

Directly from Lambton L Mount  
(The Australasian, Saturday 8th April 1876, page 13)

THE GAME OF LA CROSSE.  
TO THE EDITOR OF THE AUSTRALASIAN.

Sir,—Very many years ago, when a small boy in Canada, I used to watch, with rapturous excitement, the Red Indians, tribe against tribe, play the game of La Crosse, and always yearned impatiently for the time when I should be big enough to play also, for then it was a select game, and small boys did not aspire to more than imitate it in a bastard manner by shinny, or shinty, or hocky, or whatever you like ; but migrating to this colony while yet a lad, the feverish scenes of the golden days completely banished it from my mind, until about six months ago, while witnessing the final match of the season between the Melbourne and Carlton football clubs, it occurred to me what a much superior game La Crosse was, and I then resolved to take steps to initiate it in Victoria.

By the following mail I sent a message to Canada for 40 La Crosse sticks, and the rules of the game. Now follows a strange coincidence. By the incoming mail from England arriving here about the middle of December last came the Illustrated London News dated October 16, 1875, containing a large picture of "The Game of La Crosse as played in Canada," and on page 375 a description of the game, and some interesting remarks thereon, which, with your permission, I will now copy.

"This excellent outdoor pastime is the national game of Lower Canada, where it was learnt by the French from the Indians, before the English conquest. Mr. W. Cruickshank, of Toronto, up to which city it has passed from Montreal, contributes a sketch which requires but little explanation. Two goals, each 6ft. wide by 6ft. high, are placed several hundred yards apart, between which are the players of the respective sides, opposed to each other in pairs. The ball is started by the captains exactly in the middle of the field, and play begins. The position of the players is now entirely at discretion, or subject to the directions of their captain. The ball may not be touched with hands or feet, but is shovelled off the ground or caught "on the fly" by a crosse, which is a very primitive racquet-bat of Indian manufacture.

The crosse-stick is about 4ft. 6in. long, and has a large curve on itself at one end. From the tip of this curve to about the middle of the straight part there is a cat-gut "leading string," and the interspace is netted with gut, so that you have a kind of racquet, only the net-work is wider and longer, and the handle is longer. The goals may be from 150 yards to a mile or more apart, according to the number playing. The object of the game is to urge the ball between the posts by means of the crosse. You must not touch the ball with your hands, but must always stop it, pick it up, carry it, and throw it with your crosse. An average throw is 150 yards, but one of 200 yards has been done. The ball is of indiarubber sponge (for solid indiarubber would be too heavy) weighs about 4oz., and must be between 8in. and 9in. in circumference.

With skilful players on both sides the game may be protracted for hours the ball going almost through the goal many times. When caught by the keeper it goes to the other end of the field with a whiz like a stone from a sling, for a moment putting a new aspect on affairs. When a runner is pressed he will toss the ball up, then wheel round and catch it at the back of his pursuers, or play it into the hands of his supports, as shown, in the sketch.

That the game is of Indian origin accounts for its being all running and dodging. Some of those people were engaged in a match lately played at Toronto, which resulted in favour of the Indians. It is said that next spring 13 Iroquois Indians and 13 Canadian gentlemen propose to make a tour through England, Ireland, and Scotland, in order to show how the game should be played. We are assured that a match between these two teams will be worth going to see. Many noblemen, members of Parliament, and other gentlemen have promised their support. The late General Sir James Lindsay expressed a great desire to see the game introduced into our public schools. The Montreal La Crosse Club has the honour of having the Prince of Wales and Prince Arthur as honorary members. Both Princes were delighted with the games that were played before them at Montreal. The game has been tried during the past summer by the members of the Thames Hare and Hounds Club on Wimbledon Common."

Well, Sir, it is not very probable that the 13 Iroquois Indians and the 13 Canadian gentlemen above mentioned will visit Australia to show us how the game is played neither is it necessary, for, from the foregoing explanation, and from my own recollection and knowledge of the game, I feel assured it can soon be played as faithfully and as well here as in Canada. My object in now writing to you is to give publicity to the game, and prominence to the fact that I intend calling a meeting of my friends and acquaintances, and others anxious to initiate the game, at the Port Phillip Club Hotel on Wednesday, April 12, for the purpose of establishing the Melbourne La Crosse Club. I have a genuine Indian La Crosse stick in my possession, which I will produce at the meeting.

It is a simple, light, and inexpensive affair, and similar ones can, I think, be made here for about 7s. 6d each. In the meantime I am daily expecting to hear of the arrival of the 40 ordered from Canada. The sponge indiarubber ball and the ordinary goal posts and flags comprise the rest of the simple paraphernalia necessary to play this game. A tolerably level ground, 11 swift and dexterous men, staunch and true, on each side, "and the shouting throng, to incite you along," will display you a game electrifying in its phases; exciting in Its struggles, and highly interesting to the spectators.

—Yours, &c.,  
LAMBTON L. MOUNT.