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Yale Graduate on Hall of Fame Ballot for Baseball Achievements

Posted: Oct 21, 2015

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Adams Recognized As One Of Baseball's Earliest Organizers

Pre-Integration Era Ballot | Doc Adams Website

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Doc Adams is not a household name; in fact, his major baseball accomplishments were rarely discussed among even his own family. Regardless, the Yale graduate is now on the 2016 Pre-Integration Ballot for the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Daniel Lucius Adams, a graduate of the class of 1835, is recognized today as one of the most influential members of baseball, due to his contributions which helped to keep the sport alive in its early stages.

Credited with inventing the shortstop position, the 90-foot base path, and a proponent of the nine-inning game, Adams is one of baseball's hidden treasures – and partial founders.

"Games of bat and ball have been around since the ancient Egyptians and all throughout the Middle Ages, so not one person invented the game," said Marjorie Adams, the great-granddaughter of Doc Adams who has fought for four years to get her ancestor elected into the Hall of Fame.

It wasn't until Marjorie attended a lecture in 2011 by Gary O'Maxfield, the lead historian for the Friends of Vintage Baseball at the Simsbury Historical Society, that she made an enlightening discovery. The lecture was on the history of baseball – and Doc's picture came up on the second slide.

"We certainly heard about my great-grandfather growing up, but baseball was not the center of our world, so we rarely discussed it. We just referred to Doc as the "baseball guy" since my father and grandfather were also named Daniel," said Adams.

It was at that point when Marjorie started digging into the topic, trying to find answers to her questions, while formulating an important one of her own.

"I asked Gary, 'should Doc be in the Hall of Fame?' and he said yes he should be," said Adams. "To me, the Hall of Fame always meant Mickey Mantle, Ty Cobb, Cal Ripken, Jr., and all the big names from the 20th century. It never occurred to me that it included 19th century figures."

Doc Adams, a New Hampshire native before starting his medical practice in New York City in 1839, joined the New York Knickerbockers in 1845 – one of the first baseball clubs to ever exist.

The Knickerbockers were far from what Major League Baseball teams are nowadays. They were a gentlemen's club that played baseball for recreation, yet found it difficult to schedule games considering the lack of interest from other clubs at the time.

"It was a country club and these gentlemen didn't have many opportunities for real exercise," said Adams, an avid history buff. "This was a club, so you could be fined for ungentlemanly behavior. You had to pay your dues, you couldn't spit, you couldn't swear or do anything that a gentleman wouldn't do."

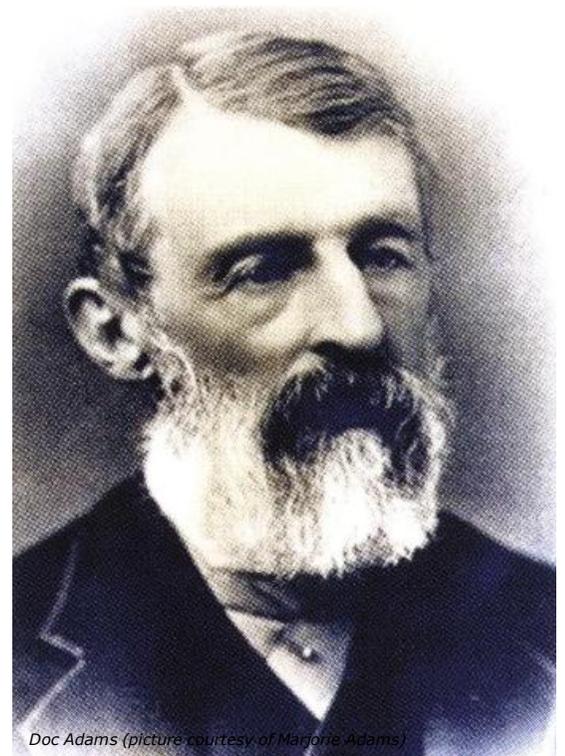
It was difficult for Doc to find enough willing participants to play; so much to the point that he gave lectures at club meetings and dinners about attendance.

"It got to the point where people have told me the whole thing could have just folded – gone away," said Adams. "It was Doc who kept the club going, got more people interested, and helped the game to grown."

This year marks the 170th anniversary of the formation of the Knickerbockers, a club that set a foundation for the game of baseball. Doc was voted Vice President in April of 1846, and later served six terms as President between 1847 and his retirement in 1862 at the age of 48.

Finding opponents was difficult for the Knickerbockers, since few teams existed at the time; even if they did schedule a game, attendance was a challenge.

"It was difficult to get to the field. You had to take a ferry from Manhattan Island to Hoboken, N.J.," said Adams. "It also requires a certain number of people to play a game. These men wanted to be there, but they had to take care of business too. They were trying to make their way in the world."



Doc Adams (picture courtesy of Marjorie Adams)

Had it not been for Doc's perseverance in organizing the games, and making the equipment, the "New York game" as we know it today may not exist.

"He made all of the balls for the team and he supervised the manufacturing of all the bats. He went all over Manhattan Island to find the right piece of wood and then stood over furniture turners to make sure the taper and length was correct," said Adams.

As for the baseballs, either a pebble or bullet shell would form the center. Doc would then collect rubber goulashes from people and cover the center with rubber strips. Lastly, he sowed leather strips over the rubber to complete the process.

The ball was light, making it easy to hit a long way but difficult to throw. Hence, the position of shortstop was created.

"When the ball was batted a long distance, it was hard to throw it back into the infield. Doc intended the shortstop position to serve as an intermediary between the infield and outfield," said Adams.

In the 1840s, there were variations of baseball being played throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the country. A version in Massachusetts was referred to as "townball", while Philadelphia played a version of its own.

"The game that evolved with the Knickerbockers in the 1850s and 1860s was called "the New York game" and though primitive, it was played in a way that would be recognizable to baseball today," said Adams.

Though similar in ways, the game of baseball in the 1840s and 1850s was played very differently from the modern day game. No gloves were used, there were no catcher's masks (until 1876), and home plate was an actual enamel plate, round in shape.

The one-bounce rule was also in effect, meaning if a fielder caught a ball off one bounce, it was recorded as an out much like a fly-out. Doc was an advocate of "fly catches", because to him, it was "more manly."

One of Doc's biggest impacts on the game was creating the 90-foot base path, an idea he had to actually measure the distance around the bases rather than estimate the length with "paces".

"The baseball diamond was imprecise, having a lot to do with the number of paces – but your pace is different than mine," said Adams. "When Doc measured 90 feet for the bases and at the time, 45 feet from "pitcher's base" to home plate, it was the first time it was actually measured."

Prior to his years with the Knickerbockers, Doc Adams attended Amherst for two years, before his father transferred him to Yale in 1833 in search of a more "pious education". Upon graduating in 1835, he attended Harvard Medical School and began his practice in New York shortly after.

After being left off the Hall of Fame ballot for over a century, Doc Adams has been named to the Pre-Integration Ballot this year – inducting baseball honorees from the time period before Jackie Robinson's debut in 1947.

"Honestly, I think some of it is that they didn't have stats back then," said Adams when asked why Doc has been left off the ballot. "We don't know RBIs or ERAs, or other things that baseball fanatics follow. Back then, it was pretty much just wins, losses and outs."

The final vote for the Pre-Integration Ballot will be on December 7 and the results will be announced on January 9. Marjorie hopes her birthday being on Dec. 7 will serve as "good karma" for the vote.

"I am interested in this project because it's the right thing to do. The history of baseball is not complete without Doc Adams," said Adams. "This committee meets every three years, so if it's not done this time, I'll have three more years to prepare. I'm not giving up."

Four years of research, study, effort and promotion to get Doc Adams to take his rightful place in baseball history – what happens if Doc is voted in this year?

"There will be crying in baseball. A lot of crying," said Adams.

Filed by Steve Lewis, Yale Sports Publicity

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