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Image of boys playing barn ball, in the 1800s, from the A. G. (Albert Goodwill) Spalding Collection at New York Public Library's Digital Gallery. "Playing ball is among the very first of the 'sports' of our early years ... Who has not played 'barn ball' in his boyhood, 'base' in his youth, and 'wicket' in his manhood? There is fun, and sport, and healthy exercise in a game of ball." (1841 article in the *New Orleans Picayune*, quoted by Dale A. Somers in *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans: 1850-1900*, at [page 48](#).)

Boys playing games with sticks and balls can be traced to Tudor England, Russia and Germany, but the true beginnings of "baseball" are shrouded in mystery.

We do know, however, that in 1760 a British children's book (*A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, intended for the Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly* by John Newbery) includes a [page on Base-Ball](#).

Key elements of the game (also referenced in the [1744 edition](#) of the book) are mentioned in this poem:

Base-Ball

*The Ball once struck off,
Away flies the Boy
To the next destin'd Post,
And then Home with Joy.*

In 1787, Isaiah Thomas published the same book for American children and sold it in his Massachusetts book shop. [The First Worcester Edition](#) references several games in addition to [base-ball](#): badminton ("[shuttle-cock](#)"), [cricket](#), [stool-ball](#), [trap-ball](#), [tip-cat](#) and [hop-scotch](#).

At about the time Louis XVI was forced to accept a French constitution - and a few weeks before Mozart's opera, *The Magic Flute*, premiered in Vienna - the town of [Pittsfield](#), Massachusetts passed an ordinance to prevent ball-game players from breaking new windows in the town hall. "Baseball" was included in the prohibited list:

Be it ordained by the said Inhabitants that no person or Inhabitant of said Town, shall be permitted to play at any game called Wicket, Cricket, Baseball, Batball, Football, Cats, Fives or any other games played with Ball, within the Distance of eighty yards from said Meeting House. (September 5, 1791 ordinance.)

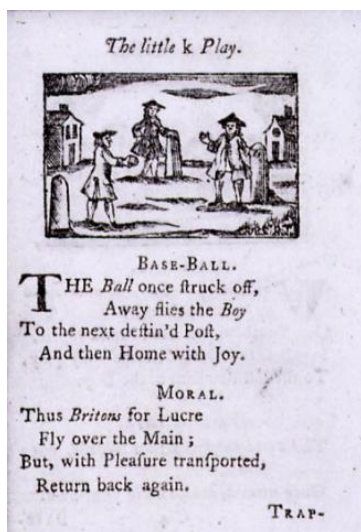
Baseball, in some form, must have also been played in Manhattan during the 1820s, as evidenced by [this reference](#) in the *National Advocate* newspaper:

I was last Saturday much pleased in witnessing a company of active young men playing the manly and athletic game of "base ball" at the Retreat in Broadway. (National Advocate - April 25, 1823.)

The [first recorded baseball game](#) (in Canada) took place in Beachville, Ontario on the 4th of June, 1838. Although it wasn't baseball as we know it, there were many similarities. (This [CBC digital-archives video](#) provides a look at that version of the sport.)

One of the early teams, playing in New York, was the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. Were its players professionals? Was the game governed by rules at that time?

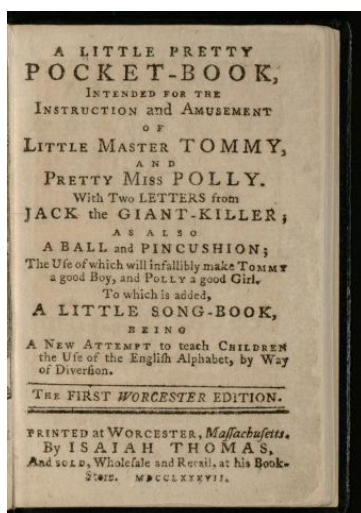
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Base Ball in 1760

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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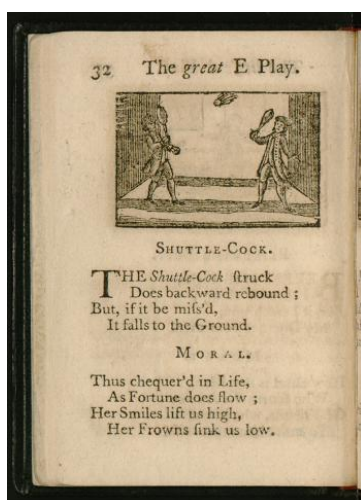


A Pretty Little Pocket-Book for American Children

Library of Congress.

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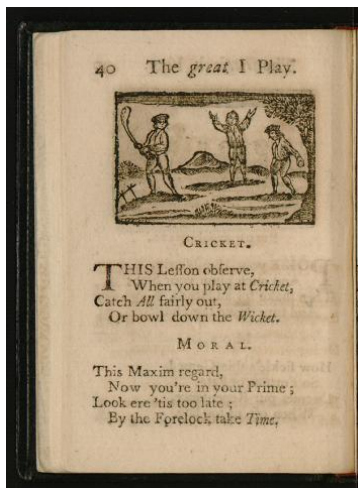
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18th Century Badminton

Published by Isaiah Thomas, Worcester Massachusetts, 1787. Image, Library of Congress.

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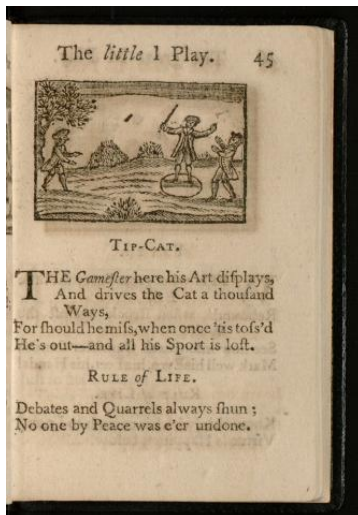


Cricket in the Eighteenth Century

Published by Isaiah Thomas, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1787. Image, Library of Congress.

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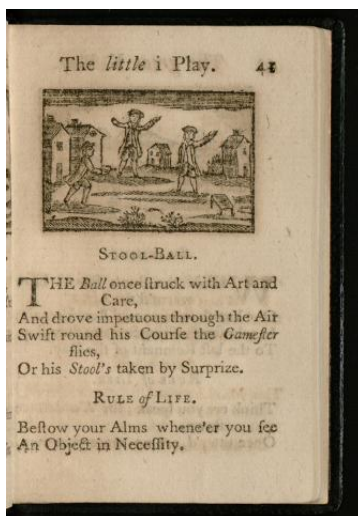
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Eighteenth-Century Tip-Cat

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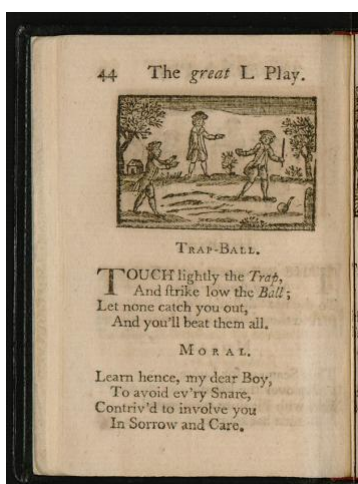


Stool-Ball, an 18th-Century Game

Published by Isaiah Thomas, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1787. Image, Library of Congress.

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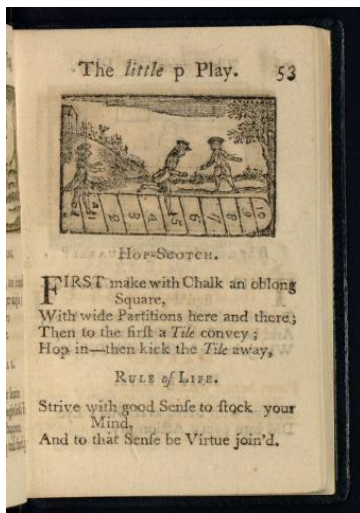
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Trap-Ball, a Children's Game

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Hop-Scotch in the 18th Century

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Map depicting Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Image online, courtesy epodunk.com website.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-depicting-Pittsfield-Massachusetts>



THE EARLY DAYS

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