

Iowa's passion for the game

IN 1888, MARK TWAIN DESCRIBED THE SPORT OF BASEBALL as “the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.”

Baseball as an expression of that century lost no vigor in the 20th century. Nor did baseball lose its capacity to link the local to the national. A town history for Eagle Grove, Iowa, tells how “the World Series Baseball Playoffs were so important in the early 1920’s [that] the baseball plays were relayed to the Northwestern Railroad trainmaster’s office by telegraph. A man would bring the message down Broadway to Gildner McCarty’s men’s store where, in the window, a board representing a baseball diamond had been set up. Electric light bulbs showed the strikes, balls and the bases the players were on. Bleachers were set up in the street to accommodate the men. However, boys from both Sacred Heart and Public High School either delayed returning to school or skipped entirely. This was better than waiting for the newspaper report.”

Iowa’s passion for baseball was not just at the national level. Town and cities of all sizes fielded teams. Often they struggled with the finances, just as the national teams did, for baseball is a story of business as well as sport.

This issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* takes a look at baseball in a special way. Detailed historical accounts abound of Iowa’s best-known players—Cap Anson, Billy Sunday, Bill Zuber, and Bob Feller. What we offer in this issue are seldom-heard stories about significant Iowa firsts and Iowa figures in U.S. baseball history. And for the national pastime at the community level, watch for our “passion for the game” vignettes and images scattered throughout the issue.

—The Editor

SHSI (DES MOINES)



Frank Beymer winds up for a pitch in this studio portrait created in 1890.

COURTESY JOHN LIEPA



A Sioux City ball player keeps his eye on the ball (probably suspended from a string) in this 1880s cabinet card produced by Old Judge Cigarettes.