Baseball, the name alone invokes thoughts and memories in both old and young alike. Often referred to as our National Pastime, baseball has roots in every community across America, including Deadwood. The significance of early Deadwood baseball has been largely overlooked when piecing together the history of the city. Yet, newspaper articles printed in the Black Hills Pioneer, the Black Hills Daily Times, and the Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times provide colorful descriptions of the men, baseball teams and games played in the northern Black Hills.

These articles demonstrate how baseball was more than just a game; it helped build and strengthen a sense of community pride. The following exhibit is an introduction into Deadwood's rich baseball history spanning from the 1870s through the early twentieth century.

Play Ball!
The American Civil War played a major role in the introduction and evolution of the game of baseball. Both Union and Confederate soldiers played the game in their spare time. Upon conclusion of the war, veterans returning home helped to spread baseball throughout the country in the late 1860s. It is no surprise that the U.S. Seventh Cavalry, under Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer, took the game with them to the Western frontier.

In the summer of 1874, Custer and the Seventh Cavalry entered the Black Hills. In addition to military gear and surveying instruments, the Black Hills Expedition also brought along baseball equipment. On July 31, 1874, in a meadow near the present-day City of Custer, the Seventh Cavalry Active Base Ball Club played the Athlete Club. An account of this event was recorded in Private Theodore Ewert’s diary chronicling the first baseball game played in the Black Hills. Eleven days later, a second baseball game was played near present-day Nemo, South Dakota.

Two years after the Black Hills Expedition, the Seventh Cavalry engaged the Sioux and Cheyenne along the Little Bighorn River in Montana and were defeated. Among the wounded was Company H First Sergeant Joseph McCurry, team captain and pitcher. McCurry had been offered the chance to turn professional when he returned East in the fall of 1877. His wounds at the Little Bighorn ended his baseball career.
On June 26, 1877 the Black Hills Daily Times newspaper announced that "base ball fever has at last reached Deadwood". Within one year, the mining camps, military posts and towns of Deadwood, Lead, Terraville, Fort Meade, Central City, Rapid City, Spearfish and Crook City had baseball teams. Club names such as the Athletics, Metropolitans, Pastime, Bush-Whackers, Rough & Ready's and Stars would compete against one another throughout the summer months. Many of the club names originated from Eastern baseball teams, which, along with the descriptions of the games, indicated the local population's extensive knowledge of baseball.

In its early years, mining camp ball games were loosely organized, social gatherings where gambling on the outcome of games was a common occurrence. To increase the hype of the match, local ball clubs printed boastful challenges in the newspaper and advertised cash purses for the victorious team. During games, lively disputes often erupted between the spectators, players and umpires over the fair play of the game. In some instances, local ball clubs, including Deadwood, recruited professional baseball players to gain a competitive edge over their opponents.

To combat against gambling and regulate the fair play of the game, Black Hills baseball clubs began to formally organize, providing bylaws for the club and written rules to govern the conduct of the players and the game. This was solidified on August 11, 1885, when the "Black Hills Base Ball League" was officially organized. League members included the Metropolitans of Deadwood, Eighty-Stamps of Rapid City, Athletes of Fort Meade, Belt Club of Central City and Terraville, Red Stockings of Spearfish, and the Sturgis Nine of Sturgis. The Black Hills Base Ball League was the first attempt at creating a regulated consortium of Black Hills teams, a precedent that would continue into the twentieth century.
In the late 1870s, Harry John Peter Marshall began his professional baseball career with the Chicago White Sox. Bill Traffley, a catcher, began his professional baseball career with the Chicago White Sox in 1888. Over the course of his baseball career, Traffley played for the Omaha Green Stockings, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the St. Louis Maroons and the Washington Senators. After one season with the Senators, Traffley returned to pitch for the Chicago White Sox in 1922.

In 1916, Bill Traffley joined the Des Moines Prohibitionists as player and manager. In 1896, his team won twenty-five straight games.

Traffley played for the Omaha Green Stockings, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the St. Louis Maroons and the Washington Senators. After one season with the Senators, Traffley returned to pitch for the Chicago White Sox in 1922.

In 1888, Ernest Follette Mohler arrived in the Black Hills and settled in Deadwood, an occupation that would follow him throughout his life. Mohler continued working as a barber until his death in 1922.

William Franklin Traffley was born on April 23, 1859, to Harry and Mary A. (Follette) Traffley in Lead, Dakota Territory. Within five years, Charles relocated from Deadwood to Washington where he continued playing baseball and working in the newspaper industry.

In 1887, Charles younger brother Frank Maskrey arrived in Deadwood to Washington where he continued playing baseball and working in the newspaper industry.

Harry John Peter Marshall was born in 1859 in Mercer, Pennsylvania. His father was a carpenter and his mother was a teacher. Marshall followed his older brother Romeo Maskrey to the Black Hills. In 1885, Charles younger brother Frank Maskrey arrived in Deadwood to Washington where he continued playing baseball and working in the newspaper industry.

In 1895, Harry and his family relocated to Deadwood, an occupation that would follow him throughout his life. In his early years, Maskrey became a barber and worked as an umpire for numerous league games, due to his honesty and astute knowledge of the game. In 1895, Harris and his family relocated to Deadwood, an occupation that would follow him throughout his life.

In 1887, Charles younger brother Frank Maskrey arrived in Deadwood to Washington where he continued playing baseball and working in the newspaper industry.

In 1864, Mark Macrae established a barbershop in Deadwood, an occupation that would follow him throughout his life. In his early years, Macrae became recognized as one of the best athletes in the game. In 1895, Harry and his family relocated to Deadwood, an occupation that would follow him throughout his life. In his early years, Macrae became recognized as one of the best athletes in the game.
October 19, 1922, was perhaps the biggest day in Deadwood baseball history. On this day, New York Yankees Babe Ruth and Bob Meusel came to town for an exhibition game at the Deadwood Amusement Park. Deadwood was one of eighteen games played throughout the upper Midwest during the 1922 tour.

Prior to the game, Deadwood Mayor William E. Adams issued a proclamation which allowed Deadwood businesses to close their doors for the day and excused students from school for the afternoon. Local newspapers estimated that over 1,000 spectators would attend the game. Local newspapers also warned: "The grounds will be policed with a large force to discourage small boys (and others) from attempting an entrance other than thru the toll gate at the main entrance."

Ruth and Meusel both played first base and pitched briefly, Babe with the Deadwood team and Meusel with the Black Hills All-Stars. The game itself proved to be a letdown. Deadwood beat the All-Stars 4-2, neither team getting much help from the baseball legends. Meusel, in his four at-bats, struck out once and popped out three times. Ruth batted three times, had two hits and one run. The Yankee stars said good things about their teammates, then left town to catch a train for their next stop on the barnstorming tour.

On the morning of the game, the Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times front page read: "RUTH AND MEUSEL START THRILLER AT 2 O'CLOCK TODAY," and ran long stories about the upcoming game with photos of Babe, Mrs. Ruth, Meusel and local Deadwood baseball players. Tickets for the game were $1.10, with $1 for parking and another 55 cents for those who wanted a reserved seat in the grandstand. Children could see the game for 55 cents.

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Deadwood’s early baseball fields.

Provided a brief overview of Deadwood Gulch. The following panel encountered competing interests for that challenge was met, they still encountered surprising interests for the small amount of ground in Deadwood Gulch. The following panel provides a brief overview of Deadwood’s early baseball fields.

In 1876, E. G. Dudley of Montana City, Dakota Territory, purchased some land within or just outside the city limits. This land was eventually named the Dudley Sawmill site and adjacent grounds at the Eighty-Stampers of Rapid City track is still visible. This field was eventually abandoned due to its distance from the mining camp before being dismantled in March 1882. Three years later, the newly formed Deadwood Base Ball Association encountered permission to develop a baseball diamond. Over the next ten years, numerous baseball games were played at this location. In 1890, the leased ground that made up the Olympic Park in Deadwood in the 1880s.

Black Hills Daily Pioneer September 22, 1885

One of the most pleasant and enjoyable games ever seen in the Black Hills was the one witnessed one of the earliest recorded baseball tournaments in the Black Hills. That field was eventually abandoned due to its distance from the town limits, this fairground boasted an oval race track, clubhouse and stables. In 1904, The Deadwood Driving Park Association began developing a horse racing complex. Approximately two miles east of the Deadwood city limits, the fairground hosted an oval horse racing complex. By August of 1904, the Deadwood Baseball Club received permission to develop a diamond at the fairgrounds. Once the next five years, numerous baseball games were played at this location. In 1913, the Deadwood City Commission proposed park would contain a race track, a football field, Olympic Club, a men’s athletic association, the Olympic Park in Deadwood.

Deadwood’s Olympic Park

In 1880, The Deadwood Driving Park and Fairground was open to the public and became one of the crowning achievements of the Days of ’76. Mayor Franklin announced that all necessary ground had been secured for the proposed amusement park in the fall of 1916. On July 19, 1917, the Deadwood Amusement Park opened. It had featured the opening day of the Olympic Park in Deadwood.

The greenhouse built into the hillside is visible in the background of the photograph. Today, the Deadwood Amusement Park consists of the Days of ’76 Rodeo Grounds and Museum, the Ferguson Football Field and Stadium and the Keene Memorial Baseball Field.

August 11, 1914

Deadwood Daily Pioneer

This is the first park in which the city had any vested rights – which was made possible by the courtesy of the railroad. The Deadwood Base Ball Association fortunately obtained permission to use the ground including the site of the old Dudley sawmill, and by a small expenditure, the wood grandstand from McDonald Park was moved to the amusement park in the fall of 1916. Mayor Franklin began negotiations with the Burlington Railroad and secured the land for the park. During the next three years, work progressed on the new field. The wood grandstand from McDonald Park was moved to the amusement park in the fall of 1916. Mayor Franklin began negotiations with the Burlington Railroad and secured the land for the park.