

June 27, 2017

Grangers Play at Jimmy John's Field

by Douglas "Moonlight" Otlewski/Special to Community Lifestyles Utica, Michigan . . .

Paraphrasing the timeless words of a baseball sage: "Build it and they will come." And so they did, in droves, to see base ball's past meet its future, when the Rochester Grangers were invited to play an exhibition at Jimmy John's Field in neighboring Utica. On a perfect evening dubbed "Vintage Base Ball Night," the Rochester Grangers' appearance might have been apropos of an H.G. Wells novel, with the vintage ballists having materialized not from a cornfield, but from the thin air of their own time-travel machine. To the wide-eyed visitors, the stadium was a technological marvel: a steel-reinforced base ball rotunda illuminated by hundreds of gas-lit globes, periodically patrolled by motorized grass-whipping wagons and buried watering machines.

As the Grangers were introduced, dozens of suspended megaphones helped amplify the voice of Bob "Piller" Lytle, the local apothecary, author and raconteur who served as Umpire for the event. He was careful to discourage players from engaging in ungentlemanly maneuvers such as bunting, stealing and swearing, lest they be subject to peremptory sanction.

The Grangers were led by their paleolithic panjandrum Patrick "Barnraiser" McKay, who was much discomfited at the closely cropped condition of the grounds, the likes of which he had not seen since his goat ran wild at Van Hoosen Farm. The anachronistic visitors, appearing without protective glove wear or face cages of any kind, were equally perplexed by the sturdily constructed fence rising from the long-field perimeter, beyond which balls could not be retrieved. Dressed in their splendid ivory and black tunics, the Grangers were finely turned out as usual, equally prepared to run the bases or man a fire brigade.

The exhibition preceded a game between the Diamond Hoppers and the Unicorns, whose rosters were staffed by a plethora of base ball mercenaries. Having little experience with such careerists, it came as a surprise to the Grangers that no less than four such clubs called the stadium home, each presumably living underground in special tunnels connected to entryways called "dugouts".

After their exercises were completed, the Grangers settled into their seats to sample exotic comestibles such as “pizza” and “hot dogs.” Keith “Boomer” Walters was fairly amazed that balls hit into the stands could be kept by spectators as souvenirs. For vintage practitioners, who might use the same mottled orb for a month, such largesse proved to be an unexpected windfall.

At evening’s end, ballists from each era agreed they had much to learn from one another. For the Grangers, it was a unique chance to share their love of the nation’s game with their professional brethren, whose affection for the game seemed to mirror their own.

Douglas ‘Moonlight’ Otlewski contributed this Granger up date in the writing style used in the late 1800s. We wish to thank our sponsors, Too-Ra-Loo, the Chicken Shack and the Grand Traverse Pie Company of Rochester. The townsfolk are invited to join the Grangers on August 5, when they play the Detroit Early Risers at 1:00 at Van Hoosen Farm. For further information on the entire schedule please call the Museum at [\(248\) 656-4663](tel:2486564663) or circumnavigate the new-fangled web at www.rochestergrangers.org .

Patrick J. McKay, Manager
Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm
[248.841.2671](tel:248.841.2671)
1005 Van Hoosen Road
Rochester Hills, MI 48306
mckayp@rochesterhills.org
www.rochesterhills.org/museum

