

Bethinking of Old Orleans

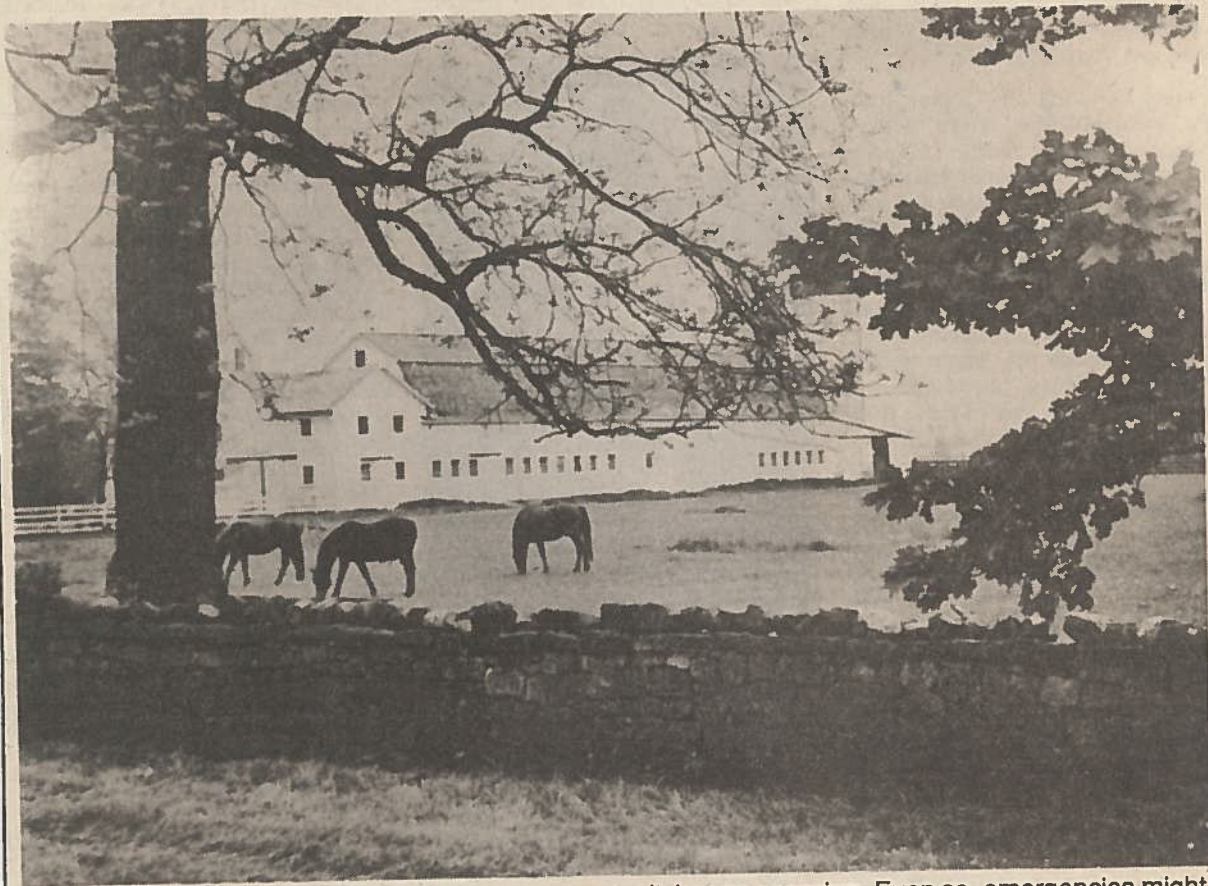
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SHELBY CENTER: A CHAMPION



The title of this article and the information herein is taken from some reminiscence by Herbert S. Weet (1871-1953) who was the Shelby Town Historian from 1948 to 1953. With the baseball season now upon us it seems appropriate to share his story with you. Before the days of Little League, almost every community had its own baseball team. I believe Mr. Weet wrote this account around 1950 as he reminisced about his boyhood, going back to the summer of 1885. Don Cook's photo of the Forestel Farm, now owned by Peter Keppler, shows the playing field and stone wall mentioned by Weet when it was the Acer Farm.

"The sport that surpassed all others in sustained interest was baseball. Directly across the street east of the present hotel was the playing field. It was then one open field extending from the stone wall on the north to the school house grounds. One of the best players on our local team was V.A. Acer, whose influence with his father was such as to secure this unprecedented privilege. In those days, when baseball grounds were practically all of the 'sandlot type' there was no better playing field in the county. To be sure of a good story, the claim is hereby made that we defeated every team in Orleans County, including Medina and Albion. In short, Shelby Center was the CHAMPION.

"Here are the names of the regular players and the nickname of each, so far as there were nicknames: Alvah Pickard, V.A. Acer, Herbert Congdon (BRIF), George Smith (NICK), Mervin Martin (MERV), Fred Benson (POOD), Marvin Sleight (TIM), Isaac Chamberlain (IKE), and Bert Weet (BUCK). Each and every one of these was a local boy, though Ike Chamberlain had moved to Tonawanda. Our nearest approach to a RINGER was Clarence Stumph, whom Ike brought with him at times. I had completely forgotten Stumph until Alvah Pickard recently reminded me of him.

"Those were not the days of the specialist, either in baseball or elsewhere. So far as we did have specialists, however, Alvah Pickard was the pitcher, Herb Congdon the catcher, and Merv Martin the shortstop. With no dependence whatever on my own memory, I do associate V.A. Acer and myself with first base, and Tim Sleight as a relief

pitcher on occasion. Even so, emergencies might from time to time call upon any one of us to fill any position. I vividly recall, for example, that in our last game of the season Herb Congdon was injured and that I took his place behind the bat. This memory is vivid because never before had I played this position and fear gripped me as I tackled the job. My only instruction was to forget the bat and assume that the ball would come straight through to the catcher. Since we lacked the body protectors of the present day and no catcher would be injured as Herb was, I had no hankering to get behind the bat. This final game was with Medina and we won it. The only members of the Medina team who come to memory now were the Skinner brothers and Lou Bacon.

"It seems scarcely necessary to point out the unparalleled conditions that prevailed in Shelby Center during the summer and that made these victories possible. So far as anyone knows, that was the only summer when a full baseball team of local boys could be found in this hamlet, and it was the only year when such a choice field in the very center of the village, was available.

"There now comes to mind one incident of serious importance to us at the time. No Sunday game was ever held in Shelby Center, even though we did sometimes steal away to some outlying field for practice. Some other communities were not so careful in this regard. On one occasion a scrub team and the Shelby Center boys had arranged for a practice game at Shelby Basin on Sunday. The storekeeper in what is now the east end of the Siewert Store here was George Wiedrich. George was a fine type of man and a good citizen whom all respected. He was not a church going man, but he vigorously opposed Sunday baseball and made it known that if we held to that Sunday game all our players would be arrested. Some of us explained to him that it was only a practice game and no different really from the sort of practice we sometimes had in the outlying fields, but the fact that we were playing another team made the difference to him and he held to his threat. We played the game, however, and apparently there was no law which George thought could be made to stick. At any rate, no arrests were made."