

Hello my name is Ben Brown, Director/Curator of the Clarke Museum. Spring is in the air, which means it's baseball season again and Humboldt County has a long history with the sport! The following is an excerpt from Jack Nash.

It is believed that the first team in Humboldt County began in 1874 and was called the Baseball Club of Rohnerville. There was very little competition at the time, the first written account was a game between them and the Ferndale Baseball Club where Rohnerville cruised to an easy victory by the score of 60-29. The high run count was not unusual for that era.

In 1878, the Blue Stocking Baseball Club was organized. They had solid financial backing and a five year lease on a piece of land opposite Pleasure Park, between F and G streets in Eureka. They lost their first game to the Mutuals by the score of 28 to 24.

One of the most famous early players was Sam Dungan. Locally born and connected to Dungan's Ferry on the Eel River, he left Humboldt in 1888 and played in the major leagues in the 1890s for the Chicago White Sox, Detroit Tigers, and others. In 1895 the Humboldt Baseball League had four teams, the Mantells of Eureka, Sperrys of Arcata, the Port Kenyon Crews, and the Rohnerville Acmes. While the name of the top local league changed many times over the years, there remained many independent teams that were mostly connected with lumber camps and mills. Early on small communities complained that it was unfair that the larger towns, such as Eureka, Arcata, Blue Lake, and Ferndale were hiring players and paying them salaries!

Any story about local baseball history has to include Joe Qeschger, a pitcher who played 12 professional seasons from 1914 to 1925. Joe was born in Chicago in 1892 and moved to Ferndale with his family in 1900, playing for Ferndale High and St. Mary's College before heading to the pros. Joe became famous on May 1, 1920 when his Boston Braves battled the Brooklyn Dodgers in a 26 innings contest that ended up a 1-1 tie, the game was called due to darkness. Amazingly, Oeschger pitched the entire 26 inning game, which is still a Major League record for the most innings pitched in a single game.

In the 1920s the Humboldt County League became a very important part of baseball on the West Coast as players were heavily recruited and moved back and forth between Humboldt County and the Bay Area's Pacific Coast League, which was considered on par with the majors. The local baseball leagues and teams remained very strong into the 1930s. The top league in the county was either called the Humboldt County League or the Redwood League with teams such as the Scotia Lumberjacks, Eureka Merchants, and the Arcata Blues.

The Humboldt Crabs was founded in 1945 by Lou "Mr. Baseball" Bonomini, and is the oldest continuously-operated summer collegiate, wood-bat, baseball team in the country. At least 60 players have gone on to play baseball at the Major League level.

The Clarke Historical Museum is dedicated to preserving and presenting this region's history, we're always looking for volunteers and new members to help keep history alive!