Baseball
By Matt Lee
Reference Outreach and Instruction Librarian, Minitex
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For some, the first sign of spring is a robin digging for worms. For others, it’s little rhubarb nubs peeking up from long dormant gardens. For a certain kind of person, spring doesn’t truly arrive until the faraway sound of a baseball bat hitting a ball is heard for the first time. Just imagine that wonderful sound! It brings both a giddy promise of summer to come, and a reminder of summers, and games, gone by. Baseball occupies an enduring place in our national history and can connect us in a very personal way to those who have played before.

Minnesota Reflections reminds us that baseball is a game for everyone.
- It is a game for kids, like this young St. Cloud slugger smashing a line drive in 1943:
- It is embraced by grown-ups, like these Minneapolis factory workers on lunch break in the early 1900s:
  [http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/umk/id/33](http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/umk/id/33)
- The only requirement – beyond a bat and ball – is a spirit of competition, as these 1922 Carleton College women’s league players demonstrate (with their game-faces firmly in place):

Ball players have been drawn to the diamond in various ways over the years. They came in organized teams...
They played pick-up wherever space and time allowed...

- An 1887 field in Northfield:  
- A 1910 ball ground in Big Stone County:  
- Or a 1921 picnic in Hibbing:  

And some of those players even made it to the big time: honest-to-goodness stadiums like Municipal Stadium in St. Cloud, pictured here in 1961:  

If workers weren’t paid to play the game, employers still encouraged them to take to the field (if only to keep them from organizing into unions or taking up other, less socially-desirable hobbies). In any event, teams grew up out of the workplace.

  - The Bearman Fruit Company fronted a fearsome team (that we can only hope was nicknamed the Bruisers)  
  - The Engesser Brewery team represented an early acknowledgement of the important link between beer and baseball. (I wonder if they ever played the boys from Hormel?)  
    http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/nico/id/1733
  - If close calls at home ever led to nervous breakdowns, it was likely a comfort to know that the team from the St. Peter State Hospital was playing on a ball field nearby  

Colleges sported their own clubs, as evidenced by dozens of team photos:  

And minor league and semi-professional ball flourished.

  - The Minneapolis Millers were pretty good:  
  - So were the St. Cloud Rox:  

One of the best things about photos of old-time baseball players are the uniforms. With the benefit of hindsight, we can look back upon the many splendors of those uniforms with appreciation.

  - Some looked sharp in their ball field whites:  
- Others looked ... uncomfortable:
  [http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/macal/id/216](http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/macal/id/216) (pockets probably *seemed* like a good idea...).
- Some sported disorienting socks:
- Others wore slacks:
- And some teams seem to have gotten mixed messages about what exactly was appropriate team attire:

No matter what they wore, or where they played, or whether they won or lost, the baseball players represented in Minnesota Reflections remind us of the enduring place baseball occupies in our national identity. Perhaps even more importantly, these ballplayers remind us of the springtime season's paramount contribution to our collective mental healthiness.

Happy spring! And thank goodness it is baseball season once again.