

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE

Newsletter

January 1990

(89-4)

From the Committee Co-Chairman

Frank V. Phelps

253 Bernard Drive, King of Prussia, PA 19406-1756

The two members who have most helped to keep the Bibliography Committee in some motion during the past year are Skip McAfee, by taking over the editorship and publication of the newsletter, and Rich Arpi, whose quarterly *Current Baseball Publications* (CBP) you receive with each newsletter. Both deserve our many thanks. A word further about Rich's CBPs: he will soon prepare a consolidated CBP for 1989. If you have spotted any errors or omissions from his 1989 quarterlies and haven't passed these on to Rich, now is the time to do so *before* he finalizes his yearly issue which will be offered to all SABR members via *The SABR Bulletin*.

As a follow-up to the note in the Oct. 1989 newsletter regarding the Ballparks Committee fund-raising efforts to publish Phil Bess' *City Baseball Magic: Plain Talk and Uncommon Sense about Cities and Baseball Parks*, you now know, from the remark in the Jan. 1990 issue of *The SABR Bulletin*, that the fund raising was successful and copies of this 48-page booklet are available (\$7 postpaid) from Bob Bluthardt, 244 North Oxford Drive, San Angelo, TX 76901. Congratulations to the Ballparks Committee on their successful completion of a worthwhile project.

Last year I called attention to *Grandstand Baseball Annual*, a paperbound compendium self-published by SABR member Joe Wayman. It is chock-full of materials to delight the hard-core SABRite concerned with the records and sidelights of the game. Just received is a card announcing the 1989 issue at \$7.95 postpaid. The four earlier annuals are also available at the same price each from Grandstand Baseball Annual, P.O. Box 4203, Downey, CA 90241.

Only two replies have been received in response to my question about changing the name of the committee to "Bibliography and Literature Committee". The floor is still open and I welcome your comments about the title or what the committee should be doing that it isn't. Excerpts from the two letters are given below.

Bill Hugo: "How is expanding the scope of the committee going to encourage what seems to be a moribund partici-

pation by a large portion of the membership? I think we as members should either put up or jump ship. If I cannot say to the committee leadership that I am working on a given project in 1990 and am willing to be accountable for the progress I have made by the end of that year, I have no business being on the committee. You are right: we are supposed to be a working group!"

Jack Kavanagh: "There are two 'bibliographical' functions unfilled which might give us content and important purpose: 1) invite SABR members to identify errors in published works, preferably as they come on the market, in hope they'll be corrected in future editions; and 2) identify articles which appear in unlikely places or, if in sports sections of daily papers, beyond the awareness of SABR's general membership."

Bill and Jack each make additional cogent points but I defer elaborating or volunteering reactions in hopes of more input from the rest of you. So, I hope there will be more to say on these matters in the next newsletter. Also coming up should be how we can best utilize and cooperate with the SABR Computerization Committee. And, if you have anything you want to put on the agenda for our committee meeting at the National Convention in Cleveland, please contact Committee Co-Chairmen Terry Smith (735 Sycamore St., Rocky Mount, NC 27801) or me.

In Pursuit of Baseball Trivia

Edward W. (Ted) Hathaway

5645 Fremont Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55419

Here's a tough one: What future dictator was once scouted by an American League team? Now it gets tougher: Who was the scout and what was the team? Need a clue? You won't find it in any record book because he was never signed. You might find it in a team history if you're willing to dig, but as most of them cover little apart from historical highlights and recent accomplishments it might be a long search. So you're left with any number of trivia books. One of them may have the answer, but they're written and designed so poorly that you'd have a heck of a time finding it! You couldn't look it up.

(Continued)

"Test your baseball knowledge" quiz books and articles have been around for a long time, but the phenomenon of baseball trivia first arrived during the nostalgia craze of the early 1970s. The great popularity of Trivial Pursuit in the early 1980s refueled this interest. Now we have "Ultimate", "All-Time", "Absolutely", and "Almost Everything" trivia books, numerous quiz books, All-Star Game and World Series trivia, and team trivia, totaling well more than 50 titles. Nearly all of them are inexpensive paperbacks ranging from a slick media format to something out of somebody's garage.

No doubt many of us over the years have received copies of these books from well-meaning relatives, or even bought a few ourselves at a moment of weakness. But it's hard to deny that they're basically bathroom reading not worth more than a few minutes' time. Actually reading one from cover to cover surely must rank with reading the dictionary for sheer boredom. Some baseball trivia books have chapters on particular facets of the game (pitchers, catchers, etc.), but after that they're largely useless as sources of information. None is arranged in any logical fashion, most cover everything under the baseball sun haphazardly, few offer significant detail, and almost none of them is indexed. These are potential storehouses of information, but as their authors were apparently interested in making a fast buck, most of them are a waste of time.

The arrival of Bert Sugar's *Ultimate Baseball Trivia Encyclopedia* in Spring 1990 may prove me wrong, but at this point there are no really useful baseball trivia books. A few, however, verge on actually being readable. For example:

Don Forker's *Almost Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know about Baseball: 1001 Incredible Questions, Answers, Statistics, and Facts about North America's Best-loved Summer Game* (New York: Pagurian Press, 1978) has an index of names. The chapters give a general division of trivia subjects ("Hitter", "Pitchers", etc.), but the subheadings in each chapter don't indicate the content. The information is pretty well detailed and good reading, but most of it is statistical information you could find more easily in *The Baseball Encyclopedia* or other records books.

Luke Salisbury's *The Answer is Baseball* (New York: Times Books, 1989) wins points for recognizing the importance of trivia in understanding and enjoying the game. Many of the questions he addresses and the answers he provides are excellent and quite interesting. Unfortunately, the book is not indexed (naturally), Salisbury has a penchant for flights of gushing sentiment, and his style is often stuffy and prolix.

Art Rust Jr.'s *Baseball Quiz Book* (New York: Facts on File, 1985) is kind in putting the questions and answers on the same page. It is divided into 150 "units" that follow no particular pattern of organization. Each unit is a question, followed by two or three related questions. The answers are well-detailed and often excellent reading. No index, as usual.

The Sporting News Baseball Trivia Book (1983) and its successor (book 2, 1987) are much like Forker's book: good details with interesting information. The chapters are on

general subjects (the All-Star Game, minor leagues, etc.) and the subheadings are in rough alphabetical order within the chapters. But, alas, no index.

As I said earlier, I have hopes for Sugar's new book (although "ultimate" is a pretty meaningless word in the title of a baseball trivia book)—or perhaps a Joseph Reichler or John Thorn in years to come will put together the "Encyclopedia of Baseball Trivia"—but until then we might at least try to better organize our trivia books, provide more detailed answers, and, above all, include thorough indexes. In some future book on "pitcher trivia", you might find that in the later 1940s the Washington Senators' scout Joe Cambria evinced a mild interest in the hurling abilities of a young Cuban law student named Fidel Castro.

Copies of "A Bibliography of Baseball Trivia Resources", containing 75 references, are available from me (see address above) upon receipt of a stamped (25¢), self-addressed envelope.

About Finch Press

Edward W. (Ted) Hathaway

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Some information regarding the inquiry about Finch Press (see Oct. 1989 issue of the committee newsletter). I found listings for Finch in the *Publishers' Trade List Annual* for 1972-1974. The listings were quite substantial with more than 40 pages of titles. Apparently Finch delved into virtually all fields, reprinting both very old as well as relatively new titles. Its original address was Finch Press Reprints, 337 E. Huron St., Ann Arbor, MI 48108. After 1973, Finch was at 220 E. Huron St. (same ZIP). Finch produced a catalogue for 1975, but apparently went out of business after that.

I checked OCLC (a national database of bibliographic information) and none of the titles listed in the newsletter inquiry were to be found as Finch Press Reprints. Arno Press came out with a reprint in 1974 for McGraw's *How to Play Baseball* (1913), while Stein and Day came out with a reprint in 1977 of Mathewson's *Pitching in a Pinch* (1912). I checked some other titles at random from Finch's book list and could not find any listings that way, either. Finch Press Reprints either never got off the ground or had a very limited circulation.

I could not find anything in contemporary publishing literature regarding the demise of Finch Press.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Send contributions for the Bibliography Committee newsletter to Skip McAfee, 5533 Colts Foot Court, Columbia, MD 21045.

Book Reviews

Frank V. Phelps

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The Reader's Catalogue: An Annotated Selection of More Than 40,000 of the Best Books in Print in 208 Categories, edited by Geoffrey O'Brien. Jacob Epstein, Publisher, 1989. Paperbound. Index of authors. \$24.95

The introduction says any book listed may be ordered directly from *The Reader's Catalogue (TRC)* by telephone, fax, or mail. Some booksellers have objected to this kind of marketing as a threat to their retail sales; yet you can buy *TRC* in many bookstores. The baseball section lists 101 titles, subdivided under general, statistics, instruction, biographies, group biographies, inside accounts, fiction, and softball. Three more appear in the "Late Arrivals" section, and, of course, some books classed under sports in general have notable baseball content. In-print go out-of-print quickly these years. If this *TRC* enterprise succeeds, perhaps it will be encouraged to issue less-expensive supplements periodically.

Diamond Classics: Essays on 100 of the Best Baseball Books Ever Published, by Mike Shannon. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1989. Cloth. Index. 455 pages. LC 89-42571; ISBN 0-89950-320-9. \$24.95

Here is a work to delight those sincerely interested in identification and discussion of good baseball literature. It contains essays of 1200 to 1800 words that minutely dissect the books' purposes and contents and provide Mike Shannon's insightful analyses and reasons why these books are "diamond classics". Each essay heads up with book title and bibliographic detail (as above), a list of other baseball books by the author, and a book review excerpt or two.

Shannon has no "ironclad definition of what makes a baseball classic" but employs three criteria: 1) reader availability (in print, library, book dealer); 2) interest to general reader; and 3) contribution to baseball literature (important information or analysis, superlative writing, unforgettable stories memorably told, pioneer intrusion on untrod paths, or pictorial excellence). His selections (mainly modern: only two predate 1950) involve history, biography, autobiography, oral history, essays, anthologies, records and statistics, pictorials, fiction, humor, and poetry. Understandably, juvenile

fiction and instructionals are excluded. SABR authors are strongly represented: Angell, Davids, Gerlach, Holway, James, Kerrane, Koppett, Murdock, Palmer, Ritter, Thorn, Tygiel, Voigt, and others.

Even though the subtitle reads "100 of the Best", not "the 100 Best", Shannon's choices become argument starters. We do have our individual hangups. Mine cause a raised eyebrow at omission of Prof. Harold Seymour's *Baseball: The Early Years* and *Baseball: The Golden Age*, available in recent paperbound editions. Presumably, *Total Baseball* came out too late to be considered. I question inclusion of two selections: *Say It Ain't So, Joe*, by Donald Gropman (too much whitewash for me although I have sympathy for Joe Jackson); and *Baseball's 100: A Personal Ranking of the Best Players in Baseball History*, by Maury Allen (more likely to make my 100 Worst List).

As already inferred, I regard the essays themselves as top-quality stuff. Well-organized, providing in-depth description of each book's coverage, the essays accomplish their desired objectives and stimulate interest in the subject books. Some set me rereading the "classics" on my shelves, some prompt me to search out and read books never read. Only in minor instances can I criticize Shannon's treatment of his subjects. I think some comment could have been inserted in the Ted Williams and Bill Veeck "autobiographies" about the real authors (John Underwood and Ed Linn, respectively) and their other books listed in the heading material. They are masters of capturing their subject's personalities and presenting their stories, as exemplified in these "autobiographies". Regarding *Bush League: A History of Minor League Baseball*, by Robert Obojski, it would have been appropriate to mention the debt Obojski's book owed to *The Story of Minor League Baseball*, edited by Robert L. Finch (Columbus, Ohio, 1952). While the review of Macmillan's *The Baseball Encyclopedia* (7th ed.) may be adequate for the general baseball reader, I quibble at the statement that the encyclopedia is "amazingly accurate", which might have been true if the intent and thrust of the first edition's architects had been followed strictly in the subsequent editions.

Mike Shannon is editor of *Spitball: The Literary Baseball Magazine*. In the introduction to *Diamond Classics*, Shannon notes that "*Spitball* reviews more baseball books than any other single journal, newspaper, or periodical anywhere." Many of you probably knew that. I didn't, but I certainly intend to pay much attention to that magazine hereafter.

Bibliography Committee Roster Changes and Additions

Timothy D. Cary

Ethan Casey

Gary D. Geer

Edward (Ted) W. Hathaway

David Scott Hornish

Robert Lord Keyes

George Land

Tom Miller

Edie Williams

Delete

New member (interest in fiction): 2533 Grant St., Berkeley, CA 94703; 415/843-3917

New address: 501 South Maple St., Columbia, SC 29205

New address: 5645 Fremont Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55419; 612/869-8318

New address: 2230 Seamans Neck Road, Seaford, NY 11783

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New address: 2990 Cleveland Road, Dalton, GA 30720

New address: 1023 W. Barre St., Baltimore, MD 21230