

NINETEENTH CENTURY NOTES

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Society for American Baseball Research

Nineteenth Century Notes is a publication of the Nineteenth Century Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research

Committee Contacts

- Chairman– Peter Mancuso
6970 Ely Road
New Hope, PA 18938
peterplus4@earthlink.net
- Vice Chair– Paul Wendt
64 Riverside Street #3
Watertown, MA 02472
pgw02472@yahoo.com
- Editor- Bob Bailey
10223 SW 49th Lane
Gainesville, FL 32608
bobbailey@cox.net

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CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

First, I wish to thank all those Nineteenth Century Committee members and others in SABR (in St. Louis this summer and those who have communicated with me since) for their patience, help and good wishes. Just two months ago, having the responsibilities of a SABR research committee chairman was not even on my radar. I will certainly try my hardest to serve this committee in a professional and friendly manner.

Second, I wish to thank SABR veteran (1982) Bob Bailey for accepting my invitation to be our new editor of "Nineteenth Century Notes." I think that you will agree he is perfect for this vital committee leadership position. Bob's love of baseball, appreciation of research, knowledge of 19th-century baseball lore, experience and sense of humor will all combine



to bring our membership a newsletter that will be informative, useful and fun.

Looking in the rear view mirror, Nineteenth Century Committee members have accomplished

extraordinary things. They have researched, discovered, written, published, curated, presented, informed, advised and have brought to life the history of our National Pastime for the enjoyment of many thousands of people of all ages and walks of life. Mostly, this has been the work of in-

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David Ball's 19th Century Player Transactions Register

The SABR web site contains a large and ever-increasing amount of research data. From time-to-time we will double-click a few items and highlight some of these perhaps little-known treasures.

In 2002 there was a thread on the 19th Century e-group in which committee member David Ball suggested someone assemble a listing of player transactions in the 19th Century. The underlying question was "What was the

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19th Century Player Contract Assignments by David Ball

The most puzzling question I have run into during my work on nineteenth century player sales and trades is the origin of the practice of direct assignment of contract rights by one team to another. This is a practice we take for granted -- at least as it applies to professional ball players. I would guess that few of us expect to be traded or sold by our employers to another firm, and if such a thing were to happen I doubt whether we would accept it as simply part of the game, as ball players generally do.

Such an odd practice can hardly have sprung up fully developed in a moment, and early player sales were in fact accomplished by a different procedure, by which one team would pay another to release a player, then sign the man to a new contract. Of course, the acquiring club would negotiate salary terms with its man before the release and get his promise to sign with that club once he was free to

do so. However, his release made him a free agent, bound only morally by his promise. A few major controversies blew up when released players refused to sign with teams that had paid for their release. More generally, the "purchase of release" player transfer gave the player leverage on the trading block that modern players lack, except in the comparatively rare cases when the rules or their own contracts allow them to refuse a trade.

So how did the modern practice of direct assignment of contracts develop? The story is a long one, but the key moment is easily singled out. The merger of the AA and NL into a twelve-team League in 1891 involved many transfers of players and required the satisfaction of the interests of all twelve teams. A deal so complex could not be held hostage to the whims and wishes of all the players involved. In the wake of two years of trade

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David Ball's 19th Century Player Transactions Register

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first player trade in major league history?" As the thread developed several folks thought it was a good idea but no one seemed to take up the challenge and run with it. So David decided to answer his own questions. (How often have other researchers done the same?)

After combing his personal files and rolling through untold rolls of microfilm and spending more untold hours online with the Sporting News he developed a substantial list of transactions. Those in the early days of the National League were mostly player sales or purchases of releases to facilitate player movement on ownership terms.

But as David points out in the article elsewhere in this Newsletter, there is great murkiness about what was the first trade. But if you page through this resource names of the famous and obscure

minge together. Although the obscure to us were well known to the fans of the day. David adds notes and comments throughout the list to identify difficulties, suppositions, insights, and oddities about over 250 transactions.

My personal favorite is the massive trade between the soon to be defunct Louisville Colonels and the soon to be powerful Pittsburgh Pirates in 1899. Louisville traded the bulk of their serviceable players to Pittsburgh for cash, several players, and a get-out-of-Jail-Free card. Among those traveling east to Pennsylvania were Honus Wagner, Fred Clarke, Tommy Leach, Rube Waddell, and other various and sundry talent. In exchange Louisville got three (or was it four) players including Jack Chesbro. Oh yeah, they also got \$50,000. This amount coincidentally was close to the outstanding debt of the Louisville franchise. A pure coincidence.

Player Contract Assignment (continued)

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war, club officials were in no mood to indulge their players, and the defeat of the players' Brotherhood in 1890 had left them cowed. After the merger, teams simply told the men where they were going and if anyone did not want to conform he did not have to play for his new team, but no other club would step in and sign the man. And so Billy Joyce, traded by Brooklyn to the Senators in February, 1893, held out the entire season but ultimately wound up playing in Washington in 1894.

If there had been any doubt as to the nature of the new order, the Joyce case settled it. No one has ever really looked back.

But did clubs immediately start transferring contract rights, or did they continue for some time to follow the "purchase of release" formula, requiring sold and traded players to sign contracts with their new teams, even though the clubs' collusion left the players no real leverage? I suspect the latter remained the case for some time, but my research has

Chairman's Corner (continued)

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dividual members, often with the help of fellow committee members and others in SABR.

On rarer occasions, this has been the work of groups of committee members, working in concert on a single project.

Going forward, I hope that the Nineteenth Century Committee will find ways to continue to support the efforts of individual members while examining ways to enhance communication and coordination among its members, and with the members of other research committees, to further advance our knowledge of baseball's history for the enjoyment of our members and for the enjoyment of all those who love the game.

I am told by Rod Nelson at SABR headquarters that 19cBB@yahoo.com is SABR's most active online email group. That is wonderful news, and I encourage all our committee members to subscribe and take part in this information universe of

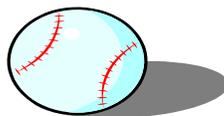
baseball history. I think you will enjoy much of the information that is made available by many of our

most active researchers and many of you will discover how to add to this growing universe of knowledge.

I will soon be surveying our entire committee membership and potential members using SABR's on-line "Survey Monkey" account (and my U.S. mail for those members without email). The purpose of this survey is to gather your ideas and reactions to ideas

on how to enhance communication and coordination among our members. Ideas about newsletter content (which can also be shared anytime with our editor), a committee conference, regional meetings, committee projects, and anything else you would like to add as a member will all be part of the survey. I hope you will take the brief time to contribute to the survey and I welcome any ideas of what could be added to the survey in the several weeks between you reading this and when the survey will be sent.

"The Nineteenth Century Committee will find ways to support the efforts of individual members."



QUESTION of the DAY

From time-to-time we will pose a question. There will be no right or wrong answers (why, oh why was that not the case in my organic chemistry class?). They will cover a broad range of interests from the frivolous to the thought-provoking; from research-oriented to opinion-oriented; from one thing to another. Responses should be either e-mailed to the Newsletter editor at bobbailey@cox.net or mailed to 10223 SW 49th Lane, Gainesville, FL 30268. Replies should contain a brief rationale for your opinion and will be subject to severe editing if you prate on and on. This offer is void where prohibited (currently that would be Alfalfa County, OK and Bullfrog County, NV).

The Question of the Day is: Who is the most overlooked (forgotten, obscure, inconspicuous, misunderstood) baseball personality of the 19th Century. This is not a question of who belongs in the Hall of Fame, although I have no doubt such positions will appear in the responses, but rather what pioneer, player, owner, umpire, writer, or fan do we need to revive or become poorer for not remembering him.

Witty and clever paragraphs will be appreciated, but a solid, well-argued candidate will be noted.

Let the advocacy begin.



RESEARCH REQUESTS

Members of the 19th Century Committee are involved in a myriad of research projects. From time-to-time we need some help. If you have some data, advice, geographic access to material, or just some experience on a topic mentioned below, please respond directly to the requesting party. If your research yields some interesting item, I know a friendly and humble newsletter editor that would appreciate a few paragraphs (or more) for inclusion in future missives. If you are requesting assistance, please be specific in your request. Asking for anything anyone might have in their files on Cap Anson will probably not get much of a response. But asking about some particular aspect of Anson's career and a specific type of event is more likely to elicit a response.

Jim Battenfield is seeking information about 19th Century uniforms; their evolution, styles, and functionality (beside the obvious that one must wear something on the ball field).
Bat10field@verizon.net.

Alain Usereau continues his ongoing research of baseball brawls. He is looking for the correct date and fight details (a sort of early tale of the tape) on a tête-à-tête between Cincinnati teammates John Reilly and Hugh Nicol in 1888. (Did Nicol bite him on the ankle? See photo below)
Althetiger@hotmail.com.



RESEARCH SOURCES

In addition to folks asking us for help, we also get notes offering help, data, and resources. Here are a few items gleaned from various sources recently.

Rod Nelson in the SABR office shares this:

The New York Times is now freely making available archival content that was formerly offered only to premium subscribers. 19th Century & Deadball Era baseball researchers will benefit from online access to public domain articles from 1851 through 1922. Also included are recent years 1989-present, There will be charges for some material from the period 1923 to 1986, and some will be free. For more info: <http://tinyurl.com/39hv32>

WorldVitalRecords.com continues to add resources like NewspaperARCHIVE.com, SmallTownPapers and Find-a-Grave plus genealogical documentation (census, births, deaths, military, marriages) from literally thousands of online databases. Check the web site for details of a 10-day free trial or 50% discount on 2-year subscriptions.

Godfrey.org is the online home for one of the nation's premier libraries of genealogy and history. We encourage members to check out their set of premium online databases.

Bill Hickman reminds us that **The New York Public Library** has placed online 569 photographs from the Albert G. Spalding Collection of Baseball Photographs. (<http://tinyurl.com/2jesql>).

Bill McMahon (mcmahon@uakron.edu) offers his work in progress to assemble game-by-game data ala the Tattersall dailies for the period 1876-1890. Drop him a note and he will e-mail a copy of his data. I am sure he wouldn't object if someone came forward to fill in a few blanks.

RESEARCH REQUESTS (continued)

Sean McNair (y2daddy@juno.com; 440.366.9690) is compiling 19th Century lineups. His period of interest is 1894-1899. He is seeking online sources for this data. He is working through paperofrecord.com and ProQuest Historical Newspapers but seeks

Brock Helander (helander@neteze.com) has some questions about the Troy Haymakers and other New York State items What were the years of John Morrissey's connection to the Troy Club? The Albany-Troy rivalry circa 1877-1880? Were their two pro teams in Troy in 1879? Albany, Syracuse and Rochester teams of 1879, particularly Syracuse's unfinished schedule?

Interested in joining the BioProject effort to produce biographical sketches of all major league players?

Dennis Pajot has collected items related to the career of 19th century star Abner Dalrymple. He offers his notes (and any subsequent finds) to whomever is interested.

This last item raises an interesting research point. As we crank through rolls of microfilm or page through dusty archives working on a particular project we stumble upon items unrelated to our research but perhaps of great interest to someone else. Now we cannot simply collect every thing we read but if we are aware of other committee efforts we may be able to help a bit. For example, there is an ongoing effort among a group of **Minor League and Ballparks Committee Researchers** to compile data from the 19th and early 20th century. Ballparks had various names, often unofficial, during the period and the group seeks to identify proper names, exact locations and dimensions for playing grounds in used in organized baseball. If you have such ballpark data, please contact **Reed Howard** (rhoward@udel.edu).

Please send us info about your research projects for future editions of 19th Century Notes!

Editor's Note

This edition of Nineteenth Century Notes needs help. As will all future editions. First it needs a better editor. That's not false modesty, rather it is an acknowledgement of my limited skills laying out this jewel as I try to learn the ins and outs of the Microsoft Publisher software. But it also needs ongoing help with material. David Ball graciously agreed to send us his essay on player contracts in the 19th Century. The next issue will have a piece by Peter Morris on his Bio Committee work to find Dick McBride, star pitcher of the Athletics of the 1870s.

We also have on hand several items from other members that will make it into the next edition. But there are many people doing many interesting things. We would like to encourage you

to give us some article on your work to enlighten and inform others who might have similar interests. My address and e-mail are on the first page.

One last note on a terrific source of a wide range of items relating to 19th Century baseball. All members of the committee are encouraged to participate in our online discussion forum—aka **The19cBB eGroup**—which is by far the most active within the SABR community. To join, simply send an email to: 19cBBsubscribe@yahoogroups.com or navigate from the SABR.org homepage (Research >> Nineteenth Century >> Online Resources). Recently there have been discussions on the spread of baseball through the country, evolution of rules and equipment, and answers to questions on 19th century history plus a raft of other topics. Sign on and have the ability to search the message archives (over 7,000 entries) and enjoy the flow of facts and opinion from the best and brightest minds on The Grand Old Game. ~Bob Bailey