

Interview Notes from Frank Nesseth of Grove City, Minnesota
Former pitcher for the Minneapolis Millers, Eau Claire Bears and
Crookston Pirates, etc.

(First half of side A of tape has garbles in it from malfunction in recorder)

Date: July 23, 2002

Present: Frank, His Wife and myself, Rex Hamann

Frank: Was born in Badger, MN on Nov. 29, 1917 and lived there for six months.

Parents farmed at Montrose, SD

moved to Westport, MN and

Elk River Minn. at about age 10

Went to High School at Age 10

Started playing ball for Zimmerman town team as a pitcher at age 16

Family of 5 brothers and 3 sisters

How he got from Zimmerman to Pennington Gap

--brother Al and scout from St. Louis Browns who sent Frank contract in '34

--Cardinals had tryout camp at Mankato, MN

Then they told him you can't play professional baseball because you jumped a contract, so they sent me to Pennington Gap, Virginia

First game was won in Milwaukee at Borchert Field

Pronouncing Nicollet: NIK-uh-let (the "e" should be upside down for Schwa)
or NIK-uh'-lit, almost NIC-lit

--one of the first rookies that started and finished his career AT Nicollet Park

Gil English

Ollie Bejma

Red Kress

Had lost no game; was 3-0 at start of MM career

Lost a few in relief; walked in winning run, including a play at the plate

Lou Novikoff: Frank hit him with a pitch and

Angel Giuliani

came out and said to Frank, What the hell are you doing?

Torii Hunter

Winifred Rosy Ryan

Loren Bain

I won three or four games in the doggone playoffs
Playoffs Against Duluth
sixteen strikeouts

Four seam vs. two-seam
Fork ball and Split-finger the same: a change-up

Weather and pitching

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Occupations:

Mechanic on jet fighters
worked on a b-25 after going to school at Wichita Falls, TX, then went to Inglewood,
CA,
then to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri

Took 51 days to get from New York to Bombay aboard the British Maritania and
changed ships in the middle of the ocean

Ended up as Casuals after Karachi, and in the Siam valley

Worked on the Radial engines, Allison In-Lines
Had basically his own plane assigned to him

Then to Mishinaw, Burma and shared a landing strip with the Japs...

Missions in six minutes to get control of strip

Patrolled the Burma Rd.

Squadrons intercepted 59 of 60 Jap planes and won award for that

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How did you feel about leaving their developing baseball career to go to army?

I didn't like it, but ya had to go.

Went to Spring Training in '46 the year Mike Kelley sold the Millers, and were place on
a war roster.

At New Braunfels, Texas where Millers held their camp at that time.

Came home and someone else calls and wants him to go to Chattanooga, TN and he

turns it down.

Owatonna club in the Southern Minnesota League which included a job on the side for the Owatonna Tool Company on the small screw machine making wheel puller legs

Then came home and went to work for a company in Litchfield.

Brother wanted to leave for Detroit so he left the farm, and Frank joined his father on the farm, 600 acres north of Litchfield, beef and hogs.

Were there about 5 years until my dad got killed in a car wreck in South Dakota, then I sold that farm and bought a smaller one. ...

Johnson Brothers construction company as a foreman on the pipe crew, driving a low-boy pulling heavy equipment, did that for about five years

One boss and I got along real well and became good buddies.

Retired in around 1980. Drove school bus after that for quite awhile.

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Photo of Frank in Cardinals uniform taken in Monett, Missouri next to house where the boys on the team lived in a boarding house.

Tedd Gullic from Koshkonong, Missouri

Wes Westrum from Clearbrook, Mn

Do you remember these players from the Northern League?

Julio Becquer - no

John Blanchard - y

Otie Clark - y

Paul Giel

Milt Nielsen - ?

Hal Raether - n

Mickey Rocco - n

Howie Schultz - yes

Dwayne Sloat - yes

Jim Suchecki - no

Wayne Terwilliger - yes, along with Goose Goslin at 2nd and short

Bill Tuttle - ?

Johnny Van Cuyk-n

Leo Wells-n

Don Wheeler - yep, what is address, just off Chicago ave. probably the same place he lived 40 years ago!

Ernie Sowada, Crookston 1940

--he's (was) a doctor in Eagan, Minn., was pitching, he and I hooked up years later
he threw me a change up and I hit it out of the park...

Story of Wright County All-Stars around 1949 or 50

Romanczek was pitching for opposing team and Frank hit two homers against him in ONE inning, as pitcher!

I pitched for Kimball for three or four years

Windy Hill Salvage yard

Scrapbooks

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As a kid did you listen to baseball?

No, we didn't have a radio. Did they broadcast games back then?

I can remember that '34 world series with Dizzy Dean

On our Dairy farm we had 60 cows, no milking machines.

How did you lose that part of your thumb?

Between two concrete buckets...at about age 50, 52...

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Related to Borchert Field

What do you remember about Borchert Field?

I remember Tedd Gullic, for sure

425 feet to dead center field...Fabian Gaffke hit one over there!

Walt Tauscher

Chief Hogsett , the left hander,

Harry Smythe

Harry Kelly little short, fat pudgy guy .

Mickey Hefner (sp)

Cash, left-hand pitcher

Bob Kline

IN THE SCRAP BOOK

Joe Hatten

Casey Stengel

Wes Westrum

picture of the Eau Claire ballclub

Tom Sheehan

"Neseth Notches First AA Win"

AA All-Stars 1941

Neseth with Sheehan

ID Frank in the EC Bears photo, Frank was 6'3", 165 pounds

"I can name you every guy on there"

We lived down in Minneapolis at the time, Mrs. took the streetcar into the games and got in with a pass to see Frank

FAMILY NEWS

NAMES ON SCORECARD

Lafata (La-FA-tuh) --he was up with the Giants for awhile

Schoenbern

Hoepner

Hartung

Schadt

Skaalen from Boyd, Minnesota, had a brother by the name of Leonard

Bonura

Walker

Hargrave

Cash

Merrick

Bain

Otis Clark

Dave Garcia (GAR-sha) he managed Los Angeles team (Angels), he was a coach with Milwaukee in the later years, played in the big leagues, he came over and talked with us for awhile...

The Millers in its day was just as good as a baseball as the big leagues today...I think maybe better, played just as good a baseball...

Those catches that Hunter made (Torii)...

In 41 down in Eau Claire I beat the colored House of David and I beat the whiskered House of David, and they wanted me to get my release and come with them! And we beat the Kansas City Monarchs! I beat all three of them in Eau Claire...

You know in Eau Claire sometimes we had 9000 people there, couldn't keep 'em off the field practically...they had the outfield roped off...when the House of David I know there was 9200 people there...

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IN 1942 I managed the Eau Claire Club...Rosy Ryan would go on a drinking spree...

We made him stay in the dugout...

Got ready to go to Winnipeg, and no Ryan...

Got to Winnipeg and we won all three, then to Duluth and we won the first two
And Ryan went to Minneapolis and had a heart attack, he was in his fifties...

I got a phone call from the owner of the Bears...

His name was Wackendorfer (sp)...you keep on managing and we'll see you in four days...

We went on and Rosy was registering the ballclub in Wausau and he keels over again!

I was still managing and we ended up with a 17 game winning streak!

I won the 13th game and lost the 18th...probably the longest winning streak in the Northern League...

And then on Rosy Ryan Appreciation night he got a car, and WE DID ALL THE DAMN WORK!!

That 18th game...

Parks in the Northern League and Names of the Northern League teams...

Superior Blues, Duluth Dukes...Wausau Timbers

Northern League reunion...Hank Aaron...

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What would have been one of your biggest thrills in the AA?

Beating St. Paul that day (1941) when I got that base hit...drive in two runs...off Sloat...left handed pitcher...dumb left-hander...

Kress was the first-baseman...

One time Sloat had two baseballs and he threw them both!...the crowd got a big kick

out of it...

Did you and Don Wheeler get along?

Don Wheeler was the absent-minded professor...he called for a curve ball and a fast ball would come ... one time he caught a curve ball with his left hand and he had to leave the game...or he'd be standing out in the outfield dreaming...he got to be a basketball referee down in the Cities for high school...

Ardis is Frank's wife's name...

...My last name was, don't laugh, Stiff!

What did you think about Nicollet Park? Did you like pitching there?

Oh, I didn't care...Nicollet Park had that short right-field fence...it was only 270 feet...with a 30 foot wall across there...not as high as Fenway...

Did you ever meet Joe Hauser?

Nope. Big first-baseman...hit 69 home runs...

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summary completed 7-24-02
by Rex Hamann

Rex Hamann
SABR Oral History Committee