

SABR Pictorial History Committee Newsletter

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TIPS ON RESEARCHING OLD BASEBALL PHOTOS

[Ed. note: PHC member *Marc Okkonen* is undoubtedly *the* authority on baseball uniforms, as well as one of the leading and most active baseball photo researchers. In his article he enlightens both the serious and casual pictorial historian with helpful hints, how-tos, and pitfalls of photo research.]

One of the most gratifying rewards about being a baseball history nut is to browse through and study old baseball photographs, especially (for me) those from the early decades of the 20th century. Very often such photos are either poorly or incorrectly identified with respect to year and locale or simply not identified at all. To establish the correct player's identification and the time and place of old baseball photos is sometimes an exciting challenge that I find hard to resist. My research on uniforms over the past few years has sharpened my skills in this regard and I

would like to pass on some useful suggestions for others who have reason to conduct this kind of research.

The most reliable source of information by far are the microfilms of daily newspapers. While the use of photos are sometimes painfully scarce in the early newspapers, in most cases the photos used are unquestionably from *that* year and locale of the newspaper date and not likely to be incorrectly identified, as can happen so often in books and publications of subsequent years. However, even these newspaper photos can be misleading—although a 1917 newspaper cannot possibly feature a 1919 photo, very often pictures are used from files of previous years. Beware of posed photos and portraits that give no positive clues that the picture is current

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PHC MEETING AT SABR 25

The first meeting of the Pictorial History Committee was held on Saturday morning, June 17th, at the SABR convention in Pittsburgh. Ideas for a large-scale committee project became the main topic of discussion. *Bob Littlejohn* brought up the idea of creating a collection of all baseball cartoons as published in newspapers, books, etc. *John Thorn* brought up the idea of creating a CD-ROM disk containing images of every major league baseball player. This project would essentially be an expanded version of a project proposed by committee chair *Tom Shieber* as detailed in the original proposal for the formation of the PHC. That project was an index of where to *find* images of every baseball player who played in the major leagues. No decision was made as to which of these (or any other ideas) should be pursued by the committee as a whole. If you have a comment, idea, or suggestion, please send it in. A poll to determine what (if any) project should be pursued will be included in the next PHC newsletter.

Also discussed at the meeting was *Marc Okkonen's* idea of forming a blue-ribbon panel of SABR picture experts that would be made available to

people and companies that would like accurate identifications and information regarding baseball film footage. While this idea was more-or-less "shelved" at the meeting, Doak Ewing later mentioned that he would be interested in having the PHC help identify players, locations, etc. in old films. These films would eventually be made available on videotape through Doak's company Rare Sportsfilms Inc.

PHC members who attended the meeting include: *John Brooks, Rich Frank, Mike Gershman, Bob Littlejohn, Neal McCabe, Marc Okkonen, Richard Puff, Greg Rhodes, Mark Rucker, Rick Salamon, Jefferey Samoray, Mike Schacht, Tom Shieber, A.D. Suehsdorf, John Thorn.* Non-PHC members who attended include: *Mark Alvarez, Alma Ivor-Campbell, Fred Ivor-Campbell, Jack Carlson, Morris Eckhouse, Steve Gietschier, Boyd Montgomery, David Pietrusza, Bill Schlencky.*

Thanks to everyone who made it to the meeting!

ARTICLES AND RESEARCH AVAILABLE

SABR Scouts Committee Chair **Jim Kreuz** sent along three articles he authored for *Sports Collectors Digest*. They are:

8/13/93—"Bob Feller and his 'field of dreams.'" Includes photos of a teenaged Feller with the '36 Van Meter High School baseball and basketball teams.

5/27/94—"Joseph Styborski - the missing 1927 Yankee." Jim's search for the lone ballplayer in the famous '27 Yankees photo who never actually played for the team (see photos on pp. 154-155 of *The Babe: A Life in Pictures* by **Lawrence Ritter** and **Mark Rucker** or pp. 118-119 of *The World Series: A Complete Pictorial History* by John Devaney and **Burt Goldblatt**).

5/19/95—"High school yearbooks are unique, fascinating collectibles." Details the extraordinary yearbook collection of **Seth Poppel**.

For a copy of all three articles, send a self-addressed 32¢ stamped envelope plus 16¢ to cover copying costs to **Tom Shieber**.

Tom Shieber has completed an index of every baseball picture published in *The New England Baseballist* newspaper. The paper ran for just two years, from August 6, 1868 - June 18, 1870 (the latter year doing business under the name *National Chronicle*). Often a woodcut of a "prominent member of the baseball fraternity" was featured. To obtain a copy of this single page index, please send a self-addressed 32¢ stamped envelope and 3¢ to cover copying costs to **Tom Shieber**.

The June 4, 1995, *Schenectady Sunday Daily Gazette* featured an article about baseball photographer **Charles Conlon**. Conlon aficionado/PHC member **Neal McCabe** as well as SABR member **Steve Gietschier** and SABR president **David Pietrusza** are quoted in this two page story. To obtain a copy of this article, please send a self-addressed 32¢ stamped envelope and 7¢ to cover copying costs to **Tom Shieber**.

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

PICTURE IDENTIFICATIONS

I have yet to receive definitive identifications of the mystery players seen in the photos reproduced in the inaugural PHC newsletter (Number 95:1). For a copy of these photos (at an unfortunately lower quality than when originally published as above) send a self-addressed 32¢ stamped envelope and 7¢ to cover copying costs to **Tom Shieber**.

SABR Oral History Committee chair **Norman Macht** stopped by the PHC meeting at the Pittsburgh convention to deliver a postcard reproduced at right. He asks for help identifying the ballplayer. Note the prominent "Baseball Centennial" patch on the player's sleeve, indicative of the 1939 season. But, according to **Marc Okkonen's Baseball Uniforms of the 20th Century**, Brooklyn wore zippered-front uniforms, not button-downs, during 1939 (and well into the '40s). I wonder if this is not a ballplayer from the 1930s at all, but a guy from the 1990s dressed up in an old (historically inaccurate?) uniform. The back of the postcard states: "From the Collection 'Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny' Photo © 1990 John MacArthur." Huh? Any ideas?



RESEARCH NEEDS

Gene Carney is looking for a picture he recalls seeing of a fan retrieving a ball from a gutter at Forbes Field. Does anyone remember such a photo? If so, in what publication might Gene find it? Contact Gene at:

2802 Ferndale Place
Utica, NY 13501

James Holl is looking for any information on the career or published works of Jack Sords, baseball

illustrator/cartoonist of the '30s and '40s. Send information to:

509 Pershing S.E.
North Canton, OH 44720

Jefferey Samoray is looking for a picture of Jerry Moore, catcher/outfielder with Altoona (UA) and Cleveland (NL) in 1884, Detroit (NL) in 1885. Can anyone help? Jefferey is located at:

28478 Ridgebrook Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI
48334-3465

Tips on Researching *continued from page 1*

or taken at least that year. Game situation or game action photos that clearly connect with the coverage of that day's baseball reports are the most reliable. Even a portrait type photo that could easily be an old file photo from a previous year, can be identified as current if, for example, the player portrayed in the photo is new to the team that year. Another clue is the uniform, if enough details of the uniform itself are in the photo. First, check out the correct uniform design or feature for that year (consult my book *Baseball Uniforms of the 20th Century*). If there has been a new design or feature on the uniform for that year it should be reflected in the picture if the photo is current. Also, if the uniform seems to match other positive game situation photos in the same year's newspaper accounts, chances are the photo is current.

Another important warning about jumping to conclusions regarding the year of a given player photo is to be aware that many newspaper photos that can be attributed to *that* year of the newspaper are carryovers from spring training and pre-season exhibition games. Such photos would indeed be fairly current but will portray the player in the previous year's uniform, since almost *always* the teams did not wear the uniforms of that year until the season openers. Some common exceptions would be the so-called pre-season "city series" between AL and NL teams in two team towns like Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, etc. Very often the teams would introduce their new uniforms for the home team fans in these games. Also, on occasion, a new uniform design would be introduced sometimes *during* the season, but daily newspaper reports can account for such a mid-season switch.

Before I go any further, I want to stress the point that although my uniforms book is an invaluable tool for this type of photo identification, it is most certainly not infallible. There are endless discrepancies in my depictions that I am continually discovering and much of the artwork I have presented represents

"educated guessing," especially regarding colors in the early years. So, for lack of anything else like it to lean on, use it ... but use it with caution.

If you are a serious enough researcher to scour the endless volumes of newspaper microfilm available in major libraries, you might try to build a file of microfilm photos (identified by year) that reveal features of the ballparks in the background of game situation pictures. I have found that this can be priceless information in establishing the exact or approximate year of otherwise unknown photos. For example, it doesn't take long to become familiar with the different features of the old (pre-1911 fire) grandstand of New York's Polo Grounds as opposed to the rebuilt concrete and steel version that succeeded it. With this type of knowledge, you can never be fooled by often published photos of McGraw's Giants. At least you'll know if it was taken before or after 1911. By observing the various modifications and expansions of certain ballparks and noting the year, you can often pinpoint the year of an unknown photo just by studying the background features. An even more precise study of backgrounds is to document the billboards displayed—these were never exactly the same from season to season. But regarding billboards, beware of newspaper photos that seem to suggest blank billboards—very often the photos were retouched to cover up certain billboards, especially those that promoted products of advertisers who refused to buy space in that newspaper—or in some cases messages that were "politically incorrect" for that time.

The often published photos of such prolific baseball photographers like Conlon, Burke, Brace, Van Oeyen, etc. have been all too frequently misdated—a good example being the famous Ty Cobb action photo that *Neal McCabe* has expertly analyzed in the previous PHC newsletter (Number 95:2). Although Conlon quite diligently recorded the year of the photo on most of his original negatives, the use of many of his player portraits have suggested a year that suited the context of the publication, and

not necessarily the correct year of the photo. For example, the beautifully presented Megacards collection of Conlon photos in most cases present the correct year, but when they grouped the pictures under a common theme, like the 1916 Boston Red Sox, they used photos freely from earlier and later seasons that still suggested that each player photo was from 1916—not intended to mislead, but nevertheless confusing. On the subject of Conlon portraits, it is important to remember that he was New York based and all of his photos were taken at the Polo Grounds, Hilltop Park and Yankee Stadium. (He rarely, if ever, ventured to Ebbetts Field). Accordingly, *all* New York players are depicted in HOME uniforms and *all* the rest were in ROAD uniforms (including Brooklyn, with the possible exception of 1937). This is very helpful to know in using my uniforms book

as a guide. The same logic applies in studying the photos from Burke and Brace—in this case all the Chicago players in HOME whites, all others in ROAD grays. Ditto for Van Oeyen, who operated in Cleveland, although he did, on rare occasions, follow the team to nearby places like Detroit and Chicago.

Unfortunately, black and white photos offer no indication of colors and even trying to distinguish white from gray in the uniform fabric is nearly impossible. Even pinstripes often disappear, especially in the coarser half-tones of newspaper photos. Just because pin stripes do not show up when maybe they should, never assume that they are not there.

Good hunting!

- Marc Okkonen

NEW MEMBERS

The SABR Pictorial History Committee welcomes the following new members:

John Brooks	20 Orchard Lane Katonah, NY 10536
Tom Hill	421 East Bigelow Street Upper Sandusky, OH 43351-1121
David Icenogle	11144 Jerry Place Cerritos, CA 90703-6453

Greg Rhodes	1908 Dexter Avenue Cincinnati, OH 45206-1458
Rick Salamon	11 Le Jer St. Peters, MO 63376

THE WINNING RUN—"HOW IS IT, UMPIRE?"

During the nineteenth century, *Harper's Weekly* published a large number of beautiful and interesting images depicting various scenes relating to the game of baseball. One such image, occupying the entire 16" by 11" page of the August 22nd, 1885 issue, is reproduced on p. 6 of this newsletter. The drawing by artist T. de Thulstrup is entitled: *The Winning Run—"How is it, Umpire?"*

The picture depicts action from an exciting game played Thursday, August 6th, 1885, between the New York and Chicago National League clubs. Before the game commenced, Chicago's record stood at 55-15, two games ahead of the 52-16 New Yorkers. Almost two months later, Chicago, despite losing 10 of the 16 games played against New York, claimed the league pennant by the same two-game margin. The third place Philadelphia club was thirty games out of first place, the greatest number of games behind for a third place team in major league history. Unquestionably, the New York and Chicago nines were the class of the league.

Just over 7000 fans filled the Polo Grounds to watch New York's Mickey Welch face Chicago's John Clarkson. Both pitchers were experiencing career-best seasons. Welch, who would finish the year

with a record of 44-11 and a 1.66 ERA, was in the midst of a 17-game winning streak, the fourth longest skein in major league history. Clarkson, who finished the campaign at 53-16 and a 1.85 ERA, had managed to string together his own streak of 13 consecutive wins earlier that season. In fact, Clarkson's record during June of 1885, was 15-1, a major league record for most victories in a single month. And just ten days before, Clarkson hurled a no-hitter against the defending league champion Providence Grays. It came as no surprise that the game was a pitcher's duel.

As was the practice of the era, the team captains tossed a coin for the choice of innings. Even though New York was the home team, they ended up batting first. Not until 1887 would the home team have the exclusive right to choose innings. Indeed, at the time it was not at all uncommon for a team to choose to bat first, as this allowed them at least a few decent cuts at a clean, unadulterated ball. In this particular game, however, the choice of innings made little difference as both teams failed to score over the first nine frames.

According to a tale related by Noel Hynd in *The Giants of the Polo Grounds*:

[New York catcher] Buck Ewing singled in the tenth inning of [the] scoreless game at the Polo Grounds. Ewing was ... a highly popular player, a showman, and a crowd pleaser. And he was fast.

He promptly stole second and third. Then, in a scene that would have been cloyingly melodramatic in a dime novel, he turned and addressed the crowd behind third base. "It's getting late," he shouted. "I'm going to steal home and we can then all have dinner."

And he did, a few pitches later. An artist of the day set to work immediately and made a dramatic lithograph of the play and entitled it *Ewing's Famous Slide*.

What actually occurred is quite a different story. John Clarkson had given up just three hits all day, when Ewing led off the top of the tenth with a single to right. Next up was the New York shortstop and captain John Ward. With two strikes on Ward, Ewing took off for second. But Ward swung at Clarkson's delivery and sent a rope to right field. Chicago right fielder King Kelly made a terrific play by fielding the ball and throwing out Ward, New York's fastest runner, at first base. Meanwhile, Ewing headed for third. After making the putout, Chicago first baseman Cap Anson hurled the ball to third baseman Ned Williamson. Ewing dove head-first into the bag and beat the tag.

Now Clarkson faced New York left fielder Pete Gillespie. With two or three balls on the batter (sources differ regarding the count), Gillespie swung at what the *New York Times* called "a slow in-cuvre [sic]," (i.e., a screwball). (Note that the *Dickson Baseball Dictionary* states that the first appearance of this term occurred in 1901, but here we have the word used some 16 years earlier.) Gillespie topped the ball and sent a slow roller toward second. Chicago second baseman Fred Pfeffer came in on the ball as Ewing broke for home. Suddenly, the ball took a wicked hop and bounded up. But Pfeffer was, according to Chicago manager Cap Anson, "as good a second baseman as there was in the profession, [though he] had a tendency to pose for the benefit of the occupants of the grand stand." Pfeffer managed to stay with the ball, and after making the scoop, threw home to catcher Silver Flint. Once again Ewing dove headfirst, a cloud of dust kicking up as he slid for the plate. When the ball appeared on the ground behind Flint, umpire and former major league pitching star Tommy Bond called the runner safe. The inning ended with Dude Esterbrook grounding out.

Chicago's half of the tenth started with Anson grounding to Esterbrook at third. The next batter, Pfeffer, reached first on an error by New York first baseman Roger Connor. Ned Williamson then lifted a

promising fly ball to center, but Jim O'Rourke made a pretty catch and, when Pfeffer tagged up to advance, O'Rourke threw to second base and retired the runner.

Though the picture is, no doubt, a stylized rendition of the play, the face of the base runner sliding home is clearly that of Buck Ewing. Umpire Tommy Bond and catcher Silver Flint frame Ewing's headfirst dive. But the rest of the picture appears completely implausible. Is that supposed to be Fred Pfeffer heading toward home? If so, who is the infielder seen on the right field side of second base? Isn't *he* supposed to be the second baseman? But no, that infielder has his hands on his knees—Pfeffer would be still be moving after his throw to the plate. Perhaps the mustachioed ball player running toward home is supposed to be Clarkson, the Chicago pitcher. But if so, we are once again left with the mystery of the motionless second baseman.

Interestingly, the outfield wall and features beyond appear to be quite accurately represented. The buildings behind the outfield wall match up quite nicely with those seen in photographs taken on opening day of 1886 (see pp. 50 and 51 of *The National Pastime—Special Pictorial Issue: The Nineteenth Century* or p. 6 of Donald Honig's *Baseball: The Illustrated History of America's Game*). And note the wooden beams that hold up the outfield walls in both the drawing and photos.

One interesting aspect of this drawing would be otherwise overlooked without a knowledge of the game of cricket. The title of the picture contains the quote "How is it, umpire?" Indeed, the same quote shows up in the game account in the *New York Times* of August 7, 1885:

"How is it, umpire?" "Is he out?"
"Does that run count?" and a dozen
other similar exclamations were put
to the official.

This call to the umpire for judgement was most probably a holdover of the cricket term "How is it?" or "How's that?" The term "How's that?" has long been and still is used in cricket in order to appeal to the umpire for judgement on whether or not an out was made. In today's game of cricket, however, this appeal is most often a barely recognizable cry of "Owzat!" One generally hears this call for an appeal on potential outs by lbw (leg before wicket) or when it appears that the ball glanced off the bat and was subsequently caught behind (similar to a foul-tip in baseball, but counted as an out in cricket). Nevertheless, all forms of outs are subject to such an appeal, including possible run outs. Modern technology has, however, taken hold of the game of cricket, and now TV replays are often used to determine whether or not a player was run out.

- Tom Shieber



THE WINNING RUN—"HOW IS IT, UMPIRE?"—DRAWN BY T. W. TUCKER.—[SEE PAGE 69.]