

The 222 History Corner - History of Baseball & Softball -

Since there is a church wide softball game planned for August, I wanted to share some of the history of baseball and softball at Belleview Baptist Church. Here is some history from our church book, *Lively Stones*, pg. 109 and 110. "Organized baseball in Boone county dates from the 1870's. One local team-perhaps Belleview! - once even played the Cincinnati Red Stockings before the turn of the century. The pros reportedly came down the river on a steamboat for a little 'county competition' and the promise of a fried chicken dinner afterwards." These small town leagues were mainly community sponsored, then later church leagues became popular. Sometime in the early 1920's all the members of the Belleview Baseball community team were also church members. "Church Treasurer, Les Ryle,... played for several semi-pro teams."



The Belleview baseball team, nearly all of whom were BBC members, taken in the 1930's. (Standing) Harold "Bucky" Rogers, Cliff Pope, Howell Hensley II, Harley Sprague, Russell Miller, Bill Rogers, Paul Cook, (Kneeling) Willard "Shiner" Rogers, Walton "Mutt" Rogers, Wallace Cline, Allen "Whiskey" Rogers, Ben Black.

After the war, baseball turned into softball. "WWII pretty much ended community and church baseball in Boone County and elsewhere. Although BBC was slower than most churches to give up on baseball, after the war a new game took over in popularity. It was a slower, more relaxed sport, one that less gifted athletes and even old-timers could play. They called it "softball."



Belleview softball fans in 2011, Senior Ladies Bessie Black and Luella Burcham holding newborn baby Grace Scott.

Our church has had a men's softball team for more than forty years. For most of those years, there were two men's softball teams. Tom Kenton has been part of the Belleview softball team since the 1980's. There was a women's league for a time as well. There were also church wide softball games with a picnic and softball game between the "Young and the Not-so-Young". Since my dad was the softball coach, I spent many Monday evenings of my childhood at church softball games. I remember the excitement of the close

games, celebrating wins with peach ice cream and the children running the bases after the game.

"Rivalries between Belleview and Burlington, Petersburg, and Walton continued for nearly two decades. The Belleview nine was nearly always the team to beat," *Lively Stones* p.109. In my lifetime, Belleview won the championship game two years in a row 2013 and 2014, they were the team to beat for several years. The fans were loyal through the rain, heat, cold and losses. The senior ladies of the church would come to cheer on the team. One of the ladies, Luella Burcham, would keep track of the runs and outs in her small notebook at the games. She would also honk her car horn when Belleview scored a home run. She had friends and family that played for Belleview Baptist and Burlington Baptist, so she would often honk for both teams. She lived through the 1920's and 1930's "golden age" of Belleview baseball well into the modern age of softball.

Church softball has a unique way of bringing together all ages of the church, from the cheering church seniors to the young children playing together at the games. I look forward to celebrating this part of our church and community history at the church wide softball game, August 10th, at 3:30pm, at the Kelly Elementary field. All ages are invited. You can expect a game of entertainment, more than a game of competition. If you are interested in seeing the more competitive side of softball, I would encourage you to attend a men's church league softball game. They still play Monday evenings at Rivershore park.

Mary Casper

"The team to beat" back to back championship wins in 2013 & 2014



2013 Championship (above)
2014 Championship (below)



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