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Baseball a hit in Clark County for over a century

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Baseball a hit in Clark County for over a century

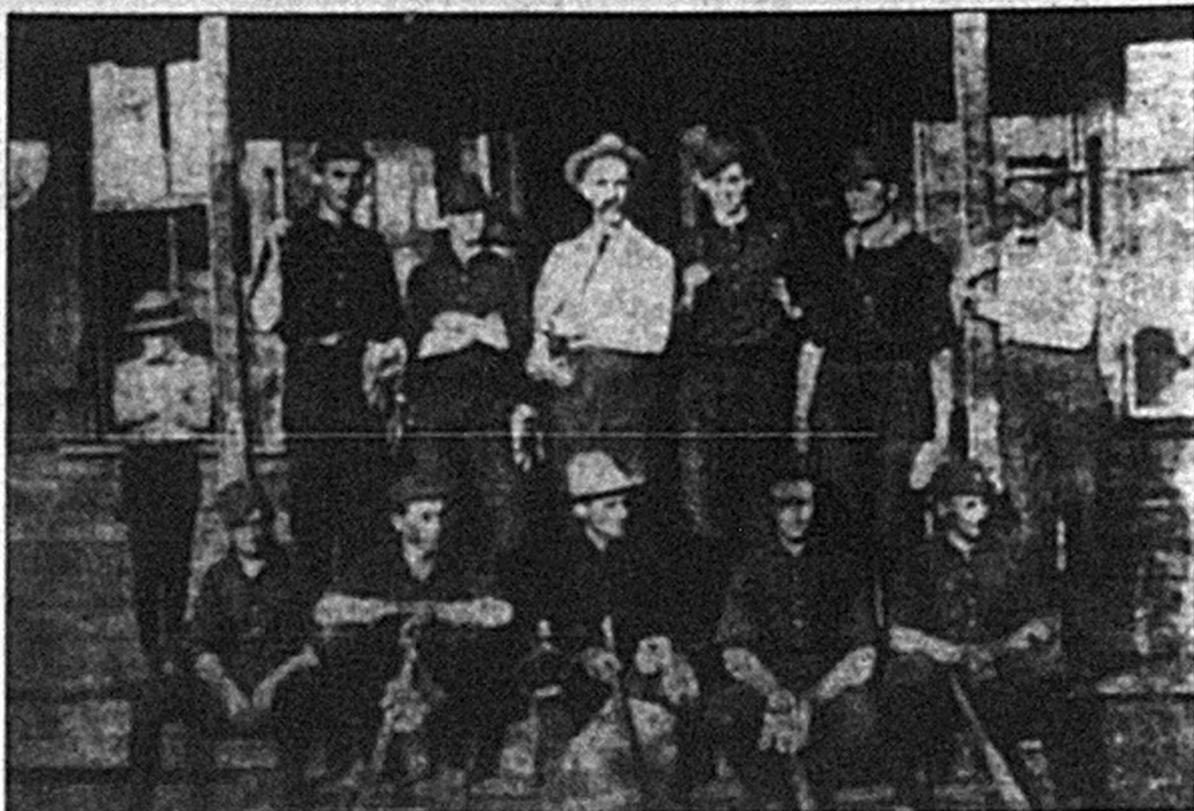


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The Daleville baseball team was one of Clark County's first professional teams. This group of players from about 1900 consisted of (front row, from left) Charles Atkins, Jim Callaway, Irvin Rudolph, Carl McDaniel (team manager), Ed Jordan, (back row) Cy Hudson, Cy Brown, C.G. Carpenter (mill manager), Dan Finger, Fred Meyers, C.C. Jackson (commissary manager). The boy at left is believed to be John Brown Jr.

By Wendy Richter
For the Times

Baseball is among the nation's most popular sports, and Arkadelphia's history of the sport goes back almost 150 years. According to local legend, baseball was introduced in Clark County by a young man named Charley Murta in 1874.

The game was played much differently in those early days. Long-time

resident James S. Barkman recalled the first game he ever saw, which was in 1874. The Southern Standard of Jan. 18, 1917, included Barkman's description of the sport's beginnings at the local level:

"Games were played every Saturday afternoon, commencing promptly at 1 o'clock, in order to play the nine innings before sundown, as in those days the nine

that made 135 to 150 was some nine, and if there were less than 75 runs made on each side it was unanimously voted to a punk game. There was a number of us

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game. There was a number of us younger boys that held the honorable position of pigtail: that is, it was our duty to take care of all balls that passed the catcher, which was most of them, as he invariably missed catching the ball on the first bounce, and if he did the batter was out, the same rule applied to the fielders — if a fielder caught the ball on the first bounce the batter was out.

"After a number of years the young boys of my size organized two teams, and Captain Lou T. Kretschmar was our official scorer, and he gave the results of the games to the newspaper edited by Col. J.W. Gaulding and Adam Clark. He also named the two teams. One team was named the S.T.R.s and the other the R.A.C.s, which were very appropriate names.

"These two teams held together until about 1882, when the old Dale Clippers were organized. This club was named after Dr. John R. Dale. We had two paid players on this team, the late lamented Pat Welch and Claude Ringo. Pat did the pitching and Claude the receiving. We paid

these two players \$12 per month without board or washing, and in order to raise the \$12 per month it was often necessary to give pink ice cream and strawberry socials: and Claude always took charge of the door to see that all who entered were fully equipped with the equivalent. Welch pitched the first curve ball I ever saw go over the plate, and he taught the art to Dougald McMillan."

Some of the early teams had very colorful names. For example, there were the Magnolias, The Kids, Dale Clippers, Hughes Rustlers, Arkadelphia Milling Company, Striped Stockings, Never Sweats, and Soul Kissers. Since the Arkadelphia Milling Company made a brand of flour named "Soul Kissed," it is believed that members of the Soul Kissers team worked at the mill.

A new ball park was

built in Arkadelphia in 1887, apparently among the state's finest. The grandstand seated about 500 people.

To maintain a high-quality playing surface, the field was plowed, harrowed and packed by a heavy roller. According to one newspaper report, though, the park's fence lacked a little of that quality: "There are cracks in it sufficiently large to admit the passage of a man's hand, and many an eye will pull through those cracks what their owners would otherwise pay a quarter to go in and get."

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clarkcountyhistory.org or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).

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