
In his introduction, David Vaught poses the question: “Why have baseball historians—scholarly and popular alike—bought the assumption that farmers and baseball do not belong on the same field, let alone in the same culture?” (9) The question is misleading, for many who have written about baseball’s long history have treated the lives of players who came from farming backgrounds—from Cy Young to Gaylord Perry (the subject of Vaught’s last chapter). What concerns Vaught, though, is the significance of baseball as an integral part of the culture of small farming communities, where local players who might be anywhere from fifteen to fifty years old played the game not only for the sheer enjoyment of it but also out of community pride and competitive drive.

Vaught divides his book into seven chapters, each of which discusses a separate topic: early baseball in Cooperstown, New York (quite apart from the Abner Doubleday myth and the specious issue of baseball’s primal act); the game as played in the rural communities of California’s Sacramento Valley during a period when the wheat-based economy of the Valley gave way to specialty crops; baseball-playing in the German, Czech, and freedmen’s settlements in the cotton-growing heyday of south central Texas; a rather strained critique of Bob Feller, as a money-hungry boy from a mechanized Iowa farm who capitalized on popular nostalgia for a vanishing agrarian America; the remarkable history of the early post–World War II Milroy team, which competed fiercely with other little towns in southwestern Minnesota and eventually won a state championship; and the poignant story of Gaylord Perry, a North Carolina sharecropper’s son who became a Hall of Fame pitcher and then tried to build a post-baseball life as a large-scale farmer, only to be forced into bankruptcy in the farm depression of the 1980s. Vaught concludes with an epilogue on the present-day popularity of well-organized “old time” baseball clubs that seek to reenact the game as it was played in the mid-nineteenth century.

The kind of baseball Vaught describes in the various farming communities is quite familiar to me. My father played that kind of baseball as a teenager and young man in east Texas, and I even played a little for a team of men from the rice-growing community of China, Texas, in the southeastern corner of the state. That kind of baseball virtually disappeared in the 1950s with the advent of television as an in-home entertainment medium, the growth of the in-
terstate highway system, and the expansion of major-league baseball out of the northeastern quadrant of the United States into the southern and western states. “Town-team” baseball once meant a lot to millions of rural Americans, whose descendants now mostly live in and around cities. But as Vaught writes, “For country people, it served as the sport of choice, a powerful cultural agent, and, in the end, the true legacy of Abner Doubleday” (11).

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In a region whose history is almost inextricably intertwined with that of the Spanish Empire, it is easy to overlook the presence of other immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula in the history of the American West. Donald Warrin and Geoffrey L. Gomes attempt to correct this tendency in their recent study of Portuguese immigrants in the West. This account chronicles the lives and contributions of a variety of Portuguese settlers, ranging from fur traders in the early-nineteenth century to cattlemen, miners, shepherders, and even a playwright.

Beginning with an introduction that explores the historical context of Portuguese immigration to the New World and a chapter on Portuguese settlers who arrived prior to the Gold Rush, the book moves from state to state as each chapter investigates the diverse experiences of Portuguese settlers in a given area. The book’s geographic range is remarkable, especially given the exhaustive research that went into each chapter: in addition to amassing a voluminous selection of archival, newspaper, and government records, Gomes and Warrin have also interviewed dozens of descendants of Portuguese settlers. The result is a unique blend of narrative history, biography, and cultural anthropology, in which the authors skillfully use their subjects to tell larger stories about the American West while also shedding light on the immigrant experience. Sometimes this approach finds unheralded Portuguese settlers in the midst of climactic historical events, such as when John “Portuguese” Philips rushed to Fort Laramie with news of the Fetterman Fight in 1866. At other times the monograph reads like a family history or a pioneer who’s who, as it showcases a parade of notable immigrants, often bouncing from one standout individual