

SABR
Biographical Research Committee
May/June 2017 Report
©2017 Society for American Baseball Research
Author: Bill Carle, Bbxper@aol.com

Jacob Knodell Found

Our *Find of the Month* is Jacob Knodell of the 1874-75 Brooklyn Atlantics and the 1878 Milwaukee Grays. Congratulations to Peter Morris and Evelyn Begley for pinning him down. The following is Peter's writeup of the search.

Jacob Knodell's major league career consisted of 79 games with the 1874 and 1875 Atlantics (National Association) and 1878 Milwaukee (National League), and a brief look at the statistics he compiled make him look more like a major leaguer by happenstance than someone who truly earned that right. That is unfair, however, as Knodell spent over a decade playing with top-level professional teams, including several seasons in the strongest minor leagues. He also spent three more in the International Association, often listed as a minor league but in fact a rival to the National League, and was an everyday player for that league's first champions, the 1877 London Tecumsehs. There is nothing unfair about Knodell's .179 major league batting average, as he showed at every stop that his bat was very weak. But outstanding defensive catchers have always been prized even when they were weak hitters, and that was especially true in the equipment-free 1870s, when pitchers not accompanied by gifted catchers saw their best offerings end up at the backstop.

So Jacob Knodell's skills were always in demand and he was a well-known figure in baseball circles. This meant that there were quite a few clues by which to identify him, of which a few stood out. While playing for Bay City, Michigan, in the Northwest League in 1883, a note in the *Bay City Tribune* on July 26, 1883, said – most implausibly – that it was Knodell's forty-third birthday. Two years later, Knodell began the 1885 season with Trenton of the Eastern League, but was released in later July and had some sort of psychotic episode a few days later. According to an account that appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on August 5, 1885, "Jake Knodell, the base ball player while on a spree at Coney Island on Friday asked for morphine at Chambers Drug Store. A dose was offered him, but he wanted the bottle in order that he might poison himself. He was sent home in charge of an officer." He did not sign with any team in 1886, effectively ending his career, and little was heard from him until another psychotic episode occurred in 1887. A front-page story in *Sporting Life*, on May 9, 1887, reported, "Jacob Knowdell, the noted catcher of this city [Brooklyn], who a few years ago occupied one of the foremost places in the baseball ranks, has for several months past boarded with his brother in law Mr. James Haver at his residence 128 Heyward St. A few days ago Knowdell was suddenly missed from home and simultaneous with his disappearance a wallet, containing \$188 belonging to Mr. Haver was also missed. He was arrested yesterday afternoon [April 29] in Trenton, N.J. Gave his name as Jacob Augustus Knowdell of 128 Heyward St, Philadelphia. He is believed by his friends to be insane."

All these leads were tracked down, but they didn't lead to Jake. His brother-in-law, James Haver, was a longtime resident at the 128 Heyward St. address, where he lived with his wife Eliza. After James's death, she moved to Detroit, where she died on October 5, 1933, at a ripe old age. Her death certificate gave her birth date as January 31, 1847, and listed her parents as Fred Knodell and Margaret Coons, showing we were on the right track. Attempts to locate the family on censuses, however, produced confusing results. No listing could be found in 1850, but in 1860 Jacob Nodell, age 7, and his brother Edward (both born in New York state) were living in an orphan's home in Brooklyn's 11th Ward. Despite the previous listing that showed them as orphans, five years later, on a state census, Jacob Nodell, age 15 and a harness maker, was listed with brothers Frederick, 17, and Edward, 12, and their very-much-alive mother Margaret, 40 and a widow, in Brooklyn's 13th Ward. Margaret was listed as having been born in Germany, while all three sons are listed as being born in Kings County. In 1873, the year before Jake began his professional career, box scores of the Davis Base Ball Club of Brooklyn's Eastern District listed a J. Knodell as catcher and an F. Knodell in the outfield, which is undoubtedly Jake and his brother Fred.

We then traced Jake's mother Margaret up to her death in Brooklyn on November 6, 1912. Her estate papers listed her survivors as: "Fred. Knodell, son, Madison, NJ; Eliza M. Haver, daughter, Detroit; Mrs. Frank Newman, granddaughter, Pawtucket, RI." So Jake was obviously dead by then, but we still didn't know when or where. We next traced Fred, who was 87 when he died in Madison in 1934, and was the subject of a fairly lengthy obituary in the local paper. It stated that

Frederic Louis Knodell, Sr., was born in Philadelphia on October 27, 1847, but moved to Brooklyn at a young age and spent most of his life in Brooklyn or New York City until retiring to Madison. His wife had died the previous year and his only child, Frederic Jr., had died unexpectedly a few months earlier. He was buried in a family plot at Basking Ridge Cemetery, but Jake wasn't there either.

A few other leads surfaced and were checked out. His name was often spelled Knowdell and occasionally by some other variant, which led us to the second enumeration of the 1870 census's listing of a Jacob Nodel, 20, in Philadelphia as a lodger. Unfortunately, the census-taker had made no effort to collect details while enumerating that page and even the ages were all in round numbers, making it pretty much worthless as a source. A Detroit marriage record on February 9, 1884, had Jacob A. Knodell, 29, born in Philadelphia, living in Brooklyn, occupation railroading, marrying Lizzie Connell, 19 and a native of Stratford, Ontario. Since Jake had played in Bay City, Michigan, in 1883, this had to be him, but it too led nowhere.

We were stuck until a record showed up in the New York City death index for a Jacob Knodell, age 35, who died in Flatbush on October 26, 1887. This was less than six months after his second major psychotic episode and in light of his unusual name it seemed as though it had to be him, but we still wanted to have positive proof. Evelyn Begley generously volunteered to make a trip to Municipal Archives to check out his death certificate, but when she looked up the certificate number listed in the index it was for a different man. The desk clerk wasn't able to provide any additional help, so it looked like we had reached another dead end. But she doggedly returned the following week to search death certificates with similar numbers in case of a clerical error. When that still produced no Jake Knodell, she explained the problem to a different desk clerk, who told her that records for Flatbush were stored separately from those for Brooklyn and had their own certificate numbers. This time her search produced the death certificate for Jacob Knodell and, wonder of wonders, his occupation was listed as "ball player." He had died at the Kings County Asylum and his cause of death was listed as "general paralysis of the insane." Terrific work, Evelyn!

Frank Shaffer/Schiffhauer

We have a new ballplayer. Some years ago, we determined that Taylor Shafer played for Altoona in 1884. We assumed that all the games credited to Shafer or Shaffer were Taylor's. Peter Morris was able to prove that wasn't true. Here is Peter's writeup of the Shaffer/Schiffhauer career:

At one time, a player named Frank Shaffer was credited with playing in the Union Association of 1884 for Altoona (19 games), Kansas City (44 games), and Baltimore (3 games). However, numerous articles helped to establish that at least part of that record actually belonged to Zachary Taylor Shafer, the younger brother of George "Orator" Shafer. Some of those articles read as follows: *Sporting Life*, July 23, 1884, George Shaffer's brother is playing for Kansas City. *Kansas City Journal*, June 6, 1884, reference to the Kansas City player as Taylor Shafer. *Sporting Life*, February 24, 1886, George Shaffer's younger brother Taylor is still in this city disengaged. He has seen service with Kansas City, Albany and others. *Sporting News*, November 12, 1887, profile of Taylor says he first played professionally with KC and Baltimore of the Union Association in 1884. *Sporting News*, February 8, 1890, Taylor Shaffer of Louisville first played with the Kansas City Unions in 1884. Bob Tholkes also found a woodcut of Taylor Shafer in a Minnesota paper in 1888 that said he had played for Altoona and Kansas City in 1884.

The May/June 2001 committee newsletter reported that Harold Dellinger had researched the question further and had established that the Kansas City player had previously played for Altoona and that he ended the season with Baltimore. As a result, the entire record that had once belonged to Frank Shaffer was reassigned to Taylor Shafer. However, that is not the only possibility that is consistent with Dellinger's conclusion. There is no contradiction between the conclusion that Taylor Shafer played for all three of those Union Association teams and the theory that all nineteen of those Altoona games belonged to Frank Shaffer. More research convinced me that in fact both of these men deserve credit for part of the Altoona record.

To begin with, consider these three notes: *Sporting Life*, February 13, 1884, "Frank Shaffer of Detroit" will play for Altoona; *Detroit Free Press*, March 6, 1884, Frank Shaffer and Jerry Moore of Detroit have signed with Altoona; *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1884, a note states that Schaefer the Altoona player is a Detroiter. There was also a listing in the 1884 Altoona city directory for: Frank Shaffer, ball player, boarding at the Central Hotel along with Jerry Moore and several other teammates. So there was evidence that points strongly in the direction of the theory that both Frank and Taylor played for Altoona. But was there more specific evidence that that actually happened?

A careful search of *Sporting Life* provided that evidence. Two weeks after that journal's initial report that "Frank Shaffer of Detroit" would play for Altoona, another note to the same effect appeared, this time giving the player's name as "Frank Schaffer." In the following issue, on March 5, an Altoona roster listed Frank Schaffer. Then in the issue dated May 14, but in a column dated May 7, came the news that Frank Shaffer had been released. Since Altoona had only played 11 games to that date, it now seemed clear that both Frank and Taylor had played for Altoona.

The search took a new turn when Al Kermisch's column in the *Baseball Research Journal* in 2001 included this note from the *Missouri Republican*, May 14, 1884: "George Shaffer's brother has joined the Altoona nine. He is said to be as graceful and efficient as the St. Louis right fielder but not quite as hard a batter. The Altoonas have released Cleary Cross and he will return to the Lucas Amateurs. They have also released Shaffer, a Cincinnati player." The column also included a note giving specific evidence that Taylor Shafer was the Baltimore player.

So in addition to providing more evidence that both Frank and Taylor played for Altoona, this note gave us a good time frame: Frank and four other players were released in the first week of May, and Taylor was one of the players signed in the next few days to take their places. The new note also raised the possibility that Frank Schaffer was from Cincinnati rather than Detroit.

Richard Malatzky and I both pored through censuses and city directories in search of a decent candidate, but the results were discouraging. The city directories of both Detroit and Cincinnati contained several men named Frank Schaffer/Shafer/Shaffer/Schaeffer, but when we linked them census listings, few of them were of plausible age. Eventually I found a Frank Schaeffer from Saginaw who played on a local team in the late 1870s, but was unable to place him in Detroit. Richard found a Prussian-born Frank Schafer who lived in Detroit before moving to St. Clair County, Michigan, but there was no evidence that he played baseball.

So matters were stalled until I found profiles of the players signed for the Altoona team in the *Altoona Tribune*, February 7, 1884, p. 3. The profile of Frank Schaffer contained the following clues: "Schaffer, who will play on third base, comes from the Detroit [sic], though he first played with [Germany] Smith in the Jennings's [sic] of Pittsburgh. He is five feet eleven inches in length [sic] and weighs 160. He is a diamond setter by trade."

I turned back to the city directories and in the 1883 Detroit CD I found a listing for "Frank Schafer, jeweler, A Schaub, bds 91 Farmer." Then in the Pittsburgh city directories, I located an 1881 listing for "Frank Shaffer, jeweler," at 231 Centre, and one for "Frank Schafer, jeweler," two years later at the same address. Frank was gone in 1884, but in his place an "Adam Schaffer, saloon" was listed at 231 Centre. So I had identified a Frank Schaffer with the right occupation who seemed to have moved from Pittsburgh to Detroit in 1883, an almost perfect match to the sketch in the *Altoona Tribune*. Even the fact that the man was absent from the 1884 CD for both cities corresponded to the appearance in the 1884 Altoona CD of "Frank Shaffer, ball player."

With a very strong candidate now identified, I turned to the census in hopes that he would be of appropriate age. On the 1870 census, in Pittsburgh's Ward 1, I found Raymond and Theressa Shaffer living with their seven children, the second-oldest of whom was Francis, age 9. I then found the same family living at 231 Centre on the 1880 census, this time with their surname spelled Schaffer. There were now eleven children living at home, the oldest of whom was Frank, 21, a jeweler. So now the perfect candidate was of an ideal age, and he had so many siblings that it would be impossible to lose him. Or so I imagined.

Instead, after a mention of a jeweler named Frank Shaffer who lived at 231 Centre in the *Pittsburgh Daily Post* on June 17, 1889, I could find no more trace of him in either Detroit or Pittsburgh under any of the myriad spellings of Shafer. My frustration grew when efforts to trace any of his many siblings past the mid-1880s. Where had they all gone?

At last, I tried a search of the "231 Centre" address and the mystery unraveled. The family name, it turned out, was actually Schiffhauer, though Frank had simplified it for the purposes of his baseball career and a few family members had followed suit. It is harder to explain why the Schiffhauer family was listed as Shaffer on the 1870 census and as Schaffer on the 1880 census, despite the fact that the corresponding listings in the city directories for those years had Schiffhauer. Perhaps the census-taker simply botched their name, or perhaps the person who provided the information didn't want to be bothered trying to spell "Schiffhauer." Either way, it was a very lucky break, as without those listings, it is unlikely that this mystery would have ever been solved.

Instead, once armed with the knowledge that it was a Frank Schiffhauer we were looking for, things went very smoothly. Frank settled in Detroit and worked as a jeweler for many years, joined for a few years by a younger brother, Charles. In 1887, he married a Michigan native named Louise Trinkaus in Essex, Ontario; the marriage produced four children before ending in divorce. He died of cancer at the William Seymour Hospital in Eloise on March 18, 1939.

Francis X. Schiffhauer
Born December 6, 1859 Pittsburgh
Died March 18, 1939 Eloise, Michigan

David Vincent

I'm sure most of you know by now, but David Vincent, expert on home runs, umpires, Bob Davids Award winner, and vice-chairman of this committee, died July 2 after a long battle with stomach cancer.

It is very difficult for me to write about David although I could probably write many pages about him. First and foremost, he was a very close friend. I talked to him via e-mail almost every day. Mostly it was about the biographical committee, but also about umpires, official scoring, home runs, cancer, or about the many wonderful trips he and his wife took since he found out his time might be short. He was a brilliant guy, and always willing to help anyone and everyone with their research.

From the perspective of the biographical committee, his loss is incalculable. He kept a copy of the biographical database on his home computer. This served as a backup to the one I have in case I had a computer crash or something like that. So any time I made any change to the database, I would send it to Dave so he could make the corresponding change in his database. If he saw something weird in a record, he would contact me to make sure our databases were in sync.

His most important contribution was maintaining the yearly rookie list. He would keep track of the rookie as the year went by, periodically sending me a list so I could track down middle names and such. At the end of the year, he would send me the list. After cross-checking his list to the list Pete Palmer sent me, I would note the discrepancies. He would correct that and send it to me as a database table that I could simply load into my database. He would also send a file of all the players team affiliations for the current year. This was a large table that I could easily load into my database. Then he would send me the report you would see every year in the September/October newsletter. In short, I had to do very little in producing the yearly rookie report. All the grunt work was Dave's. I have no idea how I'm going to get all that done from here on out. David will be missed by everyone in SABR, but I know I will miss him tremendously, both as a friend and a vice-chairman.

Vice-Chair

With David's death, I am in need of a new vice-chair. I would like it to be someone interested in taking over as chairman if I eventually step down. It would help if you have some knowledge of Microsoft Access, but if you are interested, I can help you with that. Please let me know.

Pierce

The 1884 Washington Union Association team has long been one of the most mysterious. Many of the players on that team are either unidentified, misidentified, or lost. There were 17 different players on that team who only played in one game. One guy who played in two games has long been identified as Preston Maurice Pierce. Efforts to find Pierce have proved futile, but that is probably ok because the player was likely not Preston Maurice Pierce. Here is what Peter Morris wrote me about this piercing problem:

Long ago, somebody identified this player as Preston Maurice Pierce, a Washington native who we know was a ballplayer because he appears in a well-known photo of Washington ballplayers. I have found very little else about him save that he seems to have left Washington for parts unknown. However, that doesn't matter much, because I believe the evidence is clear that the ballplayer was not Preston Maurice Pierce. Here is why.

In the early part of the 1884 season, before it became clear just how bad Washington's Union Association entry was going to be, an unidentified Sporting Life correspondent submitted weekly columns about the team's doings. He seemed to be

very knowledgeable about the local baseball season, paying particular attention to identifying local players and their backgrounds. However, in his April 30 column, he wrote that Scanlon had signed a new player named Pierce from Baltimore. Then one week later he reported that Leahan and Pierce had been released, and added the key detail that both players "came here on trial." The wording of that phrase makes it very clear that Pierce was not a local. It also makes it clear that neither he nor Leahan had a contract, which means there was no paperwork to mark their arrival or departure. That is why Leahan was long misidentified as Mike Lehane and why it took a very lucky break a few years ago to correctly identify him. And it's why I am convinced that Pierce is incorrectly identified and it's unlikely we will ever be sure who he was.

Most likely, he was George Pierce, a well-known Baltimore infielder who died in Texas. But we have no real evidence of that. He could quite plausibly be some Baltimore sandlotter. I think it is quite clear, however, that he was not Preston Maurice Pierce. Imagine in a few years that somebody tracks down a death date for Preston Maurice Pierce and sends it to you. Would you publish it, despite the lack of any evidence that he was the major leaguer? I hope you will preclude that possibility by taking the first names off this player.

I have removed the first and middle names of this player as Peter suggested. Mr. Pierce is our *Mystery of the Month*.

Birthday List

Here are the nonagenarians celebrating birthdays in July and August.

July 5	Roy Hawes	91
July 10	Chuck Stevens	99
July 16	Len Okrie	94
July 19	Billy Gardner	90
July 21	Dick Smith	90
July 22	Jim Rivera	95
July 23	Johnny Groth	91
July 24	Clint Conatser	96
July 25	Marv Rackley	96
July 26	Milt Welch	93
August 5	Rocky Krsnich	90
August 20	Larry Miggins	92
August 26	Billy DeMars	92
August 29	Al Naples	91
August 31	Paul Hinrichs	92

Scoreboard

CATEGORY	IN	OUT	PCT
Names	19005	40	99.790
Births	18545	500	97.375
Deaths	9412	180	99.055
Bats	17841	1079	94.297
Throws	18051	869	95.407
Heights	18259	661	96.506
Weights	18175	745	96.062
Debut Dates	19045	0	100.000
Questionnaires	9979	9066	52.397
Total			92.3115

New Monthly Data

Questionnaires Received:

None

New Information Received:

DEBUT YR	NAME	CHANGE OR ADD	SOURCE
1932	Allen, John Thomas	D: <u>Mar 29 1959</u> Source: Correction of typo	(C1)
1952	Amoros, Edmundo (Isasi)	B: <u>Matanzas, Cuba</u> Source: Pittsburgh Courier	(M4)
1955	Bunning, James Paul David	D: <u>May 26 2017 Southgate, Kentucky</u> Cemetery: <u>St. Stephen Cemetery, Fort Thomas, Kentucky</u> Source: Funeral home	(C1)
1952	Conley, Donald Eugene	D: <u>Jul 4 2017 Foxboro, Massachusetts</u> Source: Boston Globe	(C1)
1926	Cullop, Henry Nicholas	D: <u>Dec 8 1978</u> Source: Ohio death records, cemetery	(C1)
1885	Derby, Eugene A.	<u>BL</u> Source: Hartford Courant	(MC)
1888	Hewitt, Walter F.	Name: <u>Walter Franklin Hewitt</u> Source: Marriage record	(M3)
1915	Hickman, David James	D: <u>Dec 30 1958</u> Cemetery: <u>Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York</u> Source: Family tree, cemetery	(H4)
1872	Kenney, John J.	Cemetery: <u>Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York</u> Source: Cemetery	(C1)
1886	King, Charles Frederick	D: <u>May 19 1938</u> Source: Death certificate	(C1)
1874	Knowdell, Jacob Augustus	Name: <u>Jacob Augustus Knodell</u> B: <u>Jul 26 1852</u> D: <u>Oct 26 1887 Flatbush, New York</u> Cemetery: <u>Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York</u> Source: Death certificate	(M4)
1890	Knox, Andrew Jackson	Height: <u>6-05</u> Source: Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger	(MC)
1946	Kuzava, Robert Leroy	D: <u>May 15 2017 Wyandotte, Michigan</u> Cemetery: <u>Cremated, interred in Sacred Heart Catholic Cemetery, Grosse Ile, Michigan</u> Source: Funeral home	(C1)
1912	Maharg, William Joseph	Delete real name of William Graham. Source: 1900 census	(C1)
1936	Mayo, Edward Joseph	Cemetery: <u>Cremated, interred at Fairfax Memorial Park, Fairfax, Virginia</u> Source: Cemetery	(W4)

1895	McCauley, William H.	Name: <u>William Henry</u> McCauley Source: Marriage record	(M3)
1890	McFetridge, John Reed	<u>TR</u> Source: Philadelphia Inquirer	(C1)
1893	McGinnis, Gus	Name: <u>Augustus</u> McGinnis B: <u>Sep 16 1869 Warren, Ohio</u> Source: Birth record	(M3)
1879	McManus, Patrick A.	B: Oct <u>18</u> 1859 Cemetery: <u>St. John Cemetery, Troy, New York</u> Source: Cemetery	(C1)
1947	Mele, Sabath Anthony	D: <u>May 1 2017 Quincy, Massachusetts</u> Cemetery: <u>Mount Wollaston Cemetery, Quincy, Massachusetts</u> Source: Funeral home	(C1)
1945	Mierkowicz, Edward Frank	D: <u>May 19 2017 Rochester Hills, Michigan</u> Source: Funeral home	(C1)
1884	Pierce, Preston Maurice	Remove first and middle name and birth information Source: Research by Peter Morris	(M4)
1950	Piersall, James Anthony	D: <u>Jun 3 2017 Wheaton, Illinois</u> Source: Chicago Sun Times	(C1)
1970	Severson, Richard Allen	D: <u>Jan 19 2016 Omaha, Nebraska</u> Source: Wife	(S3)
1884	Shaffer, Francis X.	New Player. Real name: <u>Francis X. Schiffhauer</u> Debut: <u>Apr 24 1884</u> Last game: <u>May 3 1884</u> B: <u>Dec 6 1859 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania</u> D: <u>Mar 18 1939 Eloise, Michigan</u> Height: <u>5-11</u> Weight: <u>160</u> Source: Death certificate, Sporting Life	(M4)
1884	Shafer, Zachary Taylor	Debut: <u>May 5 1884</u> Source: Sporting Life	(M4)
1888	Shaw, Samuel Elmer	Cemetery: <u>West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania</u> Source: Cemetery	(W4)
1963	Starrette, Herman Paul	B: Nov 20 <u>1936</u> D: <u>Jun 2 2017 Statesville, North Carolina</u> Cemetery: <u>Cremated, interred at New Salem United Methodist Church Columbarium, Statesville, North Carolina</u> Source: Funeral home	(N5)
1990	Wagner, Hector Raul Guerrero	D: <u>Jun 5 2017 Clifton, New Jersey</u> Cemetery: <u>East Ridgelawn Cemetery, Clifton, New Jersey</u> Source: Funeral home	(C1)
1976	Waterbury, Steven Craig	D: <u>May 19 2017 Marion, Illinois</u> Cemetery: <u>Odd Fellows Cemetery, Marion, Illinois</u> Source: Funeral home	(H9)
1882	Wise, William E.	Name: <u>William Ellsworth</u> Wise Source: Marriage record	(M3)
1902	Wolff, William Franklyn	<u>TR</u> Source: Philadelphia Inquirer	(C1)
1991	Young, Anthony Wayne	D: <u>Jun 27 2017 Houston, Texas</u>	(C1)

		Cemetery: <u>Forest Park Lawndale Cemetery, Houston, Texas</u> Source: Funeral home	
1919	Zinn, James Edward	B: Jan <u>31</u> 1895 Source: WWII draft registration, cemetery	(C1)