



# The ORAL HISTORY Committee

The Society for American Baseball Research

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## Comeback story: oral history

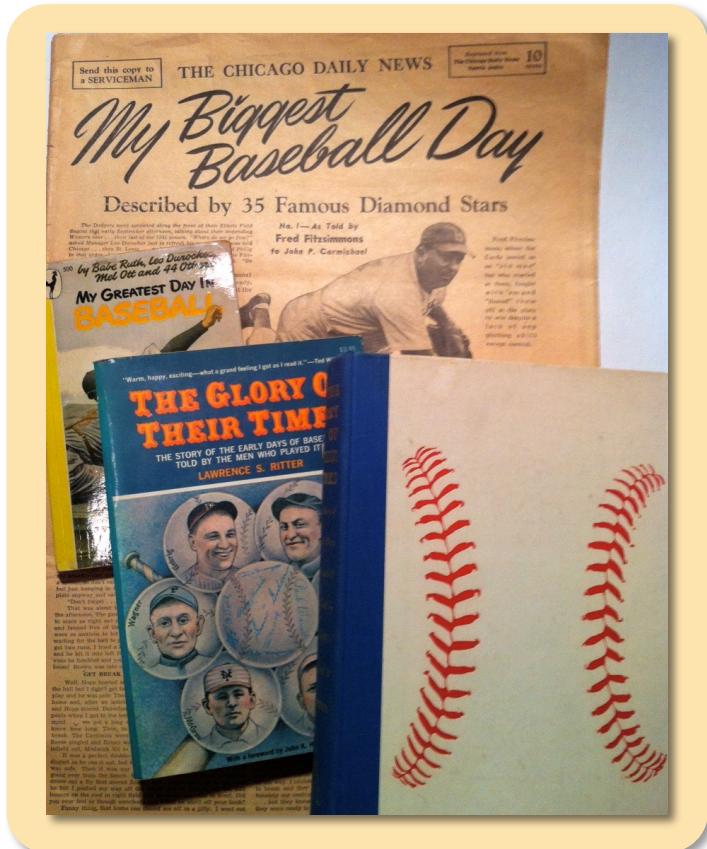
The Oral History Committee has been in a quiet state for some time. Faithful practitioners like Dave Paulson and Bill Nowlin have never stopped tending this garden for SABR, but collective attention has dissipated. In the evolution of baseball and its diverse fascinations for SABR members, energy has flowed in many research directions.

But the more fundamental practice of oral history -- the collection of testimony about baseball from living memory -- shouldn't languish as a consequence.

It's an odd lassitude, really, considering the reverence so many of us feel for the baseball classics of the form -- Lawrence Ritter's "The Glory of Their Times," or the old Chicago Daily News compendium, "My Greatest Day in Baseball." But there it is. Oral History has been in a bit of a slump.

We're now hoping to break out of it, first by reviving the discussion about oral history.

Locating players and other baseball "witnesses," approaching them, the interviewer's arts, maximizing opportunities, recording stories, options in technology -- there's lots to talk about. We hope to encourage many voices.



This committee dates to 1986. There is a rich resource of SABR members who've contributed to its work and its achievements. And there are so many fascinating stories waiting to be told. The satisfaction and rewards of this pursuit are great.

Beyond all that, we might consider giving some shape to collaborative efforts. Making a planned priority of collecting the stories of the game's oldest and most articulate survivors? Reviving the original franchise with another "My Greatest Day in Baseball" for a new generation? Certainly there are other ideas out there. Look for us on the website, and join the conversation. -- Tom Willman, chair.

## SABR's oral history collection

As of the start of 2012, the SABR oral history archive contains more than 1,000 interview files. More than one-third of those interviewees are no longer with us. Their voices remain because SABR members made the timely effort to preserve them.

SABR is also in the act of making another significant contribution to this collection. With every change in technology, it seems, we lose some history, as surely as if we'd never recorded it. That's as true for old tape recordings as it is for yellowed clippings in a musty newspaper morgue.

## REMEMBERING 'THE BLACK SOX': THE LAST WITNESS

Bibb Falk played in the Big Leagues from 1920 through 1931, and he had a fine career: Lifetime batting average, .314. In 1924, he hit .352 and for a while gave Babe Ruth a run for the A.L. batting title.

In time, his more enduring reputation became that of baseball coach at the University of Texas. He's in the National College Baseball Hall of Fame; his teams won 20 conference titles, and national championships in 1949 and '50.

But by 1988, Bibb Falk had another claim to fame. He was the last man alive to have

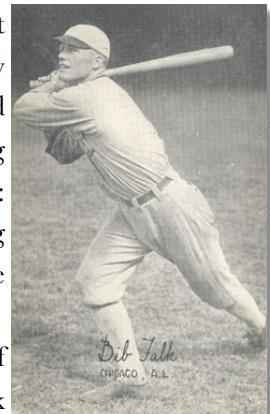
played for the Chicago White Sox as a teammate of the men who had thrown the World Series. He got into just seven games with 17 at-bats for Chicago in 1920, the season the scandal broke. But Falk recalled that he had joined the team in June, and was still with them in September -- when he was called on to fill the shoes of Shoeless Joe Jackson.

In April, 1988, Bibb Falk was interviewed by phone at his Texas home for a newspaper article. (Falk died

We never carry everything forward. But the SABR staff has committed to digitizing its oral histories, and with technological change just a blur, that will make this collection survivable and of real value.

If you're technologically savvy, and have workflow ideas about efficiently creating such a large online database, SABR's Jacob Pomrenke would be pleased to hear from you: <mailto:jpomrenke@sabr.org>

Meanwhile, for updates on the SABR oral history collection, follow the Committee on the website.



the next year, age 90.) That tape of the last living memory of the Black Sox is a good example of how satisfying these opportunities can be: Bibb Falk remembered asking Eddie Cicotte about all those World Series rumors.

But it's also an example of the challenges the work presents. White noise, old tape, obsolete hardware, software: If you have experience with it, we hope you'll join the Oral History conversation.

(Contributed by Tom Willman)

White Sox outfielder Bibb Falk, shown here in a 1920s exhibit card.  
(Source: Wikipedia).

**Click to hear a sample of the Bibb Falk interview: <https://sabr.box.com/shared/static/d48xxexy4z206o9cu7eo.mp3>**

