

The Lost American Game of Wicket

The game of wicket, sometimes referred to as wicket ball, enjoyed enduring popularity in parts of New England for many years. One early Boston reference to wicket is found in a 1725 diary and indicated that the game was played at Boston Common.

In the nineteenth century, the game often featured contests among two teams from rival towns, with the losing side paying for dinner. Like English cricket, the game involved batters defending a wicket and scoring tallies by running 60 feet or so to the opposite wicket after hitting a rolled ball. Unlike cricket, however, the ball was much larger, the wicket was low to the ground and could be 5 or 6 feet in length, and teams of up to thirty players took the field.

One area with a tradition of wicket rivalries was northward of Hartford CT, extending into central MA. Isolated accounts of wicket are known for western New York State, Ohio, and Michigan. In 1859 there was a state championship match in CT that attracted a crowd of 4000, but the pastime languished after that.

Protoball.org has a 72-item chronology of wicket extending from 1704 to 1865. MA and CT matches account for well over half of these references. Rule sets have been found for CT and MA contests, and they show some local variation.

An excellent recent description of wicket and its fate is Alex Dubois' "Litchfield and the Old Connecticut Game of Wicket" (2016).

Some open questions:

- Was wicket commonly played in VT, NH, ME RI and western CT?**
- How could so many runs be made with 30 fielders on the field?**
- How were wicket balls made?**
- Were most teams formed in smaller population centers? Why?**
- Was running compulsory or elective after the ball was struck?**