

## Beginnings of Baseball in Arkadelphia

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

The game was played much differently in those early days. Certainly, today's young players would find some of the old rules quite interesting! Long-time Arkadelphia resident James S. Barkman once recalled the first game he ever saw, which was in 1874. The *Southern Standard* of January 18, 1917, included Barkman's description of the sport's beginnings at the local level: *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 may have needed improvement: "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."