Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

April 1998 (98–2)

Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
4025 Beechwood Place, Riverside, CA 92506
909/787-4954 (home), 909/320-7868 (work)
agmccue@pe.net (e-mail)

We've had another successful quarter in producing indexes for books that don't have them. Tom Shieber produced an index to Lee Allen's *100 Years of Baseball* (1950); and then he went to work on *Babe Ruth's Own Book of Baseball* (1928). Tom also produced an index to the photos in *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide* for 1905.

Ted Hathaway, who's already doing so much with Research in Baseball Index (RBI), agreed to produce a joint index for the Putnam team histories. We're in the process of obtaining permission from the folks who produced the individual indexes. I'm hopeful we can produce this index as a Bibliography Committee publication, just as we did for Frank Phelps' index to The Sporting News *Baseball Registers* (1940 through 1995).

Dick Miller produced a much-improved index to Jim Brosnan's *The Long Season* (1960). The index in the original is one of the more strangely produced indexes I have seen. It's also incomplete. Dick has solved both of these problems.

All of these indexes are available from Len Levin at the SABR Research Library, 282 Doyle Ave., Providence, RI 02906-3355 (phone 401/351-3278).

Ron Kaplan was unable to index James Kahn's *The Umpire Story* (1953) as he couldn't find a copy of the book. He'll be working on Red Barber's *The Broadcasters* (1970) instead.

I had a conversation with Tim Wiles (National Baseball Library & Archives) recently and he mentioned the Hall of Fame is in constant need of volunteers to help with its newspaper clipping files. Being in New York, the Hall gets New York papers, but it has a much more difficult time getting papers from other major-league cities. The Hall is not looking for stories about the previous day's games, nor stories from wire services such as Associated Press; rather, it wants staff-written stories about trends, profiles of players, and coverage of non-game news events, such as trades, stadium negotiations, and franchise sales. If you're interested in doing something for your city, contact Tim (607/547-0332) at the Hall.

In January, I mentioned my success with a couple of used-book search sites on the Internet. T. Kent Morgan chipped in with a two others: a) Advanced Book Exchange (www.abebooks.com); and b) www.mxbf.com. The latter picks up listings from all three of the others I've mentioned, as well as from Powell's Books (Portland, Ore.) and Amazon.com, the web site for new books. I think because it looks so many places, it tends to be very slow.

I hope you are all planning to attend the SABR National Convention in the San Francisco Bay area. I won't be able to make it this year, so Skip McAfee will run the meeting. Please check your schedule to find out when our Committee will meet.

Research in Baseball Index (RBI)

Ted Hathaway
5645 Fremont Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55419
612/869-1420 (home), 612/630-6301 (work)
hathae@msus1.msus.edu (e-mail)

As before, the main area of growth for RBI this past quarter was with magazines. We added another 3700-plus articles bringing RBI to 53,795 magazine articles cataloged. The stalwart Brad Sullivan contributed more than 1700 articles from *The Sporting News* and *Athletic Journal*. Terry Sloope has shifted his sights to cataloging *Sport* magazine from the 1960s and has cataloged the 1963 and 1964 issues. Terry Smith, on the other hand, has agreed to tackle *Baseball Magazine* from the beginning (1908). This is a major baseball publication that has received scant attention in our project, so we are especially appreciative of Terry's efforts.

As I've mentioned in past reports, I have been concentrating on the baseball articles appearing in the many non-sport publications at the library where I work. Since June 1997, I have added several thousand articles from before 1960. Most notably, I am nearly finished cataloging *Newsweek* from the beginning in 1933 through 1960. This includes all of the baseball columns by John Lardner (1938–1960).

Magazines of note cataloged this quarter:

American Magazine (1906–1956): 57 articles
Athletic Journal (1975–1982): 184 articles
Baseball Magazine (1908): 32 articles
Boston Baseball (1995): 66 articles
Collier's (1954–1956): 32 articles
Dodgers Dugout (1997–1998): 86 articles
Harper's Weekly (1907-1916): 114 articles
Life (1942–1948): 51 articles
Literary Digest (1926-1937): 108 articles
New York Times Magazine (1947–1956): 31 articles
Newsweek (1946–1956): 253 articles
Sport (1963–1964): 197 articles
The Sporting News (1916, 1983–1984): 1701 articles

I am continuing to make corrections to the database and hope to have this task completed by May. I will then begin working on preparing the database for distribution on CD-ROM. I will be attending the SABR National Convention and will likely be demonstrating and selling copies of the database there.

Book Review

Leverett T. (Terry) Smith
North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC 27804

A HOUSE OF CARDS: Baseball Card Collecting and Popular Culture
John Bloom. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997. $14.95

I don't know of another academic study of adult baseball card collecting. On SABR-L there was a query from a member who'd read Bloom's book and was perplexed about its conclusions. He wondered what the rest of us thought. So far as I know, no one responded. Myself, I'm glad to have this book: it's brief, informative, and provocative. It's an ethnological study, of a peculiar kind in which the researcher uses "ethnographic fieldwork methods to study cultures most familiar to a researcher". To do this, the researcher must "do 'the unexpected', and place 'familiar objects in unfamiliar, or even shocking contexts'" (p.9).

Bloom is studying "middle class male American sports fans" (this phrase describes many of us, myself included), and wants us to know that he is not an objective, scientific observer. He says (p.9):

"I am a white, middle-class heterosexually identified man. I am also a baseball fan (although I do not collect baseball cards), and a more general sports fan as well. Such information is important for readers to know, for I am not an outsider looking in, and I have a particularly large stake in the things about which I write. I say this in part to dispel any sense that I am a neutral observer, for recent movements in ethnography have sufficiently unmasked the ideal of ethnographic impartiality and distance. ... Moreover, I want readers to know that I feel passionate about this topic—that I take fandom seriously, even if what I have learned about it does not always make me happy."

It is worth noting, with respect to this last, that Bloom is generally drawn to the more complicated, the more problematic aspects of card collecting and fandom. He's constantly alert for the way things don't add up.

I am grateful for the information about card collecting that this book contains, though not having read much about baseball card collecting before, I have no idea if it's accurate or not. Bloom begins with a brief history of the baseball card industry itself, focusing on the expansion to an adult market in the 1970s and 1980s. He then describes how one series of card shows works, as well as one particular collectors club. And he devotes a chapter to describing patterns of collecting baseball cards. Then in two final chapters he presents his conclusions.

Bloom identifies the early 1970s as the first time adult card collectors "organized formally on any large scale" (p.76). I suspect it's no accident that SABR was formed at the same time. He finds card collectors to be motivated by conflicting desires. Speaking of a particular columnist in a collector's magazine, he says that the columnist "articulated an important tension larger than his personal perspective on the hobby. On the one hand, he wanted what many other collectors desired: a pleasure associated with nostalgically recapturing a sense of youthful playfulness through baseball cards and memorabilia. On the other hand, he wanted baseball card collecting to be adult, important, serious, and thus worthy of attention." (p.85)

What this comes to mean Bloom expressed much more simply a few pages earlier when he speaks of "a conflict between nostalgia and money" (p.81). Card collectors complain of the intrusion of commercial values into their hobby every bit as loudly as adult baseball fans complain of players' salaries. Bloom wonders why we go to all this trouble to be so unhappy. I think he gives three answers: 1) collecting (or being a fan) also has its rewards; 2) economic status has a great deal to do with it; and 3) collecting asserts particular notions of masculinity.

Bloom sees nostalgia as potentially a positive force in our lives. The card collecting that we do results in the maintenance of a form of play in our adult lives. We are being active and creative rather than simply accepting adult conventions. More generally, we are declining to accept the passive nature of sports spectatorship (p.107). (I'm using "we" because this is what we do as members of SABR, too.) This kind of behavior makes me happy.

But there are negative dimensions to nostalgia, too. Bloom points out that "nostalgia is more often a commentary of dissatisfaction with the present than it is an attempt to accurately understand the past" (p.87). He reminds us that card collecting is primarily a middle class, white, male activity (my observations at conventions suggest this is true of SABR, too). Bloom indicates that the 1970s were a time when middle class, white males began to have plenty to be dissatisfied with. The book contains a brief summary of economic developments of the 1970s and 1980s, which cumulatively shows that it has become less and less possible to live the middle class life (secure job with a wage high enough to support a wife and children) during these years (p.87–88). In this context, Bloom finds nostalgia to be as destructive as it is liberating (p.88–89):

"Nostalgia desires ... allowed people to grasp a sense of control over their lives amid unstable conditions outside of their control. More powerful, however, are the conservative implications of such nostalgia. In the specific example of baseball card collecting, one can see that nostalgia feeds on a desire for safety and security located in a stable and mythical past. During the 70s and 80s, this nostalgia deflected critical attention away from the conditions and expectations of the 1950s that had helped to create contemporary problems. Instead, the nostalgic baseball fans I interviewed were more likely to lay the blame for social instabilities on civil rights groups, feminists, or homosexuals, who could be easily scapegoated as populations out to destroy the 'family values' of the 1950s."

This sound familiar? It should. And in mentioning homosexuals, Bloom suggests the other answer to his question: the notion of masculinity involved in card collecting. Bloom approaches this topic with some wariness, noting that youthful card collecting occurs before heterosexual activity begins in the teenage years and is often given up then, and that sports fandom tends to—though it doesn't wholly—exclude women. Speaking of card collectors who continued to collect during their teenage years, Bloom says (p.113–114):

"Collecting, for these boys, became a solitary activity largely as a consequence of the cultural ties between male heterosexuality and fears of male intimacy. It is quite revealing that two collectors I interviewed discussed how as teenagers they had to take their collections 'into the closet'. Perhaps the parallel to a metaphor for secret homosexuality is appropriate. Collecting may have allowed some boys to explore homoerotic desires, and to fantasize about masculine heroism and bodily strength, without facing the peer condemnation that goes along with homosexuality in high school settings. For others, perhaps it also forestalled the pain of rejection and feelings of failure that define high school romance for boys. Collectors never told me that this was why they continued to collect their cards as teenagers, and I could imagine that many might want to burn this book for containing such a speculation. However, when understood within a larger context of gender and sexuality, it suggests a powerful reason why those who told personal narratives of 'closet' collecting may have found their cards so meaningful. Fantasy is an important cultural source of pleasure that individuals can maintain in opposition to the world around them."

Here Bloom's own language suggests his uneasiness with the point he's making. This conclusion makes him unhappy enough to imagine readers burning the book. It is not so much that card collectors are homosexuals or unable to attract women but that, according to Bloom, human desire works differently than we are accustomed to think it does. He continues (p.115):

"Rather than fulfilling needs for human affirmation, the practice of male bonding through boyhood nostalgia provides few alternatives outside the confines of particular culture, offering only an idealized image of boyhood relationships. This is one of the sad ironies of baseball card collecting nostalgia. Not only does it whitewash the past and bury the histories of those outside the American 'mainstream', but it also undermines opportunities for human contact that collectors seemed so often to seek, ultimately providing little understanding for much beyond the white, middle-class, 1950s-style patriarchal family."

Having begun the book by announcing himself as an involved observer, Bloom ends by underlining the tentativeness of his conclusions, saying "I see this book as initiating a dialogue about the gender identities of men by critically examining an aspect of our culture" viz., baseball card collecting. I found Bloom's narrative informative and his interpretations thought-provoking.

Editor: Skip McAfee, 5533 Colts Foot Court, Columbia, MD 21045
410.730-5847

modern bullpen". He insists that the article is not about relief pitchers, but about strategy, "about how relief pitchers have been used by their managers over time" (p.330). He finds the current fixations on the single "closer" and the necessity for multiple left-handers in the bullpen to be illogical (he believes these fixations may be responsible for the apparent "shortage" of good pitching nowadays) and are bound to change. In support of this belief, James asserts that "the world is ultimately logical" (p.339), surely the most fantastic statement in the book. In both this book and *The Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (1986), James has begun to shape an analytic (as opposed to anecdotal) history of the game on the field. Opinionated, contentious, lucid, inspiring—it is essential reading.

Book Review

Ron Kaplan
23 Dodd Street, Montclair, NJ 07042

THE BABE IN RED STOCKINGS: **An In-depth Chronicle of Babe Ruth with the Boston Red Sox, 1914–1919**
Kerry Keene, Raymond Sinibaldi, and David Hickey. Champaign (Ill.): Sagamore Publishing, 1997. 307p. $22.95

"The Babe in Red Stockings" would be an apt name for a detective story and in a sense it is. The coauthors have been tireless investigators in their subject.

Ruth burst onto the scene as the ultimate raw talent. Strong, uncultured, boisterous, all this rube wanted to do, at the beginning at least, was to play ball. In the numerous biographies of the Sultan of Swat, we are reminded over and over how stunned he was to learn he would be paid for playing baseball.

Sold to the Red Sox after a stint with the minor league Baltimore Orioles, Ruth became one of the premier pitchers in the big leagues. But it was his startling strength at the plate that swayed the fans. By 1917, with the Sox floundering, manager Ed Barrow sought to use Ruth's bat on a more regular basis. Pinch-hitting was one of the few skills Babe did not acquire (he was adjudged to be a very smart fielder and a surprisingly adept baserunner). Barrow experimented, moving the youngster to first base and to the outfield. The latter move was to help compensate for the loss of Tris Speaker, perhaps the greatest centerfielder of all time. But these appearances were sandwiched between Ruth's pitching stints, and the constant shuffling began to wear on him after awhile.

Massachusetts-based Keene and Hickey, along with Sinibaldi, a long-time Bosox fan from Florida, recount almost every game the Sox played during the Ruth era. Naturally, more attention is paid to the games involving the slugger-cum-pitcher. The book is somewhat inconsistent in its renderings of the games. Sometimes his pitching lines are included, sometimes they are missing data, and other times they are simply omitted. The same with his batting performances. The authors should have decided to go entirely one way or the other.

Nevertheless the information is abundant, not only the bare facts and statistics of the games, but of Ruth himself. We can see how he changes from a hayseed to a more mature, smarter ballplayer. He married Helen Woodford, moved to the Massachusetts countryside, engaged an agent—all signs of an astute player for whom playing the game solely for the joy of it had worn off.

Baseball was relatively unaffected by World War I until 1918, when Secretary of War Newton Baker issued his "work or fight" rule. Red Sox owner Harry Frazee worked harder than any baseball executive to ensure that the season continue as long as possible, perhaps not coincidentally since his club was heading toward the pennant. The authors opined that the best that could be said of Frazee was that he was "much maligned", the worst (and closest to accurate) that he was "reviled"—"the only man the youngsters in Boston learned to hate before they even knew his name". To many he was simply "the guy who sold Babe Ruth".

Squabbles between Ruth and the Red Sox management over salary and deportment are adequately reported here, but the main story is how Ruth developed from an all-star calibre pitcher into a batting master, the likes of which had never been seen heretofore. Kids no longer aspired to be Ty Cobb; they wanted to be a slugger like the Babe. Out with the scientific game, in with knocking the ball out of the park.

The authors include a detailed version of Frazee's sale of Ruth to the Yankees, debugging several myths about the transaction. They also wax hypothetical about what might have happened had Ruth spent his entire career with Boston, both for the slugger and the Sox.

Absent from the book are the lurid escapades that helped make him larger than life (of course, most of them came once Babe had moved on to the Yankees). What *is* mentioned often is the Babe's lack of luck with cars, having been involved in several accidents of greater or lesser seriousness while with the Sox.

The appendices sport a bibliography and a game-by-game listing by year, from Ruth's debut on July 11, 1914 to his final turn on the hill on Sept. 20, 1919, a game in which, fittingly, he cranked a homer in the bottom of the ninth to lead his team to a win over the White Sox. Another section lists his World Series accomplishments and the pitching records he set.

One criticism of the book, which is ostensibly a scholarly work by dint of the copious research involved, is an amazingly shabby job of proofreading. Readers may quickly find distracting the inconsistencies in punctuation.

But after reading *The Babe in Red Stockings* one can see easily how Ruth, in the words of the authors, "took the game of baseball to a level it had never known before".

Book Reviews

Ted Hathaway
5645 Fremont Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55419

HI EVERYBODY!
Herb Carneal, with Stew Thornley. Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 1996. 232p. illus., indexed.

HOLY COW! **The Life and Times of Halsey Hall**
Stew Thornley. Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 1991. 246p. illus., indexed.

SID! **The Sports Legends, the Inside Scoops, and the Close Personal Friends**
Sid Hartman, with Patrick Reusse. Stillwater (Minn.): Voyaguer Press, 1997. 304p. illus., indexed.

The past few years have brought several new biographies of Minnesota media figures.

Although I generally loathe expressions of nostalgia with respect to baseball, I must admit that I have always associated the sound of Herb Carneal's voice with summer—usually working in the yard or the garage with my father when I was a child. Carneal's voice was as much an essential background to these activities as are crowd noises at a ball game. Describing Carneal's voice as "background" might suggest he is boring or unremarkable. Indeed, a hallmark of his style is silence. I can recall more than a few times turning the radio on for a Twins game and being uncertain if I had the station or not: the crowd noise sounded much like background static, until Carneal finally began to speak again. Of course, now that chattering idiots are the norm among broadcasters, Carneal's style is like balm.

This is not to suggest that Carneal is unemotional or always low key. Like his fellow Southerner, Red Barber, Carneal's tones are warm and friendly—smooth and comfortable like an easy chair. But he never downplays the excitement of the game. A close play at home or a big strikeout is punctuated by a growling bark, "He's out!" A mighty home run: "He swings ... *and it's* gone! Oh, man! There wasn't any doubt about *that* one!" Carneal's language has always been simple and descriptive. He has no "tags" (like his longtime partner John Gordon's threadbare "Touch 'em all, [insert name here]!") nor eccentricities in his delivery. While not absolutely impartial, Carneal does not "root" for the Twins and is quick to acknowledge the achievements of the opposing team. He also does not take cheap shots at opposing players. Carneal sees his role as broadcaster (and rightly so) as facilitating the fan's enjoyment and understanding of the game, unlike many contemporary broadcasters who apparently see themselves as part of the entertainment, or worse, as mere shills for the home team.

Carneal's biography is fairly basic, written in chronological order and containing an abundance of the usual anecdotes one expects in any sports biography. The prose is unremarkable, but concise and to the point, much like Carneal's play-by-play. Although mainly interesting to Twins' fans, other readers may be interested in Carneal's extensive discussion of his development as a broadcaster and his surprising candor regarding his many partners over the years. This last part I found particularly noteworthy: the gentlemanly Carneal being decidedly critical of a few of his past partners. Although Carneal has not made it his priority to be the player's "close personal friend", readers should find this book to be the most interesting and informative of the biographies reviewed here.

The fondness many local fans have for Halsey Hall is indicated by the success of Thornley's recent biography, written 14 years after Hall's death. Unlike the other men profiled here, Hall was a genuine success in both the print and broadcast media. Starting in the 1920s, he covered the Minneapolis Millers for local papers and radio stations. His broadcasts were highly popular while his newspaper stories were often reprinted in national publications (e.g., the "Best Sports Stories" series). When the Senators arrived in 1961, Hall was chosen as the vital "local element" to Twins broadcasts. He gave up regular newspaper coverage at that point, but continued to write for other publications until a few years before his death in 1977.

Ironically, Hall's memory, however affectionate, has become rather one-dimensional. Hall was a jocular man with a highly infectious laugh. He was also an expert story-teller. Most fans remember Halsey for the many stories he told during rain delays, his puckish sense of humor, and, of course, his laugh. A CD issued a few years ago after the Twins won the 1991 World Series has a four-minute segment entitled "The Best of Halsey Hall" consisting almost entirely of Halsey laughing. So for many people he has been reduced to a laugh track, or a kind of "Uncle Remus" of baseball. Of course, there are many people whose principal association with Joe DiMaggio is Mr. Coffee ...

Thornley's biography attempts to illustrate what a multitalented person Hall was, with numerous personal testimonies as well as reprints of several of his columns. Thornley was assisted in no small part by Hall's daughter. This is both a blessing and a curse. One the one hand, we find out much about the man and his personal life, something we get only glancingly in the other biographies reviewed here. Unfortunately, it is too much. The details of Hall's family life are not very interesting and devoting an entire chapter to the details of his unremarkable death was unnecessary.

Many of Hall's famous anecdotes are dutifully related, but Thornley doesn't tell them very well—not in print, at any rate. At a local SABR function several years ago, Thornley gave a presentation on Hall and told many of these same stories, and they were hilarious. It seems as if this biography was written with Hall's daughter looking over the author's shoulder, the author anxious not to offend. While not quite hagiography, there is too much sugarcoating in this book. Frankly, the most interesting chapters were about Hall's parents and his childhood. By the time the Twins arrive in 1961, the book has run out of gas.

Despite these shortcomings, however, this is an important work about one of the most prominent men in Minnesota sports media, with much useful information provided in a clear and concise fashion. While not the most felicitous of writers, Thornley is always to the point and does not bore his readers.

After years of waiting, local fans have finally been treated to a biography of "El Sid", which Hartman has written with the assistance of Reusse, a fellow *StarTribune* columnist. Hartman admitted in a newspaper account that he simply spoke into a tape recorder, handed the tapes to Reusse, and let him "make sense of it". Reusse did this admirably as the prose reads like typical Hartman. The gaps are enormous, with many events and individuals glossed over or left out. The timeline jumps back and forth and it is sometimes unclear what year we are at in the narrative. Despite occasional efforts to describe his own life, however, the bulk of this "biography" centers on the sports figures Hartman knows or has known.

One of the best descriptions I've heard of the writing abilities of Hartman came some years ago during a SABR research presentation. Belittling the stature of the Union Association, the presenter remarked: "Describing the Union Association as a major league is like calling Sid Hartman a 'man of letters'." The laughter that follows such a remark is stifled when one recalls that Hartman has dominated Minnesota sportswriting now for more than three decades.

Whether through his illiterate column in the *StarTribune* or his maundering radio program every Sunday morning, sports fans throughout the upper Midwest attend to the words of Sid Hartman. Perhaps they are looking for that daring prediction on the Vikings, that interesting tidbit about Carl Pohlad, or more likely that dyspeptic grumbling over the pathetic Timberwolves. Mr. Average Fan can always find something to react to, dismiss, or digest from old Sid.

Hartman's appeal has been assured by the public's appetite for celebrities. His entire career—in print, on radio, and in person—has revolved around associating himself personally with prominent figures, in and out of sports, in tireless pursuit of the "scoop". That such familiarity would often result in journalistic hallmarks like objectivity, professional integrity, and even ethics being tossed out the window is not lost on Hartman—he admits it freely. Hartman's boosterism for Minnesota teams and his "close personal friends" (i.e., Hartman's tag for celebrities he associates with for "scoops") is an anacronism reminiscent of the crass figures of Sinclair Lewis' Zenith City: the blatant hyperbole and crude hucksterism of a narrow-minded, small-town hack.

It should not be thought, however, that his approach has brought forth merely lies and distortions. Hartman's relentless pursuit of sports information, particularly on the local scene, is unparalleled in the region. He has often been the only one allowed an interview or the first or the only local journalist to find the latest on some important event or issue in local sports. Initially in Hartman's career, when he began writing his hodge-podge column of sports information, this was perhaps enough. But Hartman has never known how to interpret or sort and it is all disgorged for the reader of his columns, no matter how trivial or idiotic. It all boils down to personalities and Hartman's relationships with them. There is a place for this kind of sports journalism, just as there is a place for the gossip column, but the central place that Hartman occupies in Minnesota sportswriting is both unfortunate and disgraceful.

Also of interest: *Golden Memories*, by Ray Christensen with Stew Thornley, published in 1995 by Nodin Press of Minneapolis. Though known principally as the voice of Univ. of Minnesota Gophers football, Christensen also did broadcasts for the Minneapolis Millers during the 1950s. A chapter in this 228-page book is devoted to this part of his life.