



Members of the pre-World War I Westfield Baseball Team included Roy Inman (front), bat boy, and (front row, left to right) Eli Cook, Joel Jessup, Luther Inman, Joe "Smokey Joe" Hill and Dan Inman. On the back row are (left to right) John Inman, Sid Cook, Richard Pell and Gaston Hill.

Westfield Boasted Fine Squad

By R.J. BERRIER
Staff Writer

Ed Jessup of 180 Old McKinney Road, Mount Airy, a native of Westfield, came up with today's picture and information about early baseball teams in the Westfield area.

The late Luther N. Byrd, historian/newspaperman/Westfield School principal and coach, made mention of an early Westfield team in an article appearing on this history page in late June. The team and a squad in Mount Airy had an intense rivalry, Byrd said.

Jessup's information about the Westfield team came from a yellowed-with-age newspaper clipping that provided information sure to be of interest to area sports enthusiasts.

It says that before World War I, the Westfield community of eastern Surry County and western Stokes County boasted one of the finest baseball teams in the annals of amateur baseball in northwestern North Carolina.

Several members of the team that saw action for several years before 1917 later played professional baseball. The team broke up around 1917, a casualty of the "War to End All Wars."

Some of the members played baseball again after returning home from service, but the team was never the

same. Key players on a successful unit of 1914 had either hung up their baseball caps or couldn't rediscover their effectiveness.

Gaston L. Hill was the "Sultan of Swat" on this pre-World War I team. Rumored to have the ability to hit a ball that proverbial country mile, Hill ran a general store at Westfield after the war. He and his brother, Joe Hill, contributed in large measure to the great success of the team.

Joe Hill was described as a strong-armed right-hander who was unequalled in the area for speed and control. This legendary hurler was reported to often pitch nine, 10 or 12 full innings without walking a single man.

Reports say that his fastball could account for 12 or more strikeouts per game. He was also unique at holding men on base.

Hill's career was cut short, however, when his pitching arm was broken while throwing a wet ball in a game against Flat Rock.

Joel Jessup and Sid Cook were catchers for the squad. Because of Hill's great speed in pitching, few players had courage enough to get behind the plate. While Cook had the better throwing arm, Jessup did the better job of catching, saying, "I was the only fellow that had little enough

sense to stand behind the batter."

Other members of the team included such holders of well-known Westfield names as Eli Cook, Luther Inman, Dan Inman, John Inman, Richard Pell and, later, Vance Dearmin, Will Hundley, Roy Adams and Johnnie Love.

Reports said the squad "had a murderer's row and was a great fielding and running team. Dan Inman, a cunning left-handed pitcher, played any position on the infield and was a great base runner. He copied his style after the great Ty Cobb."

The "murderer's row" was the outfield, paced by the left-handed hitting of Gaston Hill. Hill, Dearmin and Hundley were known to smash successive home runs on more than one occasion. Often a member of this trio would hit more than one home run per game.

The team's opposition came, for the most part, from Surry and Stokes counties and included such teams as "Big A," near the Virginia line at Stuart, Mount Airy, Pinnacle, Pilot Mountain, Flat Rock, Germantown and Sandy Level.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Additional articles on old-time baseball teams and players will follow periodically. Pictures of such teams and/or players will be welcomed.