

# **“City of Champions: A History of Triumph and Defeat in Detroit”**

## **An excerpt from Chapter 30: June 2, 1763 – Lacrosse as Resistance**

Fate turns on a dime—when a ball soared out of the crowd and descended in a wide arc towards the pickets of the fort, it must have looked like a mistake, an accident, and when the ball players, all at once, “a maddened and tumultuous throng,” rushed after it, the spectators may have wondered about the rules of the game. And then, the players were at the gate.

The amazed English had no time to think or act. The shrill cries of the ball players were changed to the ferocious war-whoop. The warriors snatched from the squaws the hatchets, which the latter, with this design, had concealed beneath their blankets. Some of the Indians assailed the spectators without, while others rushed into the fort, and all was carnage and confusion. At the outset, several strong hands had fastened their grip upon Etherington and Leslie, and led them away from the scene of the massacre towards the woods.

The account, first published in 1851, is part of Parkman’s famous account of Pontiac’s War, which focuses primarily on the siege of Detroit. This is, possibly, the earliest recorded instance of a sporting event in Michigan. While Michilimackinac is about three hundred miles from Detroit by canoe, skirting around Lake Huron, and roughly the same distance by car today, the event is closely connected to the city.

Parkman’s classic history, which went through ten editions in his lifetime, has come under heavy criticism by modern scholarship. Like many historians of his time, he gave himself considerable license when it came to filling in the inevitable gaps in the sparse written record. The way he characterizes Pontiac and Native Americans in general, while sympathetic by the standards of his day, is riddled with prejudice and stereotypes. He relied almost entirely on the words of Europeans for his sources, never thinking to ask for Native American views or accounts. It appears that he got even simple details wrong. By Etherington’s own eyewitness account, for instance, the events at Michilimackinac took place on June 2, not June 4. That said, the roughly dozen extant accounts of the incident he describes, including some by Native Americans, at least appear to confirm the basic outline of his story. The subterfuge by ball game was a historical event.

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