

SABR Pictorial History Committee Newsletter

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FEET ACHE? THE COBB-AUSTIN MYSTERY SOLVED

[Ed. note: In the inaugural PHC newsletter, the mystery surrounding the circumstances of Charles Conlon's famous Cobb-Austin photo was discussed. Now, after exhaustive research by committee member *Neal McCabe*, the mystery has been solved. This is the kind of research the PHC would like to promote. We encourage other members to send in articles discussing their pictorial research.]

Charles M. Conlon called it "the greatest picture I ever took." Many people consider it the greatest baseball photograph *anyone* ever took. Few would disagree with Ty Cobb biographer Al Stump, who calls it "no doubt the most famous, and oft-reproduced, baseball photo ever taken."

Conlon never tired of recounting the circumstances of "The Slide." Here is his earliest version, which appeared in *Baseball Magazine* in April, 1917: "Ty Cobb was on second base, restless as always. I took my stand about fifteen feet from third, so that I could get a good view of Cobb should he come tearing into the bag, as he generally does. The infield played in close for the batter. [New York Highlander third baseman Jimmy] Austin moved well in. And then Ty, edging far off second, lowered his head and came tearing down like a gray hound for third base. Austin didn't see him but he heard the warning cry of some of his teammates. He started backing into the bag. Now Ty never deliberately spikes a player, I believe. But he does insist on his right to the base paths, which is proper. He drove on, spikes first. But Austin, light on his feet as a cat, jumped just in time. Cobb's spikes did tear his shoe,

but he was not much hurt and as he jumped in midair, his own shoe, bristling with spikes, curled around Cobb's neck.

"After it was all over, I said to myself, 'Well, I have missed a great picture. Why didn't I snap that?' And then the thought came to me: 'Did I take it involuntarily?' That night I developed it and found that I had indeed 'got' that view. It had been pure accident. I had acted without conscious effort and I had taken it exactly right. It was my masterpiece among pictures."

In his 1930 interview with Joe Williams in the *New York Telegram*, Conlon added that the photo was taken in 1909, and that Cobb was stealing in a one-out sacrifice situation. Such detailed recollections would seem to make the precise date of "The Slide" easy to determine, a matter of a few hours in the New York Public Library. And, sure enough, after eliminating the games where Cobb went hitless or never reached third base, there it was: Cobb stole third on June 10, 1909. But wait a second. Austin was playing shortstop, it was raining, and the crowd numbered 3000, while the photo reveals a capacity crowd enjoying shirtsleeve weather. After a painstaking and dispiriting search, it became obvious that the scenario described by Conlon never happened ... well, at least not in 1909.

It turns out that Conlon was off by one year (not bad for an old man recalling circumstances of a twenty-year-old photograph) and he had slightly embellished the drama of the situation by making it

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PHC MEETING AT SABR NATIONAL CONVENTION

The Pictorial History Committee meeting at SABR 25 in Pittsburgh is tentatively scheduled for 7:30-8:30am on Saturday, June 17th. I am hoping for a good turnout for this, our inaugural committee meeting. The agenda for the meeting is wide open. Please drop me a line (even if you won't be able to make the convention) with your ideas for what topics

we should discuss at the meeting. Here are a few ideas that I think might be useful to talk about:

- ◆ Should the PHC pursue a large-scale committee project?

- ◆ Should the PHC newsletter be published bimonthly rather than quarterly?

- ◆ How can the PHC better serve the baseball pictorial researcher and SABR members in general?

RESEARCH NEEDS

Ed Koller is looking for pictures of the following Federal League "cup-of-coffee" pitchers from 1914. Can anyone help out?

- ◆ George Hogan — Kansas City (4 games);
- ◆ Babe Sherman — Chicago (1 game);
- ◆ Clarence Woods — Indianapolis (2 games);
- ◆ Jim McGraw — Brooklyn (1 game);
- ◆ Vern Hughes — Baltimore (3 games).

Ed can be contacted at the following address:

6336 Teesdale Avenue
North Hollywood, CA 91606

Mike Bond is looking for images of Joe Jackson to aid him in creating hand-carved wine bottles bearing Shoeless Joe's likeness. Mike is carving a limited edition of these and other bottles

depicting members of the Ted Williams Museum Hitters Hall of Fame. To help Mike in his search for quality Joe Jackson images contact him at:

23011 Moulton Parkway, H-3
Laguna Hills, CA 92653

Jefferey Samoray found an interesting note in a 1909 *Detroit News* article covering the Tigers-Pirates World Series stating that a film was made of one of the games played at Detroit's Bennett Park. Does this film still exist? Has anyone heard of or seen the film? Please send any information about the film to Jefferey at:

28478 Ridgebrook Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3465

PROJECTS OF PHC MEMBERS — RESEARCH AVAILABLE

A.D. Suehsdorf is embarking on an absolutely invaluable project of indexing all baseball photos in the *New York Times*. He is working on the decade of 1911-20. Would anyone like to help out by taking on another decade, or perhaps a year or two here or there? Make sure to notify **Tom Shieber** of your intent so that we don't get redundant efforts.

A.D. has also added the Giants, Yankees, Cubs, and Baltimore Orioles/St. Louis Browns to his list of

photos from the Putnam series of team histories. He has also updated a few missing photos from the Phillies history. To obtain a copy of this 12 page (double-sided) list, please send a self-addressed 78¢ stamped envelope and 39¢ to cover copying costs to **Tom Shieber**.

Note: Please do not send cash. Make checks payable to **Tom Shieber**.

REVIEWS

The Beer and Whiskey League by David Nemec, **Mark Rucker**, Picture Editor (1994: Lyons & Burford, Publishers, New York) \$27.95

Until now, SABR's *The National Pastime—Special Pictorial Issue: The Nineteenth Century* by **John Thorn** and **Mark Rucker** was the best available source for the nineteenth century baseball pictorial researcher. However, that long-winded title must now go to David Nemec's *The Beer and Whiskey League: The Illustrated History of the American Association—Baseball's Renegade Major League*. (It is no small coincidence that **Mark Rucker** was the picture editor for both publications.) While the former publication is an outstanding achievement and covers a wider range of years, the latter will prove to be the more useful for research purposes.

Happily, *The Beer and Whiskey League* contains images from more than just the years that the American Association was in operation. Pictures from as early as 1870 and as late as 1896 can be

found. Included are over 60 team pictures and nearly 150 portraits, the vast majority of which are clear, well reproduced, and accompanied by informative captions. Quite simply, the multitude of photos, woodcuts, and engravings, makes each turn of the page a much anticipated delight.

Highlights include a stunning team photo of the St. Louis Browns of 1883 (can anyone figure out the exact date?), a marvelous photo of the 1888 Cincinnati Reds, and a wonderful glimpse at a horrible team, the Louisville Colonels of 1889. Note that in this latter photo (found on p. 173), Ed Flanagan (seated at far right) is clearly shown wearing a glove on his left hand. Both the *Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia*, and *Total Baseball* lack this tidbit of biographical information. Surely there are a great number of other research "finds" lurking throughout the book.

While the title implies a history of the American Association, *The Beer and Whiskey League* also contains chapters devoted to the Union Association of 1884 and the Players' League of 1890. The pictorial

treatment of the Union Association is brief, but quite frankly there is precious little available. Only two Union Association team photos exist today, and both are reproduced here. However, with regard to the Players' League, I would have hoped to find more pictures than were included. Perhaps some day a quality publication will be devoted to documenting (in both words *and* pictures) this under-appreciated league.

Nemec's text is obviously the product of extensive first hand research (something I cannot say for the author's previous work, *The Rules of Baseball*). But it is the wealth of interesting, important, and useful pictures that makes *The Beer and Whiskey League* an invaluable source for the baseball pictorial researcher.

— Tom Shieber

Cobb-Austin *continued from page 1*

a one-out sacrifice situation, as opposed to a straight steal with two out. These conclusions are supported by careful comparison of photographs found in the Conlon Collection of *The Sporting News*.

Conlon's famous picture of Wee Willie Keeler in right field at Hilltop Park (p. 32 in *Baseball's Golden Age* by Neal and Constance McCabe) was definitely taken in 1909, as confirmed by *Marc Okkonen's Baseball Uniforms of the 20th Century*, the 1910 *Spalding Guide*, and the dustjacket photo (also found on p. 94) of Larry Ritter's *Lost Ballparks*. A "Morisco Cigarettes" sign dominates the background, an "E+W Cigars" sign is on the left, and a "Webster Cigars" sign is on the right. To the far left is a sign painted on the wall in foul territory which appears to read "Broadway Theatre."

In Conlon's 1909 photo of Red Kleinow (a cropped version being misidentified as Fred Merkle on p. 44 of SABR's *The National Pastime*, Vol. 13), we can see directly down the right-field line. The "Broadway" sign is visible, as are the other signs seen in the Keeler photo and the photo in *Lost Ballparks*. In Conlon's 1910 photo of Lou Criger (found between pages 232 and 233 of John McGraw's *My 30 Years in Baseball*), we can again see directly down the right-field line. The "Morisco" and "Webster" signs are still there, but now the "Broadway" sign has been completely painted out, and, most crucially, the "E+W" sign has been replaced. Between Criger's wrist and catcher's mitt we can see a fraction of the new sign. In a Conlon 1910 photo of Red Killefer, the entire sign is visible. It is a "Paxto Foot Powder" sign on the outfield fence, asking baseball fans the timeless question: "FEET ACHE?"

Turning to "The Slide," note that at Austin's glove, the right-field wall in foul territory is blank. Now look directly to the left of Ty Cobb's eyes. The white spots at the top of the dark rectangle are meaningless until we realize that this is the final clue to the date of the photograph: "... HE?"—a fragment of "FEET ACHE?" Confirmation is found in a panoramic photo taken at Hilltop Park on Memorial Day, 1910, in which the signs are configured exactly as they appear in the Cobb photo. Further examination of "The Slide" reveals that - in addition

to the capacity crowds in the grandstand - fans are seated at the bottom of the "Paxto" sign.

It is exasperating to note that in contemporary New York newspapers, all outfield advertisements in baseball photographs were obliterated. This was done to avoid the possibility of free advertising. Without the fragment of the "Paxto" sign, it would have been impossible to date the photograph, since it is conceivable that the "Broadway" sign was painted out during 1909. But *with* the "Paxto" sign, it *has* to have been taken in 1910, and we can now determine precisely when Ty Cobb, Jimmy Austin - and a hapless third-string catcher - collaborated with Charles M. Conlon to produce a masterpiece.

July 23, 1910, was a beautiful Saturday, the only weekend date the New York Highlanders played against the visiting Detroit Tigers all season. "It was a bright day," recalled Charles M. Conlon. The thermometer hit 89°. Sensational rookie pitcher Russell Ford, who would go on to win twenty-six games for New York in 1910, was so popular with the hometown fans that extra security was needed to control the large crowd that turned out for his start. "Thousands of boys and hundreds of girls choked the grandstand long before the game began," reported the *New York American*. By the 3:30 game time the overflow crowd was lining the outfield fence. This was the only capacity crowd the Tigers attracted to Hilltop Park in 1910.

One cloud appeared on the Highlanders' horizon: first-string catcher Ed Sweeney was disabled by a split finger, and veteran catcher Lou Criger was still recovering from an appendectomy, forcing New York to use a converted pitcher behind the plate. "Fred Mitchell has not had enough work to keep his throwing arm in shape," reported the *New York Evening Journal*, "and if Cobb ever gets on the bases he is apt to play hob with our stocky catcher." This prophecy came true all too soon: in the top of the first inning, with two men out and the bases empty, Ty Cobb "worked a pass and stole second," reported the *New York World*. "The play was close and the fans said so. On the second ball pitched Cobb stole third and tallied on Mitchell's high throw." It appears that Cobb stole second and third *on consecutive pitches*. The *New York American* reported that "Tyrus got a base on balls, and didn't waste anytime fussing

around the bag. He stole second, he stole third, and came home on Mitchell's bad throw to Austin."

Charles M. Conlon was now in his seventh year as a baseball photographer. Just before game time he knelt in his customary position beside the third-base coach's box and carefully focused his Graflex camera on the bag in preparation for an action shot. But even the experienced Conlon was startled by Cobb's impetuosity. The uncropped photo (found on p. 26 of *Baseball's Golden Age*) shows that the photographer barely caught Cobb in the frame, and an examination of the original glass negative in the Conlon Collection of *The Sporting News* reveals that his camera was tilted downward to the left when Cobb arrived so unexpectedly. Conlon was indeed operating purely on instinct as he juggled his camera and snapped the shutter.

The burly umpire we see in the picture, his coat flapping and his necktie blown over his shoulder as he rushes to make the call, is Big Bill Dinneen; the hand clutching at the right edge of the uncropped photo belongs to the demonstrative Detroit manager and third-base coach, Hughie Jennings. But one person in the photograph is motionless, unaffected by Cobb's derring-do: New York second baseman Earl Gardner rests with his hands on his knees, observing the play dispassionately. He can do nothing but watch Fred Mitchell's throw sail into left field.

The local papers were aghast at the New York catcher's incompetence: "Mitchell's performance was simply terrible.... His pegging was so slow and inaccurate that a first-grade schoolboy could have stolen on him.... The weakest spot in the Yankee team was Mitchell behind the bat. He made atrocious pegs to the bases, and was sleepy chasing foul balls.... Brazenly [Cobb] stole second and in the same way pilfered third, Mitchell making a miserable toss to catch him. Cobb, of course, came right through on this attack of palsy on the catcher's part.... It was

largely due to egregious throwing by Mitchell that the Detroiters got their start. And Cobb was one of his greatest beneficiaries. The terrible Tyrus never showed better on the bases than he did yesterday. He was as hard to catch as quicksilver." (Only the *New York Evening Mail* asserted that "Austin muffed the throw.")

The *New York World* tried to put things in perspective: "The fans were inclined to be severe on Mitchell, overlooking the fact that Cobb pulls off his base stealing stunts against every team in the league." After his execrable performance, Mitchell was benched in favor of the barely ambulatory Criger, but he remained optimistic: "I know that I have been catching the worst ball that I have caught, but I will be working along in good shape, as I know I can catch. I went kind of bad and was anxious to get that ball away quick and was using the sidearm throw to get base runners. But there are better times coming." Better times came for Fred when he managed the Chicago Cubs to a pennant in 1918, but his playing career ended with barely a whimper.

Despite his ignominious role in Conlon's masterpiece, Jimmy Austin spoke proudly of the photograph to Larry Ritter in *The Glory of Their Times*: "See that picture? It's a famous picture. It's Cobb sliding into third, and the other guy is me, being knocked sprawling. He took my left foot with his shoulder as he came in, and down I went." Fred Mitchell's role went unmentioned, and probably unremembered, but without his rotten sidearm throw, Austin would never have assumed the awkward yet balletic pose that assures his immortality, and Cobb would never have followed the flight of the ball into left field with the demonic, lip-biting grimace that has haunted baseball fans for more than eight decades.

- Neal McCabe

LAST MONTH'S PICTURE IDENTIFICATIONS

Just a few PHC members offered guesses about the player photos reproduced in the January 1995 PHC Newsletter. From *Marc Okkonen's Baseball Uniforms of the 20th Century* we know that the portrait shot is definitely of someone in a Boston NL uniform from 1913-15, but the action shot is a bit trickier. The uniform is consistent with that worn by Boston NL (road) in 1911, but the cap lacks stripes and the old-English "B" is ever so slightly different from that found in *Baseball Uniforms of the 20th Century*. Here are the guesses I've received so far:

Tom Cline states that the action photo is of Otto Hess, and believes that the portrait may be of George A. Davis. **Lefty Blasco** agrees that the action photo is of Otto Hess. **Neal McCabe**

believes that the portrait is of Les Mann. **Marc Okkonen** discounts Les Mann, as well as other familiar faces (Johnny Evers, Rabbit Maranville, Bill Rariden, etc.). Marc further points out that the player in the portrait is clearly a pitcher, as he wears a toe plate, but guesses that the individual is a minor-leaguer from around the turn of the century.

So far, no one has given conclusive proof of any guess, so we are still left wondering "Who are these guys?" For those who lack a copy of these two photos and would like to make an attempt at identifying the players, please send a self-addressed envelope along with 40¢ (to cover both postage and photocopying costs) to **Tom Shieber**.

NEW MEMBERS

We've gained quite a few members since the last newsletter. Here are the most recent PHC "acquisitions":

Dick Clark	1080 Hull Street Ypsilanti, MI 48198-6472	Larry Lester	P.O. Box 411312 Kansas City, MO 64141
Stefan Csik	6334 Lansdowne Ave. St. Louis, MO 63109-2217	Bob Littlejohn	4144 Paxton Woods Drive Cincinnati, OH 45209-1417
Frank D'Amico	14 Rodgers Avenue Dedham, MA 02026-1606	Stephen Milman	5 Pratt Island Darien, CT 06820-5726
Dick Derby	c/o Yannigan's Baseball Memories 29217 Center Ridge Westlake, OH 44145	Bobby Plapinger	P.O. Box 1062 Ashland, OR 97520
Joe Dittmar	3112 Hayes Road Norristown, PA 19403-4018	Arnold Podair	510 Old Farm Road Statesville, NC 28677
Larry Gerlach	950 N. Bonneville Drive Salt Lake City, UT 84103	Jefferey Samoray	28478 Ridgebrook Rd. Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3465
Greg Jezewski	1607 Lucretia Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90026	Lyle Spatz	18817 Rolling Acres Way Olney, MD 20832
Ron Kaplan	17 Brookfield Road Upper Montclair, NJ 07043	Jim Troisi	136 Walton Ave. Union, N.J. 07083
Francis Kinlaw	603 Shawnee Road Greensboro, NC 27403	Bob Underwood	12104 Brook Terrace Court Des Peres, MO 63122-2119

THE FIRST BASEBALL PICTURE

On Saturday, September 12, 1857, *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, a short-lived weekly newspaper devoted to sports and theater, featured a woodcut reproduced on p. 6 of this newsletter. As best as can be determined, it was the first published image of a baseball game.

According to the caption, action was from a game between the Eagle and Gotham Base Ball Clubs played on Tuesday, September 8, 1857, at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey. These two clubs were among the very earliest organizations devoted to the game, both being founded in the early 1850s.

The game was the "return" match of what was known as a "home-and-home" series. That is, it was the second game of a best of three series in which the first and second games were played at the home fields of the two contestants, and the third game (if necessary) was played at a neutral site. The Eagles, along with the Knickerbocker and Empire Clubs, had for some time used the Elysian Fields as their home field. And, in the spring of 1857, the Gotham Club, after a dispute with their landlord, left their former grounds in Harlem for a newly leveled field adjacent to that of the Eagles. Thus, all three of the games played in the 1857 home-and-home series took place in Hoboken.

The first meeting of the season between these prominent New York clubs took place on July 10th. Though down by 11 runs early in the game, the Eagles managed to pull within one run of the "Gothamites," and as they headed into the bottom of

the sixth the score stood 18-17. But over the final innings of the game the Eagles managed only 3 more runs, while the Gotham Club scored 25, and won the game 43-20.

The return match, the one pictured in *Porter's*, was a different story. The contest was marked by excellent fielding on both sides and the Eagles emerged victorious, 15-9. As far as I have been able to document, this is the first game ever in which the Eagle Club defeated the rival Gothams.

The final meeting of the season between the clubs took place on October 9th. The Gotham Club scored 10 runs in their first inning and won 25-19 in seven innings (the game most probably shortened due to darkness).

Prior to the match of September 8, the Eagle Club had a record of 3-1, their only loss being the earlier meeting with the Gotham Club. The Gotham Club, on the other hand, had to this point played but one match in 1857, that being the victory over the Eagles.

While the drawing appears to be rather rudimentary, there are a number of interesting points worthy of note. However, one must at all times keep in mind that it is unknown how truly representative this drawing was meant to be.

The team in the field is the Eagles, as their uniform at the time was dark while the Gothams' was light in color. The pitcher is Andrew J. Bixby, and the catcher is probably Marvin Gelston. However, Gelston was known as a short man and the bearded

man behind home base appears to be, if anything, slightly taller than the rest of the players. Years later, Gelston traveled to San Francisco where he played for the Eagles of that city.

First baseman Winslow, second baseman Gilman, and third baseman Charles Place, Jr., stand upon their bags, as was the custom of the era. The shortstop is nowhere to be found, yet, contrary to popular modern-day opinion, the shortstop of the era played at a position similar to that of his modern day equivalent. The absence of this player, one Smith, is a mystery.

At the bottom left of the drawing are two individuals, one from each club, the gentleman in the Eagle uniform pointing something out to the gentleman of the Gothams. These are probably the umpires: John Mott for the Eagles and Gabriel Van Cott for the Gotham Club. Two umpires? Yes. At the time, the rules called for two umpires, one from each club, to officiate the game. Furthermore, they were to select a third, neutral official, known as the "referee" whose opinion was a tiebreaker in case of disagreements between the umpires. The referee of this game, Thomas Leavy of the Empire Club, is most probably the man in dark clothing and hat, sitting behind the table at the bottom left of the drawing.

Just one week after *The Spirit of the Times* published this picture of the Gotham-Eagle game, *The New York Clipper*, a rival, but far more successful weekly paper, published their own drawing of the very same match. In this picture, the Gothams are in the field. Once again the basemen are seen positioned directly atop their respective bases: Wadsworth at first, Johnson at second, and McCosker at third. The Gotham shortstop, Commerford, is clearly seen positioned between the second and third base bags.

The *Clipper* drawing also shows the Gotham pitcher Thomas Van Cott and his catcher, Vail. This is the same Vail who was a member of the New York Ball Club of the 1840s. His name can be found in a boxscore of a game of "base" played October 21, 1845, that some historians consider the earliest published account of a baseball game.

Interestingly, while the left and center fielders for the Gotham Club are positioned as one might expect, the right fielder is shown playing in, between the first and second bags, essentially as a fifth infielder. This, however, is not surprising, given the rules of the era. The pitcher's position was marked by a line 12 feet in length, 45 feet from home base. By pitching the ball from an extreme end of this line, the pitcher could influence the direction of the batter's hit much more easily than if the pitcher were required to deliver the ball from a fixed point within the diamond. Indeed, the *Clipper* picture shows that the batter is right-handed and with the rightfielder playing so far in, it is most likely that the pitcher was attempting to influence the batter to hit the ball toward the left side of the field.

According to Anton Grobani, Henry Chadwick's *The Game of Baseball*, published in 1868, was the first hardcover book devoted to the game. In the book, Chadwick recalls witnessing a baseball game some time around 1856. However, it is entirely possible that the game he saw was the same as that depicted in the 1857 *Porter's* woodcut: "I chanced to go through the Elysian Fields during the progress of a contest between the noted Eagle and Gotham Clubs. The game was being sharply played on both sides, and I watched it with deeper interest than any previous ball match between clubs that I had seen. It was not long before I was struck with the idea that base ball was just the game for a national sport for Americans."

