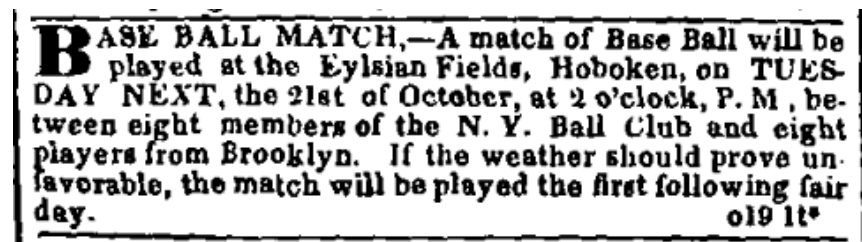


While writing a story about my Whitman find--that his famed "sun-down peramulations" musing about baseball in the *Eagle* of July 23, 1846 was fake, most of it repeated line for line from a report in *The New-York Atlas* of June 15, 1845--I lighted upon an advertisement, not previously noted, in *The Atlas* for an upcoming ball game. My goal was to note the extent to which *The Atlas* covered baseball or cricket in the period 1840-1846.

That game was the contest between Brooklyn and New York clubs, eight to the side, played on October 21, 1845 and reported in *The Herald* the following day. Ted Widmer's discovery of that report and box score made front-page news in the *New York Times* on October 4, 1990

(<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1990/10/04/937190.html?pageNumber=1>).



BASE BALL MATCH,—A match of Base Ball will be played at the Elysian Fields, Hoboken, on TUESDAY NEXT, the 21st of October, at 2 o'clock, P. M., between eight members of the N. Y. Ball Club and eight players from Brooklyn. If the weather should prove unfavorable, the match will be played the first following fair day.

This was the only mention of baseball in the *Atlas* in the aforementioned period but its citation for the "N.Y. Ball Club" (I took note of the capitals) drove me to look for pre-1846 instances of "Ball Club" in New York City papers. Voila! I spotted the 1821 notice in the *New-York Evening Post* and instantly recognized The Retreat as the site of George Thompson's find of a ball game there in April 1823; that too, made the *New York Times* front page, on July 8, 2001,

(<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/2001/07/08/151130.html?pageNumber=1>). For *Baseball in the Garden of Eden* (2011) I added material about The Retreat, its proprietors before Jones, and that epochal game of baseball.

In 2001, New York University librarian George Thompson hit the front page of the *New York Times* with his discovery of a newspaper reference to a game called baseball in New York City long before its presumed invention by the Knickerbockers. *The National Advocate* of April 25, 1823, contained this unsigned notice:

I was last Saturday much pleased in witnessing a company of active young men playing the manly and athletic game of "base ball" at the Retreat in Broadway (Jones') [on the west side of Broadway between what now is

Washington Place and Eighth Street]. I am informed they are an organized association, and that a very interesting game will be played on Saturday next at the above place, to commence at half past 3 o'clock, P.M. Any person fond of witnessing this game may avail himself of seeing it played with consummate skill and wonderful dexterity.

. . . It is surprising, and to be regretted that the young men of our city do not engage more in this manual sport; it is innocent amusement, and healthy exercise, attended with but little expense, and has no demoralizing tendency.

COMMUNICATION.

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A SPECTATOR.

We know nothing directly of what this game looked like or how it was played, but young men who took part in it knew they needed to make excuses for playing the game of their boyhood: it was "manly and athletic," it was a "manual" sport rather than a leisurely pastime, it was "healthy"—a significant virtue after the yellow fever epidemic of the prior summer—and it was without "demoralizing tendency," by which the unnamed writer was certainly referencing the customary concatenation of blood sport, gambling, inebriation, and wenching.

[...] What to make of Jones, his retreat, and the rediscovered baseball match? At some point in mid-1822 the former William Neilson property was leased by veteran innkeeper William Jones, just in time for the sudden flush of well-to-do New Yorkers fleeing that summer's yellow fever epidemic at the foot of Manhattan Island. The fever eased

with cold weather and did not return in the spring. Perhaps trying a novel idea to sustain a flagging business, Jones staged his baseball game on Saturday April 19, 1823, as mentioned in the Advocate of six days following. In that report, it was announced that another such contest was to take place at the Retreat on Saturday, April 26. No further word of the game is to be found. By May 14, Jones gave up his lease and retreated to a more modest porterhouse, which became his home as well as his saloon. The Neilson family presumably regained control of its property at this point.

Jones may have been financially ruined in his experiment to use baseball as a draw to sell other things, such as refreshments—"ice cream, cake, punch, lemonade, &c. &c."—and maybe to link with omnibus service (the Common Council did evaluate a proposal during this fever-panic period for a line from Trinity Church to Art Street, known today as Eighth Street). However, the plan of the Jones' Retreat—interurban transit plus food and drink—would become the model for baseball's magnates later in the century.

Rounding the curve: I spotted an ad including the phrase "Ball Club" in the 1821 *Evening Post*, thus creating for New York City a heretofore unsuspected bicentennial of baseball in that pioneering burgh.

