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A national pastime and Alexandria

Baseball has a long and varied history in Alexandria, despite not being widely played until the Civil War. From early, unstandardized baseballs found in brick shafts by archaeologists, exhibition games played by the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League and the short-lived residence of the Alexandria Dukes at Four Mile Run Park, Alexandria has had a long and varied relationship with America's pastime.

Some of the earliest evidence of baseball in Alexandria was discovered by archaeologists on the 300 and 500 blocks of King Street. The archaeologists found remnants of what looked like early baseballs in brick shafts that probably served as wells or privies. The detail of a well-known Civil War photograph of the 44th New York Regiment camped at the head of King Street and the foot of Shuter's Hill shows baseball fields located near today's King Street Metro Station. These soldiers from New York imported a sport that was considered a northern game up until the war.

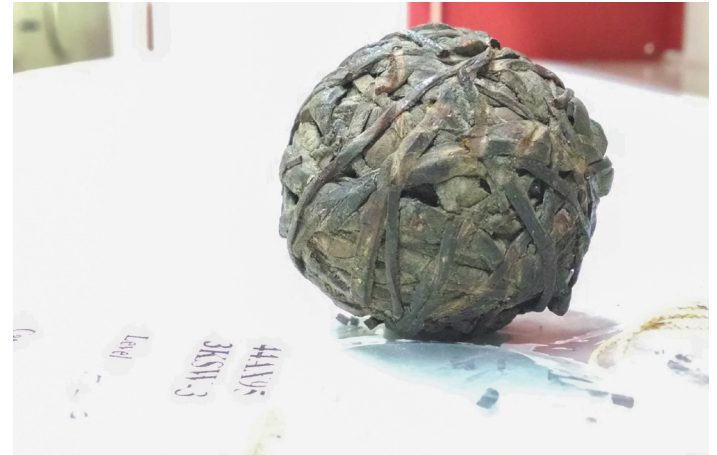
Alexandria's only National Baseball Hall of Fame member, Leon Day, was born in our city in 1916. He and his family moved to Baltimore the next year. Day's career spanned from 1934 to 1950, as he starred in the Negro Leagues and the Mexican League, set-

ting a Negro League record for most strikeouts in a game in 1942 with 18. His professional career was interrupted in 1943 by the military draft, and he didn't return to professional baseball until 1946. Cooperstown finally elected him to the Hall of Fame in 1995, six days before he passed away.

Aerial photography shows us that by 1927, there were at least 29 baseball fields in the city, ranging from Baggett Stadium, with its grandstand and scoreboard, to diamonds created by children playing the game with such frequency that they show up in the photographs.

World War II changed the baseball landscape among other things, and the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League debuted in 1943. The league operated for 13 years, inspiring the movie and TV series "A League of Their Own." In the spring of 1951, the Racine Belles and Fort Wayne Daisies played against each other at Alexandria Municipal Stadium, now Eugene Simpson Stadium.

While that 1951 game gave Alexandria a taste of professional baseball, the city didn't have a professional club until 1978, when the Alexandria Baseball Club began playing at Four Mile Run Park. Originally an independent Class A team, the Alexandria Dukes



PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM

Ball, 300 block of King Street (44AX95).

– as they were called most of their stay here – joined the Seattle Mariners system for the 1979 season.

The Pittsburgh Pirates claimed the Dukes as an affiliate from 1981 to 1983, and the team achieved its biggest on-field success in 1982 by winning the Carolina League title. The association with the Pirates meant that future Pirates Rafael Belliard and Bobby Bonilla played in Alexandria for the Dukes. Another highlight of the Alexandria Baseball Club's time in Alexandria was third baseman Garry Pellant hitting two grand slams in the same inning in 1979. Not only did Pellant hit the home runs, but he hit one from each side of the plate.

Four Mile Run Park's proximity to Cora Kelly Elementary School prevented the club

from selling alcohol at its concessions and a lack of parking led to more revenue shortages, leading the club to relocate to Prince William County in 1984. Today, the former Alexandria Baseball Club is known as the Fredericksburg Nationals.

Alexandria's relationship with baseball has run a gamut: as a recreational pastime played by soldiers in an occupying army, as a children's game, the birthplace of a Hall of Famer, as a temporary host of an early women's professional league and briefly claiming a minor league team of its own.

We hope you enjoy baseball season this year, no matter what level of competition you watch or play.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.