The SABR Black Sox Scandal Research Committee is pleased to announce a special symposium to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1919 World Series on September 27-29, 2019, in Chicago.

The museum is home to an extensive collection of Black Sox artifacts and documents, and we’ll gather in the beautiful Morse Genius Chicago Room event space to discuss the continued relevance of the 1919 World Series and its aftermath. The weekend will also include a visit to see a Chicago White Sox game, a Prohibition era-themed pub crawl, a walking tour of downtown Chicago baseball history sites, and book signings with SABR authors, including our own Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago White Sox.

Pre-registration for this event will be available at SABR.org beginning in the spring of 2019. Stay tuned as we finalize the schedule and announce more details in the June 2019 newsletter.
We’re also beginning to work on a 100th anniversary keepsake edition of the committee newsletter, which we’ll make available to attendees at the symposium next fall. In this edition, we want to focus on stories that cover big-picture topics related to the scandal, providing context to readers who may not have been keeping up with all the latest research.

Some of these topics may expand on the “Eight Myths Out” that are covered on page 3 of the current edition, and we’ll continue to write about those subjects in our interactive, online Media Guide, as well as the regular editions of the newsletter next year.

Here are some other possible story subjects for the keepsake newsletter:

- ‘He Just Saw The Opportunity’: Black Sox Gamblers from Arnold Rothstein to Remy Dorr
- How Good Were the 1919 Cincinnati Reds?
- Courtroom Controversies: Misperceptions About the Black Sox Trial
- The Feud: Ban Johnson, Charles Comiskey, and the Exposure of a Scandal
- Hugh Fullerton, Collyer’s Eye, and Shedding Light on Baseball’s ‘Darkest Hour’
- ‘22 Men Out’: Cleaning Up the Game from a Culture of Gambling
- The Judge is In: How a Baseball Commissioner Handled His First Crisis
- Did Babe Ruth Save Baseball After the Black Sox?
- Permanently Ineligible: A Century of Black Sox Reinstatement Efforts
- The Legacy of Eight Men Out
- A Look Ahead: Baseball Back in Bed with Gambling in the 21st Century

Are you interested in writing one of these stories or any others for the 100th anniversary newsletter? If so, please email me at buckweaver@gmail.com to discuss your ideas by February 1. Any subject that comprehensively covers an aspect of the Black Sox Scandal — on the field or off — will be considered.

Articles should be between 1,500-4,000 words (unless pre-approved in advance) and the deadline to submit your draft is August 1. All stories should follow the SABR Style Guide and include sources and endnotes wherever possible.

We hope to include as many different voices in this newsletter as possible. Even with so much new evidence, our interpretations and conclusions still differ on a regular basis. I hope you’ll consider contributing to the newsletters, the Chicago research symposium, and all of our 100th anniversary coverage in 2019 and beyond.

For more information about SABR’s Black Sox Scandal Research Committee, e-mail buckweaver@gmail.com.

Download your free copy of Scandal on the South Side

Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago White Sox, edited by Jacob Pomrenke, with associate editors Rick Huhn, Bill Nowlin, and Len Levin, is now available from the SABR Digital Library.

Scandal on the South Side is the first comprehensive book focused on the star-studded, dissension-riddled team that won the 1919 American League pennant and then threw the World Series — with full-life biographies of every player and official involved with that fateful team.

This book isn’t a rewriting of Eight Men Out, but it is the complete story of everyone associated with the 1919 Chicago White Sox.

Order the book:
The book can be ordered online at SABR.org/ebooks.
All SABR members can download the e-book edition for free in PDF, EPUB, or Kindle formats. SABR members also get a 50% discount to purchase the paperback or $9.99 for the e-book.

Read the bios online: All biographies from the book can also be read online at the SABR BioProject.
Visit SABR.org/category/completed-book-projects/1919-chicago-white-sox to find them all.

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Revisiting the ‘Eight Myths Out’

By Jacob Pomrenke
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More than a decade ago, author Gene Carney coined the phrase “Eight Myths Out” to highlight the proliferation of inaccurate stories about the Black Sox Scandal that persist in popular culture, from Eddie Cicotte’s nonexistent bonus to the fictitious hitman who threatened Lefty Williams before the final game of the 1919 World Series.

As we make plans to commemorate the 100th anniversary of that fateful World Series next year, we’re still striving to correct many of those misperceptions and steer people in the right direction about what really happened a century ago.

The SABR Black Sox Scandal Research Committee is planning to produce a convenient “media guide,” to be published online at SABR.org next spring, with links to updated research and resources to help ensure that future writers and readers have access to the best information about the scandal in one place.

Much of our research in recent years has been devoted to debunking the myths that were either created or popularized by *Eight Men Out*, Eliot Asinof’s best-selling book (1963) and John Sayles’ film adaptation (1988) of the same name. Both versions are based on the faulty premise that White Sox owner Charles Comiskey underpaid and mistreated his players so badly that they were easily susceptible to the lures of wily gamblers who bribed them to fix the World Series.

Carney’s original list of “Eight Myths Out,” presented at the NINE Spring Training Conference in 2006, focused on these errors. New research by members of this committee has uncovered even more stories that don’t hold up to modern scrutiny. Bob Hoie’s groundbreaking work on 1919 player salaries and team payrolls, Bill Lamb’s expert analysis of the grand jury investigations and subsequent criminal and civil trials, and Bruce Allardice’s detective work on the lives of the underworld figures who fixed the World Series have shed new light on the Black Sox Scandal and what we know about it.

Still, the misperceptions persist — as evidenced by some recent media coverage of the scandal that repeat the old myths as fact. As the lights on baseball’s darkest hour shine brighter for the 100th anniversary in 2019, it’s time for us to update the list of “Eight Myths Out” and make it clear how much better of an understanding we have of the scandal today.

We’ll sharpen the focus on this list at SABR.org in the spring, but here’s a stab at the biggest misperceptions that remain in the public eye:

1. Comiskey as Scrooge

   We can’t climb into the heads of the Black Sox to know exactly why they threw the World Series. But the players themselves rarely claimed, as *Eight Men Out* did, that it was because of Charles Comiskey’s low pay or poor treatment — and we now have accurate salary information to back that up. The White Sox had one of the highest payrolls in the major leagues and most of the Black Sox were paid better than their peers. Comiskey’s reputation as a miser lives on today, but the stories about his team playing in dirty laundry and team management reneging on promises to his players are far-fetched, if not outright false.

2. The Cicotte “Bonus”

   One of the most dramatic scenes in *Eight Men Out* is when White Sox ace Eddie Cicotte tries to collect a $10,000 bonus he says Charles Comiskey promised him if he won 30 games. (In the book, this story occurs in 1917; in the film, 1919.) In both versions, Cicotte claimed that Sox management had him benched late in the season to avoid paying out the bonus and the incident is seen as the catalyst for the scandal.

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EIGHT MYTHS OUT

Continued from page 3

for Cicotte’s involvement in the fix. But the entire story is made up, a fanciful claim conceived to cast the players in a sympathetic light. In fact, Cicotte did have a chance to win his 30th game in September 1919 — and he had already agreed by then to throw the World Series — but was yanked after pitching poorly, and the White Sox rallied to clinch the pennant that day.

3. Gamblers Initiated the Fix

It was the players, primarily Chick Gandil and Eddie Cicotte, who proposed the World Series fix to gamblers rather than the other way around. There were several plots at work simultaneously and the fix may have still gone through even without the involvement of New York kingpin Arnold Rothstein, who was credited as the “mastermind” by his henchman Abe Attell in a self-serving interview years later with author Eliot Asinof. Several other underworld figures became involved in the World Series plot, too — including a group of Midwestern gamblers who raised thousands of dollars to keep the fix alive. Fixing the World Series was a total “team” effort.

4. The Hitman: “Harry F.”

In Eight Men Out, Lefty Williams is approached by a menacing assassin on the night before he is supposed to pitch in Game Eight of the World Series. Supposedly sent by Arnold Rothstein, “Harry F.” threatens harm to Lefty’s family if the White Sox don’t lose decisively, and the pitcher complies with his demands the next day with a first-inning implosion against the Reds. This story is said to show that the naïve ballplayers were in over their heads in dealing with the gamblers, rather than instigators in the whole plot. It’s easy to believe the Chicago players could be the targets of an Al Capone-style takeout if they didn’t hold up their end of the fix. But Eliot Asinof said on multiple occasions that he invented the hitman character on the advice of his publisher, in case anyone used the name “Harry F.” in future books and articles without citing his work; many writers have done just that. But there is little evidence to substantiate the claim that Williams was ever threatened.

5. Only Eight Men Out

It’s impossible to understand the Black Sox Scandal without knowing how deeply the game was intertwined with America’s gambling-friendly culture at that time. Similar to the PED-friendly environment of the 1990s, baseball’s powers-that-be turned a blind eye to — and in some cases, implicitly encouraged — the corruption and game-fixing of the early twentieth century. The Black Sox Scandal was the culmination in a series of game-fixing incidents that baseball officials tried to sweep under the rug. When Commiss-

sioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was confronted years later with credible claims that future Hall of Famers Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker also fixed a game in 1919, he lamented how many stories like this kept popping up. However, dozens of other professional players along with the Black Sox were banned, suspended, or quietly deemed persona non grata after questions about their integrity surfaced.

6. The Cover-Up

The 1919 World Series fix was baseball’s “worst-kept secret,” but it took a long time before the rumors were accepted as fact. Nearly an entire major-league season was played before the Black Sox Scandal was publicly exposed. Some of that was due to the efforts of Charles Comiskey, who sent manager Kid Gleason to interview a gambler involved in the fix immediately after the World Series ended and hired detectives to follow the suspected players during the offseason. Still, he and others with the power to shed light on the scandal sat on their knowledge in the hopes that their dirty laundry would never air. A diligent investigation by a small Chicago-based gambling trade publication called Collyer’s Eye helped expose the corruption and grease the wheels for a full legal inquiry. AL president Ban Johnson’s ongoing feud with Comiskey spurred him to get involved and bring down his nemesis’s beloved baseball team.

7. The “Stolen” Grand Jury Confessions

The Black Sox criminal trial, which resulted in the acquittal of the players, is often depicted as an example of Chicago-style corruption and shady courtroom shenanigans. In the film version of Eight Men Out, the courtroom gallery lets out a gasp when a prosecutor announces that the grand jury testimony from Eddie Cicotte, Shoeless Joe Jackson, and Lefty Williams had been stolen, leading to baseless speculation on whether the White Sox lawyers had joined forces with gambler Arnold Rothstein to help out the players. In reality, the theft of the original transcriptions from the prosecutors’ office was discovered well in advance and the players’ testimony was re-created by the grand jury stenographers using their shorthand notes. The Black Sox defense lawyers did not contest the authenticity of these transcripts and the Cicotte, Jackson, and Williams grand jury testimony was read to the jury at length during the trial.

8. Shamed Into Silence

When Eliot Asinof went looking for the surviving Black Sox in the early 1960s, he encountered resistance from almost every ballplayer he found. Asinof attributed their reluctance to talk to the stigma that everyone involved, even the innocent players, supposedly felt about the 1919 World Series. But that wasn’t the case at all. Many other writers succeeded in getting the players to talk. More than 100 interviews have been discovered involving participants of the 1919 World Series. The idea that the “Big Fix” was too

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Thom Ross art show focuses on Black Sox in 2019

By Jacob Pomrenke
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Thom Ross has always looked to the past for inspiration in his art. History, he says, provides “the most powerful and meaningful” stories that connect us to the present and offer insight on the human condition. Baseball history, one of his favorite subjects, is chock-full of evocative stories that showcase the range of human activity, from the triumphant to the tragic.

Ross returns to baseball for an art exhibition in Chicago next summer that focuses on the 100th anniversary of the 1919 World Series. The Black Sox – A Century Later, a series of watercolor paintings that depicts the players, gamblers, and key moments from the Black Sox Scandal, will run from June 9-July 21, 2019, at the Beverly Arts Center on the South Side. A companion book is also in the works.

It is a story the New Mexico-based artist has been interested in telling for years.

“Often the power [of a story] resides more in the mythical than the historical,” Ross said. “I liken it to a coin with two sides, history and myth. And of course the Black Sox fit perfectly into that mythical role. Their story contains particles of Faust, Shakespeare, and even the Bible, in their banishment from that Garden of Eden called Comiskey Park.”

Ross’s baseball work includes The Catch (1984), a diorama of Willie Mays’s iconic World Series play that he created for the National Baseball Hall of Fame (and re-created in 2004), and The Defining Moment (1998), a tableau of 11 steel cutouts of the Seattle Mariners’ 1995 American League Division Series victory that is on permanent display at Safeco Field in Seattle.

He has also written for and illustrated a number of baseball books, including the cover art for Richard Crepeau’s Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind, 1919-1941, with a pastel drawing he titled Shoeless Joe’s Last At-Bat.

“The fix surely belongs in that group of events which will always fascinate us precisely because we don’t know really what happened,” Ross said. “Although it is a baseball story, it transcends baseball. It’s a tale of consciousness — or lack thereof — a tale of morality, a tale of baseness and greed. And it is this arc of human frailties that makes it such a great story.

“My intention (with this series) is to show these players as real men with real human failings, but also as mythic men whose lives and actions have meanings which touch on all persons.”

To view the complete Black Sox series, visit thomrossart.com/the-black-sox-a-century-later.

For more information on the Beverly Arts Center, 2407 W. 111th St. in Chicago, visit beverlyartcenter.org.
Editor’s note: A century ago, as America joined World War I, major-league players were forced to choose between enlisting in the military and taking a job deemed essential to the war effort. Many players chose the latter, including Shoeless Joe Jackson and Babe Ruth. This story by first-time newsletter contributor Geoff Gehman, a former arts and sports writer for The Morning Call in Allentown, Pennsylvania, details their exploits in the shipyard leagues of 1918.

By Geoff Gehman
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Babe Ruth is doing his bit for the World War I effort. It’s late September 1918 and baseball’s newest sensation is hitting fungo after fungo over the fence of a stadium in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, owned by Bethlehem Steel Corp., which is making a ton of money making tons of military materials.

Each blast is celebrated with grins, whoops, head shakes, cap tips, and Broadway bows. It’s a star-spangled show, and show-off, for over-worked munitions workers and sons of soldiers, some of whom hold souvenirs promised by the future Sultan of Swat.

One spectator isn’t amused. Charles “Pop” Kelchner, manager of Bethlehem Steel’s Lebanon factory team, is peeved that his slugging first baseman has used up all the batting-practice balls. His Christian code of conduct forbids him from cursing, one of his slugging first baseman’s pleasures, along with boozing, carousing, and womanizing.

Still, he can’t help but admire Ruth’s prodigious charisma. A veteran scout for the St. Louis Browns, Kelchner knows that war-weary fans will flock to see the infielder/outfielder/pitcher who just led the American League in home runs and the Boston Red Sox to a third championship in four years. Ruth, he figures, will keep folks from thinking about, and drinking away, their worldly troubles.

Pop and the Babe were among the unlikeliest of teammates in the 1918 Bethlehem Steel League, an unlikely showcase for future major-leaguers, outlet for retired major-leaguers, and refuge for active major-leaguers dodging the draft. Teams at six Northeastern plants fielded a motley crew that included a car dealer, a dentist, a judge, baseball’s first “clown prince,” three future Jewish pros, five future Hall of Famers, and the peerless Shoeless Joe Jackson, who led the league in hitting while leading a shipyard riveting gang.

For four-odd months the famous and forgotten shared Red Cross benefits, exhibitions against military and Negro League teams, minstrel shows, and the spirit of trench warriors.

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The Bethlehem Steel League was launched by Charles Schwab, Bethlehem Steel’s chairman and an industrial titan mentored by US Steel founder Andrew Carnegie, a bigger industrial titan. In less than a generation Schwab had built Bethlehem into the nation’s No. 2 steel maker, capitalizing on the development of the wide-flange beam, which spurred the skyrocketing rise of skyscrapers. One of the reasons his employees were so productive is that they were so healthy, thanks largely to a Schwab-endorsed program of recreations ranging from archery to golf, trap shooting to wrestling.

They were also entertained by a professional soccer team, also organized by Schwab, that won the American Cup (a precursor to what is now known as the US Open Cup) six times in 10 seasons. Five of those titles were coached by Bethlehem Steel athletics director Billy Sheridan, a Scottish immigrant who won five national titles during his 42 years as wrestling coach at Lehigh University, set on a mountain overlooking Bethlehem Steel’s Bethlehem plant.

In 1917 Schwab decided to boost war productivity with baseball, a sport far more popular in America than soccer. He authorized a league for Bethlehem Steel workers to keep them fit and happy while they helped make 60 percent of US guns and 65 percent of military materials and munitions for US allies. The next year the league was opened to major-leaguers who, like other males aged 18 to 45, were ordered by the War Department to fight or work in an “essential” military industry. Schwab left expansion details to Eugene Grace, Bethlehem Steel’s president and an ace shortstop for Lehigh. After hitting .400 as a senior in 1899, he was offered $200 a month from the Boston Braves. He rejected the contract for $45 a month as a Bethlehem Steel crane operator.

The new, improved Steel League began its season in May 1918, the month it signed its first marquee major-leaguer. Shoeless Joe Jackson was one of baseball’s best
... players, a five-tool outfielder who had hit over .300 in all seven of his full-time seasons in the majors and had thrown out at least 28 runners in three seasons. His military eligibil-
ity had been recently upgraded, worrying him that he would be drafted and prevented from supporting his wife, mother, and crippled sister. On May 13 he exempted himself from
conscription by leaving the Chicago White Sox for Bethle-
hem Steel’s Harlan and Hollingsworth shipyard in Wilming-
ton, Delaware, a decade after he had worked and played for a textile mill in his native West Greenville, South Carolina.

Jackson’s more patriotic peers scorned him for avoiding military service by escaping to the “Safe Shelter League.” He was called a coward, a traitor, and worse. A Chicago Tribune
writer delivered the lowest blow, declaring that the White Sox star sullied the noble name of another Jackson — Thom-
as Jonathan “Stonewall,” the fabled Confederate general.

Jackson’s detractors might have been kinder had they known that his military industrial labor was truly essential. According to a Delaware Historical Journal paper by Peter T. Dalleo and J. Vincent Watchorn, Jackson worked 44 hours a week supervising a riveting gang that helped build a record 24 war ships for the Emergency Fleet Corporation, which supervised American shipbuilding and was supervised by none other than Charles Schwab. The outfielder also raised money for the Red Cross while moonlighting in Sunday games for the Reading Steel and Casting Company. He and other Reading players were praised for stopping over-
worked munitions workers from boozing away their one free day, halting the hangovers that caused them to work poorly or not at all on Mondays.

In June the Steel League welcomed its first marquee pitchers. Charles Monroe Tesreau, nicknamed “Jeff” because he resembled boxer Jim Jeffries, was a spitballer who would win 119 games with an impressive 2.43 ERA. He left the New York Giants for the Bethlehem factory team after feuding with manager John McGraw, a notorious drill ser-
gt. Hubert Benjamin Leonard, the ace for the Fore River
factory team, was a Red Sox refugee who in 1914 recorded a microscopic 0.96 ERA, still a record for starting pitchers. Nicknamed “Dutch” because he resembled a Dutchman, he was signed by Fore River general manager Joseph Kennedy, assistant manager of the shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts, and father of future politicians John F., Bobby, and Teddy.

Leonard left the Red Sox shortly after no-hitting the De-
troit Tigers. He left behind Babe Ruth, Boston’s top pitcher, who had won 67 games during his first four major-league seasons. That season Ruth played the outfield and first base for the first time, replacing teammates lost to injury or the war effort. He ended up logging 72 games as a non-pitcher, acquiring the extra at-bats that helped him top the American League in homers (11) and slugging percentage (.555). In 1918 he became baseball’s most talked-about player; that season he became “The Man.”

Assembled hurriedly and haphazardly, the Steel League
was wooly and wild enough to be called the Frontier
League. Lebanon had the best lineup, thanks to the key connections of manager Kelchner, who knew Ruth well as a St. Louis Browns scout. Kelchner, who worked full time as Albright College’s athletics director and Greek & Latin chairman, could call on Rogers “The Rajah” Hornsby, the St. Louis Cardinals’ outstanding infielder. A future Hall of Famer with a career batting average of .358, Hornsby actually worked for Bethlehem Steel’s plant in Reading. Kelchner’s pitching staff was anchored by Cleveland Indians
righty Stan Coveleski, a spit-balling iron man who that season pitched all 19 innings of a win over the New York Yan-
kees. He would win 215 games with a 2.89 ERA and enter the Hall of Fame in 1969 as a Veterans Committee selection.

The Bethlehem team had the most ecumenical roster.
Manager Tom Keady, the winningest football coach in Le-
high University history, signed 45-year-old outfielder James
Bentley “Cy” Seymour, a two-way star like Ruth who hit .303 and won 61 games as a pitcher; Lehigh graduate Edwin
Parker “Cy” Twombly, a minor major-league pitcher (1-2
for the 1921 White Sox) better known as the father of Cy
Twombly Jr., a major Abstract Expressionist, and three
of the 160-plus Jews who have played in the major leagues.

The most illustrious member of this tribe was Al Schacht,
who made a minor impression as a pitcher (14-10 with a 4.48 ERA for the 1919-21 Washington Senators) and a major
impression as the first “Clown Prince of Baseball,” mugg-
ging with a massive catcher’s mitt and paddling infield
puddles with bats. Born on the future site of Yankee Stadi-
um, he later owned a popular midtown Manhattan restaurant and popped up in the film Breakfast at Tiffany’s.

The league’s most notable players participated in the
most notable events. In a July game at Lehigh, Dutch
Leonard outdueled Jeff Tesreau, striking out 18 batters in a 2-0 win. Jackson stole three bases in an inning against Fore
River and was picked off in two games by Tesreau. Jackson
appeared in a game replayed because of an ineligible player and a game protested because a game-tying ground-rule
double into an overflow crowd was ruled a game-winning
triple. Still another game featured a minstrel show that fe-
tured Jackson.

The Steel League was covered slavishly by The Globe,
a Bethlehem daily and an ancestor of my first newspaper
employer, The Globe-Times, where I began as a sports writer
and ended as the arts editor. No base was left undusted by
John Nonnemacher, The Globe’s chief sports scribe. He
chronicled the Bethlehem factory team’s exhibition games
against Camp Merritt, which was led by catcher Hank
Gowdy, who hit the only homer in the 1914 World Series
for the victorious Boston Braves, and the Brooklyn Royal

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Giants, a stalwart Negro League squad managed by John Henry “Pop” Lloyd, a 1977 Hall of Fame shortstop celebrated as the “Black Honus Wagner.” He reported that Bethlehem manager Tom Keady worked in Bethlehem Steel’s open hearth and was recruited to become YMCA Army physical director by Walter Camp, the legendary football coach. After Dutch Leonard struck out 18 Bethlehem batters, he raved about the lefty’s “wonderful physique.” Indulging in the era’s extravagant prose, Nonnemacher elevated batters to “sticksmiths,” pitchers to “slab artists” and very fast fastballs to “horse-hide pellets.”

Another lively Steel League messenger was The Bethlehem Booster, a new newsletter for rank-and-file workers at Bethlehem Steel’s home plant. The publication ran a photo of Steelton pitcher Eddie Plank looking forlorn after Bethlehem gave him an “awful drubbing” in a 13-hit, 6-0 victory. An anonymous Booster writer praised the gentlemanly demeanor of Plank, a Buick dealer in his native Gettysburg who had retired in 1917 after winning 326 games for the Philadelphia Athletics and two St. Louis teams.

The photo of Plank, a 1946 Hall of Famer, generated great buzz. The picture was so popular, in fact, the next issue of The Booster carried a portrait of an even more popular player. Bethlehem shortstop Sam Fishburn, a 1917 Lehigh graduate, was saluted for his four hits, or “bingles,” in a win over Jackson’s Wilmington team. “Besides being a good ball player,” the Booster writer concluded, “Sam is a first-rate accountant and also recites poetry.”

The Steel League ended its regular season on Labor Day, the same day the major leagues ended their war-shortened season. Not surprisingly, Jackson finished first in hitting (.393) and stolen bases (eight). Surprisingly, he insisted that batting in the Steel League was harder than batting in the American League. Fishburn finished second in stolen bases (seven) and first in sacrifices (12). His clutch performances helped Bethlehem tie Steelton for the top record (11-8), entitling the teams to play a best-of-three series for the championship.

The first playoff game, held September 7 at Steelton, was a Red Cross benefit. Steelton won 2-1 before an overflow crowd in which fans lined left-center field. The second playoff took place in Bethlehem on September 14, three days after the Red Sox had won the World Series. Starting time was moved back to give Bethlehem Steel middle shifters an extra half-hour to lunch and nap. General admission cost a quarter, a bleacher seat two quarters and a grandstand seat a buck. Proceeds paid for tobacco for soldiers.

The massive audience spilled onto the tennis courts by Bethlehem Steel Athletic Field, christened in 1913 as the first American soccer stadium with seats. Spectators were treated to a nail-biter won in the 10th inning when Steelton second baseman Joe McCarthy tripled home three runs. In 1931 he would become manager of a Yankees’ dynasty, supervising seven championships in 15 full seasons and ensuring his 1957 election to the Hall of Fame.

McCarthy and his Steelton comrades received gold watches for winning the Steel League title. Joe Jackson received a smaller prize for helping Wilmington win the Atlantic Coast shipyard championship. Playing on September 14 in the Baker Bowl, home to the Philadelphia Phillies, he hit two homers to support a shutout by Claude “Lefty” Williams, who had won 17 games the previous
Continued from page 8

season for the White Sox. Jackson’s second round-tripper was saluted with $1 bills tossed by workers sitting in box seats. Jackson handed the reported $60 windfall to his wife behind home plate.

The Steel League accepted its first superstar on September 23, when Babe Ruth signed with the Lebanon factory team. Recruited by Pop Kelchner, he was sweet-talked by catcher Sam Agnew, his Red Sox batterymate and good friend. Ruth came to Lebanon riding an emotional roller coaster. In two months his father had died; he had won two World Series games, extending his Series record of consecutive scoreless innings to 29 2/3; and he had been hammered by the 1918 flu that killed approximately 675,000 Americans, including Fore River pitcher Dave Roth, a minor-leaguer who had led the Steel League with seven wins.

Three days later Ruth made his Lebanon debut against a team of shipyard all-stars. Playing first base and batting cleanup, he struck out twice and walked intentionally against Scott Perry, who finished 20–19 for the 1918 Philadelphia A’s. The next day Ruth played in Reading for a Reading Steel and Casting team that also featured Joe Jackson and Rogers Hornsby. Ruth went 0–2 but redeemed himself with three innings of nifty relief pitching.

Jackson earned a $20 bonus for the game’s only homer, extending a lucky streak started by his brothers, who used to collect as much as $25 a game by passing the hats after a teenaged Joe hit four-baggers for their South Carolina textile-mill team.

Ruth played only one game for Lebanon, skipping an October 12 exhibition against a barnstorming team with four of his Red Sox teammates. Yet he left a big footprint during his short stay in Lebanon, according to an unpublished book of his Red Sox teammate and good friend. Instead of delivering souvenirs for youngsters. Yet the scout remained delighted by the memory of a truly majestic, truly memorable homer that Ruth had fungoed all of Lebanon’s batting-practice balls out of the ballpark, fulfilling his promise of souvenirs for youngsters. Yet the scout remained delighted by the memory of a truly majestic, truly memorable homer that Ruth had hit off a batting-practice pitcher.

According to Gary Gates’ manuscript about Ruth’s Lebanon sojourn, the ball soared over the bleachers of the Bethlehem Steel stadium, over the clubhouse, over a creek, and over a warehouse roof that doubled as a grandstand for steelworkers. Eyewitnesses estimated that it carried 700 feet, 135 feet longer than the longest homer in an official major-league game. Mickey Mantle’s record-setting shot in 1953 bounced around a neighborhood in Washington, DC. Ruth’s moon blast landed in a train car headed for Ohio, making it, hypothetically and mythically, the longest homer ever recorded.

Even Paul Bunyan would have tipped his axe.
‘Ropes’ at the ready: defense attorney James O’Brien

By Bill Lamb
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When those accused of corrupting the 1919 World Series went on trial, their defense was manned by a cadre of able and experienced criminal trial lawyers. Of these, perhaps the best known to the public was James C. O’Brien, lead counsel for former White Sox first baseman and reputed fix ringleader Chick Gandil.

O’Brien, however, was a newcomer to defense work, having spent most of the previous decade as a prosecutor of high-profile criminal cases, particularly homicides. O’Brien’s power to persuade Chicago juries to sentence convicted killers to death via the gallows had earned him a fearsome courthouse nickname: Ropes.

But as the Black Sox proceedings began in late June 1921, whether the courtroom skills that O’Brien had demonstrated as a prosecutor would translate into effective representation of the criminally accused was an unanswered question.

Although the surviving record is incomplete, analysis of what we do have suggests that O’Brien’s performance in the Black Sox case was no more than adequate, and that he was outshined by several of his peers. Still, Gandil’s acquittal got O’Brien off to a good start as a criminal defense specialist, attracting a number of well-heeled clients to his door. During the mid-1920s, he also briefly resumed work as a prosecutor, serving as a special state’s attorney in a headline-grabbing official misconduct/homicide probe.

Sadly, a professional malfeasance charge lodged against O’Brien cast a pall on the final days of his career. Cited as one of 47 lawyers who had accepted unearned compensation from Chicago’s notoriously corrupt city sanitation commission, O’Brien was fighting a disbarment petition when a stroke brought his life to a sudden end in November 1931.

James Collins O’Brien was born in Brockville, Ontario, on May 13, 1874, the only child of stationary engineer John P. O’Brien (1849-1897), both native Canadians of Irish Catholic descent. Time and distance shroud young Jim O’Brien’s early life. About all that can safely be said is that he grew up in Toronto, was educated locally, and remained at home until departing for Chicago at the time of the famous World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. Several years later, his parents joined him there, and Jim and his father would live under the same roof for the next 30 years.

By 1900, the younger O’Brien was a naturalized US citizen, a graduate of the Chicago College of Law, and admitted to legal practice in the State of Illinois. He had also become active in local Democratic Party politics and the Chicago chapter of the Knights of Columbus, a nationwide Catholic fraternal organization. That June, Jim O’Brien also altered his domestic situation, marrying Chicago native Margaret Powers. Soon, he and Maggie would begin the family that eventually expanded to seven children.

O’Brien began his legal career as a solo practitioner, handling whatever business — criminal, civil, matrimonial — came into his office. In 1908, he was an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the Illinois State Senate. His time in public service commenced in 1910 when he was appointed to the staff of Chicago corporation counsel James Hamilton Lewis. Two years later, newly elected Cook County State’s Attorney Maclay Hoyne selected O’Brien as one of his assistants.

In short order, O’Brien established himself as a courtroom standout and was soon assigned to prominent cases, often homicides. A fiery orator always attired with a red cravat for his closing argument, O’Brien’s show-him-no-mercy summations struck a responsive chord with Windy City juries. When convicted murderer James Franche was sentenced to death in November 1914, he was the third defendant prosecuted by O’Brien to be sent to the hangman in a three-week span. In time, “Ropes” secured death sentences for no fewer than 18 convicted killers.

O’Brien was not among the staff attorneys assigned to the Cook County grand jury probe of the 1919 World Series. That inquiry was led by ASAs Hartley Replogle and Ota P. Lightfoot. At that time, O’Brien and ASA John Prystalski, frequently his co-counsel in top priority prosecutions, were engaged in the high-profile murder trial of Carl Wanderer, accused of the cunning and cold-hearted slaying of his pregnant wife and a hapless stranger lured to the crime scene. Striving to keep the unsympathetic Wanderer from the gallows were private law firm partners Benedict J. Short and George Guenther. The following summer, these same four attorneys would be allied in defense of the Black Sox.

While Replogle and Lightfoot were engrossed in the World Series probe and O’Brien and Prystalski were busy with the Wanderer trial, a third development of consequence occurred in the Black Sox case. Their boss, Maclay Hoyne, lost his bid to be re-nominated for a third term as Cook County State’s Attorney in the Democratic Party primary.
That November, a nationwide Republican electoral tide swept the incumbent staff out of the office. Incoming State’s Attorney Robert E. Crowe, a recently retired Chicago judge and partisan Republican, would be appointing an entirely new staff of assistants upon assuming office on December 1. By that time and to much public dismay, Wanderer had been convicted only of the crime of manslaughter in his wife’s slaying. O’Brien castigated the jury, denouncing its verdict and the 25-year sentence imposed on Wanderer. “What absurdity! What ineptitude!” exclaimed the bitterly disappointed prosecutor. Shortly thereafter, O’Brien, Prystalski, and SAO colleague John Owen left the office to form their own three-member law firm.

The original indictments returned by the Cook County grand jury in the Black Sox case were published on October 29, 1920. Some two months later, O’Brien’s connection to the matter commenced when he was retained by American League President Ban Johnson to represent league interests during the upcoming proceedings. But by the time a prosecution motion to adjourn the trial was heard in March 1921, O’Brien had switched sides. He now appeared in court as lead defense counsel for player defendant Chick Gandil.

Of necessity, court representation of the American League had to be transferred to another attorney, recently hired former Chicago judge George F. Barrett. In the run-up to the scheduled late-June start of the Black Sox trial, O’Brien does not appear to have been deeply involved in the formulation of the scorched earth/concede-nothing trial tactics that would be adopted by the accused. Nor was he the author of the blizzard of pretrial motions dumped upon prosecutors. That was the work of Zork co-counsel Henry A. Berger. Rather, O’Brien seems to have devoted himself to other law firm business, making speeches to downstate gatherings of the Knights of Columbus, and dealing with personal tragedy: the April death of his first-born daughter, Mary Margaret, at age 20.

Despite his formidable courtroom reputation, O’Brien was far from the best of the Black Sox lawyers. The most vocal was veteran litigator Ben Short, lead attorney for player defendants Joe Jackson and Lefty Williams. The most effective was the team of A. Morgan Frumberg and Berger, co-counsel for gambler defendant Carl Zork.

Still, O’Brien’s cross-examination of star prosecution witnesses Bill Burns and Billy Maharg was no more ineffectual than that of other defense counsel. None of the Black Sox lawyers really laid much of a glove on the pair. Unlike counsel for other defendants, O’Brien did not seek dismissal of the charges against his client after the prosecution had rested its case. O’Brien explained his position thusly: “I am going to put Gandil on the stand and he will make categorical denial of everything they charge against him. We want our vindication from the jury.”

Other defense lawyers announced that Buck Weaver, Swede Risberg, and Happy Felsch were also definitely taking the stand. But that would have to wait. The gambler defendants were going first.

Gambler defendant David Zelcer led off with complete denial of involvement in the plot to fix the 1919 World Series. But Zelcer was wounded by effective cross-examination that placed him in intimate association with absent scandal villain Abe Attell, and by the shredding of a partial alibi defense that Zelcer had asserted. After seeing the Zelcer defense wobble, Frumberg and Berger wisely kept Zork off the stand. Instead, they offered a parade of character witnesses from St. Louis who attested to their client’s civic virtue, and credible fact witnesses who largely nullified the testimony of the only witness (East St. Louis theater owner/gambler Harry Redmon) who had implicated Zork in the fix. Then, it was the turn of the Gandil defense.

O’Brien preceded advertised testimony from Chick by putting on former White Sox teammates Nemo Leibold and Shano Collins, plus Reds pitcher Dutch Ruether, all of whom were expected to cast doubt upon the notion that Gandil and the other accused had performed badly during the Series. But in a legally dubious ruling, Judge Hugo Friend prohibited the ballplayers from offering their expert opinion on the caliber of the defendants’ Series play. Thereafter, testimony by White Sox manager Kid Gleason and Clean Sox Eddie Collins, Ray Schalk, Dickey Kerr, and Roy Wilkinson put in question the timing of a fix meeting in Cincinnati described by Bill Burns. Subsequent testimony by Gandil apartment superintendent Albert Kafka was intended to place in question prosecution proofs regarding a prior fix gathering in Chicago’s Warner Hotel, but had little apparent effect.

With the stage now set for Chick to testify, O’Brien abruptly rested the Gandil defense. The remaining player defendants thereupon rested their cases, as well. Little public explanation was provided for this unanticipated change in defense strategy. All that could be gotten from counsel was the comment that it was not necessary to put the players on the witness stand because “the state has made no case.”

The suddenness of the defense ending left prosecutors scrambling to get rebuttal witnesses to court. But given that the players had offered little actual defense, Judge Friend excluded most of the prosecution’s proffered rebuttal evidence. The proof-taking portion of the trial ended shortly thereafter.

A century ago, longwinded oratory was a staple of the American courtroom. Given ten hours for their closing speeches to the jury, defense counsel apportioned their remarks by subject. Picking up where Zork attorney Frumberg left off, O’Brien continued the defense assault on AL
President Ban Johnson, portraying him as anxious to conceal endemic levels of gambling on baseball by having the Series fix portrayed as an isolated event. As for the accused players, O’Brien maintained that their status in the eyes of the public stood undiminished, for “these boys are not fallen idols or broken idols. Send them back to Comiskey Park and listen to the applause that will come from the grandstand.”

The effect of defense orations on the jury is unknown. Suffice it to say that the jurors acquitted all those accused, including Chick Gandil, after deliberating less than three hours. Newly installed baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was among the multitude unimpressed with the jury’s judgment. Less than a day after the courthouse verdict was rendered, Landis issued his famous edict permanently banning Chick Gandil and the other Black Sox from Organized Baseball.

Gandil was not among the banished players who subsequently filed suit against the White Sox. He therefore had no further need of O’Brien’s services. For his part, the lawyer moved on, as well. For the next several years, he and his partners handled legal matters for good-paying clients which garnered little press attention. The law firm of O’Brien, Prystalski & Owen dissolved in 1924, with each of the attorneys going into solo practice thereafter.

In 1926, the murder of high-profile Cook County ASA William McSwiggin brought O’Brien temporarily back into the public spotlight. The dashing young McSwiggin and two childhood friends (who happened to be bootlegger rivals of Al Capone) were killed in a spray of machine gun fire outside a Cicero speakeasy. Public outcry about the crime, as well as the unseemly association of McSwiggin with known criminals, led to the appointment of former Chicago judge Charles A. McDonald as special prosecutor. McDonald, in turn, chose O’Brien to be one of his two assistants in the investigation.

It was widely speculated that McSwiggin had been an incidental casualty in a Prohibition Era beer war between local gangsters, and several suspects, including Capone himself, were briefly charged with the prosecutor’s murder. “I didn’t kill McSwiggin,” protested Scarface Al. “I liked the kid. Why, the day before he was bumped off, he was up to my place. I gave him a bottle of Scotch for his old man.”

In July 1931, a final burst of press attention was visited upon O’Brien. He was one of 47 lawyers accused of accepting unearned compensation from the Chicago Sanitary Board, a public utility whose dispensation of multi-million dollar construction contracts made it a sinkhole of corruption. Various sanctions were available to the Illinois Bar Association, with Judge Thomas Taylor, the inquiry overseer, recommending disbarment for O’Brien.

While awaiting a disciplinary hearing, O’Brien continued to practice law, appearing before the Illinois Supreme Court to argue for a new trial for thuggish Leo Brothers, convicted of killing Chicago Tribune crime reporter Jake Lingle. Serving as O’Brien’s co-counsel on the Brothers appeal was his son Bud (James C., Jr.), a recently admitted attorney.

A month after this proud professional collaboration, O’Brien was dead, the victim of a massive stroke suffered at his Chicago home. James Collins “Ropes” O’Brien was 57. Following a Requiem Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows Church, his remains were interred at Mt. Carmel Cemetery in nearby Hillsdale. Survivors included wife Maggie, his son, and five daughters.

Sources
The biographical information provided herein comes primarily from US and Canada census data; O’Brien family posts accessed via Ancestry.com, and the reportage of Chicago newspapers. The personal opinions offered in certain of the endnotes below are based on more than 30 years of courtroom experience as a state and county prosecutor in New Jersey.

Notes
1. Mother Mary Collins O’Brien died in Chicago in December 1897.
2. The O’Brien children were Mary Margaret (born 1901), Alice (1904), James C., Jr. (called Bud, 1906), Margaret (1908), Rita (1914), Katherine (1917), and Janeann (1924).
3. Downstate newspapers took to nicknaming him “Red Necktie Jimmy.” See e.g., the (Springfield) Illinois State
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Journal, July 28, 1919, and (Springfield) Illinois State Register, April 18, 1921.

4. Rockford Republic, November 24, 1914. The two previously condemned defendants were Joseph Esposito and Roswell F.C. Smith.


6. As a rule, Prystalski did most of the trial preparation work and shared cross-examination duties with his case partner. The prosecution’s final argument to the jury, however, was invariably reserved for “Ropes” O’Brien, clad in his signature red necktie.

7. As in most jurisdictions, criminal trial law in Chicago was practiced by only a small segment of the bar. With the notable exception of trial judge Hugo M. Friend, virtually all the professional actors — prosecutors, defense counsel, and jurists — involved in Black Sox case-related proceedings were long acquainted.

8. With an entirely different courtroom cast of characters, Wanderer was subsequently tried for the murder of the never-conclusively-identified second victim (usually called “the ragged man” by the Chicago press) found dead at the crime scene. This time Wanderer was convicted of murder, sentenced to death, and executed in September 1921.


10. The original indictments were administratively dismissed by SA Crowe in March 1921. Superseding indictments which added five new gambler defendants were returned by the grand jury days thereafter.


12. Reportage of the early proceedings often listed John Prystalski as Gandil co-counsel, but Prystalski did not appear for the defense during the trial phase of the case. A photograph taken during a trial recess depicts third law firm partner John Owen in conversation with Gandil and O’Brien, but he, too, took no active part in the Black Sox courtroom proceedings.

13. Chicago Journal, March 14, 1921. That Barrett, the older brother of behind-the-scenes AL counsel Charles V. Barrett, needed time to familiarize himself with the record was among the grounds asserted in support of the prosecution’s continuance motion, denied by Judge William E. Dever. Why O’Brien was admitted to the Black Sox defense is unclear, as ethical rules prohibited an attorney like O’Brien from representing a client (Gandil) whose interests in the case were adverse to those of a former O’Brien client (the American League). See Canon 6, Illinois State Bar Association Canons of Professional Ethics, adopted June 24, 1910.

14. More than a decade earlier, Short had been the First Assistant Cook County ASA and was a highly experienced criminal defense lawyer. Although Eddie Cicotte was nominally defended by his friend and personal attorney, Detroit civil practitioner Daniel Cassidy, Short was also effectively trial counsel for Cicotte, as well.

15. In the writer’s opinion. Frumberg and Berger also represented gambler defendant Ben Franklin, previously excused from trial on grounds of illness.

16. In the case of Billy Maharg at least, no extra demerits should be assigned to defense counsel. In the author’s experience, the most difficult kind of testimony to undermine on cross-examination is that of a witness who is both stupid and telling the truth.

17. On motion of defense counsel Max Luster, the charges against gambler defendants Ben and Lou Levi were dismissed mid-trial on grounds of evidential insufficiency. Judge Friend also reserved judgment on dismissal applications made by defense counsel Thomas Nash for player defendants Buck Weaver and Happy Felsch, and by the Zork defense.


19. As reported in the Chicago Herald Examiner, Los Angeles Times, and elsewhere on July 27, 1921. Eddie Cicotte, Joe Jackson, and Lefty Williams had testified out of the jury’s presence in support of an unsuccessful mid-trial defense motion to preclude prosecution use of their grand jury testimony. Defense counsel Short, however, was non-committal about having any of the trio testify before the jury, keeping his options open for the time being.

20. In the writer’s opinion, this is probably the only really questionable evidential ruling rendered by the court during a generally well-tried case.

21. As per an unidentified defense lawyer quoted in the Chicago Evening Post, July 29, 1921.

22. Little quarrel can be taken with the court’s ruling, but its consequences had devastating potential effect on the government’s case against Happy Felsch. For reasons unknown and mystifying, prosecutors had failed to present during their case-in-chief the testimony of Chicago American reporter Harry Reutlinger regarding Felsch’s admissions of fix guilt to him days after the scandal broke publicly. Because the Felsch defense rested without presenting any proof, Judge Friend rightly precluded the belated presentation of any prosecution rebuttal evidence against Felsch.

23. Chicago Evening Post and Chicago Herald Examiner, August 2, 1921.

24. Closing arguments often leave a deep impression on gallery spectators, the visiting press, and other courtroom tourists. Their effect on jurors — who in real life begin making up their minds about guilt and innocence from the moment they are seated — is generally exaggerated. In the

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Reds to wear throwback 1919 World Series uniforms

The Cincinnati Reds will wear a replica of their 1919 World Series uniforms next season as part of their commemoration of 150 years of professional baseball in the Queen City.

On June 2, 2019, against the Washington Nationals, the Reds will don a pin-striped version of the same uniforms they wore in winning their first World Series championship a century ago. The 1919 World Series was marred by the revelation that eight players on the Chicago White Sox intentionally threw the Series after they were bribed by gamblers.

The 1919 uniforms are one of 15 “throwback” uniforms the Reds will be wearing next season, the sesquicentennial anniversary of the first openly professional baseball team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings of 1869. As part of the celebration, the Reds Hall of Fame and Museum is also getting a facelift and a new 1869 Pavilion will be dedicated in the southwest corner of the ballpark.

Mary Darling, an Albuquerque-based screenwriter, spoke at the SABR Black Sox Scandal committee meeting on June 21, 2018, in Pittsburgh. Her new project follows Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Red Oldham to the outlaw Copper League in New Mexico with banished ballplayers Hal Chase, Chick Gandil, Buck Weaver, and Lefty Williams. Listen to highlights from Mary’s talk at SABR.org/convention/2018.

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Black Sox case, the writer holds the view that defense and prosecution summations were wasted breath, and that the defendants’ acquittals, at least as the verdict pertained to Eddie Cicotte, Joe Jackson, and Lefty Williams, were the preordained product of juror nonfeasance. For more, see William Lamb, “Jury Nullification and the Not Guilty Verdicts in the Black Sox Case,” SABR Baseball Research Journal, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Fall 2015).


26. In the ten months preceding his death, ASA McSwiggin had obtained death sentences against seven murder defendants. Only 27, energetic, and fond of publicity, the slain prosecutor had gathered a substantial following among Chicago newspaper readers.

27. Five years earlier as presiding judge of the Chicago criminal courts, McDonald had impaneled the grand jury that returned the first set of indictments in the Black Sox case.

28. McDonald’s other assistant was Lloyd D. Heth, a former Cook County ASA and the prosecutor who had obtained the death sentence in the second trial of Carl Wanderer.


30. McDonald filed his final report on the McSwiggin murder investigation on July 15, 1927. Although the perpetrator(s) went unidentified, McDonald averred that McSwiggin’s death was unconnected to his work as a Chicago prosecutor. See the Chicago Tribune, July 16, 1927.

31. During the time in question, the board’s chief attorney was first former Cook County State’s Attorney Maclay Hoyne, then his successor Robert E. Crowe, each of whom blamed the other for the payroll padding. See “Crowe Did All the Hiring, Hoyne Testifies,” Chicago Tribune, January 5, 1932. In the end, Hoyne received a slap on the wrist, suspended from the practice of law for two years. Crowe was exonerated. Also emerging unscathed from the scandal investigation was Henry A. Berger. A colleague of O’Brien at the Cook County State’s Attorneys Office and a fellow Black Sox defense counsel, Berger had been appointed to the Chicago Sanitary Commission board only recently, not long enough to get his hands dirty before the scandal erupted.


33. Illinois State Journal, October 19, 1931. Young Bud Collins was seated at counsel table during the Supreme Court argument, but his father did all the talking on behalf of Brothers.

34. As reported in the Chicago Tribune, New York Times, and the Associated Press wire, November 20, 1931. O’Brien’s death had occurred the previous day.
Lyria Williams, wife of a baseball exile

Editor’s note: After Eddie Cicotte testified to his involvement in the 1919 World Series fix, he was asked why he went along with the bribery attempt. His response — “I did it for the wife and kiddies” — became one of the most infamous lines associated with the Black Sox Scandal. Little is known of these “wives and kiddies,” the women and children whose lives were up-ended when the players were banished from baseball. This series will focus on their stories.

By Jacob Pomrenke
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Decades after her ancestors moved west in search of a better life, Lyria Wilson struck out on her own. The strong-willed daughter of Mormon pioneers found love, in the form of major-league pitcher Claude “Lefty” Williams, but when her husband’s baseball career ended in disgrace in the Black Sox Scandal, they left Chicago and drifted west, too, forging a new life in California with the help of their religious faith.

Lyria’s independent spirit and resourceful nature carried her husband through his lowest moments, enabling Lefty to turn around his life and find a measure of peace in his later days. For someone whose early years were so bound in the traditions of a church that commanded its women to be “subservient and dependent,” Lyria’s path was an unlikely one. Perhaps the harshness of her family’s exile from their homeland prepared her for the tribulations she would face as the wife of a baseball outlaw.

Born on August 12, 1889, in Farmington, Utah, Lyria Leila Wilson was the youngest of Calvin and Emeline Wilson’s 15 children. She was born at the home of her maternal grandmother, Hannah Miller, after a fire destroyed her parents’ house in Hooper. Farmington was 20 miles south, about halfway between Hooper and Salt Lake City, where Brigham Young, president of the Mormon church, had led his followers in their exodus from the Midwest a half-century earlier.

Lyria’s grandparents were part of that fateful flight in the 1840s. Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, had set up his initial headquarters in Missouri, but hostilities with the locals drove them to establish a new religious colony, called Nauvoo, on the Mississippi River in western Illinois. Lyria’s father, Calvin Clinton Wilson, was born there on Christmas Day in 1842. He was the son of a blacksmith who had converted to Mormonism six years earlier.

A wave of anti-Mormon violence followed Smith’s adherents to Nauvoo and the church leader was arrested and murdered by a jailhouse mob in 1844. Brigham Young, Smith’s successor, made plans to evacuate the community of nearly 15,000 disciples in the spring of 1846 due to the ongoing persecution. Among the first wave of refugees to leave Illinois were Joseph and Hannah Miller, who traveled with Young’s caravan across the frozen Mississippi to begin a new life in the West.

Joseph Miller was appointed captain of a large group of 50 emigrants, while Hannah, with an infant son and five other children in tow, took charge of her family’s move across the harsh, desolate prairie. Each day, she drove a horse in front of four ox teams pulling wagons, kept track of the cows, chickens, and sheep they brought with them, and then cooked and cared for her family and others when they stopped for the night.

The Mormons set up their winter quarters along the Missouri River in present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa, where Young asked Joseph Miller and his brother to stay behind and help other families who were making the difficult overland journey on what is now known as the Mormon Pioneer Trail. More than 700 people died of exposure, malnutrition, and disease along the trail that winter.

Joseph Miller and his family arrived in the Utah territory in September 1848, just over a year after Brigham Young first reached the Salt Lake Valley and declared, “This is the right place.” The Millers built a two-room log cabin in Farmington, north of Salt Lake City, and Hannah quickly became pregnant again. Emeline Elizabeth Miller, Lyria’s mother, was born on May 1, 1849, the first of their children. ➤ Continued on page 16
born in the promised land. Over the next two decades, Joseph Miller continued to serve as a guide for the approximately 70,000 Mormons who made the long journey to Utah, traveling back along the trail several times to offer his assistance and expertise.

The Wilson family — including Lyria’s father, Calvin, who was 7 years old — was among that group of early settlers, traveling west from Pottawattamie County, Iowa, in the summer of 1850.7 Their trip was just as precarious as the Millers’ but much quicker overall, as they arrived in Utah in just under three months. As he grew up, Calvin worked on his father’s farm and later served in a cavalry company in the Utah territorial militia during the Black Hawk War against local native tribes.

On March 10, 1865, Calvin Wilson and Emeline Miller married in Salt Lake City and their first child, Sabrie, was born five months later. Thirteen of their fifteen children survived to adulthood. By the time Lyria came along 24 years later, Sabrie had already married and started her own family. Lyria became close to many of her nieces and nephews while growing up in Kanesville, a small community outside of Ogden, Utah.

One of Lyria’s older sisters, Jane Ann, married a performer from Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West traveling circus, George Streeter. His horse-riding ability helped him form a friendship with the rodeo impresario and he spent several years working alongside Cody and other legendary figures such as Butch Cassidy, Calamity Jane, and Billy the Kid before settling down in Utah and becoming a homebuilder.8

Education was a core value to Mormon families like the Wilsons, and all of their children attended primary and grammar schools into their teenage years. Lyria graduated from the eighth grade in a class of seven students at the Kanesville district school in the spring of 1903; their commencement ceremony was held at the majestic Ogden Tabernacle.9

That fall, she enrolled at Weber Stake Academy, a church-owned, coeducational, private high school10 on Jefferson Avenue in Ogden. The 15-year-old student’s love of learning was likely fostered here, and her courses would have included lessons in grammar, theology (including “the Book of Mormon”), arithmetic, geography (“with special reference to Utah and Weber County”), drawing, penmanship, orthography, reading, and U.S. history.11 Lyria later reported12 that she only spent two years in high school, so it’s unlikely she graduated from the academy.

Around this time, Lyria began to show more signs of expressing her independence, breaking away from the shackles of a religion that encouraged women to marry young and produce many children, as her older sisters, her mother, and her grandmothers had dutifully done. As a New Woman, that feminist ideal en vogue at the turn of the 20th century, Lyria fully realized the principles of self-determination and economic freedom that set her apart from the rest of the women in her family.

As one contemporary writer observed of her generation, “They have an amazing combination of wisdom and youthfulness, of humor and ability, and innocence and self-reliance. … They are of course all self-supporting and independent, and they enjoy the adventure of life; the full, reliant, audacious way in which they go about makes you wonder if the new woman isn’t to be a very splendid sort of person.”13

At the age of 18, Lyria began working as a waitress at the Kennedy Cafe, owned by Angus Kennedy, a prominent businessman who later opened up the town’s first Ford car dealership.14 Lyria’s connection to Kennedy also brought her into proximity with Ogden’s baseball team, as her boss was an officer on the semiprofessional club’s board of directors. A few years later, after Ogden built enough local support to field a team in the minor-league Union Association, their star shortstop was a teenage phenom from the Bay Area by the name of Swede

Emeline Wilson poses for a portrait with her nine daughters, circa 1903-07. The teenage Lyria Wilson is in the front row, center, with her arm on her mother’s knee. Pictured back row, left to right: Bathsheba, Abigail, Hannah; middle row: Sabrie, Jane, Emeline, Ina; front row: Gertrude, Lyria, Elsie. (Photo: Patricia Shahen.)

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Risberg. Swede and Lyria would cross paths again later.

In 1910, Lyria took a job as a waitress at a hotel in Milner, Idaho, a boom town south of the Snake River that flourished with the building of the Milner Dam, which brought irrigation water to the Twin Falls area. Milner’s grandest hotel — and Lyria’s most likely place of employment — was the Riverside Inn, a modern, three-story, steam-heated resort with elaborate chandeliers in every room, tennis courts, and a dance pavilion.

It’s unclear exactly how the 20-year-old daughter from a Mormon pioneer family found her way to this remote outpost full of tourists and businessmen, 150 miles north of home, but a clue may be discerned from the 1910 United States Census. Lyria appeared there twice, first in an entry recorded in mid-April back home in Ogden, where she was a waitress and living with her parents. In late May, Lyria showed up in the Census again, this time working at the hotel in Milner — along with another “hired girl,” Rosa McHenry, 25, from Utah. Rosa also showed up twice in the Census that spring; in April, she was living with her widowed mother just a few blocks down from the Wilsons’ home in Ogden. By May, she was working at the same hotel as Lyria in Milner. Perhaps the two young women went up to Idaho together for an exciting new adventure.

The opportunity must have been short-lived, because Lyria was back home and living with her parents again by the following spring. Calvin Wilson, retired from his farm, had turned their home on Harrick Avenue into a boarding house and rented out furnished rooms for $1.50 per week.

In 1913, Lyria’s father died at the age of 70 after suffering a fatal stroke in August.

In 1914, she began working as a manicurist at a swanky barber shop inside the headquarters of the prestigious Weber Club, a social club for prominent civic leaders in Ogden. The club took up the entire top floor of the brand-new Hudson Building, which opened with a lavish reception attended by Utah Gov. William Spry. Now called the Kiesel Building, it’s just a block away from the picturesque Lindquist Field, where Ogden’s minor-league baseball team plays today.

Down in Salt Lake City, a new minor-league team moved to town before the 1915 season and its star pitcher, Claude Williams, would change Lyria’s life. The 22-year-old Williams, a hard-throwing left-hander from Springfield, Missouri, was in his fifth year as a professional ballplayer. He had made a few brief appearances with the Detroit Tigers before he was sent back to the minors for more seasoning. His performance with the Salt Lake Bees of the Pacific Coast League would turn heads — none more so than a 25-year-old waitress at a downtown hotel — and send him back to the major leagues for good.

Lyria landed a job that spring as a waitress at the Hotel Utah, a “noble white palace” with one of the finest bars in an otherwise mostly dry city, a feature that would have attracted ballplayers from the Bees and visiting Coast League teams during the baseball season.

Lefty Williams, a slender, introverted Southerner, and Lyria Wilson, a tall, vivacious, educated woman from a prominent pioneer family, were an unlikely match on the surface. Her intellectual curiosity and independence set her apart from most baseball wives. During the 1919 World Series, one reporter observed, “I liked [Lyria] immensely because she had something in her head besides a cold.” Lefty and Lyria’s differing natures brought them together and complemented one another throughout their lives.

While Lefty was dominating the Pacific Coast League in 1915, winning 33 games with a league-leading 294 strikeouts for the Bees, he began a courtship with Lyria, writing frequent letters to her as he traveled throughout the West. His stellar performance earned him an invitation to spring training with the Chicago White Sox. Williams remained in Salt Lake City for the winter before reporting to the major-league team. He made the White Sox roster on Opening Day and quickly established himself as one of the top strikeout pitchers in the American League.

Off the field, he and Lyria decided that the distance between Salt Lake City and Chicago was too far for either of them. A few weeks into the season, she boarded a train and left for the Windy City. The couple quietly married on June 6, 1916, after the White Sox’s scheduled game was called off because of rain. No one in the team’s clubhouse except catcher Byrd Lynn, Williams’ best friend and roommate, was even aware of their wedding.

The newlyweds had no time for a proper honeymoon, as the groom was back at the ballpark the following day. On June 16, the Williamses celebrated by entertaining guests with a dinner at the Blackstone Hotel on Michigan Avenue. Lefty’s marital bliss seemed to lift his performance on the field, as he won his next five starts in a row, throwing his first major-league shutout on July 1 against the Detroit Tigers and another the following week against the Boston Red Sox. One reporter observed, “Mrs. Williams seems to have inspired her young husband to hop in and work even harder. He’s been doing some high-class southpawing for the White Sox to date.”

In 1917, Lefty opened the season on another long winning streak, helping lead the White Sox to the American League pennant, while Lyria settled into her new life in Chicago. She attended many games at Comiskey Park and made fast friends with Katie Wynn Jackson, the wife of Shoeless Joe Jackson; the two couples kept up a regular correspondence for the rest of their lives.

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That championship season was the pinnacle of the Williamses' life in baseball. Lefty made just one appearance during the World Series, but he and the other White Sox players were rewarded with a $3,669 bonus for winning it all — more than double his annual salary during the season. If Lefty was like most of his married teammates, he might have “purchased something in the way of diamond rings or pins” for Lyria in New York City to celebrate the World Series victory over the Giants.

The specter of World War I loomed over the 1918 baseball season. After the US government issued a “work or fight” order that forced all major-league players to join the military or take an essential defense-industry job, even married players like Lefty Williams — originally exempt from the military draft since his wife depended on his income — were forced to step away from baseball. In June, Lefty left the White Sox to work at the Harlan & Hollingsworth shipyard in Wilmington, Delaware, where he and Lyria shared a rooming house with Joe and Katie Jackson. Williams and Jackson spent most of their time playing ball for Harlan’s company team, which they led to the championship of the Delaware River Shipbuilding League. When the war ended, they all returned to Chicago and the White Sox resumed their winning ways, capturing their second American League pennant in three years. This trip to the World Series proved to be a far different experience than in 1917, and Lyria found herself embroiled in the controversy along with her husband.

A few weeks before the 1919 World Series began, Williams was approached by first baseman Chick Gandil and invited to join a plot with Joe Jackson, Swede Risberg, and four other teammates to throw the Series to the Cincinnati Reds. Lefty agreed to participate for a payoff of $10,000 from the gamblers financing the fix, although he only received half of that sum in the end. “I had no money and I might as well get what I could,” he said later.

According to Lefty’s grand-jury testimony, Lyria was infuriated when she found out about the deal. “You have done it,” she told her husband after seeing the $5,000 in cash he was paid after Game Four. “What can I say now? Let it go and just get the best of it.” Later, there were widespread reports that Lyria had placed bets against the White Sox in a Chicago poolroom during the Series, and it was rumored that she might also be called to testify to the grand jury. She denied the accusation, telling a Chicago American reporter that she considered it bad luck to bet when her husband was pitching and that she had been attending the theater with Katie Jackson at the time she was accused of gambling.

In the same interview, Lyria recalled attending Game Five at Comiskey Park, when the Reds beat Williams and the White Sox, 5-0. She said she got “so excited that I cut my hand on the railing. When [center fielder] Happy Felsch misjudged that fly ball, I could have jumped out of the box and killed him on the spot.” She defended her husband’s integrity, saying, “I never knew of a man who worked so hard to win when he was sent in to pitch.”

Lefty did his part to earn the bribe money, losing all three of his starts against the Reds to set an ignominious World Series record that still stands. In the final game, he was yanked after just five batters as Cincinnati erupted for four hits and four runs in the first inning to clinch its first championship.

It is widely believed that a threat was made against either Lefty or Lyria’s life before the final game, but there is little evidence to substantiate that claim. Lyria said years later that Lefty was fearful of retaliation if he didn’t lose quickly and decisively. “It’ll be the biggest first inning you ever saw,” one gambler predicted before the game, perhaps insinuating that Williams was warned to put the game out of reach early. But Williams testified later that he pitched to win; he also told teammate Eddie Cicotte during the Series “that he was out to win because he had been double-crossed” by gamblers for the rest of his promised payoff.

Lefty Williams and the other seven players involved in the World Series fix were permanently banned for their role in the Black Sox Scandal. At the age of 27, his professional baseball career was over and so was his primary means of supporting his wife.

In the years following his banishment, life was a constant struggle for the couple. Lyria went back to work as a waitress at the Seafoam Restaurant at 22nd Street and...
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Michigan Avenue to help make ends meet. Lefty took odd jobs around Chicago as a painter, a department store floorman, and a tile-fitter, but none of them lasted for long. He began drinking more and their marriage suffered. In 1923, he reportedly suffered a serious bout of pneumonia that landed him in the hospital and nearly killed him.\footnote{The following year, with Lefty still drinking heavily, Lyria kicked him out of the house and they separated.} The following year, with Lefty still drinking heavily, Lyria kicked him out of the house and they separated.\footnote{Lefty moved away from Chicago to hook up with his old teammates, Chick Gandil and Buck Weaver, as they played baseball together in an “outlaw” league based in the Southwest. Lefty spent two summers pitching in the Copper League for teams in Douglas, Arizona, and Fort Bayard, New Mexico. In the latter town, he held down a steady job in the motor-vehicle division of the military hospital there.}

Lyria, no longer working outside the home, put her boundless mental energy to other uses. Over the years she developed a reputation as a civic gadfly and a community activist; she often appeared at city council meetings questioning zoning changes, street pavings, and other neighborhood proposals.\footnote{In the early 1930s, Lyria also began turning back to religion, although not with the Mormon faith in which she had been raised. Instead, she became involved in the Christian Science church, where she and Lefty volunteered in some capacity with their local branch. Her church connections compelled them to move west — together this time — to California around 1937. The Williamses were among the more than 1 million Americans who migrated to the “land of opportunity” during the Great Depression.}

Lyria Williams, left, and Katie Jackson made fast friends when their husbands, Lefty Williams and Shoeless Joe Jackson, played with the Chicago White Sox. The two couples kept up a regular correspondence for the rest of their lives. (Photo: BlackBetsy.com.)

The Williamses settled first in Burbank, where they were surrounded by members of her family. Three of Lyria’s siblings and several of her nieces and nephews lived in the San Fernando Valley at that time. One of her brothers, Lawrence Wilson, likely helped Lefty get a job as a truck driver.\footnote{In 1954, Lefty and Lyria moved about 80 miles south to Laguna Beach, where he opened a nursery business. The couple bought a hillside beach cottage in the historic Coast Royal neighborhood of South Laguna, with a view of the Pacific Ocean — and, on clear days, Catalina Island — from their front window.}

Lyria, no longer working outside the home, put her boundless mental energy to other uses. Over the years she developed a reputation as a civic gadfly and a community activist; she often appeared at city council meetings questioning zoning changes, street pavings, and other neighborhood proposals.\footnote{During World War II, Lefty and Lyria relocated for a few years — although it’s unclear exactly why — to Pearblossom, a remote area in the Antelope Valley north of Los Angeles. Lefty worked as a carpenter and he also tried his hand at gardening at their modest property off Pearblossom Highway. They lived a few miles from the ranch of eccentric author Aldous Huxley, who had moved to California’s High Desert for the cleaner air.}

Lefty and Lyria also maintained their close friendship with Joe and Katie Jackson over the years and visited each other occasionally. In an interview late in his life, Shoeless Joe told a reporter that “none of the other banned White Sox have had it quite as good as I have … unless it is Williams. He is a big Christian Science Church worker out on the West Coast.”\footnote{When Jackson died in 1951, the Williamses wired their condolences to his widow. After the Black Sox Scandal returned to the headlines a few years later, Lyria sent a feisty letter to Katie lamenting the media attention: “You sure have trouble with the newspaper men in the South. They don’t seem to have much to write about if they have to dig up the old scandal. … I am glad they do not know where we are. We would send them chasing if they came here.”}

That letter also offers a tiny window into the Williamses’ feelings on what happened in 1919. Lefty gave no known interviews about the World Series fix afterward, but in Lyria’s letter to Katie Jackson nearly four decades later, she wrote, “It has been such a long time [that the scandal] never enters our existence and it does not seem like it was us. We have outlived it and it does not bother us now what anyone thinks or says.”\footnote{In 1954, Lefty and Lyria moved about 80 miles south to Laguna Beach, where he opened a nursery business. The couple bought a hillside beach cottage in the historic Coast Royal neighborhood of South Laguna, with a view of the Pacific Ocean — and, on clear days, Catalina Island — from their front window.}

Lefty suffered from the effects of Hodgkin’s disease in his final years. At the age of 66, he died at home on November 4, 1959, less than a month after the White Sox lost to the Los Angeles Dodgers in the team’s first World Series since the Black Sox Scandal. A Christian Science funeral was held for Lefty, and his ashes were interred in
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an unmarked location at Melrose Abbey Memorial Park in Anaheim.60

Following the death of her husband of 43 years, Lyria remained in Southern California for the rest of her life. She stayed in contact with her surviving siblings and her many nieces61 and nephews, and kept her mind active by writing letters to the Christian Science Monitor.62 She sold their house in the mid-1960s and moved to Sunset Beach for a few years before settling in at Leisure World Seal Beach, the first planned retirement community in the nation.63 She died of heart failure at the age of 85 on June 15, 1975. Her ashes were interred at Angeles Abbey Memorial Park in Compton.

Portions of this article were adapted from the author’s biography of Lefty Williams at the SABR BioProject.

Notes


2. E-mail to the author from Patricia Shahen, May 19, 2010. Shahen said her information was obtained in an interview conducted by her cousin, Rex Stevens, with Lyria Williams at her California home in the 1970s.


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.


10. After years of fighting with the federal government over how much religious education was allowed to be taught in public schools, the LDS church in 1888-89 opened dozens of private high schools known as “stake academies” that were open to any student of any religious denomination, male or female, with free tuition. There were general courses of study, as well as specialized courses for aspiring teachers, office workers, and seminarians. See Kevin Stoker, “Academy era short-lived, but impact long lasting,” Deseret News, May 28, 1988; accessed online on August 9, 2018.


15. The 18-year-old Risberg spent a half-season in Ogden in 1913 and returned in 1914 to hit .366 in 108 games, earning himself a call-up to the Venice Tigers of the Pacific Coast League. He spent two more years in the PCL before he was signed by the Chicago White Sox and made his major-league debut in 1917.


18. Lyria is also listed in the 1910 Ogden City Directory as living at home.

19. 1910-13 Ogden City Directories, Ancestry.com. Ads for the “Wilson Rooming House” can be found in the Ogden Standard on December 23, 1910; September 30, 1911; June 20, 1914.


21. The financially strapped Sacramento Wolves of the Pacific Coast League transferred their operations to Salt Lake City in 1915.

22. The 18-year-old Risberg spent a half-season in Ogden in 1913 and returned in 1914 to hit .366 in 108 games, earning himself a call-up to the Venice Tigers of the Pacific Coast League. He spent two more years in the PCL before he was signed by the Chicago White Sox and made his major-league debut in 1917.

23. 1915 Salt Lake City Directory, Salt Lake City Public Library. Thanks to librarian Cherie Willis for her assistance.


30. Salt Lake Tribune, June 21, 1916: 5. One special guest at their dinner was a 19-year-old socialite and aspiring actress from Salt Lake City, Beatrice Banyard, who later became the fourth wife of celebrated Broadway
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writer-director Willard Mack.
32. Lefty Williams made $3,300 in 1917, according to his organizational contract card available at the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library. For a full list of White Sox player salaries, see SABR.org/research/1919-american-league-salaries.
40. Ibid.
44. Carney, 203. Williams was deposed twice, in May 1923 and January 1924, for Joe Jackson’s lawsuit against the White Sox seeking back pay owed to him. In the latter deposition, Williams was inconsistent about many aspects of the World Series scandal. But his testimony is more credible than a second-hand anecdote in *The New Yorker* (see Note 42) about Lyria told 40 years after the Series ended, which seems to be the strongest independent evidence that any threats were made against Lefty and/or Lyria.
45. “Near Death,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 30, 1923, 26. The *Tribune* reported that Williams lapsed into a coma at Columbus Hospital in Chicago, but he came out of it a day later.
46. A February 19, 1924, report filed by a private investigator hired by White Sox counsel Alfred Austrian stated that Lyria had not seen her husband in three weeks. He had reportedly traveled to Milwaukee to attend Joe Jackson’s back-pay trial against the White Sox. This letter is now housed in the Chicago History Museum.
49. Index to Register of Voters, Los Angeles County, California, 1938-42, Ancestry.com. Burbank City Directories, 1937-42, Burbank Central Library. Lyria’s brother, Lawrence Wilson, a widower, had been living in Burbank since at least 1928 and one of his sons, Louis, was also listed as a truck driver in the Los Angeles County voter rolls.
50. Email to the author from Bob Hoie, August 21, 2010. See also: “Owners File Paving Plea For Lindley Ave.,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1953.
55. A copy of the telegram can be found at BlackBetsy.com.
57. Ibid.
60. “Claude (Lefty) Williams of Sox Fame Dies at South Laguna,” *Santa Ana Register*, November 6, 1959: B-2; “Certificate of Death: Claude Preston Williams,” filed November 9, 1959, State of California, Department of Public Health. Numerous inquiries by researchers and journalists with Melrose Abbey have failed to uncover the specific location of Williams’s ashes.
61. One of Lyria’s nieces was even named after her. Lyria Edna Wilson (1918-58) had a short, rough life. She became pregnant with a son as a teenager and suffered through three abusive marriages before her death of cirrhosis at the age of 40 in Las Vegas.
Shoeless Joe film project in the works

By Jacob Pomrenke
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A new film about Shoeless Joe Jackson is in the works with the backing of a pair of Hollywood veterans responsible for the classic sports films Hoosiers and Rudy.

Writer Angelo Pizzo and director David Anspaugh have teamed up with producer Renee James for a project tentatively titled Shoeless Joe: The True Story, which they hope to release in 2019, the 100th anniversary of the 1919 World Series.

Billy Bob Thornton has signed on as an executive producer and appears in a promotional video for the project, which has the support of SABR members Mike Nola of BlackBetsy.com and Arlene Marcley, director of the Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum in Greenville, South Carolina.

The film will focus on the story of the Black Sox Scandal from Jackson’s perspective, with an eye toward persuading Major League Baseball to lift the former White Sox star’s lifetime ban and clear the way for possible election to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

“It is our hope that this movie will give the man a second chance at the world knowing the truth,” James wrote on the film’s website, ShoelessJoeProductions.com.

“Everything you look at in this case about Shoeless Joe points to the fact that he was innocent,” Thornton said in the video.

The film is now in the “predevelopment” stage, with an Indiegogo fundraising campaign set to begin soon.

AROUND THE WEB

Here are some other articles related to the Black Sox Scandal that have been published recently:

- Spitball Magazine is seeking submissions for a special Black Sox Scandal-themed issue in the spring of 2019. Poems, short stories, essays, and other unpublished writings will be considered. Learn more at SpitballMag.com. The deadline to submit is March 1.

- In November, MLB announced a deal that will make MGM Resorts International the league’s official gambling partner in the United States and Japan.

- As the Associated Press reported, “MGM will become an MLB-authorized gambling operator and will promote itself with teams and on the MLB Network, MLB.com and the MLB At Bat app. MLB will make a limited part of its Statcast data available to MGM on an exclusive basis.”

- Grant Brisbee looks at why gambling used to scare baseball and why it doesn’t anymore. Spoiler alert: $$$. (SB Nation)

- Matthew Prigge details the rise and fall of Happy Felsch, local hero turned baseball outcast. (Milwaukee Magazine)

- Dawn Mitchell examines the role of Indianapolis’s Bush Stadium in the filming of Eight Men Out three decades ago. (Indianapolis Star)

- Gary Cieradkowski tells the sordid tale of Benny Kauff, the New York Giants outfielder who stole bases and automobiles, and was run out of baseball by Judge Landis in 1921. (Studio Gary C)

- The Fort Bayard Historical Society’s new baseball exhibit features Black Sox Chick Gandil, Lefty Williams, and Buck Weaver, who all played outlaw baseball in the Copper League from 1925-27 at the historic military fort in southwestern New Mexico. Click here to read the placards in the new baseball exhibit, written by Jacob Pomrenke.
The 1919 Reds: requiem for the robbed

By Jeff Kallman
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The centenary approaches of a baseball season that finished with the most tainted World Series in the game’s history — and with a champion unfairly tainted for winning almost by default.

Seventy years before Pete Rose was banished from baseball for betting on the game, a Cincinnati Reds pennant-winner won a World Series besmirched by members of the Chicago White Sox conspiring to throw the Series for gamblers’ payoffs. If your heart has a place for real victims, you should spend that centenary commemorating the 1919 Reds any way you can. The thrill of victory never smelled so much like the agony of defeat.

Those who seek curses, actual and alleged, remember that it took forty years before the White Sox turned up in another World Series (in 1959) and eighty-six before they won another Series (in 2005.)

The Reds were only slightly less cursed, with long periods of mediocrity in between their championship seasons of 1919, 1940, and 1990. Their only sustained success came in the 1970s, when the Big Red Machine won five division titles, four pennants, and back-to-back World Series.

While the 1919 White Sox were robbed by their own Eight Men Out, the reputation of the 1919 Reds has been equally sullied. The mythology still seems to hold that if the World Series was played on the square, the Reds would have been buried alive.

That would not be the last time the accepted wisdom proved demonstrably false or prone to extremely reasonable doubt. Those who propagated and secured the accepted wisdom should have paid closer attention. They and their descendants might actually quit feeling sorry for the Eight Men Out and, concurrently, quit believing the Reds were handed victory by the jaws of self-defeat.

During the Series itself, opinions were mixed on whether the White Sox were quite as powerful as their legend came to hold. Damon Runyon isolated that belief when writing about the Reds’ Game One rout:

“Doesn’t everybody say the dream is nonsense? Didn’t everybody say the Reds couldn’t possibly win? Experts, ballplayers, and fans — didn’t they all laugh at Cincinnati’s fall pretensions as they have laughed every year for many years? Cincinnati will tell you that they did. Didn’t they tell you Pat Moran’s ball club was made up of castoffs of baseball, and that it was just a sort of baseball joke compared to the million dollar club that represents Chicago? Cincinnati will tell you they did. Cincinnati never tires of the telling, in fact. But all the time they were telling these things about the Reds, Cincinnati was secretly dreaming a great dream that was realized at Redland Field this after-

noon, with 30,000 pop-eyed breathless Cincinnati people looking on.”

American League umpire Billy Evans, who called the World Series games, believed the White Sox and the Reds matched evenly. He gave a slight edge to Chicago on account of its high-powered offense being “prone to have one big inning” giving them the slight edge. But he cautioned that the Reds had a good chance to win:

“If Red Faber of the Sox was pitching in 1917 form, I would say without any hesitation ... White Sox. But ... I am much in doubt as to Chicago’s chances. It is my opinion that no National League club that has met the American League entry in the big series in the past ten years entered the classic with a better chance to win than the Reds.”

Faber, the future Hall of Fame right-hander, was inactive for the Series because of arm and ankle trouble that bothered him much of the season. Young left-hander Dickey Kerr, one of the untainted Clean Sox players, had been impressive in his rookie season, but his performance was considered to be a wild card before the Series began. Hall of Fame pitcher Christy Mathewson, the Reds’ former manager, believed the White Sox “would need all their defensive strength ... to hold the Reds safely.”

Outfielder Edd Roush believed the Reds had more than a reasonable chance to win a Series played on the level. “Sure, the 1919 White Sox were good,” he told Lawrence Ritter years later for The Glory of Their Times. “But the 1919 Cincinnati Reds were better. I’ll believe that until my dying day. We could have beat them no matter what the circumstances.” Note that Roush said “could have,” not “would have.” How right was he?

Faith in the American League’s superiority came from its representatives winning eight of nine World Series prior
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to 1919. The Philadelphia Athletics won three (1910, 1911, 1913); the Boston Red Sox won four (1912, 1915, 1916, 1918); and the lone interruption in the AL streak was the 1914 “Miracle” Boston Braves.

Philadelphia and Boston’s co-ownership of the American League pennant was interrupted by the White Sox in 1917. Chicago stumbled to sixth place during the war-shortened 1918 season, but returned all of its top starters in 1919 and rarely faltered on the way to a second pennant in three years. However, they weren’t exactly what Eliot Asinof referred to as “the all-powerful colossus from the west” waiting to devour the poor Reds.5

As tough as the American League was in that decade, the National League’s pennant winner won more regular-season games than the AL champion five times: the 1910 Chicago Cubs, the 1913 New York Giants, the 1916 Brooklyn Robins, the 1918 Cubs, and the 1919 Reds, who won 96 games against a White Sox team that won 88. The Reds also had the decade’s second-best winning percentage (.686) behind the 1912 Red Sox (.691).

A season’s second half gives you a better idea of a World Series entrant-to-be’s strength. If so, and if you’ll pardon the expression, you should have put your money on the Reds without the White Sox even thinking about trying to throw the Series. The Reds were 47-19 in the season’s second half; the White Sox were 40-26.

A pennant winner’s performance against the other contenders in their league should tell you something, no? Against three other National League contenders (the Giants, the Cubs, the Pirates), the Reds went 38-22. Against three other AL contenders (the Indians, the Yankees, the Tigers), the White Sox went 35-25. In September, the Reds faced other contenders ten times and went 8-2; the White Sox faced other contenders twelve times and went 6-6.

The Reds finished with a better second-half winning percentage than first, and nine games ahead of the second-place Giants. The White Sox finished with a lesser second-half than first-half winning percentage and 3½ games ahead of the second-place Indians. The Reds look less and less like the other guys out 23 times while the White Sox did it 14 times. Do the White Sox still look like a colossus?

Christy Mathewson was right to be impressed with the White Sox defense. But the Reds were actually better. The Reds committed 24 fewer errors than the White Sox despite having 103 more fielding chances. The Reds’ fielding percentage (.974) was five points higher than the White Sox’s, and their range factors (the Reds: 4.12; the White Sox: 3.96) suggested the Reds’ fielders got to a few more balls, too.

As teams, the White Sox hit better (although you may be surprised to know that White Sox position players walked only one time more than those of the Reds) but the 1919 Reds pitched better. The Reds’ top two starting pitchers, righty Hod Eller and lefty Slim Sallee, didn’t have won-loss records as gaudy as the top two White Sox starters, Eddie Cicotte and Lefty Williams, but the Reds’ team ERA was 2.23 while the White Sox’s was 3.04.

The Reds’ fielding-independent pitching — that’s your ERA when your fielders are taken out of the equation — was 2.81 to the White Sox’s 2.88, and the Reds’ staff also had a 1.10 walks/hits per inning pitched (WHIP) rate against the White Sox’s 1.25. The White Sox pitchers sometimes had harder luck, but the Reds were a little better at making their own pitching luck.

Reporter Hugh Fullerton, who ultimately helped blow the whistle on the scandal, believed the White Sox entering the Series didn’t have enough pitching aside from Cicotte and Williams to win.6 Gleason juggled numerous options behind that pair all season and found them all wanting. The best of the lot, Frank Shellenback, struggled enough to earn a trip to the minors early in 1919 and never came back to the White Sox because his best pitch — the spitball — was outlawed by the majors a year later. Shellenback won more than 300 games in the minors, primarily with the Hollywood Stars of the tough old Pacific Coast League, throwing the wet one. The White Sox could only ponder what might have been.

It’s been too simple to forget that baseball’s two worst gambling scandals, the Black Sox and Pete Rose, left the Reds the real victims. The first one compromised the credibility of their first World Series-winning team through no fault of their own; the second compromised a franchise icon and cost them their manager through all fault of his own.

Maybe it’s asking a little much, but perhaps today’s Reds and White Sox alike might think about honoring the 1919 champions at last. It won’t give the old Reds a chance to throw the Series. The Reds were 47-19 in the season’s second half; the White Sox were 40-26.

Notes