

AMBLER'S FIRST BASEBALL TEAM

by Newton M. Howard

"Our left fielder, Jack Acuff, could run a block and jump up on a fence to catch a high ball and never miss, but if he had to stand and wait for a ball to drop in his mitt, the chances were 10 to 1 that he would miss it." Those were the words of William L. Diehl, manager of Ambler's first organized baseball team, as he returned some thirty some years later, meeting with a group at the Euclid Avenue home of the team's captain, Newton B. Myers.

Present at this reunion, in 1918, was Andy, the bat boy, who added, "Many a time we would hold our breath, waiting for Jack to make the catch, fearing he would miss and lose the game for us." Other old-timers were present for this momentous reunion. Newt Myers was now confined to a wheel chair by a crippling illness.

This famous team was organized in the spring of 1887 with the backing of Henry G. Keasbey, partner in the local Keasbey & Mattison Company. He and Dr. Richard V. Mattison had founded their Chemical Works in Philadelphia in 1873, moving in 1882 to larger quarters in Ambler.

The playing field was on South Main Street just off Butler Avenue on land that would later house the Reading Freight Station. It was just across the tracks from the Keasbey & Mattison plants, and from the third floor of one of these buildings, Keasbey's family and friends frequently watched the games.

These were the members of that now well-known team: pitcher, Ed Thomas, catcher Tom McCann, first baseman, Ed Delp, second baseman and captain, Newton B. Myers, shortstop, Jack Gillan, third baseman Jack Urban, left fielder Jack Acuff, center fielder, Elmer Gorman and right fielder, Joe Morley. The team's mascot and bat boy was thirteen year old Andy Godfrey. Eight of the players were employed at the

Keasbey & Mattison Works, while the ninth, Ed Thomas, worked for his brother Arthur, owner of the local newspaper.

According to Manager Diehl, "We had no substitutes; in fact, we didn't need any, as every man would play the game through, even if he had to play



Photograph from the Collection of Newton M. Howard

Front: Ed Thomas, pitcher; Andy Godfrey, bat boy & mascot; Tom McCann, catcher. Middle: Ed Delp, first base; Newton Myers, Captain and second base; Jack Gillan, shortstop; Jack Urban, third base. Back: Jack Acuff, left field; Elmer Gorman, center field; Joe Morley, right field.

on one leg, and if I remember rightly, I think our catcher, 'Old Stonewall' Tom McCann caught a ball one time with one hand because the other one was injured."

Diehl continued. "We had some good games, though not as scientific as games played today. The boys all tried to knock the cover off the ball, and usually it was sent a mile, or else there was a strike out. Ed Thomas was quite a pitcher that year and had a splendid drop curve ball, which baffled all the batters who stood in front of him. As for our catcher, Rom McCann, anything that came within three yards of the plate would not get past him.

"Our first baseman, Big Ed Delp, could catch anything near him. He had been brought down from Hatfield to work at the Plant just so he would be eligible to play on the team." Andy Godfrey noted that work was secured at the K & M plant for several other players just to get them on the team.

Former bat boy and mascot, thirteen year old Andy Godfrey, now local physician Dr. Andrew Godfrey, told the

group of his experiences since the days of that 1887 team. Following Medical College, he entered the army during the Spanish-American War, serving as a field surgeon. After the War he started his practice in Ambler, only to have it interrupted again by the World War. He recalled an interesting happening in 1902, between the two wars. Returning from a house call, he was driving up present day Church Street before any houses had been built, when his horse suddenly began to sink into the quicksand near Trinity Church. Fortunately the horse

remained perfectly still, allowing Godfrey to unhitch and remove him from the quicksand. Ambler's streets at that time were poor, having several areas of quicksand, the worst being on North Main Street, near Tennis Avenue.

This renowned team of 1887 played some very good games with Sellersville, Quakertown and other local clubs, building a reputation so great that in succeeding years it was not easy to equal their outstanding record.

Editors Note: We're very interested in your reactions to the History of Ambler columns that have appeared in the last two issues of the ENTERPRISE. Please let us know what you think. Drop us a note or give us a call. The address and phone number can be found on page 4 of this paper. Thanks, in advance, for your opinion.