

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee



VOL. XV, NO. 4: "LET'S GET THIS LUMPY LICORICE-STAINED BALL ROLLING!" SEPTEMBER 2015

THE CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN: CHARLES ALEXANDER'S REMARKS AT THE DEC MEETING

by **John McMurray**

In his remarks at the Deadball Era Committee meeting at SABR 45, Dr. Charles Alexander, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at Ohio University, suggested that the period of baseball which this committee studies may be named imprecisely: "Deadball Era' is a convenient term, and I'm not advocating we call the period from 1900 to 1919 something else, but I would suggest that it's a misnomer," said Alexander. In particular, Alexander took issue with having some kind of official division between baseball played in the late 19th century and baseball played in the early 20th century: "Why do we date the 'modern era in baseball history' from 1900? Did anything happen in baseball to justify that periodization, apart from the emergence of the American League and the creation of the National Commission as baseball's governing body? Could anything really have happened in baseball from 1899 to 1900 or 1901 that would make you say, 'okay, this is pre-modern, and that's post-modern'? I don't get it. I guess with the rise of the American League or with the promotion of the American League, they

continued on page 20

IT WEIGHED 300 POUNDS AND TRAVELED 95 MPH

by **Joseph Wancho**

It is doubtful that Charles Evard Street will be recognized as one of the great catchers in the Deadball Era of major league baseball. Chances are excellent that many baseball fans may not recall him at all. For Gabby, it was outside the white lines of a baseball diamond that brought him the most notoriety. First, he was used to settle an unorthodox wager between two Senators fans in 1908. Three decades later, he was a pennant-winning manager for the St. Louis Cardinals.

But the garrulous Street was given the nickname "Gabby" for good reason. His battery mate from the Washington Senators, Walter Johnson, explains Street's moniker. "You don't see Gabby's kind of a catcher anymore. He never hit much, but what a receiver he was — big fellow, a perfect target, great arm, slow afoot, but spry as a cat on his feet behind the plate, always talking, always hustling, full of pep and fight," said Johnson. "Gabby was always jabberin,' and he never let a pitcher take his mind off the game. When we got in a tight spot, Gabby was right out there to talk it over with me. He never let me forget a batter's weakness."¹ Street could also be an annoyance to the opposition. "He always kept the pitcher in

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good spirits with his continual chatter of sense and nonsense,” said the Big Train. “Ease up on this fellow, Walter, he has a wife and two kids,’ he would call jokingly when some batter was hugging the plate and getting a toehold for a crack at one of my fast ones. ’This fellow hasn’t had a hit off you since you joined the league,’ might be his next remark and so on throughout the game.”²

As Johnson pointed out, the Huntsville Alabama native was not a great batsman. One only has to note his .208 career batting average over seven seasons. But Street may never have gotten his chance to play in the major leagues at all if it were not for Branch Rickey. Cincinnati had called up Rickey from Class C Dallas of the Texas League. But Rickey, a devout Christian, refused to play ball on Sundays. Rickey was subsequently returned to Dallas and the door was opened for Street.

During a ballgame on June 3, 1905, two catchers for the Boston Beaneaters were injured. The National Commission facilitated a loan of Street

to the Beaneaters.³ However, his tenure was short, as he committed four errors in a game on June 7. The very next day, he himself was hurt, his index finger hit by a pitch which broke it. But with no other catcher available he had it bandaged and continued.⁴ Street was returned to the Reds in the middle of June. Boston was a dismal team in 1905, as four starting pitchers registered 20 losses or more on the season. To prove that it was no fluke, they duplicated the feat in 1906, with three new pitchers no less.

In February 1906, Street’s contract was purchased by San Francisco of the Pacific Coast League. He spent the next two seasons on the “City by the Bay,” although on April 18, 1906, he almost got dumped into the Bay. “I was living in the Golden Gate Hotel, patronized largely by baseball players and members of the theatrical profession and during the wee hours of April 18 of that year, I was thrown from my bed,” said Street. “Out in San Francisco they still refer to the Act of God which tossed me from my bed as ‘The Fire,’ but the force that removed me from my mattress to the floor was an earthquake. Aroused, I rubbed my eyes, looked out the window and saw buildings crumbling, and having heard whispers of quakes, I headed for the street. If I live to be a hundred I shall always



**The
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**NEW DEADBALL ERA
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Inside Game is pleased to welcome the following SABR members who have expressed interest in the Deadball Era to the committee:

Alex Drude
Paul Langendorfer
Corbin Lorick
Mark Manuel
Chuck McGill
David Newman
James Overmyer
Steven Soucie

We look forward to their active participation in committee endeavors. These new committee members, as well as our newsletter contributors, can be contacted via the SABR directory.

remember that scene. The *Beauty and the Beast* and *Babes in Toyland* companies were living in the same hotel and what the female members of those troupes wore as they hiked for the exits is nobody's business. As we hit the street, en masse, the rear of the hotel collapsed and the water tank on the roof, halved by the second shock, washed everyone of us. I walked through showers of brick and mortar to the Golden Gate Park where I spent the night."⁵

Persistence paid off for Street, and his contract was sold to the Washington Senators of the American League. Of the 504 games that Street played in the major leagues, 429 of them were over the next four years (1908-1911) in Washington. Defense was his specialty, as he led the league in putouts and double plays in both 1908 and 1909. In 1910, he was atop his peers with a fielding percentage of .978. However, Washington was not fielding a championship team in those days. They finished no better than seventh place in the American League, and no closer than 22½ games back of the pennant winner.

But what was it that made fans remember Gabby Street? He was perhaps best known for catching a ball dropped from atop the Washington Monument on August 21, 1908. Senators fans Preston Gibson and John Biddle had made a wager of \$500 whether the feat could be done. After all, the ball would travel 555 feet, and at a high rate of speed. Gabby was never one to be deterred from a challenge and set his place at the foot of the monument. Gibson and Biddle climbed to the top with a basket full of baseballs, and constructed a wooden chute so the ball would slide to arc away and clear the wide base of the enormous structure. The first 10 baseballs caromed off the base of the monument, so the chute was discarded and the pair of fans took turns throwing the ball from their perch. Gabby, dressed in street clothes, with arms outstretched over his head as if to corral a pop fly, made the successful catch on the 15th attempt. It was calculated that the baseball had picked up 300 pounds of force by the time and was traveling 95 miles per hour by the time it landed into Street's



***Washington Senators batterymates
Walter Johnson (left) and Gabby Street,
circa 1908***

mitt, which almost hit the ground from the impact. "I didn't see the ball until it was halfway down," said Gabby. "It was slanting in the wind and I knew it would be a hard catch."⁶ But the feat was no big deal to Gabby. He continued on his way to work. He caught Johnson that afternoon, as the Senators topped the Detroit Tigers on a five-hitter, 3-1.

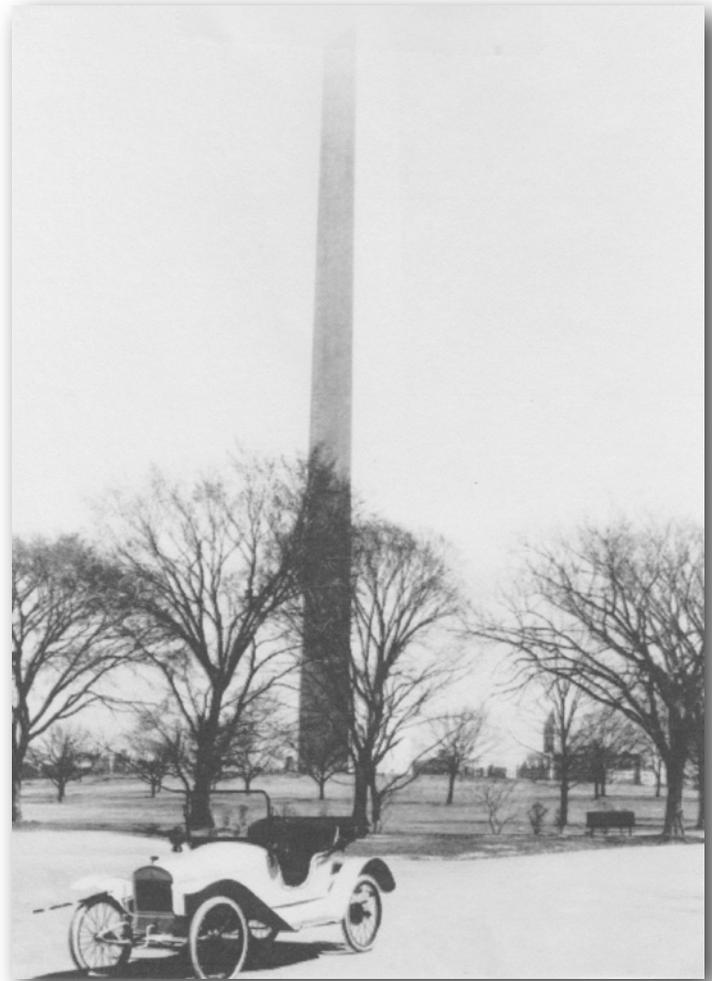
Street's last season in the majors was 1912. He split the season between the New York Highlanders and Providence Grays of the International League, participating in a handful of games for each team. He spent the next five seasons in the Southern Association, suiting up for both Chattanooga and Nashville.

Gabby Street became known as Sergeant Street when he enlisted in the Army in March, 1918. As Street put it, he was going off to fight in the "real" World Series. "I was sent to Fort Slocum,

N.Y. and everybody interested in baseball thought it was great that I should be on hand to catch the army team. I finally convinced my lieutenant that I joined the army to fight, pointing out that I could have continued playing baseball for a salary. I was one of the first 50,000 to get over and took part in three major engagements: Chateau Thierry, St. Mihiel and the Argonne. That St. Louis regiment, the 138th, was as fine as an outfit as I ever saw, and I was proud to be attached to it," said Sergeant Street.⁷ He was assigned to the First Gas Regiment, Chemical Warfare Division. He and his men joined the 138th in the Battle of Argonne, France. Street's men held down a smoke screen for the 138th infantry (St. Louis) of the 135th division on September 26, 1918. A machine gun bullet from a German airplane punctured his right leg on October 2, 1918. Gabby was awarded the Purple Heart, but his war days were at an end.

At 36 years of age, combined with the injuries he suffered in the war, Street's baseball playing days were coming to a close. He spent the next nine seasons as a player-manager in the minor leagues. One of his stops was in Joplin, Missouri in 1922-1923. There, Street met and married the former Lucinda Rona Chandler. They married in 1923 and had two children, Charles Jr. and Sally.

Branch Rickey was building a juggernaut in St. Louis, as the Cardinals won their first World Championship in 1926, finished in second place to Pittsburgh in 1927, and won the pennant in 1928. Street was added to St. Louis Manager Billy Southworth's staff in 1929. But the Cards slumped and Street was inserted as the skipper in 1930. St. Louis owner Sam Breadon had a penchant for making changes, especially managers. Street was the fifth new manager to start a season in five years. It was a goal that Street had set for himself and now he saw it fulfilled. Breadon said he had hired Street, "Because I believe he is just the man to give us a winner. He knows baseball through and through, is smart, a hustler, and the game is his main interest in life. The players like him and respect him. He was glad to get the job. It was unanimous."⁸



The Washington Monument

The team of which that Street took the reins was by no means a rebuilding project. Jim Bottomley, Frankie Frisch, George Watkins, Jimmie Wilson, and Chick Hafey anchored a formidable lineup in which each starter hit over .300 and the team scored 1,004 runs. The pitching staff was led by Jesse Haines, Bill Hallahan, and spitball hurler Burleigh Grimes. Street did not have the burden of developing players as he had in the minor leagues. Indeed, it was a smart manager who recognized the talent on his club and did not tinker with it too much. "The difference is I don't have to show these fellows how to play ball," said Street. "Most of them have had long experience. They do the work and make my job easy for me."⁹

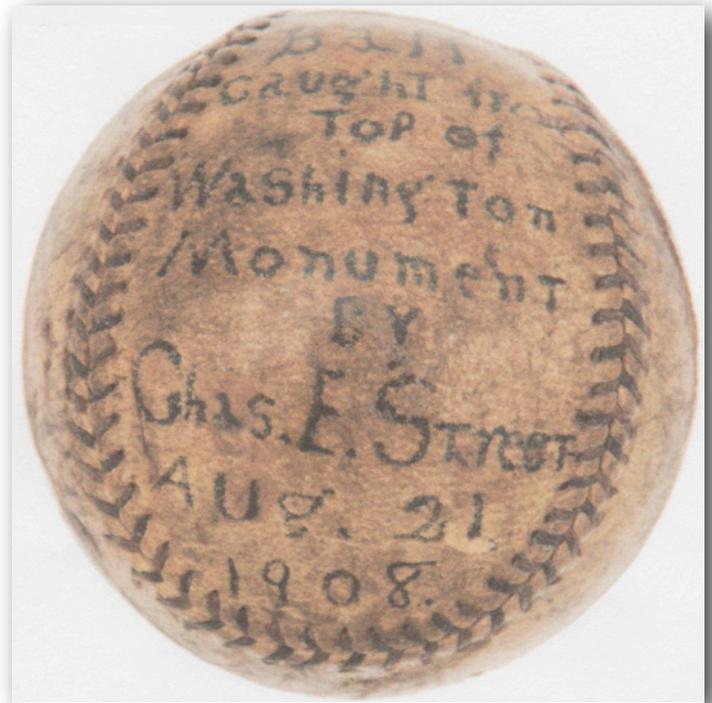
The veteran squad won a pennant in 1930, but lost in the World Series to the Philadelphia Athletics in six games. The following season the

Cards breezed through the regular season, besting the New York Giants by 13 games. Their opponent was once again the Athletics. This time the Cardinals came out on top, winning the championship in a hard-fought seven game series.

St. Louis fell in the standings the next two seasons. In 1933, during spring training, the sportswriters began to write about Street's "board of strategy." In essence, Gabby allowed some of the veteran players to assist him in the decisions he made on the field. The result was a cooperative team and two pennants. When the Cards started losing, Street's way naturally began to take a hit in the press. Suddenly Street felt he was not getting the credit he deserved for the two pennants.

In a spring training meeting, Street blew up at his team, telling them that he and he alone would be making every decision in the dugout. "Gabby didn't like those stories about the Cardinal 'board of strategy' on the ballclub," said Frisch. "There wasn't going to be any board of strategy from there on. He'd crack the whip, he'd make all the decisions, he'd take all the responsibility, and maybe after the next pennant the Old Sergeant would get just a little bit of credit as manager of this club. Spoken or not, the sentiment was: 'We'll let him manage the ballclub, we'll let him crack the whip, and we'll let him get all the credit, and we'll just keep our damned mouths shut.' It hurt me to see the absolute divorce between manager and squad. I got him alone one day and asked him why in the world he had lost his temper and popped off like that to a club that thought so much of him. 'Frank,' he said, 'I just got so damned sick of that junk in the newspaper that I couldn't stand it any longer.'"¹⁰ Street was not around to see the conclusion of the season, as he was replaced by Frisch. He did return to managing, taking the reins of the St. Louis Browns in 1938. He didn't last to the end of the season, being dismissed after posting a 53-90 record.

With a nickname like "Gabby," he was a natural for a color commentator on radio broadcasts. He started his second career in 1940, providing his



The Washington Monument baseball

unique insight to Browns ballgames and was eventually paired with a young Harry Caray to broadcast Cardinal games from 1945 to 1950.

Charles Evard Street passed away on February 6, 1951 after battling pancreatic cancer. In 1966, he was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. His former broadcast partner Caray served as the host. "Gabby could talk because he lived through so much. To be able to have this man as my friend was the greatest thing that could happen to me."¹¹

"WINTER" BALL WORRIES MAGS

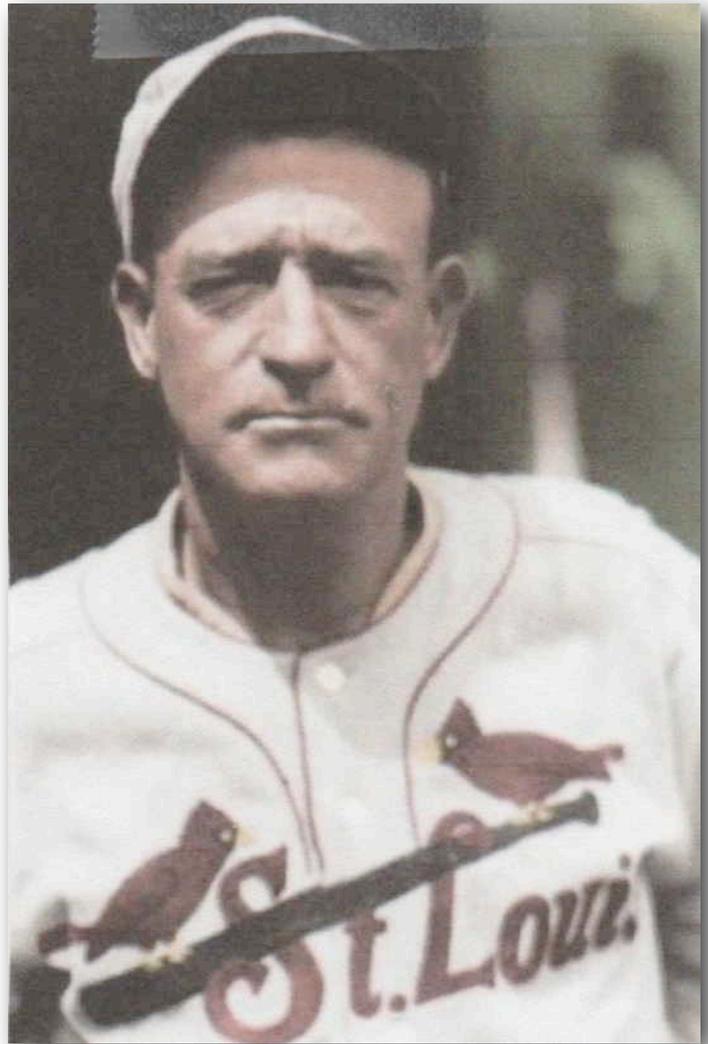
SAN FRANCISCO—Moral suasion and the efforts of individual ball club owners will have to be used if the Pacific Coast League stamps out the winter baseball evil.

At the annual meeting just closed, the Coasters adopted a resolution setting forth that in the opinion of the magnates it was not beneficial to the players to play in the off season. The league went no further for the simple fact that there is no legal way to control the tossers.

The Seattle Star, November 18, 1915

NOTES

1. Alan Gould, "Gabby Street, Ace of the Cards," *Associated Press*, September 20, 1931.
2. Henry W. Thomas, *Walter Johnson: Baseball's Big Train* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 55.
3. *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 1905.
4. *Boston Globe*, June 8, 1905. These were the only four errors that Street committed during the three games in which he appeared for Boston, but four errors in 18 chances saddled him with a .778 fielding percentage in the short stay, from which he also returned with a broken finger.
5. *The Sporting News*, October 2, 1930.
6. Unidentified clipping from Street's player file at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.
7. *The Sporting News*, October 2, 1930.
8. Gould.
9. Ibid.
10. Peter Golenbock, *The Spirit of St. Louis: A History of the St. Louis Cardinals and Browns* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 163-164.
11. Unidentified clipping from Street's player file at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.



Manager Gabby Street, 1932

CIRCLED BASES TWICE BUT UMPIRE CALLED HIM OUT, THEN FLED

DIXON, ILL.—Tim Hogan, who umpires all the thrilling engagements between the Dixon and Sterling baseball teams, was not at his barbershop Monday, so a couple of hundred angry fans who dropped around to continue Sunday's heated argument were disappointed.

Umpire Hogan got in bad with the fans in the seventh. Ned Whitehead, slugging outfielder for the Dixon Stars, drove the ball into the river and circled the bags, but Hogan declared he failed to touch third. Whitehead raced the circuit again.

"You're out," said Hogan, "you missed second."

Hogan led by a neck when the crowd chased him to the left field fence, dropped over and disappeared. Dixon lost the game.

South Bend (Indiana) News-Times, August 4, 1913

**Centrifugal
Baseball Parlors**
—Open for Business—
at N114 Howard Street

THE WATKINS
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C. W. Van Wye, Proprietor.

F. W. SMITH
Sales Agent for the Machines for United

The (Spokane) Spokesman-Review, June 13, 1915

US 1198300 A. Mechanical ball-pitcher. William F. Watkins

DEADBALL COMES ALIVE AT SABR 45

Attendees at the SABR convention in Chicago were treated to a healthy dose of presentations that focused on the Deadball Era. The meeting of the Deadball Era Committee was highlighted by the acceptance of the 2015 Larry Ritter Award by co-winners Nathaniel Grow and Chuck Kimberly, and by the remarks of renowned baseball author Charles Alexander. More detail on the meeting is provided in The Chairman's Column.

The convention's Deadball presentations were delivered by a mix of longtime contributors to the newsletter and some new voices. Tara Krieger led off with an informative retrospective on a now-forgotten labor dispute: pitcher Andy Coakley's fight with the Chicago Cubs for a share of the 1908 World Series winners' pot. The ill-treatment of Coakley by both the club and baseball media proved a catalyst for a new push for unionization by the players. The rookie season of Hall of Famer Oscar Charleston with



Photo: Dixie Tourangeau

Tara Krieger (Andy Coakley)

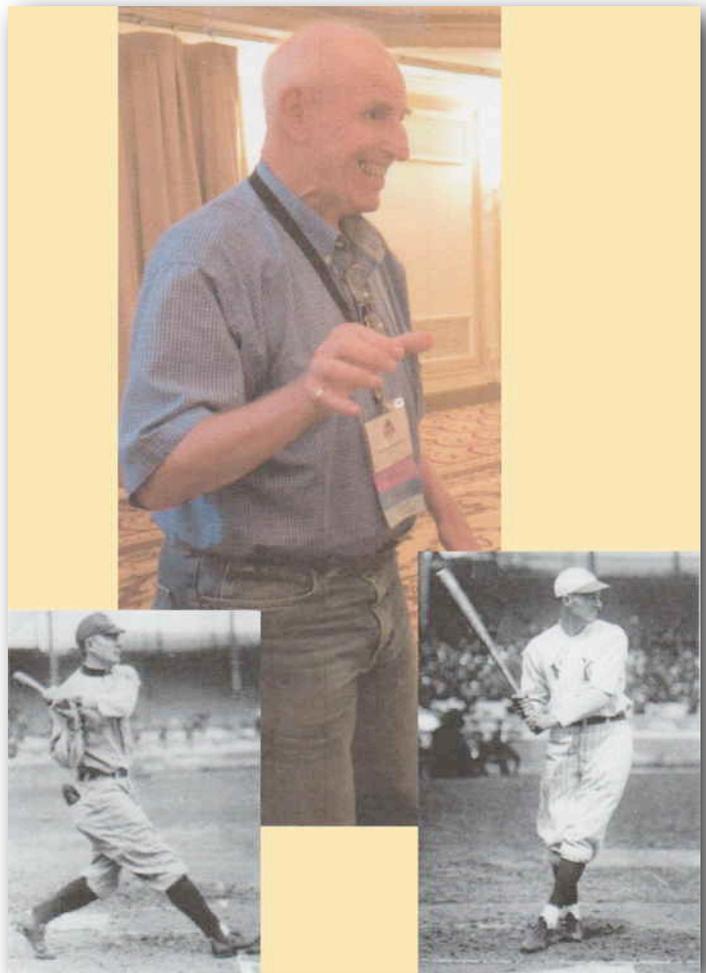
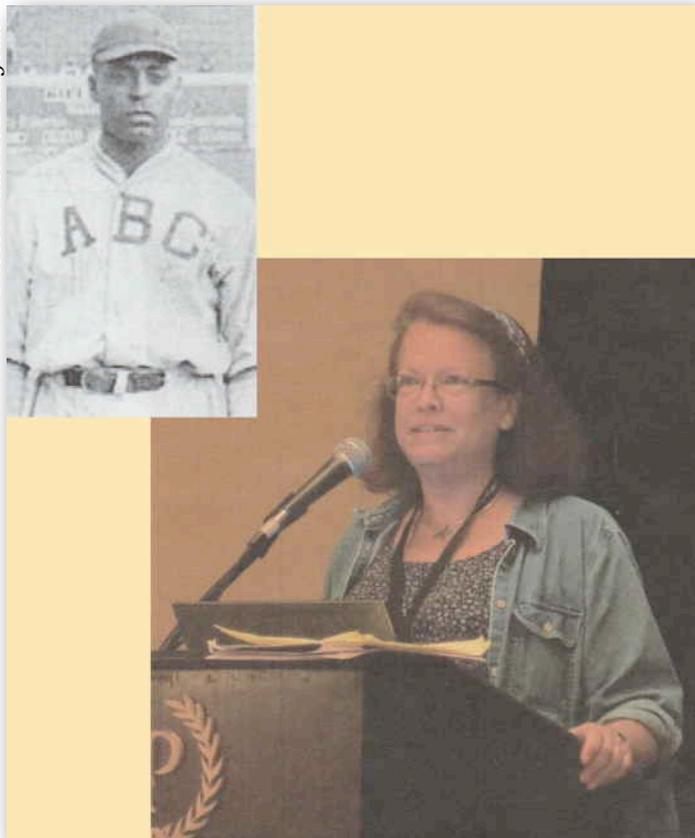


Photo: Dixie Tourangeau

Herm Krabbenhoft (Bobby Veach and Heinie Zimmerman)

Photo: Dixie Tourangeau



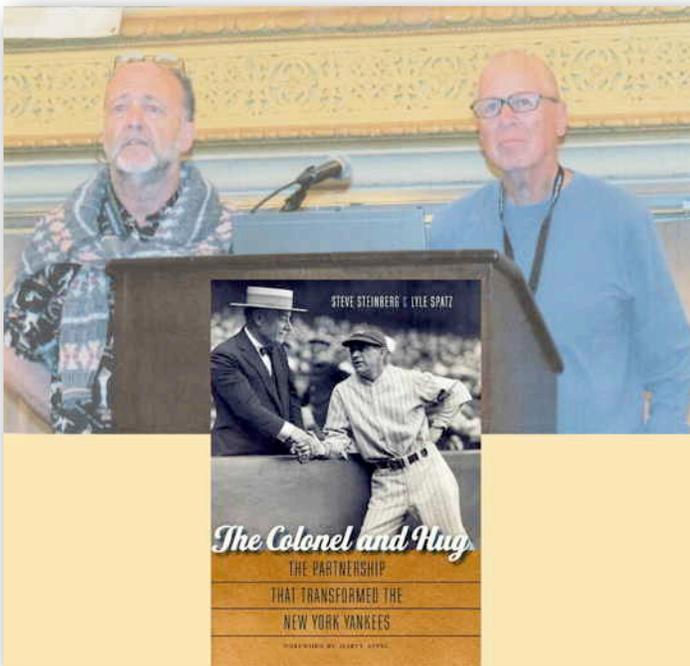
Geri Driscoll (Oscar Charleston)

the Indianapolis ABCs was recalled by Negro Leagues historian Geri Driscoll. Charleston's conversion from pitcher to outfielder, his conflicts with club management, and his subsequent military service were among the subject's explored in Geri's excellent presentation.

Herm Krabbenhoft regaled conventioners with his authoritative research on the 1917 RBI crowns. A full exposition of Herm's findings on the American League RBI contest will appear in the November issue of *The Inside Game*. For now, suffice it to say that Heinie Zimmerman (NL) and Bobby Veach (AL) were pronounced

the true title holders. Steve Steinberg and Lyle Spatz introduced their audience to New York Yankees owner Jacob Ruppert and manager Miller Huggins, the subjects of the speakers' superb new dual biography. We hope to include a review of *The Colonel and Hug* in the November newsletter. Finally, baseball's vaudevillians were center stage in R.J. Lesch's lively presentation. Although most of these acts were eminently forgettable, R.J. deemed Irish tenor Red Dooin a genuine talent.

Photo: Jacob Pomrenke



Steve Steinberg and Lyle Spatz

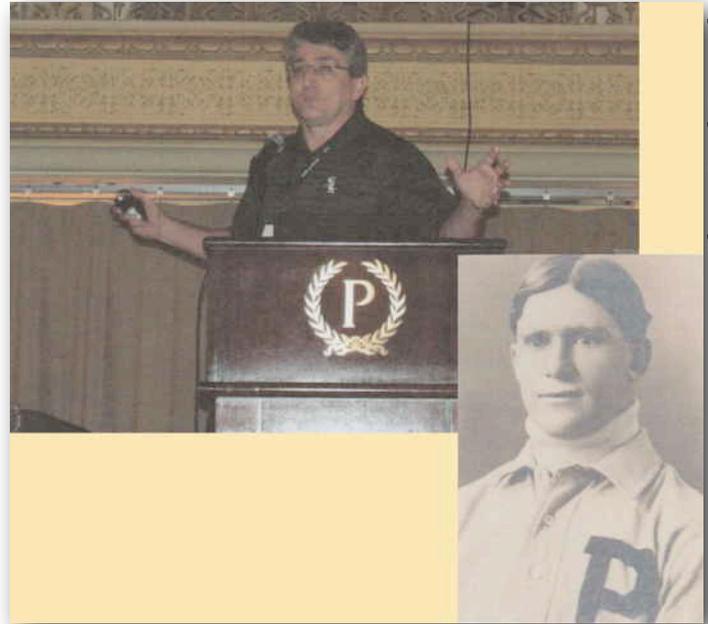


Photo: Jacob Pomrenke

R.J. Lesch (Red Dooin)

Cypheum
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WEEK BEGINNING THIS AFTERNOON MATINEE EVERY DAY
A MARVELOUS NEW BILL

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RUBE MARQUARD
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"THE LATE MR. ALLEN,"
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WOTPERT & PAULAN
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4 Bears—5 Dogs—5 Monkeys—1 Act Extra

EDDY HOWARD
(Late of Howard & North),
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Last Week—Immense Hit, B. A. Rolfe's Extravaganza,
"PUSS IN BOOTS"
An English Americanized Pantomime—A Company of 25 People, Featuring
WILL L. KENNEDY

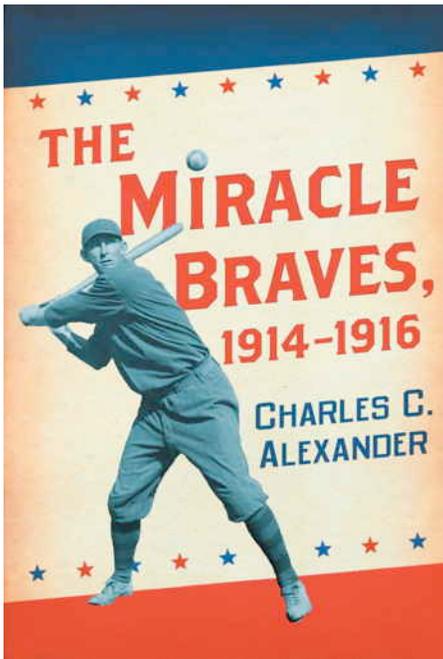
EVENING PRICES—10c, 25c, 50c, 75c, Box Seats, \$1.
MATINEE PRICES (except Sundays and Holidays)—10c, 25c, 50c.
PHONES—DOUGLAS 70, HOME C1570.

The San Francisco Call, March 2, 1913

NO MORE BEER; NO MORE BREWERS

Patrons of the Milwaukee club of the American Association conducted a successful campaign to rename the Brewers, now that the manufacture of beer, Milwaukee's leading industry, has practically been buried. The team has been called the Brewers since joining the association. The Panthers is the new name selected for the club.

The Toledo News-Bee, January 28, 1919



**THE MIRACLE BRAVES,
1914-1916**

**BY CHARLES C.
ALEXANDER**

*2015. Jefferson City, NC:
McFarland & Company.
[ISBN: 978-0-7864-7424-0;
ebook: 978-1-4766-1964-4.
232 pp. \$29.95 USD, Softcover
(6" X 9")]*

Reviewed by
David Lee Poremba
daveporem@yahoo.com

The story of the Boston Braves miracle season of 1914, which celebrated its centennial last year, is relatively well-known to fans of the modern game and to those who also study its history. What is less known is the story behind that season and the campaigns that followed. Charles Alexander relates the story beginning in 1912 and carries it through to 1917, introducing the reader to the most pugnacious and

profane group of ballplayers ever to do battle against opposing players, umpires, and each other. Led by their manager, George Stallings, and their player-manager, Johnny Evers, the Braves were the antithesis of a disciplined baseball team. Constantly baiting umpires and physically brawling with opposing players, they were frequently ejected from games and fined for misbehavior. Stallings, managing from the dugout in civilian clothes and thus denied access to the playing field, would greet umpires after the game with invective and — sometimes — fisticuffs.

Evers, whose nickname the “Crab” suited him so well, spent almost as much time on suspension as on the field. Jim Gaffney, Braves owner, ordered Evers to stop getting thrown out of games, and this in the middle of the 1914 season. His “crabbing” got so bad in later seasons that the team made him pay his own fines. As for fisticuffs, he would not hesitate, even if it was with a teammate. Nevertheless, Evers was not signed to be a

superstar, but was sought for his experience as a player and a manager.

Joined by team batting leader Joe Connolly, RBI leader Rabbit Maranville, and a trio of nearly unbeatable pitchers, Dick Rudolph, Bill James, and Lefty Tyler, the Braves found themselves in last place on July 4, yet went on to win the National League pennant by a hefty 10½ games over the New York Giants. They then won the National League’s only championship from 1909 to 1919 in the first ever four-game sweep in World Series play.

Readers will discover that the 1914 Braves were not a flash in the pan, but were also serious pennant contenders in 1915 and 1916. In August 1915, the Braves opened the last of the National League’s “jewel box” stadiums, Braves Field, after playing the first half of the season at Fenway Park. Even with the acquisition of Philadelphia Phillies star, Sherry Magee, the Braves finished a tough season in second place, seven games behind the Phillies. The following season, the team was

NEW FROM THE GAMES AND BIOPROJECT

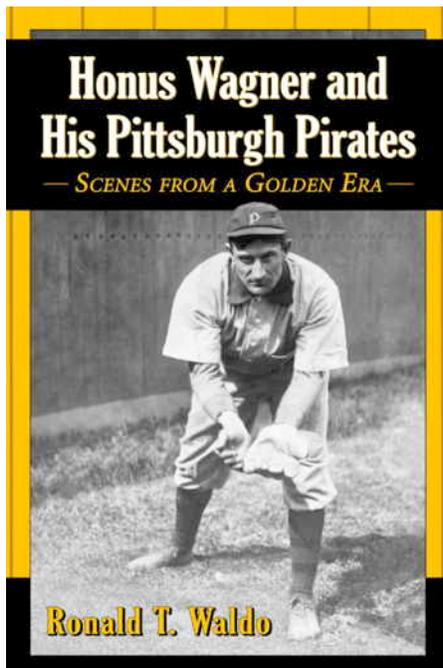
Among the games recently memorialized by the Games Project is a June 12, 1908 contest between the Greenville Spinners and the Winston-Salem Twins highlighted by the exploits of a young Shoeless Joe Jackson. The most recent BioProject profiles of interest to Deadballers include: Otto Knabe, Jimmy Dygert, Lee Dashner, Zeb Terry, Rudy Sommers, Cotton Minahan, Henry Mathewson, Fred Herbert, Jimmy Ring, Dutch Ruether, Chick Shorten, Jiggs Donahue, Frank Foutz, Doc Miller, Bill Rariden, Jack Morrissey, and Miller Huggins. As always, we urge you to check these interesting pieces out if you have not already done so.

sold to a syndicate headed by former Harvard football coach Percy Haughton. In an exciting four-team race, Boston finished third, behind Brooklyn and Philadelphia, just four games off the mark.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I, disrupting and changing America's and baseball's life patterns for good. The season itself was uncertain. Would baseball continue? Would the players be drafted into uniform or would they be exempt? In the shortened season, with players leaving either for service or jobs in a war-related industry, the Braves finished in seventh place.

The author of a number of baseball books, including biographies of Ty Cobb, John McGraw, and Tris Speaker, Alexander introduces numerous characters in this book, from magnates and managers to reporters and ballplayers, and includes a "what-happened-to-them" section at the end of the book. This book contains ample notes and an impressive bibliography, reflecting the depth of research that characterizes it. It is a very readable, informative, and entertaining story that belongs on every baseball bookshelf.

David Lee Poremba was manager of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, and the Ernie Harwell Sports Collection. He now lives and works in Florida.



**HONUS WAGNER AND
HIS PITTSBURGH
PIRATES: SCENES
FROM A GOLDEN ERA**

BY RONALD T. WALDO

2015. Jefferson City, NC:
McFarland & Company.
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ebook: 978-1-4766-1882-1,
228 pp. \$29.95 USD,
Softcover]

Reviewed by
Gail Rowe

growes36@comcast.net

In *Honus Wagner and His Pittsburgh Pirates* Ronald Waldo, author of a half-dozen books on the early Pirates, their players, managers, and fortunes, offers readers an uneven collection of tales by and about Honus Wagner, his teammates, fans, friends, and acquaintances. "Each anecdote," Waldo assures readers, "was carefully selected

in order to highlight Wagner, his Pittsburgh Pirates or that particular era of baseball history" (p. 3).

Waldo organizes his work by topic, opening with a general overview of Wagner's rise from a promising player in Western Pennsylvania to stardom with the Pittsburgh Pirates, and follows with chapters that provide a deeper look at Wagner's life and career. "Trains, Dining Cars, Theaters and the Stage," "Ham Hyatt, Turkey Mike and Jimmy Viox," and "Tommy Leach, Truck Eagan, Bill McKechnie and Others" are some of his chapter titles. Drawing upon his previous research on Wagner's long-time teammate and manager, Fred Clarke [*Fred Clarke: A Biography of the Baseball Hall of Fame Player-Manager* (2011)], he devotes two entire chapters to the "rough and tumble" Clarke.

Elements of Waldo's work are problematic. Conclusions are often based on questionable evidence. Arky Vaughn is quoted as saying he was unsure of how effective Wagner's coaching was, noting that Wagner just told him, "You ... run fast, grab the ball, and throw it to first base." The next sentence concludes that "... Wagner's tutelage paid huge dividends ..." as Vaughn became a top-rated shortstop (p. 184). Unnecessary sentences abound. We are told, for instance, that his "Research was done using various tools such as books, magazines, and newspapers in order to

formulate [the] narrative” (p. 3). Waldo’s organization and presentation leads to repetition, long quotations, and eyebrow-raising observations. Without editorial comment readers are told that “[Kid] Gleason ... sank the ball in between two of [Fred] Clarke’s ribs [and] they had to call time while the ball was yanked from Fred’s hide” (p. 138). Questions are raised on nearly every page. Was Pete Lavelle “a great catcher” (p. 25)? Was Wagner as a youth incapable “of doing a mean ... thing if he had tried” (p. 10)? Did Wagner really describe teammate Babe Adams as “rather phlegmatic” (p. 79)? If an author’s role is to engage readers — even on an incredulous level — Waldo has achieved that goal.

On one occasion, we are told, while facing Cy Young who was dominating the Pirates with his fastball, Wagner took two fastball strikes, then reached out, caught Young’s third fastball barehanded and sneered, “Change up, huh?”, causing Young to lose both his poise and control (p. 18). To substantiate that feat Waldo cites Louis Mazur’s *Autumn Glory: Baseball’s First World Series* [2003, p. 24]. Mazur provides no citations for the story. For Wagner’s most frequently repeated exploit — his introduction as a Louisville Colonel to the Baltimore Orioles in 1897 where, on an apparent inside the park homerun, he was obstructed and harassed by Oriole

infielders only to later successfully retaliate by adopting their brutal tactics against them — no contemporary citation is provided (pp. 32-33, 197, n. 33-35). These examples do not inspire confidence in Waldo’s assertion that he “made a concerted effort to research these incidents ... to prove their veracity or correct any discrepancies” (p. 3).

To his credit, Waldo understands many of the limitations of his goal and approach. He acknowledges that numerous tales told by and about Wagner were embellished and honed over time. And to be fair, even some of the shortcomings are not without value. For instance, while the numerous long quotations become onerous at times, they also convey the mood and style of the times, one of Waldo’s prime objectives.

What Waldo gives readers is an entertaining compilation of the

familiar and not so familiar yarns touching Wagner and those around him. In doing so he captures the temper and tone of the era — particularly its hyperbole and florid language. In addition, he reminds us of the proclivity of players and former players to give the public stories and opinions it longs to hear, true or not. Waldo’s selection of anecdotes is a very personal one; readers will find some more worthwhile and convincing than others. What is undeniable is that this is a labor of love, a very individual expression of Waldo’s long-held affection for the early Pirates, the community that inspired and followed their fortunes, and the web of characters and events that gave context to Wagner’s life and career.

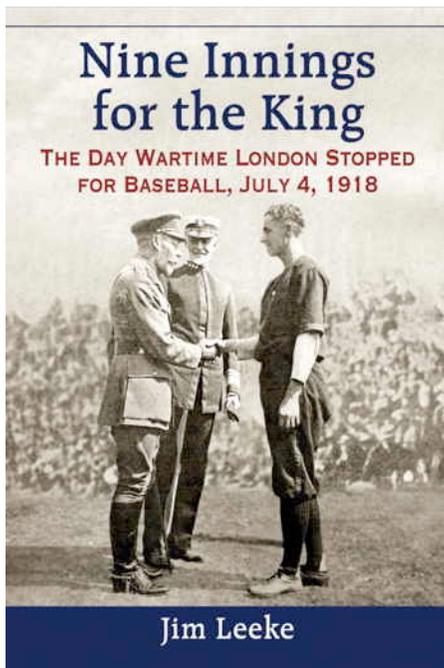
Gail Rowe, a long-time member of SABR, has served on the Seymour and Ritter book award committees, and as book review editor of The Inside Game.

GET AT LEAST \$3,000

**OR KEEP OUT OF BASEBALL,
HUGHEY JENNINGS TELLS STUDENTS**

ITHACA—No college man should go into professional baseball unless he can be sure of a \$3,000 salary, declared Hughey Jennings, manager of the Detroit Tigers, in a talk with Cornell men. Jennings said: “In ten years a man loses his speed and then has to fall back on his bank account, and if he has not had a good salary he finds he has not any money and has no means of earning a living. It is better to go into business right away unless he can earn a good salary at the start.”

The Topeka State Journal, March 5, 1912



**NINE INNINGS FOR
THE KING: THE DAY
WARTIME LONDON
STOPPED FOR
BASEBALL, JULY 4,
1918**

BY JIM LEEKE

*Jefferson, NC: McFarland &
Company*

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Reviewed by

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In the waning days of World War One, an event took place that helped solidify British-American relations in the trying months ahead. Despite its significance, the event has been largely forgotten. In his splendid new narrative, *Nine Innings for the King: The Day*

Wartime London Stopped for Baseball July 4, 1918, Jim Leeke brings alive for the modern reader the baseball game that took place on this day between the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy. This game became known as "The King's Game," and was attended by many members of the royal family, including King George V, as well as Winston Churchill. Umpired by the "fresh" Arlie Latham and featuring a pitchers' duel that included Herb Pennock, soon to become a fabled member of the 1927 Yankees, it exhibited all the greatness of what it was to be American, and gave the crowd, estimated at over 40,000, the chance to forget about the horror of war for that single sunny afternoon.

From a dusty newspaper box score published in the armed forces newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, Leeke builds the tale of the game, the players, the spectators, and the playing field into a narrative that is difficult to put down. Along with the *Stars and Stripes*, many additional sources are used to expand upon this little-known baseball saga. This is one strength of the work. It is difficult to pinpoint a true origin of the King's Game on that Fourth of July day in 1918.

We learn of the wounded Canadian troops and their desire to play and of Ban Johnson, president of baseball's American League, coming to their aid and donating equipment to the cause. From there came the evolution of the Anglo-American Baseball League and its eight teams, four American, four Canadian. The teams of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy formed the backbone of what would become a symbol of America and the patriotism felt toward Americans by their British comrades. While Britain never fully embraced baseball or understood its myriad rules (at the King's Game scorecards were disbursed to attempt to convey understanding) on that day London became one with the "New York" game, not so different from its ancestor, rounders.

Incredibly, there were no true sportswriters assigned to cover the game. Using accounts from the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail* as well as the official box score, Leeke painstakingly reconstructs the game action, inning-by-inning and pitch-by-pitch. We are drawn into the age-old chess game between pitcher and batter, as Herb Pennock stares

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down at his Army counterpart “Doc” Ed Laffite. As Leeke writes, “So here they were, Chateau Lafitte and the squire of Kennett Square representing the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy in the middle of a World War with the King and Queen of England watching from gilded chairs and only God knew how many tens of thousands of Yanks and Britishers howling like banshees from the stands and surrounds. All of this on the Fourth of July in England. Who would’ve believed it back home in Atlanta or Philadelphia?” (p.171) The description of the game, part sports column, part biography of the players, is fantastic.

The true strength of the work is its narrative. The book is divided into three parts: the story of the current situation in the war, how the King’s game came to be, and biographies of some key players. The only problem with this arrangement of chapters is that the work jumps from one chapter — and sometimes from one paragraph describing a character or the war — to an unrelated chapter or paragraph about a totally different subject. While a well-rounded story is the goal, presenting the information in this format sometimes makes the narrative choppy, interrupting the flow of the work. Perhaps a better option would have been to have a brief summary of the war up to the game, and then lead into the game and its importance on a grand scale.

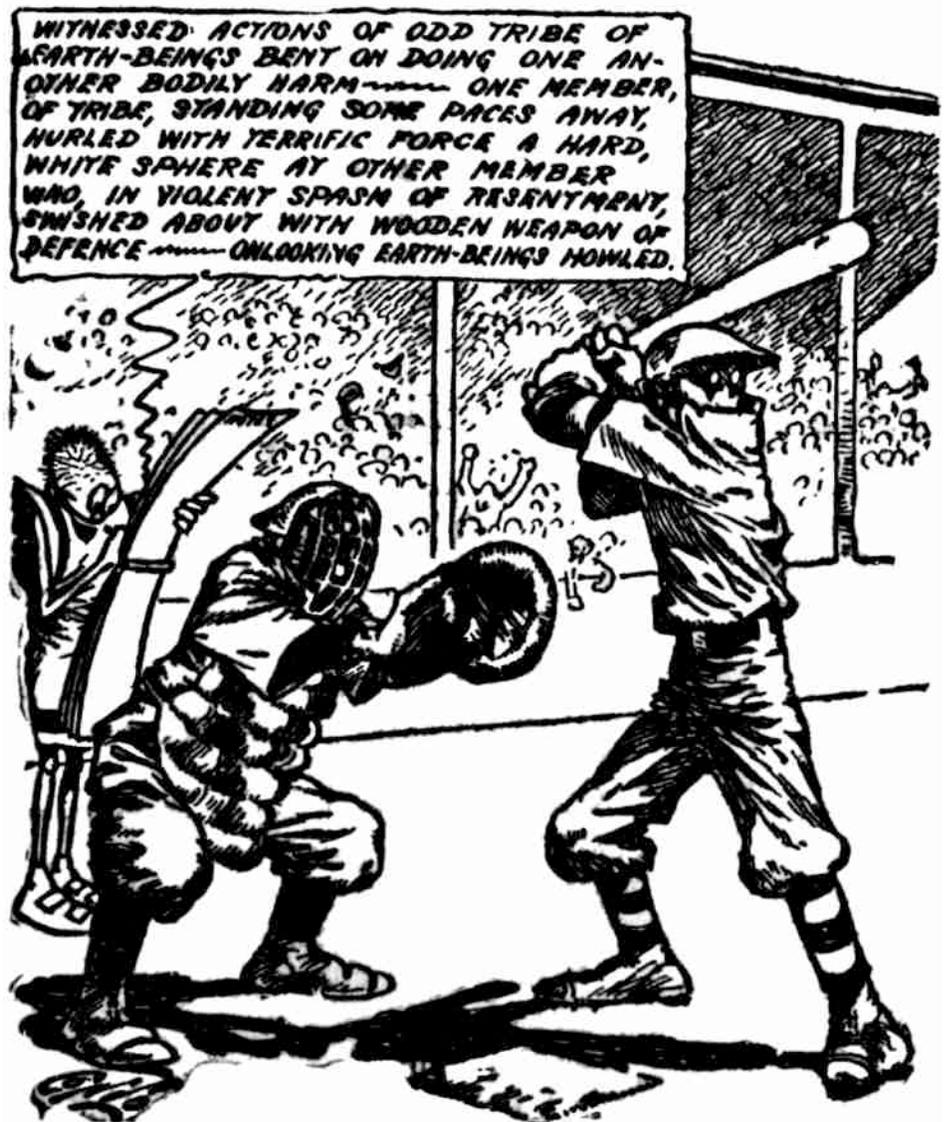
When exploring works on wartime baseball, we come across many that speak of World War II or the evolution of the game leading up to and after the Civil War. Never, though, has a shelf been graced with a book on such a unique game during World War I in London. This is great narrative of a forgotten game brought

back to life almost a hundred years later.

A holder of a B.A. in English from Canisius College and a M.A. in History from the University of Colorado at Denver, Paul “Yank” Langendorfer plays right scout for the Denver and Rio Grande Reds of the Colorado Vintage Base Ball Association.

MR. SKYGACK FROM MARS.

He Visits the Earth as a Special Correspondent and Makes Wireless Observations in His Notebook.



The Tacoma Times, June 11, 1909 (A.D. Condo)

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MILWAUKEE BREWERS TO THE ST. LOUIS BROWNS

by **Dennis Pajot**

The Milwaukee Brewers had been members of the Western League since its inception in 1895, and charter members of the major league version of the American League in 1901. Managed by Hugh Duffy, the Brewers finished 1901 with a last place 48-89 record. At the gate the Milwaukee club was second-to-last in the AL, 139,034 spectators passing through the gates of Milwaukee Park at 16th and Lloyd Streets. Financially the American League's first season as a competing major league with the National League was a great success. AL president Ban Johnson at first claimed only Milwaukee had lost money. This, however, is doubtful. Other reports claimed Cleveland had lost over \$15,000. Books in Detroit showed the club losing between \$6,000 and \$7,000. Johnson even admitted later that the Baltimore Orioles did not make money. On the other side of the ledger it was estimated Boston cleared about \$35,000, Chicago \$30,000, Philadelphia \$15,000, and Washington \$10,000 to \$14,000.

How the Brewers did financially is in question. In late August club president Matthew Killilea was reported as saying the Brewers would earn from \$10,000 to \$15,000 for the season. However, after the season the *Milwaukee Sentinel* wrote: "That the season of 1901 has not been of pecuniary benefit to the Milwaukee magnates there is little room for doubt, and the fact that the team lost so consistently from start to finish inclines one to the belief that the bank accounts of the owners of the franchise suffered to the extent of about \$5,000." In the beginning of the season it was believed the Brewers would have a total expense of about \$30,175. B.F. Wright in the October 5, 1901 *Sporting News* figured that after the 10% American League fund deduction and money given to visiting teams the Brewers took in about \$25,850 at Milwaukee Park, and \$24,975 on the road (having a road attendance of over 222,000), thus totaling

\$50,825—a little more than Cleveland, and not much below Washington and Baltimore. Wright could not understand how Milwaukee lost money, thinking possibly the statement was "to reconcile the Milwaukee fans to the transfer of the club to St. Louis." However, in the October 12, 1901 issue of *The Sporting News*, Frank Patterson pointed out that some cities' attendance reports "were at times very much exaggerated." This included Milwaukee's, which were "padded very considerable." Patterson also believed Wright underestimated salaries in the American League. He reported the Brewers' salary list "was hardly below \$40,000."

As far back as February 1901 rumor was about that the Brewers would transfer to St. Louis. On February 25 the *Milwaukee Sentinel* wrote that if the Brewers did not transfer before the 1901 season, they probably would by 1902. According to a later *Sporting News* report, the American League picked Milwaukee over St. Louis "for sentimental reasons." Matt Killilea had "declined to accede to the request of President Ban Johnson, White Sox owner Charlie Comiskey and others prominent in the American League" to transfer his team to St. Louis "with protestations of civic pride." The talk died until June when the AL magnates met in Chicago and said they would enter St. Louis and/or New York in 1902, dropping Milwaukee and/or Cleveland. Later there was talk of the AL going into Pittsburgh, but doubted by most, as the Pennsylvania city was not allowed Sunday ball. In late July Killilea conferred with Comiskey and Johnson, and reported the American League plan was to transfer the Washington franchise to New York and the Cleveland club to St. Louis. Killilea said he would "personally vouch for the retention of this city [Milwaukee] in the circuit." He told the public that he had just turned down a \$30,000 offer for his franchise from St. Louis people.

The club and franchise is not for sale at any price, as we are satisfied that in years to come the Milwaukee team will be a money maker. The patronage here has always been liberal, and while this season the team has not been playing up to its usual form, the attendance has been

larger than we expected under the conditions existing. Milwaukee will continue to be in the American League during the life of its franchise, which has nine years to run after this season, and it will be the aim of the owners of the club to place the best team in the field that money commands. We are making every effort to strengthen the weak spots, and hope before the present season ends to merit the support that Milwaukee people have been giving us.

Others, including Jim Manning of Washington, insisted Milwaukee would go to St. Louis.

Meanwhile, talk of peace between the two major leagues was being heard. Even a rumor that the two leagues would merge into a 10-club circuit was about. Both sides denied these stories. In August a story broke that Ban Johnson had received an option on the stock from the St. Louis National League owners and he had given Killilea a chance to take up the option. Privately, Johnson was admitting Milwaukee would be transferred to St. Louis, and stated "the players at present with the Milwaukee club are popular in St. Louis and they, with a materially strengthened team, would undoubtedly be well supported there." The *Milwaukee Sentinel* believed the Brewers would go to St. Louis, and Baltimore would transfer to Providence, as New York's National League owner Andrew Freedman was too strong in baseball and political circles to crack. It appeared nothing was to come of the story, but something was definitely brewing in St. Louis. Ban Johnson said the AL would enter St. Louis, but at this point declined to say what city would be dropped. The *Milwaukee Daily News* was sure it would not be Milwaukee because of Matthew Killilea:

He has been one of the staunchest supporters of the American League, and he did as much if not more than any one person to place Ban Johnson in the comfortable berth he has today. Mr. Killilea is high in the councils of the American League and if he cares to have one of its teams here next season his wishes will be respected.



Matthew Killilea

In late August Matthew Killilea again turned down an offer for his club. "An authentic source" said some National League ball players "who are in the possession of wealth accumulated during a long term of service" composed a syndicate that offered Killilea \$42,000 for the Brewers. Names were not announced, but it was believed Bid McPhee, Jake Beckley, and Frank Bancroft, all associated with Cincinnati, formed the syndicate. They wanted to move the club to St. Louis, but concentrated on the Cleveland franchise when turned down here.

By mid-September reliable sources were claiming the Brewers would be transferred to St. Louis and the team be composed of the best Milwaukee players and some of the best St. Louis National League players. Matthew Killilea's brother Henry, now the directing head of the Brewers, as Matthew was ill, denied this. A St. Louis dispatch reported, however, that the Killileas and Hugh Duffy had secured nine players from the National League Cardinals to play with St. Louis in the American League in 1902. Those mentioned were Jesse Burkett, Bobby Wallace, Jack Harper, Emmet Heidrick, and Art Nichols, as well as player/manager Patsy Donovan. It was reported in St. Louis that Jake Beckley — a very popular figure in the World's

Fair City — was being considered to manage this new team.

The *St. Louis Republican* was certain the American League would transfer the Brewers to the Missouri city. On September 15, 1901 the editor wrote:

[Matt] Killilea has had his eye on St. Louis ever since the American League began planning for the invasion. He denies in a half-hearted manner that the Milwaukee club will be transferred to this city, but it is regarded as certain that Milwaukee will not be on the circuit next year. With a further expanded circuit and an increase in salaries over the past year, owing to the continuance of the war between the two big leagues, it will be necessary for Killilea to seek a better paying city. Conditions have not been as favorable as they might have been in Milwaukee this year, owing to the position of the club in the race.

It now looks as if it would be war to the knife this winter, and while the merry battle between the two big leagues is being waged, St. Louis will not be the least point of interest. St. Louis is recognized as one of the best, if not the best, baseball towns in the country, and could support both teams if the attendance was evenly divided, providing that both aggregations maintained good positions in the percentage columns. The schedules will not necessarily conflict and games could be arranged so that the local followers of the great national sport could witness a contest nearly every day during the season. Both could play 50-cent ball and draw crowds, providing a hot pace was set.

Matt Killilea told the Milwaukee press that he wanted to retire from baseball and would not run the St. Louis club if the Brewers moved there. In late September Philadelphia sources claimed Ban Johnson had reportedly made a deal where the Milwaukee owners would receive \$25,000 for 40% of the stock they held by a St. Louis brewer, and Matt Killilea would be made president of the

club after the transfer to St. Louis. In early October Henry Killilea went to St. Louis, reportedly to negotiate the disposal of the franchise. The Milwaukee owners were reportedly opposed to the move, but liberal inducements were offered them. Killilea returned shortly and St. Louis dispatches reported the Brewers would transfer, and that Jim McAleer would manage the club. Ban Johnson also reported the transfer. Milwaukee officials, however, denied this. McAleer did come to Milwaukee to talk to Henry Killilea and club secretary Fred Gross. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* wrote: "You pays your money and takes your choice" on who was telling the truth. The *Evening Wisconsin* was sure the Brewers would transfer and gave reasons.

It is an impossibility for Milwaukee to spend as much money in getting a team together and putting up the salaries requisite to get gilt-edged players and put a team in the field like Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston, and unless the Milwaukee fans are content to travel along as the tail-enders of the American League for another season, the best thing that can be done in the interests of the sport locally will be to quit and get into a class where Milwaukee will be able to hold its own in place of simply serving as the means to fatten the averages and standings of the other teams.

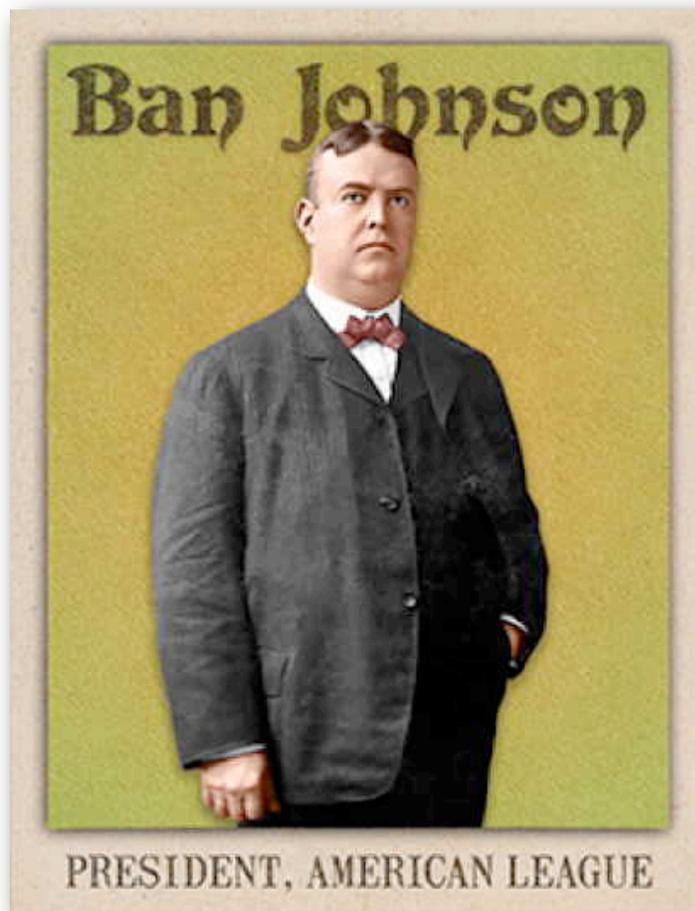
However, there were people who thought Milwaukee could survive in the American League. The Milwaukee correspondent to *Sporting Life* wrote on September 28, 1901:

The statement that Milwaukee cannot afford to support a team of equal caliber with Washington and Detroit is absurd. If the Milwaukee magnates engage high-salaried players, and the team makes a favorable showing — that is, winning half of their games — the patronage they will receive will surprise those who are now deriding the ability of Milwaukee for supporting first-class exhibitions of baseball. ... Milwaukee will not support a tail-

end team or a mediocre aggregation of ball players. It demands the best, and when that is provided there is no limit to the extent of the patronage. ... Milwaukee is a better ball town than Baltimore, Cleveland or Washington, and as good as Detroit, and if these cities can afford to secure leading talent for their respective teams for 1901, then the management of the Milwaukee Club can surely take a similar risk.

The evidence was mounting that Milwaukee was on the way out of the American League. On October 10 it was reported that Hugh Duffy had resigned as manager of the Brewers, wanting to go back to Boston, but this was denied. The following day, Ban Johnson announced he had signed five players from the Cardinals to play for the new St. Louis club. Matthew Killilea, however, still denied any move was in the works. These continuing reports and denials led the Milwaukee *Sporting News* correspondent to write these were only “one of the thousand little and big things which prove how much confidence may be placed in the announcements of the base ball magnates these days. They have adopted a policy of denying and claiming everything, so that when a piece of news that is authentic is dug up, it must be supported by oaths and pledges, or it looks like the stuff that is being piped by the guess artists of the major league cities.” Back in St. Louis dispatches reported Gussie Busch, Zach Tinker, and George Heckel would back the club and they wanted Matt Killilea for president. The group went so far as to name the team players, including eight Brewers. Others in the AL favored the transfer. James Manning and John McGraw, for example, believed that St. Louis would pay visiting clubs \$5,000 more during the season than the clubs could get in Milwaukee. On October 13, 1901, the *Sentinel* attacked Ban Johnson and his cronies:

American League magnates are exhibiting a selfish streak of well developed proportions this fall in making an attempt to deprive Milwaukee of its franchise. For years this city was the backbone of the league, supplying Johnson and his



Associates with the sinews of war even when the team representing Milwaukee was not considered a factor in the championship race. Now that the American League has expanded into a simon pure organization, and simply because the Brewers graced the tail end of the processions ... and did not attract the people to the ball grounds as they had in preceding seasons, the other magnates now say “T’ell with Milwaukee.”

The Milwaukee owners did not give in that easy. They set a price tag of \$60,000 for the franchise, a figure they believed too high for acceptance. They were right. Ban Johnson said “there is not a club in the country that is worth \$60,000 today in these troublesome times of baseball.” Back in St. Louis, Zach Tinker backed out. It was reported Tinker was willing to put \$25,000 into the St. Louis club for half interest, but was told he would need more to have even a 40% interest. Tinker wanted control of the club, but the Milwaukee owners wanted to retain that. It was

said an imposition of a special tax of \$2,000 by the St. Louis city council deterred Killilea and Gross from trying to run the club with St. Louis interests.

The Milwaukee press believed the deal was off and the Brewers would stay. Ban Johnson said otherwise. He called Milwaukee a "one day town," saying they only drew good crowds on Sunday. Johnson stated the Brewers would go to St. Louis and there would be no local money in the club, the capital would be furnished by the American League, and the franchise the league's "common possession until such time as a proper man could be found to relieve it of the holds and take personal charge."

The St. Louis-Milwaukee mess was not clearing up. Pitcher Bill Reidy and three other Brewers stated they would ask for an increase in salary if the club was transferred, as their contracts with the Brewers did not require them to play in St. Louis. Picher Ned Garvin said he was dissatisfied with the situation and was going to jump to the National League. Outfielder Billy Gilbert said the same. Infielder Wid Conroy did, jumping to Pittsburgh.

The AL was having difficulty finding grounds in St. Louis. Early on two sites were being considered. One was Handlan's Park, but AL leaders quickly decided against this location. The other was at the location of the original Sportsman Park. It was said that with the addition of about 550 feet of ground, which was said could be obtained without much trouble, the grounds would be roomy enough to accommodate all comers and a new grandstand and bleachers would afford sufficient seating capacity. But price was an object for any location. Charles Comiskey said the American League "does not want to buy the city, simply a slice thereof, but the figures asked are out of reason." Finally the old Sportsman's Park site was secured.

Finally, December 2 came. The American League met in Chicago and re-elected Ban Johnson as president. Fred Gross was at the meeting, but as Matthew Killilea had been detained by the trains, Milwaukee was not dropped. Killilea told

newsmen "the owners of the Milwaukee club are opposed to the transfer to St. Louis and the American League cannot make a change without the consent of the owners." Word was around, however, that he wanted \$48,000 for the franchise. The next day, after a session that lasted past 11:00 p.m., the long-awaited transfer was completed. Matthew Killilea purchased the majority interest of his brother Henry, who did not want Matt in baseball because of his failing health, and transferred the Milwaukee club to St. Louis. Matthew Killilea was president and principal owner of the St. Louis franchise. Jim McAleer was named manager. The *Milwaukee Journal* was not kind, saying "it is a very clever trick of the American League bunch in keeping Killilea ... on their staff with ground awaiting them in Milwaukee in case St. Louis should go to the lead." The *Milwaukee Daily News*, bitter over the transfer, wrote Killilea and Gross "have pink tea in their veins instead of sporting blood" for not taking a chance on Milwaukee. The *Milwaukee Sentinel*, however, said of the transfer on Dec 6, 1901:

The owners of the Milwaukee club removed their team to St. Louis as a business proposition. They expected to sell out, but the absence of capitalists in the Mound City to shoulder the burden made it necessary for them to carry the load themselves, and it is possible that they may make their independent fortunes as a result of the move. The Killileas and F.C. Gross stated that Milwaukee could not adequately support the expensive team they had secured; so they had to leave the city.

Because of his health, Matt Killilea spent the winter in Texas and left George Munson, who had been secretary to Chris von der Ahe of the old St Louis Browns, to run the club in his absence. Some, the *Daily News* and the *Chicago American* included, doubted if Killilea was really behind the club because of his health, thinking Johnson and Comiskey were looking after the finances of the club. In January Matthew Killilea sold out to a St. Louis syndicate headed by

retired carriage manufacturer Robert L. Hedges for a reported \$40,000 (or \$50,000, depending on the source). Henry Killilea said after the sale: "Matt was never in favor of going to St. Louis, and when the opportunity came to sell out at a higher price he willingly consented. We were treated liberally by the men purchasing and have no complaint to make." Matthew Killilea was to die July 27, 1902, of tuberculosis.

The Brewers transfer from Milwaukee to St. Louis was in some ways a matter of timing, as well as necessary in the American League's war strategy. Matthew Killilea was reported in September as saying: "If there was no war, then Milwaukee would be sure to remain in the American League. You must fight the devil with fire, and the American League must go into the National League's territory to wage a successful war. Before peace is declared the American League will doubtless be in New York and St. Louis." The 1900 census showed St. Louis' population to be 575, 238 — the fourth-largest city in the United States, with over twice as many people as Milwaukee's 285,315. The attendance figures reported in *The Sporting News* of October 19, 1901, showed the St. Louis National League team had the highest major league attendance for the 1901 season.

Ban Johnson's dream of transferring Baltimore to New York was accomplished in 1903. From 1903 to 1954 the American League of Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Washington, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and St. Louis remained unchanged. In 1954 the St. Louis Browns were transferred to Baltimore. Could Milwaukee have flourished in the American League, and avoided the fate of the St. Louis Browns? So many factors enter into what happened and what might have happened, that nothing can be certain. And in any event, history cannot be changed. But it is fun to look back and wonder, what if?

Author Note: The above is a slightly different version of the Milwaukee-to-St. Louis transfer that originally appeared in my book The Rise of Milwaukee Baseball: The Cream City from

Midwestern Outpost to the Major Leagues, 1859-1901, *copyright 2009 Dennis Pajot, by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640; www.mcfarlandpub.com. The book includes a detailed history of the start of the Western League and its climb to major league status in 1901, which should be of interest to those interested in the early American League. Rather than take up space in this newsletter, endnotes with sources for the quotes herein are printed in the McFarland book.*

MILWAUKEE WANTS CARD FRANCHISE

MILWAUKEE—Manager Rowland of the Brewers admits there is a plan on foot to secure the St. Louis National franchise for Milwaukee and transfer the Brewer franchise to Omaha. The Cards are a losing proposition in St. Louis.

The Toledo News-Bee, August 28, 1919

EARLIER GAMES FOR CUB FANS

PRESIDENT MURPHY WILL CONSULT PATRONS ON PROPOSITION OF ADVANCING TIME TO 2:30 O'CLOCK

President Murphy of the Cubs has found the scheme of starting weekday games at 3 o'clock so pleasing to the patrons of the west side ball park that he is contemplating advancing the starting time another half hour to 2:30 o'clock, but will consult the said patrons before deciding to do so. He has had ballot boxes prepared and as soon as the ballots can be furnished, will ask the fans to vote on the proposition. They will be requested today or tomorrow to express their choice between the present time of beginning games and 2:30 o'clock. If the vote favors the earlier hour all games, including Saturdays and Sundays, will commence at that time.

Chicago Tribune, June 9, 1911

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

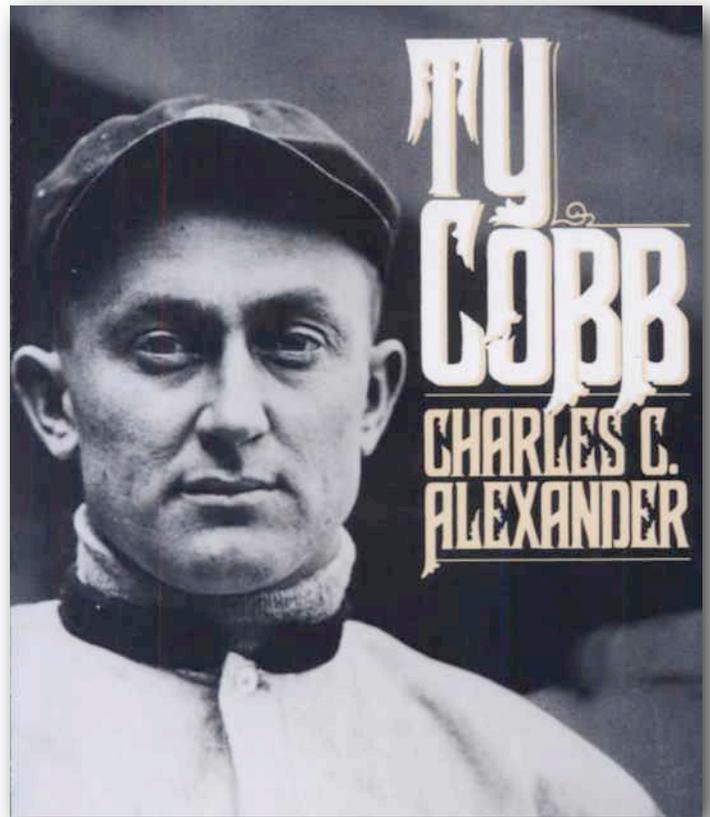
continued from page 1

did something new so we're in the modern era. If you were Honus Wagner, for example, would you have come to spring training in 1900 and said, 'hey, I play in the modern era now!' I just don't think it has a legitimacy."

Alexander noted that, to his knowledge, no changes were made to the baseball itself between 1899 and 1910 which would have prompted observers to feel that the ball had been suddenly stripped of its vitality. The ball, said Alexander, "was as dead as it had been, and it was as dead as it would continue to be." Even when offensive numbers spiked during the 1911 and 1912 seasons, the Deadball Era remained "a period of pitching domination," Alexander said. "With all the additional hitting going on in 1912, Joe Wood won 34 games, Walter Johnson won 33 games, Ed Walsh 27, Eddie Plank 26, Bob Groom — sort of a forgotten star pitcher of that period — 24 games," said Alexander.

Though it had nothing to do with the ball itself, Alexander cited the rise in the pitcher's mound, the introduction of the foul strike rule, and improved playing surfaces as factors that worked in pitchers' favor, thus resulting in lower offensive output. Better gloves helped fielding percentages to improve by a larger percentage during the first decade of the 20th century than in any subsequent decade, Alexander offered. "So all of these factors that I've mentioned resulted in a corresponding decline in batting averages from 1903 — I'm using 1903 as my baseline because both leagues were using the foul strike rule — to 1910, a decline in the National League from .269 to .256, and in the American League from .255 to .243," said Alexander. "And, of course, corresponding declines in runs earned and earned run average. So those are some of the circumstances that created what we call the Deadball Era in that nineteen-year period."

In addition to writing renowned biographies of Rogers Hornsby and John McGraw, Alexander is best known in baseball circles for his 1984 biography of Ty Cobb. "(The Cobb biography) was my first venture into baseball history," said



Alexander. "It was a good way to start because I found Ty Cobb to be an absolutely fascinating man. As I had suggested in the introduction to that book, I think Ty Cobb would have been very successful in a whole lot of lines of endeavor, not just baseball. He was a very intelligent man, a very resourceful man, a very insightful man about what he wanted to do with his life. "Cobb did not change the way baseball was played, I think we would all recognize, as Babe Ruth did, starting in 1919 and 1920. What Cobb did was bring to its highest level of excellence and expertise the style of baseball that was being played when he reached the major leagues in 1905 at the age of eighteen. I would suggest that as much as Ruth dominated the game in 1920, Cobb was the dominant player in the two decades we know as the Deadball Era."

Noting that there are two new books recently published on Cobb's life, Alexander also wondered whether there is new ground to cover: "Since Oxford University Press published my biography of Cobb in 1984, so much has been written about him that I can only scratch my head when I try to think of anything new that is accurately new that is to be said about him. We

now have more biographies of Ty Cobb than we have biographies of President James K. Polk, who was arguably our most successful president. I did not say, the president with whose policies we could be most in agreement or should most admire. But in terms of the history of James K. Polk's four years as president, accomplishing the four things he came into office to accomplish, he was our most successful president."

Cobb, Alexander said, "has become basically a caricature, as given to us by people who refuse to take the trouble to scrutinize the large amount of Cobb mythology and folklore and go ahead and blindly accept it and pass it along. Well, to be honest, that situation both saddens and angers me because I think there's a great deal

understood about Ty Cobb that people refuse to understand ... I just think it's very unfortunate that a very complicated man and a very great baseball player has been made into this caricature. As popularly understood today I say 'popularly understood' — Ty Cobb was a ranting lunatic. He was a mean-spirited man. Off the field, he was a vicious enemy of everybody on it. He was generally without friends and generally uninterested in having any friends. In short, he was an altogether despicable human being. That's the popular image. And I'm afraid we're stuck with it, despite the best efforts of some of us to get through the caricature and get through to the real man. And, as I said, that situation both saddens and angers me, but I guess there's not anything we can do about it at this point."



Photo: Doug Skipper

Chuck Kimberly, Charles C. Alexander and Nathaniel Grow

Alexander discussed his own approach to Deadball Era research as well and continued with his thoughts on how to cite dialogue properly: “Well, of course, everybody from that time period is dead ... So what are we going to do — we can’t talk to these people. A certain amount of correspondence and other kinds of primary materials, the kind of thing that historians really long for, is available. The Cobb collection at the National Baseball Library, for example, is fairly extensive. It’s one of the largest, in fact, of an individual player at Cooperstown. Still, we mostly have to rely on records and contemporary coverage in daily newspapers, the weekly sports reporting news, *Sporting Life* ...”

“I don’t write dialogue,” Alexander said. “And, frankly, for all the value, for example, of Fred Lieb and the other team histories in the old Putnam Series, it just jars my sensibilities to read the invented dialogue that the authors of those books put into peoples’ mouths. Fiction writers are free to invent dialogue. People trying to write serious history shouldn’t do that. So, what I look for, especially, is quotable material, from players, managers, owners sportswriters, whoever. Quotable material can be used to illustrate and enliven and punctuate the narrative.”

“On a few occasions, I have quoted conversations but only as a conversation has been reported by a participant or eyewitness. For example, I included one bit of dialogue in my 2011 book *Turbulent Seasons*. There’s a conversation between A.G. Spalding and John Montgomery Ward in December 1890 in the aftermath of the collapse of the Players’ League. But that conversation was reported by Tim Murnane of the *Boston Globe* who arranged the meeting between Spalding and Ward at the Manhattan Club and sat in on the meetings. I think it is fine to include dialogue if you have that kind of person who actually witnessed the dialogue taking place.”

Alexander concluded his remarks with a tale about “a lost and precious primary source.” In 1982, while researching his biography on Cobb in Cooperstown, Alexander said he listened to a tape recording of Cobb, provided to him by Tom

Redding, then assistant to Cliff Kachline at the Baseball Hall of Fame. Kachline himself said that he didn’t even know such a tape existed. Alexander cited the two-hour tape extensively in his book, where Cobb early in 1958 “reminisced in considerable detail about his boyhood, his careers in baseball and business, his life in general.” But two years later, when Alexander returned to the Hall of Fame, Alexander mentioned the Cobb tapes to Tom Heitz, who had succeeded Kachline as the Hall of Fame’s Archivist. “Tom was dumfounded to hear about them,” said Alexander, and the tapes could not be found. Even though Heitz began a search for the tapes and an FBI agent even called Alexander to ask about them, the tapes have never been found.”

“I actually did hear them and sat there and listened to them,” said Alexander, “but I don’t know. I’m sure the National Baseball Library Archives are now managed more systematically and efficiently now than they were thirty years ago. But it was far too late as far as the Cobb tapes were concerned.”

MUST CARRY SPONGE

PRESIDENT PULLIAM HAS OBJECTIONS TO THE “SPIT BALL”

NEW YORK—Under certain conditions the “spit ball” will be a balk in the National League this year. President Pulliam has no objections to the “spit ball” in itself—alho he does not fancy its name—but he thinks there is such a thing as using it in a manner not entirely consistent with good taste.

Pulliam has instructed his umpires to see to it that the pitchers do not moisten the ball in an ostentatious or objectionable manner—for instance, with the ball a foot or so away from the mouth in one hand and deliberately wetting the fingers of the other hand after the manner of licking a postage stamp. A balk will be called on every pitcher so doing, provided, of course, there is somebody on a base.

The Minneapolis Journal, April 13, 1905

HE'S OUT!"



The Washington Herald, September 3, 1918 (Bob Satterfield)