



This is the first in hopefully a long series of expanded PHC newsletters. One reason for this - we of course want to include photos. The mid-1990's newsletter ran a "Mystery Photo" feature in most issues. We begin with a column that is an attempt to resurrect the concept, but with some differences in approach. Along with photos that are truly a mystery (at least to the author of this column and his colleagues), we will feature images that previously were a mystery or were incorrectly identified, with plenty of analysis leading to the correct identification. So, let's begin in that vein. ~ *Mark Fimoff*

Mystery Photo

by Mark Fimoff, bmarlowe@comcast.net

Given a good reference photo of a Deadball Era or 19th Century ballplayer, deciding whether or not a face in another photo is that same ballplayer shouldn't be that hard, right? Actually, anyone who has tried to do this often enough knows it can be incredibly difficult. When only a few reference images are available, comparing them to another face at a different viewing angle or with a different expression can be daunting. The poor quality of some of the images does not help. "Experts" will give differing opinions.

A bit of science can be used to reduce the subjectivity involved in some cases. It is well known in biometrics that ear shape and structure is nearly unique to the individual. Ears have a fingerprint-like quality. Absent physical injury, ear shape and structure is relatively permanent during adulthood.

An example is in order. From the Library of Congress, Photo #1 below left, had long been identified as Hall of Famer Joe Tinker. Photo #2, below right, is without question a photo of Tinker.

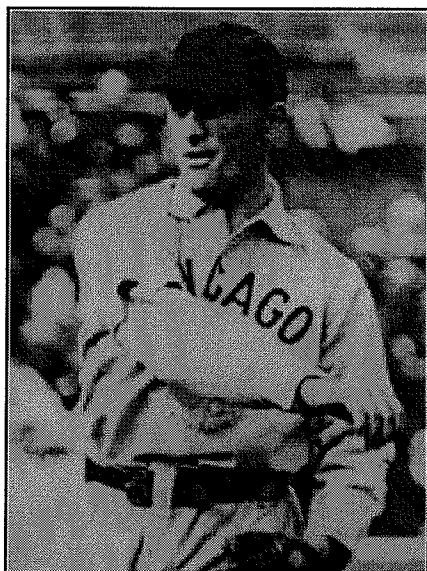
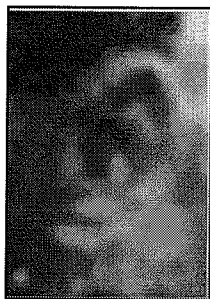


Photo #1 - was ID'd as Tinker



Photo #2 – definitely Tinker

Let's zoom in on the left ear of both images and compare:



from Photo #1

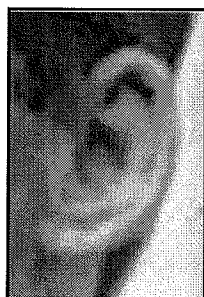


from Photo #2

The ears above are quite different. Hence Photo #1 cannot be Joe Tinker. Let's now compare the left ear in Photo #1 to the left ear, below right, belonging to another Chance-era Cub:

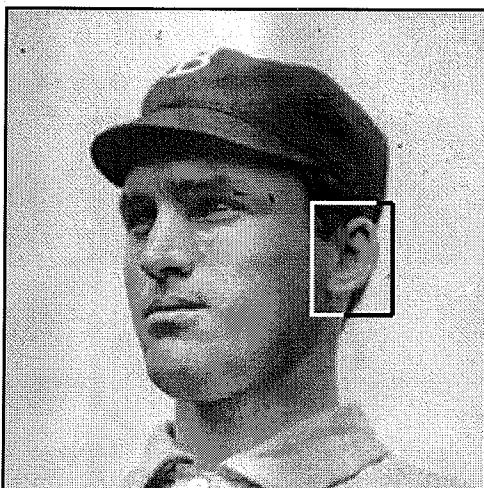


from Photo #1



from ?

Despite a very different lighting angle causing different internal shadows, it is clear that these ears are at least extremely similar, likely identical. So who does the ear belong to?



Jimmy Sheckard

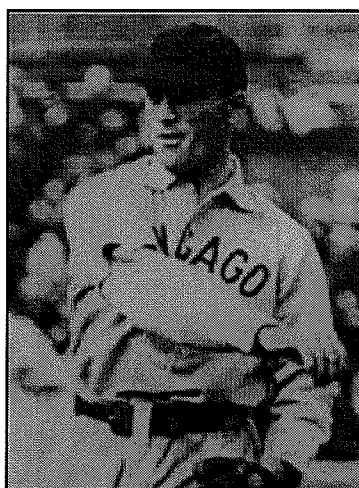
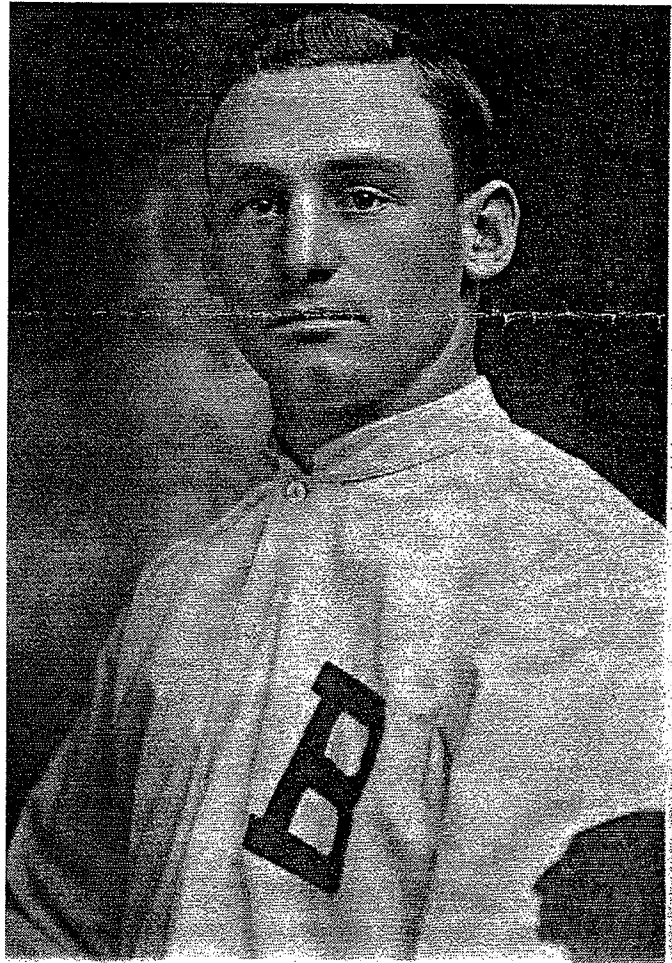


Photo #1 - also Sheckard

It's Tinker's teammate, Jimmy Sheckard, shown above left a few years earlier with Brooklyn. He is the guy pictured in Photo #1.

So, with our new skills, let's examine a mystery photo left over from the January 1995 Pictorial History Committee newsletter. It's from the Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. No consensus was ever reached on this player's identity. As Tom Shieber said in 1995, "So far no one has given conclusive proof, so we are still left wondering...." Can anyone shed light on 13 years of darkness and establish who this is? Readers' comments, as well as the author's "proof", will appear in the next issue. ■



Mystery photo redux

The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author. Supportive or contrary opinions from readers are strongly encouraged. Well reasoned comments will be reprinted. Also, if you have a mystery photo that might be an interesting subject for a future column, please submit it to bmarlowe@comcast.net.

Request for Articles and Other Assistance

As the author of today's supplement is something less than a desktop publishing expert, we are looking for a qualified volunteer who would be willing to put four of these together per year from submitted articles. We are also looking for additional submissions of "mystery photos" and also interesting photos that have been fully or partially analyzed. Contact bmarlowe@comcast.net

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