

# Nineteenth Century Notes

NEWSLETTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY COMMITTEE  
SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN BASEBALL RESEARCH

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## HUSMAN TO LEAD COMMITTEE INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

ALTHOUGH THE MILLENNIAL HOOPLA will begin in 2000, we historically-minded folk on the Nineteenth Century Committee know that the twenty-first century really begins a year later, on New Year's Day 2001. The approach of a new century provides an incentive to review the past and plan for the future, and that's what we'll begin doing at our annual meeting June 28 at the SABR convention. The meeting marks the conclusion of my sixth year chairing the committee, and I feel it's time for new leadership. On my recommendation, SABR's Board will appoint JOHN RICHMOND HUSMAN our new committee chair at their meeting June 24.

John, as associate chair for vintage base ball for the past four years, forged a mutually profitable bond between our committee and the vintage base ball community, spurring exciting new research into how the early game was played and increasing the historical accuracy of vintage ball, which is making great strides in conveying a knowledge and understanding of nineteenth century baseball to the general public. Husman, a longtime vintage player and leader of Sylvania's Great Black Swamp Frogs vintage club, is also a founder of the Vintage Base Ball Association, a leading researcher into the history and development of the early Knickerbocker game, and the authority on his great-grandfather, pitcher J. Lee Richmond, author of major league baseball's first perfect game. I can't think of anyone more

qualified and capable of leading us nineteenth century baseball researchers into the twenty-first century

The annual committee report, printed below, suggests some of the topics we'll be considering at our annual meeting. We will assess the state of the committee's current projects, look at possible new committee projects, and ask what the focus of the committee should be in the next century. John Husman will give us his vision for the flume of the committee.

I will continue to compile NCN. Please note my new e-mail address printed above under the masthead.

If you're attending the convention, or if you're in the San Francisco area, plan to attend the meeting. It is scheduled for Sunday 28 June, from 10-11 AM, at the San Francisco Airport Marriott, Burlingame.

-FRED IVOR-CAMPBELL

## NINETEENTH CENTURY COMMITTEE, SABR ANNUAL REPORT, MAY 1998

ORGANIZED IN THE FALL OF 1982 by JOHN THORN and MARK RUCKER to combat the widespread ignorance and neglect of baseball's early decades, the Nineteenth Century Committee has gone far toward restoring nineteenth century baseball to the consciousness of the baseball public. Thanks to committee projects and members' individual research and publication, we now have a statistical, biographical and historical record of nineteenth century baseball comparable to that of the twentieth century. In addition, the committee cooperates with the Vintage Base Ball Association in researching early rules, practices and styles of play so that today's spectators may witness accurate recreations of early baseball.

The committee explores all facets of the nineteenth century game, and works with other committees whose interests overlap. It has taken part in a Ballparks Committee project to research nineteenth century major league ballparks, and is considering a joint project with the Baseball Records Committee to research and perfect early National League statistics.

Three important committee projects have been completed: compilation of full statistics for the National Association

(1871-75), and two volumes of nineteenth century biographies. One of the two ongoing projects has stalled temporarily: researchers have not been found to cover some of the cities in the American Association History Project. The Pre-1871 Rosters Project remains active under Rich Puff's direction, although additional researchers are always needed to help uncover the full record of the game's earliest decades.

At its annual meeting in June, the committee will begin looking ahead toward the new century. Should the committee expand its purview to include the early twentieth century? or contract to focus on baseball's origins and pre-professional years? or continue to cover the game's history through 1900? How precisely should the committee's goals be spelled out? How may they best be realized?

At last year's annual meeting, TIM WILES and JOHN THORN pointed out the need to digitize baseball's documentary history, especially its early record. Should this become a committee project? Should the committee establish a web site on the Internet? How can the committee best employ the new research tools that have become available since its founding? How can we better disseminate what we learn to one another, and to the world beyond SABR?

To an impressive extent, the Nineteenth Century Committee and its members have fulfilled the original hopes of its founders to improve the record of the early game and restore it to the mainstream of baseball history. But those who research nineteenth century baseball know that the progress made so far is only a beginning. Much of the data we have is still flawed, and much more information about the game's early decades remains to be uncovered, analyzed and communicated.

FREDERICK IVOR-CAMPBELL, Chair  
8 May 1998

## COMMITTEE PROJECTS

TWO LONG-TERM COMMITTEE PROJECTS have been completed since the last issue of *NCN* appeared so long ago: *Baseball's First Stars*, the second volume of nineteenth century baseball biographies which all SABR members received early last year; and the National Association (1871-1875) Box score Project, which under BOB TIEMANN'S leadership has compiled for the first time complete player and team statistics for baseball's first professional league. These NA stats are now part of the official record.

RICH PUFF, who heads the Pre 1871 Rosters Project, is looking for biographical information on pre-1871 players, especially those who did not play in the NA or later. Rich is looking for obituaries, dates and places of birth and death, cemeteries, heights, weights, throws and bats, etc. If you come upon this kind of information, please send photocopies to Rich at P.O. Box 551, Slingerlands, NY 12159, or e-mail him at <rpuuff@ccgateway.amc.edu>. Whatever you send, Rich says, "it's important to make note of the source, page and date."

The other current committee project, the American Association (1882-1891) History Project, is at a standstill. Day-by-day research has been done for many of the AA cities, but some remain unfinished or not begun, and researchers have not surfaced who have access to the needed information. BOB BAILEY has taken the project as far as is presently possible, and is stepping down as project director. The future of the project will come up for discussion at the annual committee meeting later this month.

A new project proposal, to be undertaken jointly with the Baseball Records Committee, will also be considered at the meeting. In his detailed research on pitcher Tim Keefe, JOHN O' MALLEY has found numerous problems with the National League statistics for 1876-1890, and proposes a major project to recompile the stats for these years from a comparative study of newspaper accounts and box scores-the same sort of study that was done for the National Association.

## DEATH OF FORMER MAGNATE CHRIS VON DER AHE

**The Passing of a Base Ball Man Once a Power in Base Ball; and Famous for Phenomenal Luck, Quaint Sayings and Queer Doings**

*[JACK KAVANAGH sent in this 14 June 1913 Sporting Life obituary of one of the nineteenth century's most colorful and important club owners. The obit shows that although Von der Ahe was poor and long out of baseball at his death he was by no means forgotten. It also suggests that while he was the butt*

*of what strikes us today as rather insensitive humor, he was more beloved than scorned. Von der Ahe is the subject of a recently completed biography by committee member TOM HETRICK.]*

St. Louis, Mo., June 7-Chris Von der Ahe, owner of the old St. Louis champion ball team of 1885-88 and years ago one of the best known base ball magnates in the country, died at his home here late Thursday afternoon, June 7. Von der Ahe has been seriously ill for two months. Death was caused by cirrhosis of the liver and dropsy Chris Von der Ahe was born in Hille, Germany, in 1852. He came to the United States in 1870 and settled in St. Louis. Very soon after his arrival he opened a saloon and boarding house on the Northwest corner of Grand and St. Louis avenues, then in the suburbs. The present Sportsmen's Park was a vacant lot. The boys who played base ball, then in its infancy, resorted to this lot. Von der Ahe found the people who came to see and to play base ball good customers at his bar. So he

### BECAME INTERESTED IN BASE BALL

as he might have become interested in pretzels, peanuts or any other incentive to thirst and beer drinking. In 1860 Al Spink, Charley Higgins, the late William F. Nolker, John J. O' Neill and other[s] organized the St. Louis Base Ball Association. This club played independently in 1881 and made some money. Von der Ahe enjoyed the refreshments privileges and they proved more remunerative than the "gate" itself. Much encouraged by the receipts of bar and gate, in 1881 Von der Ahe did what many of the critics have said was the one really clever business act of his base ball career. He bought a great majority of stock in the St. Louis Base Ball Association and became owner of the famous four-time pennant winners, the St. Louis Browns of 1885-86-87-88. Base ball in 1881 was deemed a sport, not a business. The stockholders of the St. Louis Base Ball Association bought a few shares each to

### HELP THE SPORT ALONG.

A great majority of the stock was left in the hands of Von der Ahe to be sold, if possible. At the end of the season Von der Ahe surprised and pleased his stockholders by telling them he had sold all the stock in the club, 189 shares, at par, \$30 each, or \$1800 in all. "Who bought it, Chris?" asked a delighted investor. "Neffers mindt who pought it," said Von der Ahe, "here is der check of Chris Von der Ahe for \$1800." In the following eight years Von der Ahe made more than \$500,000 on that original investment of \$1800, became a national figure, owned the greatest base ball team of the time, built blocks of houses about Grand and St. Louis avenues and was one of the most written and talked about men in the United States. For eight years he made money hand over fist, though his

### BUSINESS METHODS WERE LAX

to a laughable degree. It has often been said that he was plundered of more than he made in these eight years. Base Ball war with the Brotherhood, or Players' League; in 1890, and a war with the National League in 1891, depleted Von der Ahe's resources and changed his fabled "Dutchman's luck." His last winning club was that of 1891, which finished second in the American Association, in which he had been chief; in fact, sole factor for ten years. In 1892 he entered the 12-club National League, and his teams invariable [*sic*] finished last or next to last until 1899, when the Sportsmen's Park and club were sold to satisfy the demands of

VON DER AHE'S NUMEROUS CREDITORS.

The sale was made by the sheriff at the East steps of the Courthouse, and bought by E. C. Becker, a retired grocer of St. Louis, for Frank DeHass and Mathew Stanley Robison, who transferred the Cleveland Club to this city and named it the Cardinals. On his retirement from base ball in 1899 Mr. Von der Ahe went into the saloon business at his old place, Grand and St. Louis avenues. Later he was in business at Jefferson avenue and Olive street and Market and Thirteenth streets. The saloon at Jefferson avenue and Olive street is still in his estate. A perfect picture of Gambinus and the possessor of a delightful German comedian dialect, a generous and whole souled fellow, Von der Ahe became the delight of newspaper reporters and that part of the American people who read base ball and who like droll stories. A very

#### FUNNY GERMAN DIALECT STORY

that came out was attributed to Von der Ahe. He had among his players several wags and jesters, among them Arlie Latham, Charlie Comiskey, Tommy Dowd, Bill Gleason, Bobby Carruthers, Yank Robinson, etc., who never were so happy as when they were retailing "a new one on the Dutchman." The players always were playing practical jokes on their employer and always laying some pitfall for his entertaining tongue. Thus "Von der Ahe stories" became so famous that a book of them was compiled at the time and had a large sale in base ball circles. One of the funniest was the umbrella-telephone tale which has in one form or another been used by generations of German dialecticians. A friend phoned to Chris saying: "I left an umbrella at your park today. Have you seen it.?" Chris (at phone and holding up umbrella): "Vos dis idt?"

#### VON DER AHE' S GREAT SUCCESS

came when he got Charles Comiskey to join his club in 1882. He paid "Commy" \$60 a month for the first year. In 1884 Comiskey managed the team and in 1885 began his cycle of Four Time Winners, which made Von der Ahe rich and famous. He paid Comiskey from \$3000 to \$5000 a season for making him \$75,000 a year. This \$60 a month always stuck in Von der Ahe' s mind. He disliked to pay large salaries to players and when an aspiring young man asked for a salary larger than Von der Ahe wished to pay Chris always told him: "Vy, who do you dink you ar? I got Commie for \$60 a mont." The last few years have been lean ones for the once wealthy base ball magnate. A little saloon he maintained hardly brought in enough to keep him. Old time base ball friends contributed regularly to his living.

#### IMPOSING ON GOOD NATURE

Two of the best stories told on the deceased were the following: Von der Ahe was lecturing his players on drinking. "I vill soagk any man vot I catch trinkin' vun munth' s pay," cried Chris. "I ain' dt mention' s no names but Liadam (Latham) or Macgurdy (McCarthy) is lissenin' dey know who I mean." Anon Chris was again lecturing his winners for drinking. He had them in his room on the fifth floor of the old Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York. His broken English elicited aloud laugh from Latham. "Dott laff gosts you vun hundred, Ladam," cried Chris in great anger. "Honest boss," said Latham, "I was laughing at a boy that passed the window and made a face at me." "Dot' s all right, den, Lad," said the good-hearted Von der Ahe, who gave no thought to the fact that a boy could scar[c]e pass by a fifth-floor window. Later on McCarthy called his attention to the oversight. "Yee' s Dommie," cried Chris, "why didn' t you tell me den. I' d half

soaged Ladam two hundred instead of vun. Bud, it' s too late now. He touched me for all der glub owed him before I got oud of der room."

#### The Veteran Laid at Rest.

St. Louis, Mo., June 9-The funeral of Chris Von der Ahe, owner of the "four time winners," the old St. Louis Browns, of the old American Association, took place yesterday afternoon, attended by a notable group of his old-time associates. The body of the former base ball owner was interred beside the tombstone he purchased in his prosperous days of 15 years ago. The pallbearers were Ban Johnson, President of the American League; Charles A- Comiskey, C. P. Spink, James Davis, Ted Sullivan, William Gleason, Jack Gleason and George McGinnis. Hundreds of devotees of the national game gathered at the little home of the man who gave St. Louis its only winning base ball teams. Owing to the lack of space, few heard the Rev. Frederick H. Craft, who officiated at the ceremonies, describe true Christian life in terms of the diamond. "First base is enlightenment," he said; "second base is repentance; third base, faith, and the home plate the heavenly goal!" He told of how many fail to touch second and lose the game of life. "Don' t fail to touch second base, for it leads you onward to third. All of us finally reach the home plate, though some may be called out when they slide Home." The floral offerings were many and elaborate.

#### PRICELESS PAIRS

ONE OF THE DISCUSSTONS LAST YEAR on SABR-L, SABR' s Internet discussion group, concerned twentieth century major league teams that had two pitchers with 20 wins or more and ERAs of less than 2.00. There turned out to be several such learns. I decided to see how many *nineteenth* century teams featured similar priceless pairs. Since 20-game winners were common in that era, I thought there might be quite a few, but there turned out to be only four, plus one near miss. There were surprisingly few seasons when more than one pitcher in a league, let alone on one club, compiled an ERA below 2.00. Also, in the earliest major league years most clubs would go with one main pitcher, removing the possibility of pairs of 20-game winners. Here are the four fortunate clubs:

Chicago (NL) 1880

Larry Corcoran 43-14, 1.95; Fred Goldsmith 21-3, 1.75

St. Louis (UA) 1884

Bill Taylor 25-4, 1.68; Charlie Sweeney 24-7, 1.83

New York (NL) 1885

Tim Keefe 32-13, 1.58; Mickey Welch 44-11, 1.66

New York (NL) 1888

Tim Keefe 35-12, 1.74; Mickey Welch 26-19, 1.93

All these teams won pennants except the 1885 Giants, who finished second to Chicago in a close race, but were Still one of the great teams of all time. Note that Keefe and Welch in 1885 form a unique higher level of the teammate category: they are the only pair to win more than 30 games each, with an ERA under 1.75.

The near miss was Hartford (NA) 1875, when Candy Cummings went 35-12, 1.60, and Tommy Bond was 19-16, 1.41. It was Bond' s second major league season, and the only one of his first seven in which he won fewer than 20 games.

Charlie Sweeney' s 1884 record is worthy of further comment. He didn' t join the St. Louis club until after midseason; he began 1884 with Providence (NL), for whom his record was 17-8, 1.55. If he had stuck it out with Providence for three more wins before jumping to the outlaw Union Association, he might have made the super-pairs list twice in the same season, with Providence teammate Charlie Radbourne and his 59-12, 1.38 record, as well as with St. Louis.

-FREDERICK IVOR-CAMPBELL

## LAST MAN OUT, NEXT MAN UP

Baseball rules were constantly changing in the pre-1894 era, and some of the old rules seem strange to the modern fan. One rule that was in effect through the end of the 1878 season was the batting order rule that read, in part: "After the first inning, the first striker in each inning shall be the batsman whose name follows that of the third man out in the preceding inning."

A careful reading of this rule shows that if the third man put out was a base runner and not the last batsman, then someone would get to bat again in a way that smacks of "hitting out of turn" today. Here is an example: On June 21, 1875, the Philadelphias were playing at St. Louis, and in the fifth inning, John McMullin walked with one out. Chick Fulmer then fouled out to the pitcher, and McMullin was caught off first before he could return, completing an inning-ending double play. Since McMullin was the third man put out, Fulmer led off the sixth inning. Later, in the eighth, Levi Meyerle led off with a hit and moved to second while the next two hitters, Fisher and McMullin, were retired. Fulmer then singled to center, but Meyerle was thrown out at home to end the inning. So in the ninth, Fisher led off followed by McMullin and Fulmer. As the side was retired in order, Fulmer was the last man to bat for the Phillies. After the Browns broke the scoreless tie in the bottom of the ninth and were then put out (the rules also required each club to complete nine at bats, even if the team batting last was ahead), the game was over. So for the Phillies, Fulmer, the number seven man in the order, wound up with five at bats, while the number eight hitter, Charley Snyder, only came up twice Here is the box score, using modern scoring methods:

PHILADELPHIA	ab	r	h	bi	bb	so	po	a	e
Mumane, lb	3	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	1
McCearry, 3b	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Addy, rf	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Meyerle, 2b	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	1
Fisher, p	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
McMullin, cf	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Fulmer, ss	5	0	1	0	0	0	2	7	0
Snyder, c	2	0	0	0	0	0	9	1	0
Treacy, lf	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	28	0	2	0	1	1	27	13	3

ST. LOUIS	ab	r	h	bi	bb	so	po	a	e
Cuthbert ,lf	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Pearce, ss	3	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	0
Pike, cf	4	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Chapman, rf	4	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Hague, 3b	4	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	1

Bradley, p	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Battin, 2b	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Dehlman, 1b	3	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Miller, c	3	0	1	0	0	0	8	1	1
Totals	33	2	4	1	1	2	27	6	2

Philadelphia 000000000=0

St.Louis 000000002=2

Earned runs: none. Reached first base on errors: Phi 1, StL 3. Left on base: Phi 2, StL 5. Double play: Miller-Bradley-Dehlman. Stolen bases: Murnane, Chapman, Hague. Caught stealing: Dehlman. Passed ball: Snyder. Time: 1:48. Attendance: 1200. Umpire: McLean.

-ROBERT L. TIEMANN

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: A survey of recent books of interest to nineteenth century baseball researchers, including reviews of the most important of them.