

## *CHAPTER ONE*

### *THE EARLY YEARS 1960 - 1973*



Lions Park Golden Valley Park and Recreation team in the early 1960s

The first year of GVGS, 1974, was far from the start of girls softball in Golden Valley. There was a shameful lack of organized athletic opportunities for girls and women through most of the first 80 years of the twentieth century, the result of a variety of social and cultural attitudes, prejudices and myopia, suffered mainly by men. The efforts of many extraordinary people have made great strides to overcome these maladies, and this story is just a small example of the incredible changes over the last 40 years. But even before those changes happened, girls and women liked to play softball.

First, a little about softball. Softball is a great example of adaptation to existing circumstances. It is, of course, a close cousin to the great game of baseball, our national pastime. The most popular version of the history of the game credits its invention to one George Hancock, who on Thanksgiving Day in 1887 started a game in a gymnasium in Chicago with chalk lines on the floor for bases, a boxing glove for a ball, and a broken stick for a bat. He and the players must have liked it, for he immediately refined the equipment and baselines, wrote some rules, and called the game indoor baseball. It quickly became popular, and Hancock adapted it for outdoor play. It grew from there and had mass appeal for both men and women.

The wonderful thing about softball is that it makes baseball available to everyone. Baseball is a terrific game, but as a mass participation sport it is limited by two factors. First, it requires a large field. Second, it is a hard game to play, much less to master. Softball, with all its iterations, has an amazing ability to capture the essence of baseball but adapt to the space available and ability of the players. It has proven its adaptability over and over again through the years, with different versions, field sizes, equipment changes and pitching styles. Softball is a great team sport, and almost anyone can play at some level and have a lot of fun. It can be played by men, women, seniors, little kids, blind people and people in wheelchairs. It can also be played by highly skilled college and professional athletes.

Girls and women started playing softball in Golden Valley long before 1974. While the history is fuzzy before 1960, girls were probably playing softball in Golden Valley