

BLACK SOX SCANDAL



Vol. 1, No. 1, May 2009

Research Committee Newsletter

Leading off ...

What's in this issue

- ◆ Yoseloff Grant PAGE 2
- ◆ Q&A with author
Alan Muchlinski PAGE 3
- ◆ Book review: "Eddie Collins:
A Baseball Biography" PAGE 4
- ◆ Book review: "Harry Frazee,
Ban Johnson and the Feud
That Nearly Destroyed the
American League" PAGE 4
- ◆ Black Sox winters PAGE 6
- ◆ SABR convention PAGE 6

Chairman's Corner

By Gene Carney

carneya6@roadrunner.com

The publication of this newsletter is, I hope, a milestone for research into the events and people involved in the baseball crime of the century — last century — but just 90 years ago this October. I started my "B-Sox" research in September 2002, almost accidentally. To continue as a member of a SABR committee seems perfectly natural. After all, support from SABR members has been essential all along the way.

I recently spoke in Cooperstown to a group of fourth- and fifth-graders from New Jersey, a Law Club; in May, they will present their research in a trial, looking at the cases for and against Shoeless Joe Jackson and Buck Weaver. I told them that I wish I was their age, and just starting to collect pieces of the B-Sox puzzle — because maybe, just maybe, if I kept at it until I was around 63 years old, I

► Continued on Page 2



Gene Carney reviews Rick Huhn's biography of Eddie Collins, which was a finalist for the Larry Ritter Award. See Page 4. (Photo credit: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library)

Trial transcript, detective reports highlight archives

By Peter T. Alter

I'm a curator at the Chicago History Museum, where we specialize in all things related to the history of the Windy City.

Although I'm not an expert in the 1919 Black Sox scandal, I have been lucky enough to work with two relatively new museum purchases related to these momentous events in baseball history.

In December 2007, CHM purchased a major collection of Black Sox legal papers in an online

auction. As you might imagine, the papers are a treasure trove of materials generated by the Chicago White Sox law firm then known as Mayer, Meyer, Austrian, and Platt. Attorney Alfred S. Austrian was a close personal friend of Charles A. Comiskey.

One of the major jewels of this collection is a partial trial transcript from the 1921 Black Sox criminal trial that took place in Chicago. Of interest to Shoeless Joe Jackson fans

and many others, this portion of the transcript includes his testimony.

Other gems of the collection are reports of private detectives who followed White Sox players Fred McMullin, Chick Gandil, Swede Risberg and Happy Felsch.

Comiskey hired a detective firm shortly after the 1919 Fall Classic hoping to get inside information on the scandal. One undercover agent met frequently with Risberg's

► Continued on Page 5

► CHAIRMAN

Continued from Page 1

might have some certain answers.

The subject of “the Black Sox scandal” — I always use quotes now, because the title increasingly seems inaccurate — is endlessly fascinating. It combines baseball, history, and mystery. It is not an old case, but a cold case, and so finding out new things by our research is as exciting as turning up new clues or evidence, to shed new light on people and events.

Last year the film *Eight Men Out* celebrated its 20th anniversary. 2008 also saw the passing of the author of the 1963 book on which the film was based. I think most people today, if they have heard about the fixed World Series of 1919 at all, know about it mainly from the movie. And while the John Sayles film is an accurate version of Eliot Asinof's book, the book itself has flaws.

The greatest problem, and I believe Mr. Asinof would agree, is that we have access today to much more information than he had in 1963. For one thing, Mr. Asinof did not have SABR to assist him! His focus was on why the players conspired with gamblers; I think today he would spend much more time on the cover-up, which lasted nearly a year.

Very soon, a huge collection of new documents will become accessible for

research at the Chicago History Museum. We will have, for the first time, some transcripts from the 1921 trial. We will have many pages of notes from the White Sox lawyers, from before Eddie Cicotte's grand jury appearance, through the 1924 Joe Jackson trial in Milwaukee. We will read how Cicotte spoke of a fix being in for the 1918 Series — perhaps someday a target for another SABR Research Committee.

To travel back in time to 1919 via research is to enter a world that is at once familiar and strange. The B-Sox story can be as complicated as a Russian novel and as baffling as anything Agatha Christie wrote. So it is wise to make the trip not by oneself, but with lots of companions.

If ever a subject needed diverse points of view, many people looking in different places and a group discussion to test every theory and check every fact — this is the one. Because the more we learn, the less certain we become about what we thought was established fact. Yet we can make progress, and this newsletter will be one place where we can mark our trail.

So whether you have had an interest in the B-Sox for fifty years, or are just learning the names of the players, in a sense we are all beginning over, together.

Read Gene Carney's "Notes from the Shadows of Cooperstown" at www.baseball1.com/notes.

Yoseloff Grant deadline: May 15

Do you have a research idea that's been kicking around in your head? If lack of funds for travel, photocopying or other research-related expenses has stopped you from pursuing a pet project, consider applying for a SABR-Yoseloff research grant. Through the generosity of the Anthony A. Yoseloff Foundation, SABR is able to award baseball research grants to its members with the intention of later publishing that research.

A minimum of \$4,000 is allocated for awards annually, but distribution is dependent upon the quality of the proposal pool. The maximum grant award is \$1,000, and individuals are limited to one grant per year. The Yoseloff Grant Program is not restricted to any single area of baseball research, thus most projects are eligible for full or partial grant funding.

The final work product of the proposed research must be suitable to be published by SABR, although copyright will remain with the author. The final work product may be something that SABR can publish on its web site in electronic format, such as an article, a database or other media product.

Only SABR members are eligible to be considered for a Yoseloff-SABR Baseball Research Grant. Proposals will be accepted for the 2009 calendar year until May 15. Application forms are available on the SABR web site, www.sabr.org.

Black Sox Scandal Research Committee

Chairman:

Gene Carney, carneya6@roadrunner.com

Vice Chairman:

Jacob Pomrenke, buckweaver@gmail.com

E-mail list manager:

Rod Nelson, rodericnelson@gmail.com

Newsletter editors: Jacob Pomrenke, Mark Dugo, Steve Klein

E-group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/1919BlackSox>

Q&A: 'After the Black Sox' author Alan Muchlinski

By Jacob Pomrenke
buckweaver@gmail.com

Alan Muchlinski is the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at Cal State University-Los Angeles, where he has been a faculty member since 1979. He grew up in Minnesota as an avid baseball fan.



Alan Muchlinski

In 2006, he self-published a book on Charles "Swede" Risberg, the Black Sox infielder who was banned from organized baseball after helping to fix the 1919 World Series. Muchlinski was interviewed at his home in West Covina, California, in January 2009:

Q: When did you start seriously researching Swede Risberg?

A: It was probably in the mid to late 1980s. It took a lot of years to find the information. ... Part of the issue was just finding out where he had played. I know my dad had played [in Minnesota in the 1920s] and had seen Risberg, so I knew, 'Well, it's gotta be around here somewhere.' And then I found out, well, he had probably played in Rochester. But, how many years? Some of those teams didn't have a hometown, so nobody covered them. ... Some of these towns had a couple teams. It

was amazing that some of these towns, even smaller ones, had more than one newspaper. And one newspaper wouldn't cover the team and the other one would. ...

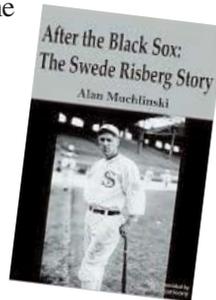
So ... it's a lot of detective work, as you know, which makes it fun. It's historical detective work. And you're on this trail, and all of a sudden the trail goes blank. Where, where? Did they go this way or this way? And you start looking, and you finally find some trace, and you pick up the trail again and you go on.

Q: Did you find any other people who had done this type of research before?

A: It was pretty much solitary for me. My goal was, for my own desire, to document his career. ... The point wasn't to write something that would be the great American novel of outlaw baseball. It was just, I wanted to do it. Now, I wish I would have had more time to track down things, because I would have loved to gone up to Red Bluff, California, to look around. The problem is, by the time I got around to this, almost everybody was dead.

Q: Were you able to find much information on Risberg's life off the field?

A: It was 95 percent baseball-related, because it all comes from the newspa-



pers. I tried ... I contacted the recorder or assessor in Blue Earth County [Minnesota], because I wanted to find out, did they really own a farm?

Where was it? You bring up the name Swede Risberg to them, and that name doesn't ring a bell unless they're interested in the history of baseball. So they're going, 'No, we don't really know anything. It would take looking through the books.' ... That part I missed. I would have loved to get more information on his personal life versus just, you know, his baseball life.

Q: So when did you know you had enough information for a book?

A: When I just ran out of energy [laughing]. ... I wanted to document his career in the Minnesota area; that's where my family was from and that's where my interest was from. And I got to the end of that and ... I had less time to work on it and said, that's gotta be it, so I'll just go with that. You never come to an end with these things. If you're a writer, you say, 'I could have added this ... I could go in this direction.'

Q: Do you have plans to write any other books?

A: Not right now. The work I've done on Swede Risberg, John Donaldson,

the Pipestone Black Sox ... it's just because I wanted to. You know, for my own personal satisfaction, learning things. And I've always liked history, especially aspects of history related to small towns, rural Midwest. You go to these small towns, and the baseball field is still there. It's the same one, in many cases, that these guys played on. Nobody plays on it anymore, but it's still there. It's got lights. But it's neat, you know, to go to Lismore, [Minnesota], and ... there's the baseball field. That's the one that John Donaldson played on. There's the house he lived in, it's still there. So that's neat, to see that level of history, you can still see it. It's easy to envision what it must have been like.

Q: So what are your thoughts on Swede as far as the Black Sox scandal?

A: You know, I just ... I don't care. That's not what I was looking at. ... What I was interested in was, what was it like for a guy to be, in a sense, an itinerant baseball player — albeit a very good one — to go around and play these other teams. You've got a major league caliber ballplayer, and in many cases, those other teams aren't going to have the skill level to keep up with him. So he could have kicked back and taken it a little bit easy. But there's very good evidence that his competitive spirit was still really there.

LARRY RITTER BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

Eddie Collins' story needed to be told long ago

Black Sox Scandal
Research Committee members **Rick Huhn** and **Mike Lynch** were among the finalists for the 2009 Larry Ritter Book Award, presented by the SABR Deadball Era Committee for the best new book related to the Deadball Era. Huhn's book, "Eddie Collins: A Baseball Biography," and Lynch's book, "Harry Frazee, Ban Johnson and the Feud that Nearly Destroyed the American League," were both published by McFarland & Co. The Ritter Award winner was Ron Selter for his book "Ballparks of the Deadball Era."

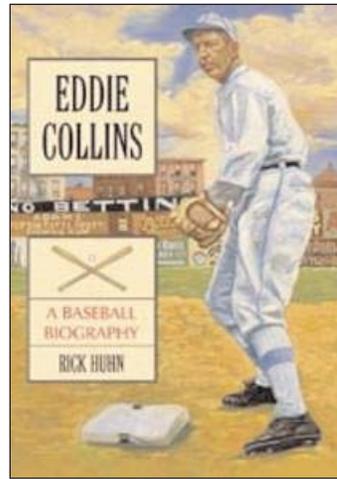
The following is an excerpt from a book review that first appeared in the Deadball Era Committee's newsletter in August 2008.

"Eddie Collins: A Baseball Biography," by Rick Huhn
McFarland & Co., 2007

By Gene Carney
carneya6@roadrunner.com

When I finished reading Rick Huhn's excellent and comprehensive biography of Eddie Collins, one of the top second basemen and batsmen (.333) of all time, I was left with one burning question: Why has it taken so long for this story to be told?

That the tale is worth telling is obvious. Eddie Collins was an educated man with baseball braininess to



boot — not the first, but a standout in his era. His ML playing career spanned over two decades, and his seasons climaxed six times with a World Series.

So why is he not the subject of the small library of biographies that he seems to deserve?

Huhn's book represents the answer. First, Eddie's baseball story spans a quarter of a century, just on the MLB diamonds, and to set the stage, you need to look at his days of college ball. But there's more: he was not just a player, but a manager, coach, scout (without that title) and then general manager with yet another team, the Boston Red Sox, sandwiched between Tom Yawkey and Joe Cronin, and a force in more World Series in the Ted Williams era.

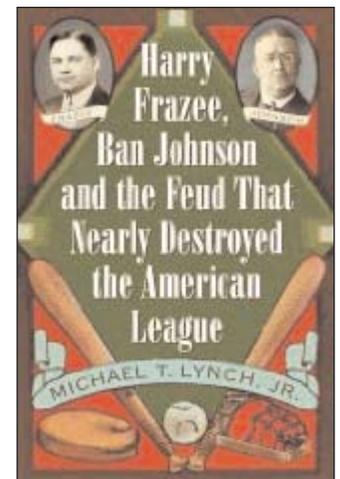
Telling his story requires an understanding of various baseball eras, as well as the events and economics that shaped each — both World

Wars, the Depression, the dramatic transition from Deadball Era to Lively. While many biographies fit into one or two periods, Collins runs the gamut. And along the way, there is a stumbling block.

And that is "the Black Sox scandal" — an event in which Eddie Collins and each member of the 1919 Chicago White Sox, like it or not, played a role. It would be easy to simply declare Collins a member of the "Clean Sox" and distance him from the fixed World Series, but to his credit, Huhn tackles this complicated and mysterious (even today) occurrence head-on. Not only that, but he looks even closer at the shady business in 1917, and during the seasons of 1919 and 1920, a treat for readers who know that The Big Fix of October 1919 was hardly "baseball's single sin" (in Voigt's phrase).

The balanced tone of the book is a treat. It is never hero-worship, or too-harsh criticism. Huhn himself is thoughtful and reflective, as if in the time he has spent with Collins, something has rubbed off. Eddie Collins was the quintessential Quiet Man, before, during and after the Babe Ruth comet blazed across the game. He was a ballplayer first and foremost, letting his bat and glove and spikes do most of the talking. Perhaps this is another reason his biography appears so late.

If they make a movie of the life of Eddie Collins, it just might need that old title, "It's a Wonderful Life." Like the character Jimmy Stewart played in the Christmas favorite, Eddie's life touched and influenced many others — take it away and there would be a huge hole in baseball history.



The following is an excerpt from a book review that first appeared in the Bibliography Committee's newsletter in January 2009.

"Harry Frazee, Ban Johnson and the Feud That Nearly Destroyed the American League," by Michael T. Lynch Jr.
McFarland & Co., 2008

By Leverett T. Smith
lsmith@ncwc.edu

In this book, Michael T. Lynch Jr. has set out to tell a story nearly as complicated as his title is long. He's

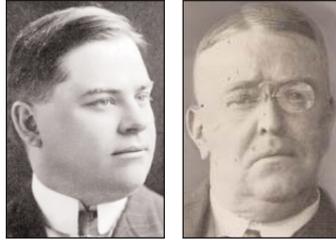
► Continued on Page 5

► FINALISTS

Continued from Page 4

committed himself to the notion that at the heart of the tumultuous events on and off the field in major league baseball between 1913 and 1929 lies a feud between American League President Ban Johnson and Boston Red Sox owner Harry Frazee. I'm not sure he's correct about this, but his account of these events is certainly interesting nonetheless. Lynch relies mainly on secondary sources, newspaper accounts and Internet sites in developing his thesis.

Lynch has several purposes in writing his book. On the one hand he wants to correct the picture of Ban Johnson drawn by Eugene Murdock in his 1982 biography of Johnson. He says of Murdock's book, "Eugene C. Murdock wrote a very flattering biography of Ban Johnson 25 years ago that glossed over Johnson's



Harry Frazee Ban Johnson

faults and blamed everyone else for his undoing." Lynch will present a less flattering portrait. The rest of the quote reveals two more purposes; it reads "but he barely scratched the surface of the feud Johnson had with Frazee." First, Lynch will present a more full portrait of Harry Frazee than has been previously available. Secondly, Lynch proposes to set their relationship at the center of events.

So one thing we get is a biographical sketch of the life of Ban Johnson. I must say that, given the information Lynch provides, I've not changed my understanding of Johnson that much. He may, as he says, portray Johnson less sympathetically than Murdock does, but

Lynch's Johnson still seems the overbearing president, used to running things his way, who is in the process of losing his power. Lynch complicates this portrait, showing him acting both reasonably and unreasonably, but he doesn't change it.

Lynch's Johnson is primarily a feuder. Before he runs into Harry Frazee, he feuds with Indianapolis and New York Giants owner John T. Brush, then with Yankee owners Huston and Ruppert, then with Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis. And always he feuds with Charles Comiskey. Lynch's summary of this last on-and-off relationship is particularly good.

Lynch believes that Johnson's feud with Frazee is at the bottom of Johnson's decline from power. While it may seem from Lynch's account that Johnson's other feuds were more important than the one with Frazee, he

is right to underline the fact that Frazee was the first American League owner to acquire his club without Johnson's blessing and thus become an object of his suspicion. Frazee's uneasiness with Johnsons rekindled Johnson's feud with Comiskey and alienated Huston and Ruppert from Johnson.

Lynch's extensive treatment of Frazee's life, both before and after his time as the Red Sox owner, is, for this reader, the most important part of the book. He is at least an important part of the uproar that goes on in the American League in the 1910s and early 1920s.

Lynch's book both enlarges and complicates our view of Harry Frazee and also offers an engaging picture of the events and personalities that together caused the collapse of the National Commission and the substitution of the single commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis.

► MUSEUM

Continued from Page 1

girlfriend who lived on the city's South Side. Another investigator went ice fishing with Felsch.

In 1924, Shoeless Joe also took the White Sox to court over back pay, and this collection includes extensive materials from those legal proceedings.

Unfortunately, the papers

— many of them nearly 90 years old — are not in very good shape. CHM's paper conservator has said this small collection alone would be several hundred hours of work. The Museum has photo copied the materials so that researchers might consult those copies.

In the fall of 2008, CHM made another important Black Sox purchase. This time the Museum bought the papers of Eliot Asinof as they relate to

his books "Eight Men Out" and "Bleeding Between the Lines." This collection features such great pieces as Asinof's notes from his interviews with Felsch, Red Faber, and Judge Hugo Friend.

Other highlights include a transcript of a 1960 interview with Abe Attell which Asinof called a "self-serving confession of innocence" in "Bleeding Between the Lines." Most of the "Eight Men Out" original hand- and type-written

manuscript was also included.

Both collections will be available sometime later this year through our Research Center. Please feel free to contact me with any general questions you might have.

To learn more about the Chicago History Museum, please visit our site at www.chicagohistory.org.

Peter T. Alter is a curator at the Chicago History Museum. He can be reached at alter@chicagohistory.org.

COMMITTEE NEWS & NOTES

The Black Sox Scandal Research Committee has formed six special interest groups in order to organize and coordinate future projects. If you would like to contribute — or even just to stay in the loop — please contact the group coordinator listed below. The six groups are:

■ **CRIME & PUNISHMENT:** This will focus on the legal aspects of the B-Sox event, including anyone with special interest in the gamblers/fixers. Coordinator: **Jason Hinners**, hinnersjr@yahoo.com.

■ **GAMES AND PLAYERS:** This will include both those interested in the game accounts and all issues related to the 1919 Series as it played out. Also anyone interested in the players of that Series, the 1919 Reds and White Sox, their managers, coaches, scouts, trainers and bat boys. Coordinator: **Matt Aber**, mattaber2007@gmail.com.

■ **INDEX PROJECT:** This will focus on sorting out and identifying all the sources for Black Sox research, which will help make all our other research projects easier; we'll better know what is available and where to find it. Coordinator: **Rod Nelson**, rodericnelson@gmail.com.

■ **NEWSLETTER:** This will focus on writing and editing all content for what you're reading right now. Coordinator: **Jacob Pomrenke**, buckweaver@gmail.com.

■ **WEB SITE:** This will focus on getting a committee Web site up and running, working closely with the SABR office. Coordinator: **Mat Kovach**, mek-sabr@mek.cc.

■ **WRITERS & PAPERS:** This will focus on the written record — the reporters, editors, and anonymous chroniclers of the American press (and maybe Canadian and Mexican) — involved in the Black Sox scandal. Coordinator: **Irv Goldfarb**, irvin.j.goldfarb@abc.com.

HOW THEY SPENT THEIR WINTERS

This excerpt first appeared in "Notes from the Shadows of Cooperstown," No. 480, at www.baseball1.com/notes/?p=122

By Gene Carney

carneya6@roadrunner.com

The 1920 Reach Guide gives some personal info on the Sox — a short history of their baseball careers, height and weight, whether married or not — and where they reside.

If you think that the players were interviewed back home, after the 1919 Series and are curious about what they said, here are some leads for you:

- Eddie Cicotte: Detroit, MI
- Claude Williams: Springfield, MO
- Dick Kerr: Paris, TX
- Urban (Red) Faber: Cascade, IA

- Grover Lowdermilk: Odin, IL
- William James: Ann Arbor, MI
- J.J. Lefty Sullivan: Chicago, IL
- R.H. Wilkinson: Canandaigua, NY
- J. Erskine Mayer: Philadelphia, PA
- Chick Gandil: Chicago (but not in the off-season; try California)
- Eddie Collins: Lansdowne, PA
- Buck Weaver: Chicago
- Swede Risberg: San Francisco, CA
- Fred McMullin: Los Angeles, CA
- Harvey McClellan: Cynthiana, KY
- Joe Jackson: Savannah, GA
- Kid Gleason: Philadelphia, PA
- Ray Schalk: Litchfield, IL
- Byrd Lynn: Unionville, IL
- Joe Jenkins: Hanford, CA
- Happy Felsch: Milwaukee, WI
- John (Shano) Collins: Pittsfield, MA
- Harry (Nemo) Leibold: Detroit, MI
- Eddie Murphy: Dunmore, PA

Register for the SABR convention

The 39th annual SABR national convention is scheduled for July 29-August 2 at the J.W. Marriott Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., and all SABR members can pre-register for \$115 until June 15.

Registration can be completed at the SABR online store (store.sabr.org).

Your registration fee allows you access to all research presentations, panels and special topics, as well as the trivia contest and research committee meetings.

Guest speakers include Christina Kahrl, managing editor of baseballprospectus.com, and Paul White, founding editor of USA Today's "Baseball Weekly." In addition, you'll receive a well-stocked convention goody bag.

SABR members can also register for optional events, including a tour of Nationals Park, a Red Sox-Orioles game at Camden Yards, minor league games at Potomac and Southern Maryland, a Smithsonian Event or the awards dinner featuring keynote speaker Stan Kasten, president of the Washington Nationals.

SABR has also negotiated a rate of \$179 per night (plus tax) at the J.W. Marriott Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown Washington, D.C. The SABR rate will be in effect between July 27 and August 5.

For more information on the convention, or to register for the event, visit SABR 39's official site at convention.sabr.org.