

HUZZAH FOR BASE BALL

In the 1870s, Hartford residents made their way to a field on the Colt property southeast of downtown to watch the still-new game of "base ball." Now they are doing it again.

A nonprofit called The Friends of Vintage Base Ball has brought an early version of the national pastime back to the city. The players wear the uniforms and use the rules developed in the 19th century. The games are free and a lot of fun.

HARTFORD TRADITION

» Vintage teams now have home field

Vintage base ball, which is equal parts sport, theater and history, began three decades ago and now claims about 300 men's and women's teams across the

U.S. and Canada.

Hartford has had teams for several years, but never a home field. Last winter, the Friends group worked with city officials and members of the Coalition to Strengthen the Sheldon-Charter Oak Neighborhood to develop a field called the "Hartford Base Ball Grounds at Colt Meadows," one of many historic references brought to the operation.

Another is the city's two vintage teams. Colt Meadows is the home field of the Hartford Senators, who play in the 1880s style (overhand pitching); and of the Hartford Dark Blues, who play in the 1860s style (underhand pitching). The Dark Blues is the namesake of the team that was a charter member of the National League in 1876 and played on land leased from Elizabeth Colt near the Church of the Good Shepherd. The Senators were the minor-league team that played in the South End in the first half of the 20th century.

Since the season began in April, the Dark Blues and Senators have played teams from all over the Northeast. Before each game, a player, umpire or the commissioner in period costume reviews the rules of the game that's about to be played and a bit of history of the location. Education is part of the show.

"We are working with youth groups and schools to bring the history of baseball alive for the kids. Not just the history but the customs, culture and spirit of the 19th-century game, which stresses the important of gentlemanly conduct, team-playing, honor and sportsmanship," said Friends president Karen O'Maxfield.

So take yourself out to the old ballgame (see www.friendsofvintagebaseball.org).

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