stretched far above the heads of the spectators, made him the sensational attraction of street carnivals from coast to coast. He began his career by walking along the tops of every fence in the neighborhood, progressed to a tight rope stretched in the back yard and perfected his technique by walking the cables stretched across the stone quarries. In 1916 he joined a carnival company and soon was its stellar attraction. He married a professional aerialist who was known by the name of Madam Leonora and the two put on a spine-tugging act which won them the plaudits of the multitudes. The climax of the act was the Elephant Walk. The two donned an elephant costume and walked the rope, stretched between two high buildings, to the humorous chant of the Elephant Walk. Harvey was a fatalist. He frequently said, "I'll get it eventually." He did. While putting on his act in Chicago, he fell to the ground and was killed.

Another boy of this period found inspiration for his life's work in the gilt and glitter of the circus and carnival. His name was Clyde Beatty. He hailed from neighboring Bainbridge but the streets of Greenfield were about as familiar to him as those of his native habitat. Today Clyde Beatty is generally recognized as the world's greatest trainer of wild animals. He was the first man to successfully work lions and tigers together in the same cage. Clyde's wild animal act has been the central feature of many movie thrillers. He is still the greatest trainer in the business with his own circus which bears his name.

61.

"Play Ball!"

In the spring a young man's fancy always turned to thoughts of baseball, at least that was the way it was in Greenfield half a

century ago. Every vacant lot had its team made up of the neighborhood kids who played the game with all the fervor and enthusiasm of big leaguers. The kids graduated to the Town Team which was always able to more than hold its own with the teams from neighboring towns. In the spring of 1899, some of the boys got together and organized a team as usual. Jake White let them use the old Fair Grounds for their games. The boys took their shovels and scalped a diamond. Jim Brattin and Dr. David Hanawalt, a veterinarian, consented to book games and look after the business arrangements. The team clicked from the start. By the Fourth of July the town was baseball crazy. It was necessary to erect bleachers to accommodate the crowds. When it became necessary to pay for the bleachers at the end of the season, the till was empty and some Oldtimers still remember that they had to fork over ten dollars apiece to pay the bill.

Having disposed of all the neighboring teams, a game was booked with Waverly which had an unbeaten team. Greenfield fans invaded the Pike county metropolis headed by a band under the direction of Jerry Price. Waverly, however, had heard about the prowess of the Highland county boys and had strengthened their team with imported players. With Frank Spencer, a first class pitcher in the box, they were confident of the outcome. The gloom that settled over Mudville when the mighty Casey struck out was inconsequential compared with the gloom which enveloped Greenfield when the news was relayed back home that their favorites had gone down to defeat. The team returned home, their heads bloody but unbowed. They revamped the team, strengthening its weak spots and were ready when Waverly appeared to play the return game. It ended in a decisive victory for the local boys, but it was marred by a peculiar accident. Spencer, the Waverly pitcher, had a way of winding himself up in a manner marvelous to behold and delivering the ball with the speed and accuracy of a bullet. On one of these occasions, the spectators heard a sharp report like the crack of a pistol. Spencer stood on the mound with his arm dangling at his side. The bone had snapped under the stress and strain of his delivery.

In the spring of 1900, with Charles Parrett as manager, the team entered the semi-professional ranks. Washington C. H. and Wilmington also organized semi-professional teams. For the next three years Southern Ohio has rarely, if ever, witnessed such magnificent baseball as these three teams gave their communities. In addition to their games with each other, games were booked with teams from Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Lancaster, Zanesville, Portsmouth, Springfield, Hillsboro, Chillicothe and other towns. The climax of Greenfield's 1900 season was a game with the Cincinnati Reds. The National League team had to extend itself to win a 3 to 1 decision. The *Republican* particularly commended the work of

Frank Doyle and predicted a brilliant future for him in the baseball world. It also had a kind word for the umpire. "Fred Patterson, the king of umpires, handled the indicator with his usual precision and skill which had a tendency to eliminate the senseless kicking that disgusts the spectators."

Perhaps the high spot in Greenfield's baseball history was the two-game series with the far famed *Mountaineer Tourists*, a team organized and directed by Max Fleischmann, a Cincinnati millionaire. It was reputed to be the best semi-professional non-league team in the United States. Greenfield split the series with the Mountaineers. During the period from 1899 to 1902 no less than twenty players on the Greenfield team were drafted by the Major and Minor leagues. Mike Mitchell, the Babe Ruth of his day, went to the Cincinnati Reds; Al Bridwell to the New York Giants; Gus Banno to the Washington Americans; Sweeney to the Boston Nationals, Ben Nippert to the Cincinnati Reds. Fred Hunter, Greenfield's pitcher, made such a sensational record at Kansas City that he was sold to Pittsburgh for \$10,000, the highest price that had ever been paid for a player up until that time. He is now a scout for the Boston Red Sox. Summers, Schroder, McClain, Deckart, Benny Falone and Rantz all went to the minors. Jimmy Falls and Denning, who played under the name of McGraw, turned down minor league offers to enter the Catholic clergy.

Branch Rickey played his first professional baseball with the Greenfield Club. He was, at various times, a member of the Cincinnati Reds, the New York Yankees and the St. Louis Browns. Eventually he became manager and later president of the St. Louis Cardinals. He invented the famous Cardinal system of farming out promising young players. He later became president of the colorful Brooklyn Dodgers, affectionally known as "Dem Bums" and as such introduced the first negro player to Big League baseball. He is now president of the Pittsburgh Pirates and is universally regarded as "the brains of baseball."

Of Greenfield's own home town boys, Charles Doyle, Frank Doyle and Earl Boyd went to the Minors. Frank Grubbs from the neighboring hamlet of Good Hope, after playing with minor leagues in Ohio and Indiana, retired to devote himself to politics and poetry. Frank Doyle made a lifetime career of baseball, playing on and managing many minor league teams. Other local boys who played on Greenfield's famous teams were Luther Sexton, Frank Mitchell, Eugene Moore, Charles Hamilton, Fred Holby, Robert Bailey, Charles Stoneburner and Pearl Heaton.