

When Sunday Baseball Came to Brooklyn

Stuart M. Blumin and Glenn C. Altschuler

On Sunday, May 3, 1874, police in Brooklyn, New York, arrested seventeen boys, ranging in age from ten to seventeen, and hauled them to court where each was fined the nontrivial sum of \$2. The boys were not accused of stealing, disturbing the peace, trespassing, interfering with the services of a nearby church, or uttering foul language within earshot of respectable citizens. The “green fields in the suburbs” where they had gathered were remote from stores, churches, homes, and tender ears. Their crime? They were playing a game of baseball. Sunday baseball, it seems, was illegal in Brooklyn, New York.¹

Sabbatarian laws—“Sunday blue laws” in common parlance—were common in nineteenth-century America, especially in areas dominated by Protestants who maintained religious values and practices inherited from their Calvinist forefathers. Brooklyn’s original European settlers were the Dutch, whose Reformed Church sprang from traditions similar to those of English Puritans. But it was New Englanders, direct heirs of those Puritans, who came to dominate this old agricultural community as its East River shoreline began to sprout docks, warehouses, and workshops during the last years of the eighteenth century and when Brooklyn Heights emerged a few decades later as “America’s first suburb” on a steeply rising bluff directly across the river from lower Manhattan.² The people who pioneered this new form of American community on the Heights were, for the most part, well-to-do merchants, bankers, and brokers who had migrated to New York from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and other New England states. Now they began to make much shorter daily migrations, by steam ferry, to build spacious homes beyond the crowded and noisy city, and to form a pious, well-ordered, and church-oriented community of like-minded believers.

1. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 5, 1874. This essay expands upon our discussion of baseball and Sabbatarianism in Stuart M. Blumin and Glenn C. Altschuler, *The Rise and Fall of Protestant Brooklyn: An American Story* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2022).

2. Robert Furman, *Brooklyn Heights: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of America’s First Suburb* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2015); Clay Lancaster, *Old Brooklyn Heights: New York’s First Suburb* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press), 25–32.



Figure 1. Large policeman arresting small baseball player. CLIVE WEED, *New York Evening Sun*, FROM *Letters, Comments and Editorials Endorsing Sunday Baseball* (BROOKLYN, N.Y.: N.P., 1918), 51.

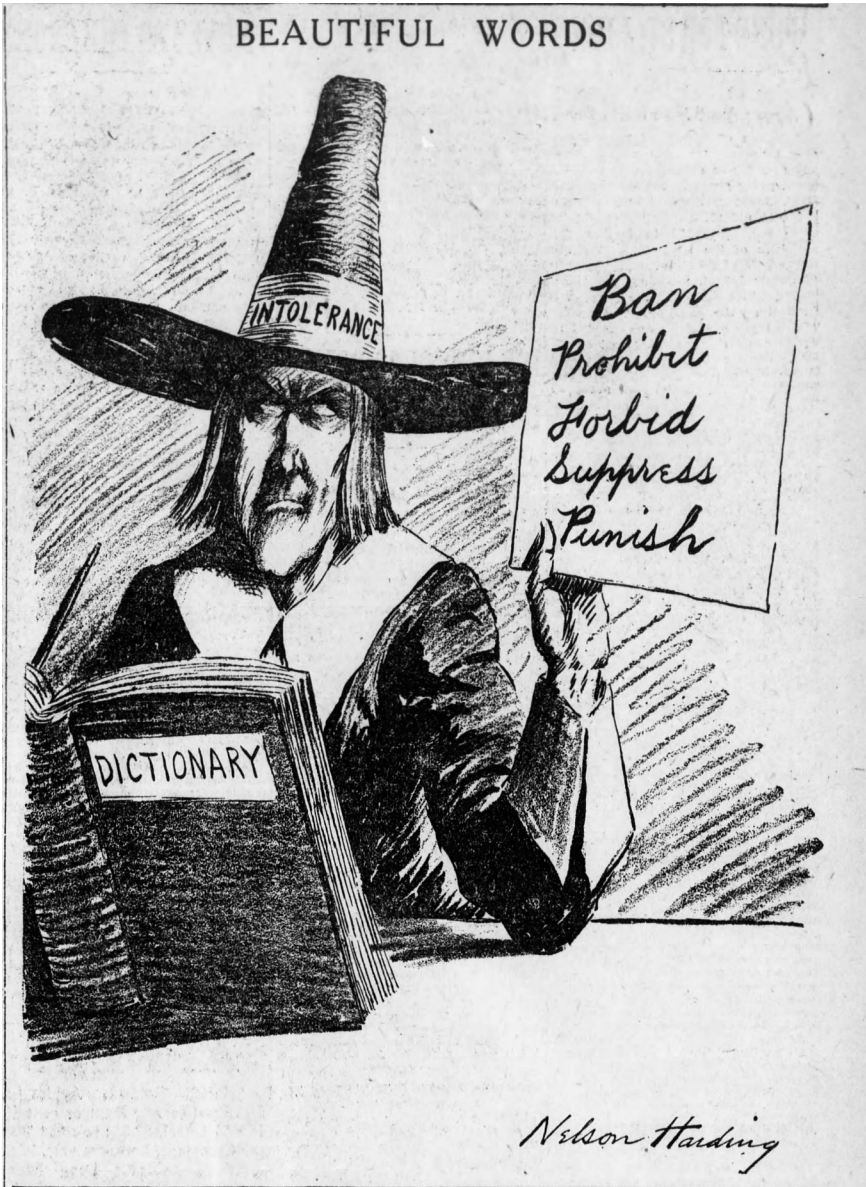


Figure 2. "Beautiful Words." NELSON HARDING, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, DECEMBER 1, 1920.

When the Village of Brooklyn was incorporated by the State of New York in 1816, among the first acts of its government was a law prohibiting “any work or servile labor on the Lord’s day” as well as “shooting, sporting, playing ball, or other unlawful exercises or pastimes on said day.”³ By 1834, when Brooklyn earned a city charter, it was already becoming known as the City of Churches, a sobriquet it would proudly bear through the remainder of the nineteenth century. The charter celebration helped give substance to the name. Citizens assembled before the Dutch Reformed Church and paraded through the downtown and the streets of Brooklyn Heights to the new city’s bastion of New England Protestantism, the First Presbyterian Church, where they listened to an ode, an oration, an anthem, and a song praising the Pilgrim Fathers.⁴

Brooklyn was by no means the only American community to claim a Plymouth patrimony or to perpetuate its Puritan lineage by means of laws protecting the sanctity of the Sabbath. But its experience was unique in ways that cast a particularly strong light on both the continuing power of Calvinist and post-Calvinist Protestantism in the United States and various challenges to that power. Brooklyn grew very rapidly during the nineteenth century; by 1860 it was the third largest city in the United States. Accompanying its growth was the appearance of a range of urban secular attractions, some of which were difficult to reconcile with traditional notions of Sunday as a day of church attendance and private prayer. Among those who swelled the local population were foreign immigrants, including Irish Catholics, who brought with them very different forms of religious belief and worship. Even many Protestant immigrants—German Lutherans, among others—saw the American Protestant Sabbath as a dull and needless exercise in self-abnegation. These were general phenomena of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but as a three-year battle over whether horse-drawn trolleys should run on Sundays suggests, Brooklyn experienced them on a larger scale and perhaps with more intensity than most other American communities.⁵

Important aspects of Brooklyn’s experience, moreover, were distinctive. It was the largest and most significant American city that was also a suburb of another, even larger city with which it was often at odds. New York had its religious communities and many residents who maintained a quiet and prayerful Sunday. But it was also, and famously, the site of brothels, illicit theatrical performances, and other corrupting institutions—a Sodom just a short ferry ride across the river from the City of Churches. New York loomed over Brooklyn in a way that at once threatened and reinforced the smaller city’s values. The *New York Times* expressed this fraught relationship in 1858 when it referred with undisguised sarcasm to “the nice religious feelings of our excellent neighbors across the East

3. *Long-Island Star*, July 3, 1816. This ordinance exempted children under fifteen years of age. The City later eliminated this exemption; hence, the arrest of ten-year old boys in 1874.

4. *Star*, April 24, 1834.

5. *Brooklyn Evening Star*, July 6, 1854; October 10, 1854; March 13, 1857; *Eagle*, February 7, 1856; March 14, 1857; April 8, 1857; April 9, 1857; May 13, 1857; May 18, 1857.

River.⁶ The sarcasm was undiminished a quarter of a century later when the *Times* termed Brooklyn the “moral suburb” of the great city.⁷ Brooklyn was itself a great city by this time, growing more rapidly than New York, but it could not escape the dominance of its larger and more powerful neighbor. “Every other city earns its own way,” observed the journalist Julian Ralph in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1893, “while Brooklyn works for New York, and is paid off like a shop-girl on Saturday nights.” When Brooklynites travel, they “write New York opposite their names on hotel registers.”⁸

Just as unusual, and as threatening, was Brooklyn’s own site of illicit pleasures, the popular seaside resort on Coney Island—a “Sodom by the Sea.”⁹ Coney Island earned an unsavory reputation as “a haven for gamblers, confidence men, pickpockets, and prostitutes,” and though it became more respectable with the construction of large and elegant hotels during the late 1870s, the perceived threat to Brooklyn’s moral order was not dispelled.¹⁰ Immense amusement parks built after the turn of the twentieth century attracted their largest crowds of families and young singles on summer Sundays, offering attractions that could not be confused with prayer. Other communities dealt with nearby amusement parks, beaches, or other such distractions from Christian duty, but nothing on the scale of Brooklyn’s Coney Island.

And finally, there was Brooklyn’s nearly unique relation to baseball. Cooperstown may be the adored, albeit mythical, shrine of baseball’s origins, but the game itself developed mainly in the New York metropolitan area, and Brooklyn was an active participant from its earliest days.¹¹ By 1858 there were at least twenty amateur “base ball” clubs in Brooklyn and an unknowable number of informal “pickup” games on fields and empty lots. The local press embraced the sport, reporting regularly on games and proclaiming baseball to be America’s pastime.¹² But some Brooklynites were as deeply committed to Sabbatarianism

6. Quoted in *Eagle*, November 5, 1858.

7. David McCullough, *The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 519.

8. Julian Ralph, “The City of Brooklyn,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 86, no. 515 (April 1893): 652.

9. Oliver Pilat and Jo Ranson, *Sodom by the Sea: An Affectionate History of Coney Island* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1943).

10. John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 29.

11. On the early history of baseball see Harold Seymour and Dorothy Seymour Mills, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Peter Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820–70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports: Baseball and Cricket, 1838–72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

12. *Brooklyn Evening Star*, July 26, 1855; June 18, 1858; October 8, 1858; *Eagle*, September 1, 1858; September 2, 1858; September 4, 1858; September 11, 1858.

as others were to the new game, making Brooklyn, in the estimation of one historian, “the center ring in the battle over Sunday baseball in New York.”¹³

During the preprofessional era baseball posed only a limited threat to the traditional Sabbath. Organized amateur leagues and most independent teams did not schedule games or practices on Sundays, and informal Sunday games among boys and young men rarely caught the attention of the Brooklyn police.¹⁴ Amateur baseball, moreover, was easy to defend, except when noise and errant baseballs caused a disturbance. A healthful exercise for youngsters who might otherwise be drawn to Coney Island, local poolrooms, or sidewalk craps games, baseball brought young men who worked indoors all week into the sunshine.¹⁵ Why, some asked, could Brooklyn youth not enjoy an informal Sunday afternoon game after a morning spent in church? Did such games constitute as serious a violation as the taverns and grog shops that kept their side doors open on Sunday while police looked the other way? At least some defenders of the Sabbath agreed that they did not.

Things became more complicated with the development of professional and semi-professional teams and leagues during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Professional baseball took some time gaining a permanent foothold in Brooklyn. Three Brooklyn teams joined the year-old National Association of Professional Base Ball Players in 1872, but the Association folded in 1875, and the transfer of one of the local teams to the newly formed National League in 1876 lasted only a year.¹⁶ An enduring professional club was founded in 1883, at first as a member of an Inter-State Association of Professional Baseball Clubs, then (from 1884) as a member of the American Association, and finally (from 1890) as a member of the National League, winning the pennant in the club’s first year. This team, which cycled over the years through a variety of nicknames—including the Grays, the Atlantics, the Bridegrooms (so called because several of its players married during the 1888 off-season), the Superbas, the Robins (after its longtime manager, Wilbert Robinson), the Trolley Dodgers, and the Dodgers—remained in Brooklyn until its much-mourned removal to Los Angeles in 1957.¹⁷

13. Charles DeMotte, *Bat, Ball and Bible: Baseball and Sunday Observance in New York* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2014), xvi.

14. For one example in which nine boys were arrested see *Eagle*, October 11, 1858.

15. This common argument failed to take into account the time taken from work during the week by players on organized amateur teams, a phenomenon that suggests enthusiasm for the game by various employers, including those who were not organizing company teams. However this may have worked within specific workplaces, it was clearly the case that at least some amateur players did not need Sunday to get their time in the sun.

16. This team was the Mutual Baseball Club of New York, which from 1868 played its home games in Brooklyn.

17. During these early years of professional baseball, club names were usually the inventions of local sportswriters rather than properties of the club itself and could be rather fluid. In one 1906 *Eagle* article, the Brooklyn team was referred to as the Superbas, the Trolley Dodgers, and the Dodgers: *Eagle*, April 14, 1906. The word “Dodgers” did not appear on the uniforms of the Brooklyn Baseball Club until 1932.

At first, the professional teams, including the formidable Bridegrooms, did not challenge Brooklyn's Sabbatarian laws. When the Brooklyn team joined the National League the league itself forbade Sunday games. The issue of organized Sunday baseball arose mainly in response to some of the city's new semiprofessional teams. Semiprofessionals were men who, like most amateurs, held jobs in stores, offices, workshops, and factories. But unlike the amateurs, they supplemented their incomes by charging spectators to watch them play. Amateurs in the early days played mostly on unenclosed fields, where family, friends, and fans were free to gather outside the foul lines and in fair territory behind the outfielders to take in the game. But as the size of crowds was not the amateurs' main concern, they confined their games, with few exceptions, to weekdays and Saturday afternoons. To the semiprofessionals, the lure of large Sunday crowds of paying spectators was irresistible. But when they enclosed their playing fields, scheduled Sunday games, and extracted a fee for passing through the gates, they violated laws of the city and the state.

Brooklyn's ordinances (however erratically enforced) forbade both the playing of games and the conducting of business on the Christian Sabbath. State law added another dimension to the offense. Section 265 of the state penal code, enacted in 1787, long before baseball arrived on the scene, read: "All shooting, hunting, fishing, playing, horse racing, gaming or other public sports, exercise or shows upon the first day of the week, and all noises disturbing the peace of the day are prohibited."¹⁸ Despite Section 265's prohibition of mere "playing," most Sabbatarians were willing to abide pickup games and even the occasional amateur game as private affairs, even if large crowds came to watch. But they seized on the phrase "public sports" to add the power of the state to the defense of the quiet and prayerful Sunday against games for which an admission fee was charged.

Semiprofessional teams adapted to the assault on ticket sales at Sunday games by finding indirect methods of charging admission. They allowed spectators into the stands without a ticket but, before seating them, insisted that they buy a program, or perhaps a bag of candy, at the inflated price of 50 or 75 cents. Or they collected a "voluntary" contribution from each spectator as he or she walked through the gate, with a word of encouragement from a muscular team official to individuals who somehow did not see the collection box. Considerably more subtle was a public declaration that the Sunday game was open only to club members, many of whom were able to enroll at a table just outside the gate, or at a nearby transit stop, by paying a week's dues of 50 or 75 cents. The police were not fooled by these subterfuges and sometimes arrested program and candy sellers, team managers, the leadoff hitter, pitcher, and catcher once the first pitch had been thrown; they even occasionally arrested entire teams.

18. The original act included the prohibition of "pastimes," but this was eliminated when this section was amended in 1883, several years before the state's penal code was invoked to prevent Sunday baseball. "AN ACT to amend certain sections of the Penal Code," ch. 358, sec. 2, par. 265, N.Y. Laws 541.

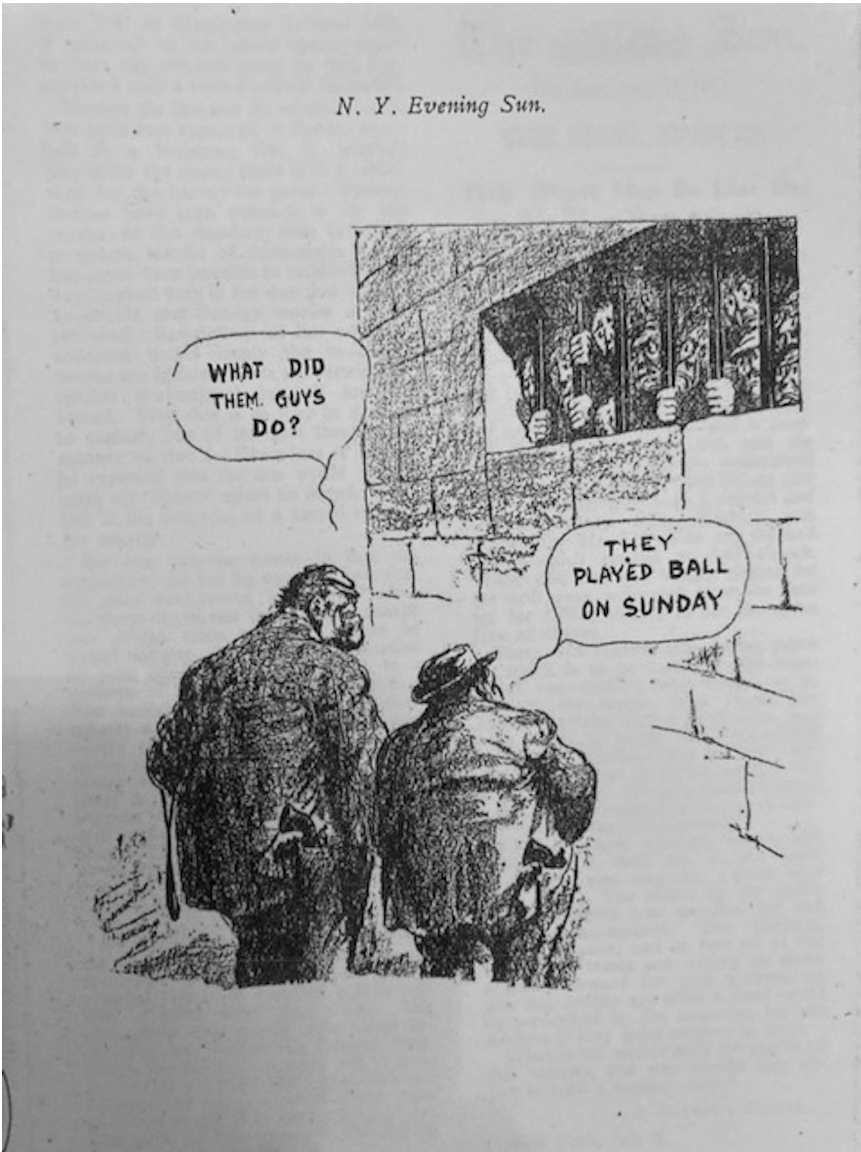


Figure 3. "What did them guys do?" CLIVE WEED, *NEW YORK EVENING SUN*, FROM *LETTERS, COMMENTS AND EDITORIALS ENDORSING SUNDAY BASEBALL* (BROOKLYN, N.Y.: N.P., 1918), 35.

To Brooklyn's Protestant churchmen, Sunday baseball, semiprofessional or otherwise, was at first a manageable problem, handled well enough by the police and magistrates. It grew somewhat more urgent in 1894 when Justice William J. Gaynor decided that games were legal if they were played on private grounds and provoked no complaints of Sabbath disruption. Responding to the arrest of several young men who had traveled to a remote

area of Brooklyn to play an informal baseball game, Gaynor clearly intended only to protect amateur Sunday players from what he regarded as overzealous policing. But his ruling alarmed the Sunday Observance Association of Kings County, which had been formed a dozen years earlier by Protestant ministers to deal with the threat of theatrical productions and Coney Island. The Association's counsel, W. T. B. Milliken, contested Gaynor's decision on the grounds that the state's penal code prohibited *any* playing on the Sabbath and called on the police to "enforce the law with the ready zeal of faithful officers of a Christian city."¹⁹ Milliken may have realized that Gaynor's ruling, which did not refer to either direct or indirect admission fees, could be construed as justifying any organized commercial game that did not disrupt the Sabbath. The Sunday Observance Association, in any case, did not pursue Milliken's brief.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the issues posed by baseball to Brooklyn's Sabbatarians became more serious. Many amateur games had shifted to Sunday, semiprofessional teams increased in number, the management of Brooklyn's professional team grew increasingly restive about missing out on the substantial Sunday revenues that were now being collected by National League teams in Midwestern cities, and judicial interpretation of the law regarding Sunday baseball remained unsettled. Arrests and court cases continued and in 1904 reached a frequency and intensity that promised a possible resolution. The focus this time was on professional baseball. That spring, as the 1904 season got underway, Charles H. Ebbets, the president and majority owner of the Brooklyn Baseball Club—now the Superbas—scheduled a series of Sunday games at Washington Park, the Superbas' home field. It was understood that the team would sell programs instead of charging an admission fee.

Ebbets had laid down the gauntlet, and Sabbatarians soon picked it up. The Rev. O. F. Bartholow declared that the Methodist Church was united in opposing commercial Sunday baseball and that the Brooklyn Law Enforcement Society, already known for investigating brothels, gambling dens, and illegal liquor licenses, would file suit. The Rev. J. M. Farrar of the Second Reform Church predicted that moral sentiment in Brooklyn would prevent Ebbets from carrying out his plan.²⁰ The Brooklyn and Long Island Methodist Preachers Association confirmed Reverend Bartholow's claim of a Methodist Church united against Sunday baseball, and as the season proceeded, the Sabbath Observance Association of Kings County appeared at Washington Park, taking notes alongside police officers from the Sixth Avenue Station.²¹

The Superbas' first Sunday game was played without any intervention, but Police Commissioner William McAdoo decided to make a test case out of the next contest. Before the game started, he had three program sellers arrested, and in the first inning, after

19. *Eagle*, August 11, 1894; September 8, 1894.

20. *New-York Tribune*, April 14, 1904.

21. *Eagle*, May 3, 1904; *New York Times*, May 30, 1904.



Figure 4. Charles H. Ebbets. COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION.

Philadelphia's leadoff hitter, Frank Roth, hit the second pitch, five policemen walked onto the field and arrested him and the Brooklyn battery, pitcher Edward Poole and catcher Frederick Jacklitsch. The game then continued without further interruption, Brooklyn winning 8 to 6. (The box score gave no indication of the initial difficulty—Roth, Poole, and Jacklitsch were simply excluded.)²² The case was heard by Justice Gaynor, who released the arrestees, ruling as he had done ten years earlier that a Sunday baseball game is illegal only when there is a specific complaint that “the peace and religious liberty of the community has been disturbed.” Gaynor once again attacked the police for overzealous enforcement of what he regarded as an obsolete statute, this time going further to criticize “those who control” or “those who rule” the police. Gaynor did not specify who those people were, but he was certainly aware of the involvement of Protestant Sabbatarian groups, one or two of which had openly implored McAdoo to clamp down on the Sunday game and District Attorney John H. Clarke to vigorously prosecute the case.²³

The Brooklyn team left for a long western road trip, visiting Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis (where Sunday baseball was legal). On the first Sunday after their return, they played their crosstown rival, the New York Giants, and the police brought Brooklyn pitcher

22. *New-York Tribune*, April 25, 1904.

23. *Eagle*, May 2, 1904; *New-York Tribune*, May 3, 1904.

and catcher, Ed Poole and Frank Dillon (the Giants' leadoff hitter was spared), to William Gaynor's courtroom. At the arraignment hearing Gaynor asked District Attorney Clarke whether "some people came forward and instigated the police in this matter." "Yes, sir," Clarke responded. "Are none of them willing to swear that the repose of the Sabbath was interfered with?" the judge continued. "Where is their zeal for the Sabbath if they are not willing to do that? It is a very strange thing if they won't." Gaynor continued the case, but not before Clarke raised the issue of an admission fee to the game as a violation of the state's penal code. This in turn provoked Bernard J. York (a former police commissioner, now the attorney for the Brooklyn Baseball Club), to describe Section 265 as "a relic of barbarism," a characterization that seemed to comport with Justice Gaynor's own views.²⁴

But when the case returned to Gaynor's court two weeks later, the judge ruled that "a game to which an admission fee is charged—when proposed to be played on Sunday, is prohibited by law." The ruling appeared to be a significant change of mind on Gaynor's part and a great victory for Brooklyn's Sabbatarians. It was not quite either. "In his decision," the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* explained, "Justice Gaynor is careful to take issue with persons who would make Sunday a day of gloom or of religious ceremony only, that the Ten Commandments only prohibit work, but do not prohibit physical exercise and games and that the New Testament contained no Sunday law at all."²⁵ Justice Gaynor may have felt compelled to apply the law that prohibited *professional* baseball on the Sabbath once the statute was cited by the District Attorney. But he was willing to do so only as long as the casual, noncommercial pursuit of healthful exercise by ordinary citizens was not compromised. His ruling, moreover, did not settle the status of *commercial* baseball. District Attorney Clarke and Sabbatarian ministers such as the Rev. Arthur W. Byrt of the Warren Street Methodist Episcopal Church, claimed that Gaynor had outlawed Sunday games that charged admission "in any form," including the selling of programs or any other means of gaining revenue from spectators without selling them a ticket.²⁶ But the judge had mentioned only an "admission fee," which left the issue of indirect charges unresolved. This twentieth-century Battle of Brooklyn had not yet been decided. As for Dillon and Poole, Gaynor released them on their own bond while their case was sent to the Court of Special Sessions.²⁷

Two days after Justice Gaynor's decision, the Superbas played another Sunday home game against the Giants, this time without intervention by the police. The game itself, though, was a disastrous 11-0 shellacking by the Giants, and the *Eagle* could not resist

24. *Eagle*, May 30, 1904; June 6, 1904; June 7, 1904. York also claimed that by eliminating "pastimes" from Section 265, the state legislature intended to exclude baseball from its restrictions, as baseball "was surely a pastime." The same point was made a year after the 1883 revision by a New York judge, W. H. Kelly. *Eagle*, June 29, 1884.

25. *Eagle*, June 19, 1904.

26. *Eagle*, June 24, 1904; July 26, 1904.

27. *Times*, June 25, 1904.

casting its report in terms of the recent off-the-field proceedings: “If the preparation of a case depended entirely on their batting exhibition the Superbas would hardly be convicted of disturbing anybody’s religious repose yesterday afternoon.”²⁸ The police arrested two players and a program seller at the following week’s game against the Boston Beaneaters, and the “spectators shouted, hooted and indulged in catcalls when they saw what the police were up to.” The *Eagle*’s report the next day hinted at battle fatigue on both sides: “The proceedings in court to-day lacked the spirit characteristic of the crusade when it was begun a few weeks ago, neither the ball playing fraternity nor the church people being so largely represented as they were when the proceedings were more of a novelty than they were to-day.”²⁹ The Superbas’ schedule provided a welcome ceasefire, as they went on another road trip after the Boston game. The team returned home in August but played no more Sunday games at Washington Park for the remainder of the 1904 season.

While the Superbas were away, one of the active Brooklyn Sabbatarian ministers, Rev. John Rippere of the Forty-Fourth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, turned his attention to amateur teams that had been playing on Sundays on fields located in sparsely settled areas of the borough, seemingly insulated from claims of illegality by Justice Gaynor’s rulings.³⁰ The results of their Sunday games were reported routinely and without comment in the local press. Early in July, however, Reverend Rippere demanded the arrest of players in three upcoming amateur Sunday games. When Captain Evans of the Fourth Avenue Precinct failed to respond, Rippere warned that ignoring his responsibilities “would bring him into trouble.” The arrests were made, and four players from each home team, ranging in age from 15 to 35, were brought before Magistrate James G. Tighe. The case focused on players from the team sponsored by St. Michael’s Roman Catholic Church, whose rector, consulted beforehand by Evans, had agreed to the arrests as a test case. Rev. Arthur Byrt, who had earlier challenged the Superbas’ Sunday games, joined Reverend Rippere in arguing that the sale of scorecards at the St. Michael’s game violated the law as cited by Justice Gaynor. He did not mention that the proceeds from the sale were turned over to the parish relief fund nor that the game was scheduled for 4 o’clock in the afternoon so that it would not coincide with any church service. The players from the other two teams who had not sold anything were dismissed, and the case against the St. Michael’s players was carried over until the following Monday.³¹

Magistrate Tighe ruled on Monday that the sale of scorecards at St. Michael’s home field, which was not enclosed, was not an admissions fee, and that the players had nothing to do with any Sunday commercial activity. Since no one complained of Sabbath disruption, the magistrate dismissed the players, adding a strong endorsement of amateur Sunday

28. *Eagle*, June 20, 1904.

29. *Eagle*, June 27, 1904.

30. Brooklyn was an independent city only until 1898, when it became one of the five boroughs of a greatly expanded New York City.

31. *Eagle*, July 11, 1904; July 15, 1904.

baseball as a “proper outlet” for youthful energy and as a force for both good citizenship and, borrowing a term from the Sabbatarians, the “repose of the community.”³²

Reverend Rippere, who was not at the courtroom that day, had delivered a sermon at his church the previous evening, wherein, according to the *Eagle*, he gave two reasons for his opposition to amateur Sunday games. One was his suspicion that some two hundred of the seven hundred children enrolled in the church’s Sunday school were playing hooky to attend the games. The other was decidedly less relevant to the maintenance of a pious and prayerful Sabbath: that the games “attracted to a respectable neighborhood Italians and negroes. ‘Little Italy’ and ‘Little Africa.’ He admits the field is not near the church, but if ‘those classes’ continue to come to the games they will want to move into the neighborhood, ‘and that will drive out the very class of respectable and well-to-do people whom we depend upon to build up our church.’” The *Eagle* noted that “Mr. Rippere had a large and affirming audience to listen to the sermon, and he was encouraged to continue his good work.”³³

Personal bigotries aside, Reverend Rippere’s sermon helps us locate the Sabbatarian attack on Sunday baseball within forces that were reshaping the city and borough that Yankee Protestants had dominated for several generations. The Italians he feared were among the latest of Brooklyn’s growing ethnic communities—immigrants and their American-born children, differing from the Yankees in their religious and secular lives, asserting their rights as residents and as citizens, and rising collectively to form the majority of Brooklyn’s population. Rippere’s fear of “negroes” expressed little more than racism: among the still quite small number of African Americans who lived in Brooklyn in 1904 were but a handful whose homes were anywhere near the Sunset Park neighborhood Rippere sought to protect from unwelcome outsiders.

The large-scale immigration of Irish Catholics and German Catholics and Protestants during the 1840s and 1850s had introduced a significant degree of ethnic and religious diversity to Brooklyn. On the eve of the Civil War, these two immigrant communities amounted to nearly 40 percent of the city’s population.³⁴ With some exceptions these were among the poorest and least influential people in the growing city, and if they found ways of resisting the constraints of Yankee Sabbatarianism—the Irish, native Protestant stereotypes maintained, in grog shops, the Germans in beer gardens—they had little power over the law itself or the manner of its enforcement. This imbalance of power began to shift later in the century, with the maturation of the American-born children of the antebellum immigrants, and even more dramatically, with the arrival in the United States of some nine million “New Immigrants” from Eastern and Southern Europe between 1900 and the

32. *Eagle*, July 18, 1904.

33. *Eagle*, July 18, 1904.

34. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of the United States . . . in 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1866).

beginning of World War I.³⁵ The majority of these immigrants—Russian, Ukrainian, and other East European Jews; Italian, Polish, and Hungarian Catholics; Greek and Russian Orthodox Christians—arrived through the port of New York, and some found their first American homes on Manhattan’s already crowded East Side.

With the opening in 1903 of the Williamsburg Bridge (soon dubbed the Jews’ Highway or the Passover Bridge), the 1909 opening of the Manhattan Bridge, and the digging of subway tunnels under the East River, hundreds of thousands of Jews, Italians, and other New Immigrants relocated their homes to Brooklyn. Seemingly overnight, an already shrinking native Protestant minority was reduced to less than 20 percent of Brooklyn’s vastly larger population, producing a mosaic of culturally divergent communities sprawling across the whole of Kings County. The largest component of this mosaic, fully a third of Brooklyn’s population by 1930, was Jewish, with Italians about half as numerous, the two groups together amounting to half of an “outer borough” that was now more populous than Manhattan.³⁶

Brooklyn’s Jews had little interest in the Christian Sabbath; indeed, because Saturday was their busiest day of the week, many of the borough’s numerous Jewish storekeepers resisted Sabbatarians of their own faith. And Italians bolstered a Catholic community that focused more on attendance at mass and less resolutely on the prayerful private Sabbath that conservative Protestants insisted should follow a morning spent in church. The result was a marked diminution of the reach of Yankee Sabbatarianism. Looking back over the previous generation in 1915, a commentator in *Brooklyn Life*, a self-described journal of Brooklyn’s elite, wrote of the diminishing power of the “New England element”; and an *Eagle* report on the 1930 dinner of the New England Society of Brooklyn lamented that this “Gibraltar of New England” had crumbled away, while “dominance has passed to racial groups hardly of considerable importance in 1880.”³⁷

The Brooklyn to which these immigrants were moving (just as the battle over Sunday baseball was heating up), was in other respects different from the place the Irish and Germans had found before the Civil War. Theaters, including at least one devoted to vaudeville, had found a foothold, and were beginning to feel competition from new venues that showed motion pictures. The one moderately sized department store from the antebellum era, Journey & Burnham, was now dwarfed by Abraham & Straus and one or two other larger emporia in a more imposing—and exciting—downtown Brooklyn. These institutions were not permitted to do business on Sundays, but even those that conformed to the law enhanced a taste for secular amusement and material life that had always competed for the attention and commitment of Brooklyn’s churchgoing community.

35. Bureau of the Census, *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, 1965), 56.

36. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Population*, vol. 3, part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 279.

37. *Brooklyn Life*, June 1, 1915; *Eagle*, March 2, 1930.

And secular enjoyments were now available on the Sabbath: a large and glorious Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, replete with woods, gardens, lawns, bandshells, and a lake for summer boating and winter skating; vaudeville and movie theaters that often avoided law enforcement; and, of course, the many commercial amusements on Coney Island, which, as Charles Ebbets never tired of pointing out, operated freely every day of the week without any disturbance from Brooklyn's police.³⁸ Wealthy Brooklynites joined golf, tennis, and yachting clubs and went for Sunday automobile drives in the Long Island countryside. These, too, attracted the notice of Brooklyn's baseball managers, who argued that ordinary players and fans ought to have affordable Sunday outlets of their own.

None of these secular distractions in modern Brooklyn precluded old-style religious observance in the City of Churches. But simultaneous with their development was what some saw as a decline, or at the very least a significant change, in the religiosity of Protestant Brooklynites. By the 1880s some of Brooklyn's clergy were complaining about preaching to half-empty churches, leading the *Eagle* to reflect on "doubts and questions about the Old Testament, the miracles, plenary inspiration and other dogmas," calling this a "profound change" in Brooklyn's popular culture.³⁹ Among persisting believers, too, there were shifts in religious practice that de-emphasized the old Sabbatarian ideal. The embrace of the Social Gospel by some local churches elevated Christ's mission to the poor over the duty of private prayer. Brooklyn's most popular preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, who was raised squarely in the New England Calvinist tradition, promoted active engagement with the world and a loving religion that rejected the sternness and gloom of the early Calvinists. "Love, with its freedom," he proclaimed in 1873, "has taken the place of authority, and of obedience to it."⁴⁰ Beecher saw himself as a reformer of Calvinism—until he renounced it completely six years before his death.⁴¹

Brooklyn was home to other eminent Protestant clergymen such as Richard Salter Storrs of the Church of the Pilgrims; Charles H. Hall of Holy Trinity Church; Episcopal Bishop Abram N. Littlejohn (formerly the rector of Holy Trinity); Theodore Cuyler of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church; Lyman Abbott, who succeeded Beecher at Plymouth Church; and Newell Dwight Hillis, who succeeded Abbott. Some of these men were conservative in their theology, and all ministered to influential congregations heavy in New Englanders (only Cuyler was based outside of Brooklyn Heights, the center of Yankee Protestantism). Yet, none was active in the Sabbatarian movement that took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; nor did important laymen from their

38. For evidence that Sunday vaudeville shows and movies were also permitted by the police, see *Eagle*, May 25, 1913.

39. *Eagle*, October 4, 1886.

40. Quoted in Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 355.

41. Applegate, *Most Famous Man*, 462.



Figure 5. Canon William Sheafe Chase. COURTESY HISTORIC IMAGES OUTLET.

churches join in the struggle against Sunday baseball. One of the most important features of this struggle, in fact, was its narrowing to a relatively small number of clergymen and, except for the signing of petitions, still fewer laymen, most of whom served or represented churches that were not the traditional centers of religious influence in Brooklyn. Men from several denominations joined the Methodists we have cited, but it cannot be said that any denomination (despite the claim of a united Methodist Church) brought its full weight to bear in defense of the traditional Sabbath. Rather, a few voices dominated as the struggle went forward. The voice heard most often, sometimes to the exclusion of others, was that

of an Episcopalian, Canon William Sheafe Chase, rector of Christ Church on Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg and third vice president of the Sabbath Observance Society of Kings County.

Despite this narrowing of Sabbatarian forces and their relocation outside the old centers of Yankee influence, opposition to Sunday baseball in Brooklyn remained strong enough to continue the dispute over the proper interpretation of the state penal code relating to “playing” and “public games.” In September 1904, the Court of Special Sessions released the players arrested earlier that year, and this emboldened Charles Ebbets to schedule Sunday games at Washington Park for the 1905 season. But when a game was announced for April 23—Easter Sunday!—Reverend Byrn and Rev. Daniel H. Overton, chair of the Sunday Observance Association, demanded that Police Commissioner McAdoo enforce the Sunday law.⁴² At first McAdoo largely ignored the Sabbatarians’ demands. A police captain was sent to Washington Park to gather the names of program sellers and players, and a “big platoon of police was present,” but “the bluecoats did nothing but pose,” and the game went on with neither arrests nor interruption. For the next month, too, there was little intervention by police in the Superbas’ Sunday games, although some arrests of the Brooklyn starting battery were made at the outset before allowing the game to continue. (Anticipating these arrests, Brooklyn’s manager paid up to \$25 for volunteers from his bench to start the game as pitcher and catcher and serve as “arrestees for hire.”)⁴³ Amateur and semiprofessional games were also allowed to continue in the borough, apparently with no arrests.⁴⁴

But by the end of May, after getting advice from corporation counsel, McAdoo ordered the arrest of those responsible for Sunday games where even an indirect admission fee was charged, and he made it clear that games of this sort would no longer be tolerated. On May 28, seventy amateur players were arrested by Captain Evans in the Fourth District (once again they were members of teams in the Catholic league), and several more were detained in other parts of Brooklyn. The Superbas avoided arrests by canceling that day’s game with the Giants, despite the expectation of a huge crowd that had gathered to watch the crosstown rivals.⁴⁵ The Superbas then left town on a long road trip, and on the Sunday following their return several hundred hopeful fans found signs on the Washington Park gates that read “No Game To-Day.” As in the previous year, that sign forecast the end of

42. *New-York Tribune*, April 22, 1905. The precise meaning of the law was, however, still unclear. In its report of Ebbets’ plan the *New-York Tribune* described the right to play Sunday baseball as “a legal enigma.”

43. *Eagle*, April 24, 1905; May 1, 1905; May 8, 1905; May 15, 1905; May 22, 1905. On “arrestees for hire,” see Charlie Bevis, *Sunday Baseball: The Major Leagues’ Struggle to Play Baseball on the Lord’s Day, 1876–1934* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), 9–10.

44. *Eagle*, May 22, 1905, for a report on nine Sunday amateur and semi-pro games played in Brooklyn with no mention of police intervention.

45. *Eagle*, May 24, 1905; May 29, 1905.

major league Sunday baseball in Brooklyn for the remainder of the season.⁴⁶ Amateur and semiprofessional teams continued to play on Sunday, however, presumably in the absence of direct or indirect charges for admission.⁴⁷

Commissioner McAdoo's course change in May of 1905 was less than a total victory for Brooklyn's Sabbatarians. Play continued on fields outside of Washington Park, and Ebbets began the 1906 season with renewed dedication to collecting Sunday revenues, resorting this time to "voluntary contribution" boxes rather than to sales of overpriced programs. For two months he succeeded. Deputy Police Commissioner Arthur J. O'Keefe attended the first game of the season, assured himself there was no coercion at the contribution boxes, and announced that the system did not violate the law. It helped, too, that nothing was sold at the ballpark. "The spectator could not buy a programme," the *Eagle* reported, "nor was it possible to buy a peanut."⁴⁸

Deputy Commissioner O'Keefe did warn of possible objections from "the Sabbath Observance people," and when in early June New York City's new police commissioner Theodore Bingham ruled that the Sunday contribution boxes were illegal, an exasperated Ebbets complained of "Sabbatarians who wanted to regulate the morals of everybody."⁴⁹ There was no game at Washington Park on June 10, but Ebbets was in no mood to capitulate. He scheduled a game for June 17, and was among thirty-seven team executives, managers, and players, professional and semiprofessional, who were arrested in Brooklyn that day for violating Section 265 of the state penal code. The Superbas game was allowed to continue after the arrests, and the charges against Ebbets and the other arrestees were almost immediately dismissed.⁵⁰ And yet, Ebbets capitulated to a force he evidently deemed too strong, or at least too persistent, to defeat with program sales, contribution boxes, or any other subterfuge. Once again, Sunday games were canceled for the rest of the season. But this time the week-to-week battle was not resumed in the following year, nor was it taken up in the years following that. During the next decade and beyond, Brooklyn's major league team played many Sunday exhibition games outside of New York City—in New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and upstate New York—where Sunday laws existed but were less likely to be enforced against such popular and occasional barnstormers. But they did not play Sunday ball in Brooklyn.⁵¹

It was increasingly evident to Brooklyn's baseballers that their problems with Sabbatarians emanated from the law itself, and it is not surprising that the battle over Sunday baseball soon shifted from playing fields, police stations, and courtrooms in Brooklyn to the state legislature in Albany. The initial skirmish was, ostensibly, over the legal exposure of amateur teams and players, who were vulnerable not only because they sometimes raised

46. *Eagle*, June 26, 1905

47. *Eagle* Monday editions, June 5–October 9, 1905.

48. *Eagle*, April 16, 1906.

49. *Eagle*, June 9, 1906.

50. *Eagle*, June 18, 1906; June 19, 1906.

51. Bevis, *Sunday Baseball*, 162–63.

revenue from Sunday games but also because of the very fact that they played on the Sabbath. In 1907, a newly elected Brooklyn assemblyman, William Leo Mooney, introduced a bill that would legalize amateur Sunday baseball by amending Section 265 to exempt players who did not earn their living from the game. This seemed a modest enough proposal, but Mooney was wrong to expect an easy victory. Canon Chase was among several Protestant ministers from Brooklyn and elsewhere in the state who appeared in Albany to oppose a bill that they perceived as a significant threat to Sabbatarianism. Curiously, though, their arguments did not directly challenge the legitimacy of amateur Sunday games. Chase claimed that the real backers of the bill were Brooklyn's trolley companies, which stood to gain from transporting larger crowds to the ball fields, and liquor dealers who would profit from those crowds. Others argued that Mooney's real motive was to protect semiprofessionals, who, like the amateurs, earned their livings from jobs outside of baseball.⁵² Mooney had himself been a semiprofessional player and manager in Brooklyn until just before running for the Assembly, and it had already been reported that the semiprofessional Managers Protective Association actively supported the bill.⁵³ Mooney vehemently objected to Chase's remarks, but he had no answer to the other charge. It is not clear that any of this (or the increasingly cloudy distinction between amateur and semiprofessional teams)⁵⁴ was decisive in the face of upstate Protestant Assemblymen who opposed Sunday baseball at any level. The bill ultimately did pass in the Senate (on reconsideration, after an initial defeat), but it did not make it out of the Codes Committee of the Assembly.⁵⁵ A slightly amended version of the bill met the same fate during the following year's legislative session.⁵⁶

Over the next several years, amateur baseball continued to be the focus of (or the pretext for) the New York legislature's ongoing combat over Sunday games. During that time Canon Chase emerged as the major nonlegislative opponent of proposed bills, though in the process he shifted his argument to align with those who stressed the hypocrisy of legislators who used amateur players as cover for their support of the semiprofessionals. The result was always the same even after Chase secured an amendment to the 1911 bill that prohibited "admission fees, directly or indirectly," to Sunday games. Upstate opposition remained too strong and pointed to the limits of Chase's influence and that of a borough where the traditional Yankee Sabbath no longer enjoyed broad support.⁵⁷

52. *Eagle*, March 14, 1907.

53. *Eagle*, February 9, 1907; February 16, 1907.

54. Amateur teams increasingly resembled the semi-professionals in charging entrance fees or selling programs. The difference, they argued, was that the money they raised was intended only to offset the costs of equipment or the rental of fields, or, as in the case of Catholic teams, to provide funds for their churches' charitable work. Sabbatarians countered that it was the revenue itself, not its disposition, that was at issue. On Brooklyn's "quasi-amateur" baseball teams, see *Eagle*, June 5, 1905.

55. *New York Times*, April 16, 1907; May 17, 1907; *Eagle*, May 16, 1907.

56. *Eagle*, January 9, 1908; February 13, 1908.

57. *New-York Tribune*, April 27, 1910; March 15, 1911; *Eagle*, May 5, 1910; February 2, 1911, February 10, 1911; February 16, 1911; November 8, 1912; February 6, 1913; March 27, 1915. In what may be an urban legend, when William Gaynor, now mayor of New York City, was introduced to Canon

Even while Brooklyn's baseball advocates were failing in Albany, amateurs continued to play Sunday games with at most intermittent interference from the police. They even got a significant boost from city officials. In 1912, after years of closing the parade grounds adjoining Prospect Park, the decision was made to open this large space for Sunday games by amateur players, defying the organized protests of nearby residents (and, according to one interpretation, the state law against "playing").⁵⁸ This policy was an immediate success, and the parade grounds were crowded with amateur players on Sundays for years to come. Semiprofessionals, too, continued to play on Sundays across the borough line in Ridgewood, in Queens, and in Red Hook and other Brooklyn working-class neighborhoods where police were less inclined to interfere.⁵⁹ The most important practical effects of the failure to change the state's penal code, therefore, were felt by Brooklyn's professional team. In 1907, Charles Ebbets had proposed to the semiprofessionals that the Mooney bill be expanded to include professional baseball, but the Managers Protective Association turned him down not only because they were sure such a move would ensure the bill's defeat but also because they correctly saw the Superbas as a dangerous competitor for Sunday crowds. Ebbets realized he had few allies in Brooklyn's baseball world. And with the defeat of the Mooney bill and its successors over the next few years, he knew that he had little chance of success in Albany.

A new set of possible allies for Ebbets and the Superbas appeared in 1913, when twenty-seven mayors in New York State petitioned the governor to introduce a new law giving each municipality the option of legalizing Sunday baseball within its boundaries.⁶⁰ But nothing came of this initiative or of a bill introduced in the Assembly two years later by Arthur G. McElroy of Buffalo (home to a minor league professional team) to legalize Sunday professional baseball in the state. "The up-State won over New York City today," wrote the *New York Times*, "in a contest on the Assembly floor over Sunday baseball." Rural and small-town upstate Assemblymen voted against reporting the bill out of the Rules Committee,

Chase, he refused to shake his hand, exclaiming, "Canon? You're no Canon. You're only a popgun." Louis H. Pink, *Gaynor: The Tammany Mayor who Swallowed the Tiger* (New York: International Press, 1931), 77. The broad support for Sunday baseball in Brooklyn, and its much weaker support in upstate New York, helps explain why local Sabbatarian leaders relied on the state's penal code rather than on Brooklyn's Sabbath ordinances to assert their legal claims against Sunday ball in the City of Churches.

58. *Eagle*, May 27, 1912; May 28, 1912; May 29, 1912; June 1, 1912; June 3, 1912; May 25, 1914.

This new policy did not extend to Prospect Park itself; indeed, during June of the following year, a number of small boys were incarcerated for playing baseball in the park. Mayor Gaynor was infuriated to learn of yet another overzealous police action against mere playing (there was no mention of disturbing the Sabbath or charging fees of any kind) and ordered the prosecution of eighteen policemen who participated in the arrests. See *Eagle*, July 7, 1913.

59. Years earlier, the *Eagle* commented on the games in Red Hook: "There is no church in the vicinity, and most of the residents not being at all Puritanical, there are no complaints." *Eagle*, June 30, 1890.

60. *Eagle*, June 14, 1913; June 29, 1913.

and it never reached the Assembly floor.⁶¹ Ebbets revived the mayors' local option idea for Sunday baseball in 1916, but without effect.⁶² In the meantime, he avoided new confrontations with the police or with the courts by scheduling no Sunday games either at Washington Park or, from 1913 onward, at Ebbets Field, his new stadium. As late as 1916, Sunday major league baseball appeared to be a lost cause in New York State.

But a year later, when Brooklyn boys sailed to France to fight in the Great War, Ebbets seized on an opportunity to change the balance of power between professional baseball and the Sabbatarians. On Sunday, July 1, 1917, tickets were sold for a patriotic concert at Ebbets Field "for the benefit of the Naval Militia of Mercy, the Red Cross, and other war relief organizations of this borough." When the concert ended, the stadium gates were opened to all who wished to watch, free of any charge, a baseball game between Brooklyn—now generally known as the Robins—and the Philadelphia Phillies. Neither the concert nor the game was disturbed by the police, but summonses were later issued to Ebbets and field manager Wilbert Robinson for violation of the Sunday laws. After both men were committed to trial at the Court of Special Sessions, a sacred music concert and free game scheduled for the following Sunday were canceled. This was reported by the *Eagle* on Saturday under a large headline: "No Sunday Game Tomorrow; Red Cross Loses about \$5,000."⁶³

There was already a good deal of support for Sunday baseball in Brooklyn, but this was a public relations triumph for Ebbets and his team. "Sunday Law Agitators Hurt Every Brooklyn Regiment," wrote the *Eagle* on July 17, before listing eleven charitable organizations, along with Brooklyn's hospitals, that stood to lose from the efforts of the Sabbatarians—now labeled "Agitators" against the war effort.⁶⁴ Ebbets went on offense, accusing the Albany-based Law and Order Society of orchestrating his summons and arguing for the repeal of "ancient legislation" that "is still invoked by a well-meaning but noisy minority to discredit a perfectly commendable and worthy institution."⁶⁵ A month later, his case still pending, he began a newspaper war with Sheriff Edward Reigelmann that culminated in both a large advertisement in the *Eagle* opposing Reigelmann's campaign for borough president and an open letter to legislative candidates asking for their stance on the legalization of Sunday baseball. "The Brooklyn Baseball Club," wrote the *Eagle* shortly before the November election, "is in politics with both feet."⁶⁶

61. *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

62. *Eagle*, June 13, 1916.

63. *Eagle*, July 2, 1917, July 7, 1917. The Yankees held a concert followed by a baseball game at the Polo Grounds two weeks before Ebbets employed the same plan in Brooklyn. The Yankee managers, however, were not arrested. Indeed, they secured the approval of Mayor John Purroy Mitchel before the event. Bevis, *Sunday Baseball*, 186–87.

64. *Eagle*, July 17, 1917.

65. *Eagle*, August 12, 1917.

66. *Eagle*, September 13, 1917; September 14, 1917; September 18, 1917; September 20, 1917; October 24, 1917. On September 24 Ebbets and Robinson were found guilty of violating the Sabbath law and were given suspended sentences. See *Eagle*, September 24, 1917.

Ebbets and his co-owners of the Robins, the brothers E. J. and S. W. McKeever, lined up more than thirty candidates favorable to amending the Sunday laws. New York's American League club, the Yankees, which previously "had not made a yip about the subject," was finally aboard, with Col. Jacob Ruppert announcing that he had enlisted nineteen pro-baseball candidates, mostly in the Bronx.⁶⁷ (Giants owner John T. Brush had earlier deferred to Ebbets on the Sunday issue, and his successor, his son-in-law Harry N. Hempstead, stayed out of the fray. Brooklyn really was the "center ring" in the battle for Sunday baseball in New York.) Anticipating yet another difficult fight in the state legislature, Ebbets and E. J. McKeever wrote a conciliatory circular letter to Brooklyn clergy, embracing "the sanctity of the Sabbath," asserting that their opposition to a "blue law" enacted in 1787 reflected the opinions of the vast majority of Brooklyn's "respectable law-abiding church-going citizens," and asking for their views on the subject. Two responses appeared in the *Eagle* the next day. The first, from Rev. T. J. Lacey, rector of the Church of the Redeemer, was entirely favorable to amending the law, the defense of which he considered "utterly senseless, intolerant and antiquated." The second was a much longer letter from Canon Chase, excoriating Ebbets for hypocrisy and assuring him of failure "in every attempt you make to commercialize the Lord's Day." Chase described Ebbets's battle with the sheriff and took obvious pleasure in pointing out that Reigelmann had been elected Brooklyn's borough president despite Ebbets's efforts to defeat him.⁶⁸ The coming battle in the state legislature would indeed be a difficult one.

It began on March 5 with the introduction of a bill by Senator Robert R. Lawson, from the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, to legalize Sunday baseball games, whether or not an admission fee was charged. A conference of Lawson's fellow Senate Republicans had refused to back the bill, but Lawson pressed ahead, knowing that the cause was popular among his constituents.⁶⁹ The bill was referred to the Codes Committee, where it ran into a second headwind in the person of Canon Chase. In "a verbal war" before the committee, Chase argued that Sunday was "a day for holiness, for the church and for religious instruction," and an exasperated Lawson responded that Chase was "always on the wrong side of every question that ever came up."⁷⁰ Fully aware, however, that Chase's defense of the Sabbath would find support among rural upstate legislators, Lawson amended his bill to include the option for localities to reject its terms. "This," according to the *Eagle*, "won the support of quite a number of men from northern cities," several of which had professional minor league teams. In its amended form the committee reported favorably on the bill.⁷¹

Between the committee report and the floor votes, Lawson worked hard to demonstrate

67. *Eagle*, October 31, 1917, November 3, 1917.

68. *Eagle*, November 23, 1917; November 24, 1917.

69. *Eagle*, March 5, 1918.

70. *Eagle*, March 20, 1918.

71. *Eagle*, March 21, 1918.

that his bill was popular and had the support of the right people in Brooklyn, the state, and across the country. On April 1 he claimed to have a petition signed by some forty thousand people, and submitted to the governor, the New York State Senate, and the Assembly a pamphlet that included favorable testimonials from thirteen Brooklyn clergymen; the New York City Board of Aldermen; the Executive Chairmen of Brooklyn's Republican and Democratic parties; sixteen American mayors from as far away as Butte, Montana; the 1913 pro-baseball resolution of twenty-seven New York State mayors; and dozens of newspaper editors and reporters in New York City.⁷² Frank L. Brown, executive secretary of the World's Sunday School Association, responded that the clergymen endorsing Senator Lawson's bill were, with one exception, Catholic, Jewish, Episcopalian, and Lutheran, and hence, the "principal Protestant church membership of the state is not represented at all."⁷³ He need not have bothered. Lawson's bill passed in the Senate after a "stiff battle," but it never made it to the Assembly floor.⁷⁴ The legality of Sunday baseball in Brooklyn, and all over the State of New York, remained in limbo for yet another year.

And that year, 1919, was decisive. Early in March a bill was introduced in the Assembly by Republican John G. Malone of Albany and in the Senate by Democrat James J. ("Gentleman Jimmy") Walker of Manhattan. It was nearly identical to the previous year's bill of Robert Lawson, who was no longer in the Senate, but differed mainly in that the local option required a positive enactment by the municipality rather than the municipality's rejection of the state's legalization of Sunday games.⁷⁵ Arguments for and against the bill were much the same as they had been the previous year—and some years before that. This time, however, a few Assembly Republicans, mostly from larger upstate cities, supported the legislation. The Senate passed it on April 3 by a vote of 29 to 21, with 7 Republicans (including one each from the Bronx, Albany, Syracuse, and Rochester) joining all 22 Senate Democrats in favor.⁷⁶ In the Assembly, which this time had a floor vote, the result was 82 in favor and 60 opposed. The partisan and geographic patterns were similar to those of the Senate. Fifty-one Democrats (all but one, a Manhattanite) voted for the bill, as did the chamber's two Socialists. Fifty-one of these 53 Assemblymen were from Greater New York City (the other two represented Buffalo and Troy). Among the 29 affirmative Republican votes were only 5 from the predominantly Protestant rural upstate counties that provided 51 of the 59 negative Republican votes. A dozen were from upstate counties with sizable cities—Buffalo,

72. *Letters, Comments and Editorials Endorsing Sunday Baseball* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: n.p., 1918). We cite here the second edition of this pamphlet, which enlarged a first edition published in March.

73. *Eagle*, April 25, 1918.

74. *Eagle*, April 5, 1918; April 12, 1918.

75. *Eagle*, March 5, 1919. A second bill was introduced by Assemblyman Owen M. Kiernan of Manhattan, but it was the Malone-Walker bill that went forward. Malone-Walker also legalized fishing on Sunday.

76. *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York . . .* (New York: E. Holt, Printer to the State, 1919), 866–67.

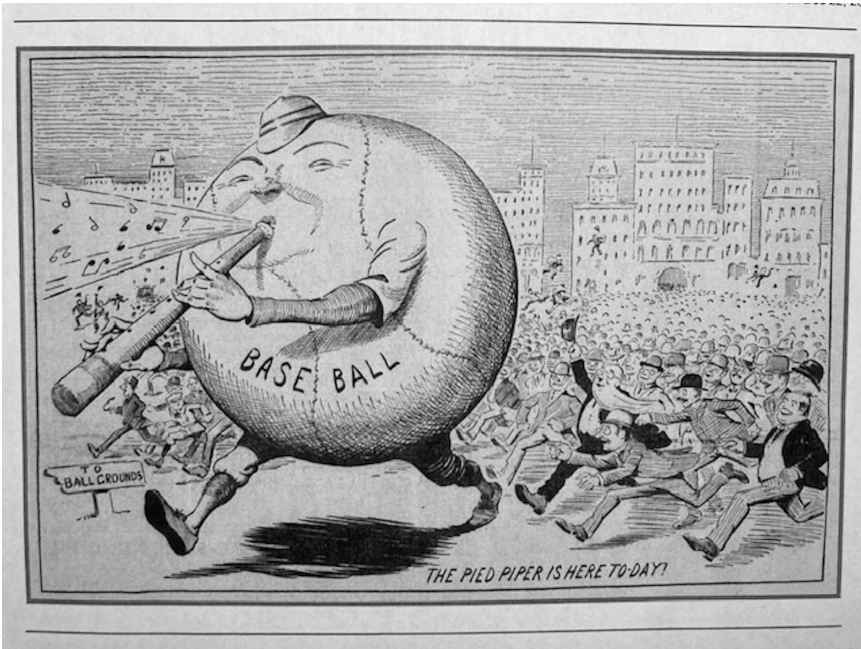


Figure 6. “The Pied Piper Is Here Today.” COURTESY *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, APRIL 21, 1911.

Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany.⁷⁷ Eleven days after the Assembly vote Governor Al Smith signed the baseball bill—and along with it a bill legalizing Sunday movies, which had moved in tandem through the legislature with Malone-Walker.⁷⁸

When the New York City Board of Alderman met on April 22 to consider its new power to authorize Sunday baseball in the boroughs, Canon Chase was prominent among those who appeared in opposition. If the Board approved of commercial baseball, the poor would suffer, he now argued, because all the desirable open lots would be rented by professional teams (he could only have meant fee-charging semiprofessional and amateur teams—the Robins were comfortably at home in Ebbets Field). “All that will be left for the poor,” Chase claimed, “will be the privilege of paying 50 cents to see a professional game.” He did not carry the day. Only one Alderman, Charles A. Post from Queens, voted

77. *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York* . . . (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1919), 1701–2. See also *Eagle*, April 8, 1919.

78. *Eagle*, April 19, 1919, *Times*, April 20, 1919. In two states with major league teams, Sunday baseball remained illegal after 1919. Massachusetts legalized Sunday ball in 1928 (to take effect in 1929), and Pennsylvania did the same in 1933 (in time for the 1934 season). Curiously, because of the proximity of Fenway Park to a church, the Boston Red Sox played their Sunday home games at Braves Field until 1932, when someone in the organization finally thought to ask the church’s minister if he objected to Sunday games. He did not, and Sunday baseball has been played at Fenway ever since.

to postpone the Board's vote for a week, and that was to enable testimony from others who opposed the measure. By rule, only one negative vote was required for postponement, so there was no vote that day. When the Board reconvened on April 29, representatives of the Baptist Tabernacle Church of Brooklyn, the Methodist Preachers Association, the Presbyterian Ministers Association, the Reformed Church Ministers Association, and the Long Island Ministers Association—but apparently not Canon Chase—spoke in opposition. The Alderman then voted, 64 to 0, to legalize commercial Sunday baseball in the five boroughs of New York City.⁷⁹ Mayor John Francis Hylan signed the ordinance almost immediately.⁸⁰

Thus ended decades of conflict over the legal standing of Christian Sabbatarianism and a highly popular form of secular leisure in the place once called the City of Churches. Brooklyn's first indisputably legal Sunday major league baseball game was played on May 4, 1919. The Brooklyn Robins defeated the Boston Braves, 6 to 2.⁸¹ The Giants also played that day at the Polo Grounds, losing to the Phillies, 4 to 3. The *New York Times* reported that sixty thousand spectators attended the two games.⁸²

79. *Eagle*, April 23, 1919; April 29, 1919; April 30, 1919.

80. *Eagle*, May 2, 1919.

81. *Eagle*, May 4, 1919; May 5, 1919.

82. *New York Times*, May 5, 1919. In 1920 there were twenty Sunday games in Ebbets Field during a twenty-six-week season. This was due in part to the National League's decision to schedule some Sunday games in Brooklyn for both Boston and Philadelphia, which still could not legally play them at home. The establishment of major league Sunday baseball in New York City may have had an indirect effect on the building of Yankee Stadium. The Yankees had been leasing the Polo Grounds for their home games, an arrangement that limited the Giants to thirteen Sunday home games and the Yankees to twelve in 1920, the difference in revenue for the Giants amounting to more than the proceeds of the Yankee lease for the entire year. The *Eagle* speculated that the Giants would not renew the lease for that reason (*Eagle*, February 14, 1920). The lease was renewed, but the relationship between the Giants and the Yankees did not last. Construction of Yankee Stadium began in 1922.