Monumental Baseball
The National Pastime in the National Capital Region

Edited by Bob Brown

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Baby Birds versus Bronx Bombers

No Mismatch After All!  Francis Kinlaw  #

Washington Homers  David Vincent  #

Clark Griffith  Joel A. Rippel  #

Ted Williams  Steve Walker  #

A Brief History of the Washington Stars  Maxwell Kates  #

A Ground-Zero Start to Building a Baseball Team and Ballpark  Bill Hickman  #

Contributors  #
Note from the Editor

Text TK

Name
BASEBALL is among the most heavily mythologized elements of American culture; Abraham Lincoln is among the most heavily mythologized Americans. Inevitably, their mythologies have become intertwined.

The most reliable place to look for baseball mythology is Spalding’s *Americas National Game*, and it doesn’t disappoint. This story from the book is accompanied by a drawing of Lincoln holding a bat and ball:

It is recorded that in the year 1860, when the Committee of the Chicago Convention which nominated Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency visited his home at Springfield, Illinois, to notify him formally of the event, the messenger sent to apprise him of the coming of the visitors found the great leader out on the commons, engaged in a game of Base Ball. Information of the arrival of the party was imparted to Mr. Lincoln on the ball field.

“Tell the gentlemen,” he said, “that I am glad to know of their coming; but they’ll have to wait a few minutes till I make another base hit.”

Another example of Lincoln baseball mythology comes from a newspaper article, found on a webpage entitled “President Abraham Lincoln Baseball Related Quotes”:

At about six o’clock, the President, who was prevented from appearing earlier on account of the semiweekly Cabinet meeting, came on the ground and remained until the close of the game (Washington Nationals 28 vs. Brooklyn Excelsiors 33), an apparently interested spectator of the exciting contest.

These are the most substantive claims of Lincoln playing—or at least watching—baseball. Neither stands up to scrutiny. The newspaper article is genuine, from the *Washington National Republican*. Unfortunately, the game reported was played September 18, 1866, and the president attending was the distinctly non-mythologized Andrew Johnson.

The story about Lincoln receiving word of his nomination is more interesting, as it is an improved version of a contemporaneous newspaper account:

How Lincoln Received the Nomination—When the news of Lincoln’s nomination reached Springfield, his friends were greatly excited, and hastened to inform “Old Abe” of it. He could not be found at his office or at home, but after some minutes the messenger discovered him out in a field with a parcel of boys, having a pleasant game of town ball.

All his comrades immediately threw up their hats and commenced to hurrah. Abe grinned considerably, scratched his head and said, “Go on boys; don’t let such nonsense spoil a good game.” The boys did go on with their bawling, but not with the game of ball.

This varies from Spalding’s version in various minor details and in the major detail—which game it was that Lincoln was playing: base ball, according to Spalding, meaning the New York game, or town ball, meaning the local version of the baseball family.

The New York game was spreading to the West as early as 1857 and, while there is no record of its antebellum play in Springfield, Illinois, its presence is not impossible. But the contemporaneous newspaper account makes the much-more-plausible claim of Lincoln playing the local version. Spalding improved the story to fit the needs of his mythology. (It doesn’t actually make sense in the context of his history, as it does not include the game spreading widely before the Civil War, but Spalding was not one to be deterred by a foolish consistency.)

The contemporaneous story is, however, almost certainly untrue. Soon after his assassination, Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, set to writing a biography, *Life of Lincoln*. His research included interviews and correspondence with persons who knew Lincoln, including several accounts of what Lincoln was doing the day of his nomination: anxiously awaiting word from the party convention. The most likely interpreta-
tion of the story is that it was pure political propaganda: a tale showing Lincoln to be a man of the people, unconcerned with personal ambition. From the perspective of baseball history this story is interesting, as it shows town ball’s status in American culture. “Town ball” required no further explanation, and claiming that a man in his fifties was playing it was taken to be plausible and a political asset.

The other contemporaneous association is a Currier and Ives cartoon, published soon after Lincoln’s election, showing Lincoln and his three rivals holding baseball bats and Lincoln holding a ball, with the four discussing the recent election using baseball metaphors. The suggestion for this choice of metaphor is shown in the caption: “THE NATIONAL GAME. THREE ‘OUTS’ AND ONE ‘RUN’. ABRAHAM WINNING THE BALL.” The unusual circumstance of four presidential candidates lent itself to this, and baseball was attaining the national prominence to make the cartoon intelligible.

Of course, this says nothing about Lincoln having any personal connection to the game, but some connection can be salvaged if the search is broadened to the entire baseball family and not merely the New York game. Several of Herndon’s informants mentioned town ball. Most reports seem to be background material about what games were played generally, but James Gourley, a Springfield boot maker, reported (probably in the late 1830s or early 1840s) that “Lincoln played town ball . . . could catch a ball.” A biography of Lincoln from 1900 included a report by Frank P. Blair, whose grandfather owned an estate seven miles north of Washington. He recalled that when he was seven or eight years old Lincoln would come to visit quite frequently:

We boys, for hours at a time, played “town ball” on the vast lawn, and Mr. Lincoln would join ardently in the sport. I remember vividly how he ran with the children; how long were his strides, and how far his coat-tails stuck out behind, and how we tried to hit him with the ball, as he ran the bases. He entered into the spirit of the play as completely as any of us, and we invariably hailed his coming with delight.5

None of this is extraordinary for a man of Lincoln’s background. There are ample accounts of men playing ball, particularly in the less-settled regions of the West, and while Lincoln might seem a bit old for such activ-

Notes
1. Albert Spalding, America’s National Game (1911; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 361.
3. This account was printed in several newspapers, including the San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin (18 June 1860).
WHEN Connie Mack began his rookie major league season with the Washington Nationals (aka Statesmen) in 1887, the city was among the smallest in the National League, with a population approaching 200,000. It was also the hottest city Mack had ever known. In the heat of July and August, he recalled, “after a game I would get home utterly fogged out and I hardly ate any supper. All night I would lie in the vestibule trying to get cool. The next day would be the same thing over again.”

Washington was fast becoming electrified in public areas; street lights brightened many sections of town. Horse-drawn streetcars were giving way to electric trolleys. A few hundred “electric speaking telephones” linked the White House and other government offices.

Set near a neighborhood of fine homes in a section called Swampoodle, Capitol Park was located at North Capitol Street between F and G Streets, where Union Station and the National Postal Museum now stand. The outfielders had a fine view of the Capitol dome. Beyond the left field fence, B&O railroad cars were shunted about on side tracks. A block away on the opposite side stood the Government Printing Office, whose upper floors afforded an unobstructed view of the action on the field. John Heydler, a future president of the league, began working there in 1888.

Politicians and government employees formed the bulk of the team’s following. One of them was the young leader of the U.S. Marine Band, John Philip Sousa, whose passion for baseball was second only to his music.

The crude little dressing room at Capitol Park offered more facilities than most, such as they were. Connie Mack once described them: “The locker room . . . had no showers or bathing facilities, other than a sort of barrel-like pool sunk in the ground filled with water. The water would stay there for a week without being changed. After a while they outgrew the barrel and put in little individual tin pans. On the other side of the locker room a sink was put in with three or four spigots from which we could fill our pans. I anticipated the shower bath by a number of years by filling my pan up at the sink and pouring its contents over my head and shoulders.”

The infield was well sodded, but grass was sparse in the outfield and foul areas. Outfield fences were decorated with advertisements for beer, tobacco, sporting goods, and public baths. The small, primitive grandstand, little more than bleacher boards, seated about 1,800, the bleachers twice that number. The cranks were boisterous, sometimes riotous. When they took exception to a call by the lone umpire, the police often had to fire their revolvers in the air to restore order.

When Washington first baseman Bill Krieg hit a home run in the third inning of the opening game, “hats, umbrellas, and canes were thrown into the air and the multitude shouted forth their joy in hilarious manner,” was the Morning Republican’s understated report. That was practically the high point of the season. The home team trailed, 6–4, when the rains came in the sixth inning.

Washington’s 46–76 record for the year kept it out of the cellar only because a more inept Indianapolis team lost 89 games.

This article is adapted from Connie Mack and the Early Years of Baseball, by Norman L. Macht (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).
Cupid Childs

Jimmy Keenan

Cupid Childs was one of the best-hitting major-league second basemen during the late nineteenth century, not to mention a better than average fielder who possessed great range on the diamond. Only four other second basemen in the history of major-league baseball have averaged more total chances per game than Childs. His all-around outstanding play made him an integral part of the great Cleveland Spiders teams of the 1890s.

A natural middle infielder, Childs threw right-handed and batted left-handed. He played shortstop during his early years in the minors but eventually settled in at the keystone position for the remainder of his career. Childs, who seldom struck out, was a great contact hitter with an excellent batting eye. In his prime, he batted anywhere from first to fourth in the batting order. His best years in the majors produced batting averages of .345, .317, .326, .353, .355, and .338. Childs’s lifetime major-league on-base percentage of .416 is higher than that of every second baseman in the Hall of Fame except Rogers Hornsby and Eddie Collins. His .306 lifetime batting average is higher than seven of these second basemen who have already been inducted into the Hall. Childs’s obituary notes that he first played professional ball in 1883, when he was sixteen years old, for Durham in the North Carolina State League. According to the obituary, he was paid four dollars a week, and the team paid his room and board. Not much is known about Childs’s baseball career at this time. By May of 1885, Childs was playing shortstop for the very talented Monumental team in Baltimore in the Maryland Amateur Association. Future major-league pitcher Frank Foreman pitched for the Woodberry team in the league that same year. At this time, Cupid Childs was living at 77 South Gilmore Street in Baltimore. His occupation is listed as can-maker in the 1885 city directory.

Childs started out the following season playing for the Brooklyn Harlems semipro team. The Harlem team traced its roots back to the New York City amateur leagues of the 1850s. By June of 1886, Childs had moved on and was playing shortstop with Petersburg in the Virginia State League. He played for Petersburg from June 25 to August 11. He left the Petersburg team and signed on with Scranton of the Pennsylvania State League for the rest of the 1886 season. He played in 24 games for Scranton from August 17 to September 30. His final statistics for the 1886 Pennsylvania State League season were 27 hits, 6 doubles, 1 triple, 1 home run, 8 stolen bases, and a .267 batting average.

Childs began the 1887 season with Johnstown of the Pennsylvania State League. He played with Johnstown from May 7 to July 4, when the Johnstown team folded and was partially reconstituted in Allentown. The Allentown Chronicle and News of July 7, 1887, observed: “The Allentown nine has secured Childs, the second baseman of the disbanded Johnstown club. Childs is a good hitter and a splendid baseman, and will prove a strong addition to the team.”

An article in the same paper on July 12 mentions Childs coming through with a clutch triple in a 14–8 Allentown victory over the Bradford team: “Then Childs picked up the stick and drove the ball to right field for three bases sending home Beatin and O’Brien.
which tied the score and caused such yelling that several boards back of the catcher split.”

Childs was with Allentown from July 8 to July 15, 1887, when the team dropped out of the league. Childs appeared in a total of 38 games during the 1887 Pennsylvania State League season. He had 69 hits, 7 doubles, 6 triples, 2 home runs, and 14 stolen bases, finishing the year with a .373 batting average.

On August 4, Cupid signed with the Shamokin team of the Central Pennsylvania League. He played second base for the team until a broken collarbone ended his season on September 19, 1887. The Shamokin team went on to win the league championship.

In 1888, Childs signed with baseball pioneer Harry Wright’s Philadelphia Quakers of the National League. He made his major-league debut on April 23 against Boston and future Hall of Famer John Clarkson in Philadelphia. Childs went hitless at the plate that day. In the field, he played second base and handled six chances with one error, while turning one double play. Clarkson pitched a complete game that day, beating the Philadelphia team by the score of 3–1. The Quakers managed only six hits off Clarkson. Cupid Childs appeared briefly in the next game and was slated to be released from the Philadelphia team. The Philadelphia Inquirer explained Childs’s pending release:

“Childs and [Bill] Hallman are good players but they lack experience and that is worth a great deal in this league.”

A few days later, Philadelphia attempted to trade Childs to the Washington club for Gid Gardner. Gardner reported to the Philadelphia team, but Childs could not come to financial terms with Washington and refused to accept the trade. Gardner actually played one game for Philadelphia before being sent back to Washington due to the nullification of the deal on May 6, 1888.

In June, Childs traveled out to Kalamazoo, Michigan, to try out for that city’s local professional baseball team in the Tri-State League. The Chicago Tribune of March 25, 1900, described Childs’s audition. Although the writer is mistaken about Kalamazoo being Childs’s first professional team, the story is an amusing look at how Childs was perceived by his peers:

Childs appeared in 58 games for Kalamazoo from June 9 to September 1. His statistics for the 1888 Tri-State League included 11 doubles, 3 triples, 23 stolen bases, and a .282 batting average. Childs left the Kalamazoo team in early September and came back east in time to play nine games at the end of the season with the Syracuse Stars of the International Association from September 8 to September 19. For the Stars, Childs had 11 hits, 1 double, 1 triple, and hit .297.

Childs stayed on with the Syracuse ballclub for the following year. He played the entire season with the Stars, appearing in 105 games, and finished with 145 hits, 21 doubles, 12 triples, 53 stolen bases, and a .341 batting average. Childs and the Syracuse team left the International League in 1890 and moved up to the majors by joining the American Association. Childs appeared in 126 games for Syracuse in 1890, amassing 170 hits, 72 walks, and 14 triples and scored 109 runs. He led the American Association that year with 33 doubles and finished the 1890 season with a .345 batting average and 56 stolen bases. On June 1, Childs tied a record for second baseman when he collected 18 chances (albeit with one error) in a game against Toledo.

On January 26, 1891, Childs signed with his hometown Baltimore Orioles of the AA for $2,300 plus a $200 advance on signing day. In early February, the American Association withdrew from Baseball’s National Agreement and decided to conduct operations as an independent major league. This meant that all of the American Association teams, including the Orioles, were no longer bound by the by-laws and clauses that were part of the National Agreement.

The American Association’s withdrawal led Childs to conclude that his Oriole contract had been voided. The Orioles did not agree, and still considered him under contract. News of Childs’s availability spread, and in early February the Boston team of the American Association sent their manager, Arthur Irwin, to Baltimore in an attempt to sign Childs. Newspaper accounts stated that Irwin was unable to locate Childs in Baltimore. It appears that Childs did not want anything to do with any of the teams in the American Association. Childs, now considering himself a free agent, signed with the Cleveland NL team on February 16, 1891. On March 2, 1891, Childs met with Orioles manager and part owner Billy Barnie. Childs informed Barnie that he would not be playing for the Orioles in the upcoming season. Barnie said, “The only explanation Childs gave him for leaving the team was that he could do better.” Childs also attempted to return the advance money to Barnie, but the Oriole manager refused.

Baltimore team management filed an injunction in Baltimore City Circuit Court to force Childs to honor his Oriole contract. The trial opened on April 5, 1891,
with William Shepard Bryant and the Honorable Bernard Carter representing the Baltimore Baseball and Exhibition Company and Thomas I. Elliot representing Childs. One hundred and thirteen pages of testimony were read on the opening day of the trial. “The courtroom was crowded with professional and amateur ball players and lovers of the game,” wrote the Baltimore Morning Herald after the first day’s session. The trial gained national attention. On April 22, 1891, Judge Phelps finally ruled in favor of Childs, and the injunction filed by the Orioles was dissolved. Childs’s Oriole contract had stated that he was due all of the rights accorded to professional baseball players designated by the National Agreement. Judge Phelps reasoned that the National Agreement no longer bound the Orioles; the team could not offer Childs the conditions that they had originally agreed upon, thus voiding the contract. By the time the case was eventually settled, the Orioles had already filled the second-base position. It seems that Oriole management pursued the Childs case on principle rather than necessity.

Baseball fans in Cleveland were overjoyed at the outcome. When the verdict was announced, the Cleveland management telegraphed Oriole manager Billy Barnie with the phrase, “He who laughs last, laughs best.”

Cupid Childs went on to play his next eight seasons with the Cleveland Spiders, led by their hard-nosed and hot-tempered player-manager Patsy Tebeau. Baseball historian Lee Allen said, “Patsy Tebeau was the prototype of all hooligans and his players cheerfully followed his example.” At one time, Tebeau’s Cleveland Spiders lineup included Hall of Fame players Cy Young, Jesse Burkett, Buck Ewing, John Clarkson, and Bobby Wallace, plus outstanding players like Chief Zimmer and Ed McKean.

Childs hit .281 and stole 39 bases in his first year as a Spider, with 120 runs, while working pitchers for 97 walks in a league-leading 141 games. The following year, Childs stroked .317 in 146 games and led the NL with 136 runs scored and a .443 on-base percentage.

The next year Childs slapped .326 with 23 steals, 120 walks, and 145 runs in 124 games. Amazingly, Cupid struck out just twelve times in 609 at-bats.

Childs had another good year in 1894, hitting .353, with 169 hits, 107 walks, 21 doubles, 12 triples, 143 runs, and 17 stolen bases. Throughout his career Childs missed his share of games due to injuries and sickness, but he also was capable of playing hurt. On August 8, 1894, Childs fell and broke his collarbone after he was tripped by Pittsburgh first baseman Jake Beckley while he was running down the first-baseline. Cupid must have had great recuperative powers, because he was back in the Cleveland lineup at second base just 13 days later. In September, Childs handled 16 chances without an error in the first game of a doubleheader against Brooklyn. Remarkably, Childs finished the 1894 National League season with just 11 strikeouts in 591 at-bats.

In the spring of 1895, Childs was having contract problems over a difference of $300 and briefly left the club on April 23. Childs declined to leave on the train with the club for a road trip, stating that he was going to sign with New York if his contract demands were not met. Childs and Cleveland management eventually came to terms and Cupid rejoined the Spiders for the rest of the 1895 season.

The contract troubles may have affected Childs—his batting average slipped to .288. However, he was on base enough to score 96 runs and steal 20 bases. He also poked a career-high 4 homers and knocked in 90 runs in 119 games.

Childs bounced back in 1896 with a monster year, rapping 177 hits with 100 walks, 24 doubles, and 106 RBI, and scored 106 runs in 132 games. Childs struck out just 18 times during the season. He finished the 1896 National League season with a .467 on-base percentage, a .355 batting average, and 25 stolen bases.

The 1897 season was Cupid Childs’s last great year in the majors: a .338 batting average, 105 runs, and 25 stolen bases, with 15 doubles, 9 triples, and 1 home run.

Childs played his final year for Cleveland in 1898, hitting .288 with 90 runs scored. Injuries took their toll on Cupid, as he missed 39 games during the season.

The Cleveland Spiders played in three postseason Championship Series while Childs was a member of the team. The first was in 1892, when the National League played a split season. The Boston Beaneaters had the best record for the first half of the season, and Cleveland had the best record for the second. The two teams played each other at the end of the year in a Championship Series that Boston eventually won. Childs excelled, finishing the series with a .409 batting average. He had 9 hits, including 2 triples and 5 walks in the five Championship games. Childs handled 32 chances at second base during the series without an error.

The other two postseason appearances the Spiders made were in the Temple Cup in back-to-back years. The Temple Cup, named after the trophy’s donator, Pittsburgh sportsman William C. Temple, was a Championship Series played from 1894 to 1897 at the end of the regular season between the first- and second-place
NL teams. The Cleveland Spiders played the Baltimore Orioles in two hotly contested Series in 1895 and 1896. The Spiders, who were the second-place team during the regular season in each of the two years, won the Temple Cup in 1895, but lost in 1896. Childs did not hit well (.190 and .231) in either Series. Even though the Spiders and Orioles were bitter rivals on the ball field, Childs always remained popular in his hometown. "Cleveland second baseman Paca Childs is a Baltimorean and has many friends in this city," wrote the Baltimore Sun after an Orioles home stand against the Spiders during the 1894 season.

Childs was the all-time base-on-balls leader for the NL Spiders team with 758. His .434 on-base percentage as a Spider was the second-highest in team history to Jesse Burkett's .436. His .318 career batting average as a Spider is second on the team's all-time list, well behind Burkett's .356. Childs ranks third on the Spiders all-time hit list with 1,238 after Ed McKean (1,693) and Burkett (1,453). He finished third on the team, with 70 triples (McKean had 127, Burkett 92) and third in runs scored with 941, close behind McKean (996) and Burkett (987). Finally, he led the Spiders with 52 sacrifice hits. Childs, Burkett, and McKean—they were the Big Three of the Cleveland Spiders.

The Spiders had an overall record of 613 wins and 470 losses while Childs was there. In 1899, the Robison Brothers, owners of the Cleveland team, bought the struggling St. Louis club and assumed joint ownership of both National League franchises. The Cleveland ownership then transferred Patsy Tebeau, Cy Young, Jesse Burkett, Ed McKean, Bobby Wallace, Harry Blake, Cupid Childs, and a few others over to St. Louis in an effort to strengthen the ballclub. Unfortunately, Childs contracted malaria while playing for St. Louis that year. When Childs was finally healthy enough to return to the lineup, he was not up to par and finished the year hitting .265. The year before, in 1898, the St. Louis team had won 39 games and finished last in the twelve-team National League. With the addition of the new manager and players from Cleveland, the St. Louis Perfectos won 84 games and finished fifth.

The following season, the Chicago Orphans of the National League purchased Childs's contract from the St. Louis club. Only after second baseman Bill Keister committed to the St. Louis team did St. Louis manager Tebeau agree to let Childs go.

When a reporter asked Childs how he felt about joining the Chicago team he replied, "I am pleased with the idea of playing in Chicago. I had a little hard luck last season and my relations with the St. Louis club were not pleasant for the club or myself. This Chicago team looks good to me, and I think is stronger than ever. The Chicago club always troubled us to beat it and it is much stronger in the box. I have been riding horseback and taking light exercise all winter in Philadelphia to keep myself fit, for I do not want to take any chances of another attack of malaria and another bad season."

On April 11, 1900, Chicago Orphans manager Tom Loftus announced his starting lineup for the upcoming season. Childs had won the starting second-baseman position and was batting second in the order. "Childs is showing beautiful form at second and his work is a sign of promise," wrote the Chicago Tribune regarding Cupid's play in late April.

Childs was getting older now, but he evidently still possessed the old Cleveland Spiders fighting spirit. In May of 1900, Childs and Pittsburgh player-manager and future Hall of Fame member Fred Clarke got into a fistfight at the train station in Pittsburgh. Childs and Clarke had collided with each other at second base in a recent game. Clarke had dared Childs to fight him on the field that day, but the two were separated before the trouble escalated. Childs and Clarke then ran into each other at the train station in Pittsburgh when both teams were leaving the city. The two exchanged words, and a fistfight ensued. Sources at the time said that there had been bad blood brewing between the two players dating back to previous seasons. Eyewitness accounts said that both players took a beating, but that Clarke got the worst of it.

At some point early in the 1900 season, Childs began to feel the effects from his previous bout of malaria. His weakened state was causing his hand-eye coordination and reflexes to fail him. Although the press was relatively kind to Childs, there were many instances of thrown balls going right through his hands on potential double-play opportunities. Childs evidently knew something was wrong, because in early June he told the Chicago Tribune, "If I last through this season I will quit baseball. I have an excellent business opportunity and will get out of the business." Later in the article the Tribune observed, "Childs is playing good ball for Chicago and helping the team by his clever bunting. He is drawing more base on balls than any man on the team and fielding well." Nevertheless, Childs finished the season with an uncharacteristically low .241 average.

The business deal must have fallen through, because Childs returned to the Chicago team for the 1901 season. He never got on track and hit just .258 in
63 games. Since the nineteenth century, major-league players who were past their prime would often catch on with minor-league teams to finish out their professional careers. Childs followed and signed with Toledo of the Western Association, where he appeared in 71 games and earned 17 doubles, 14 stolen bases, and a .247 batting average.

Childs must have regained some strength, because he bounced back to have a good year in the minors in 1902. Cupid started out the season with the Jersey City Skeeters of the Eastern League; playing in 33 games, he hit a solid .290 with 5 doubles, 2 triples, and 6 stolen bases. Childs then moved to Syracuse of the New York State League, where he collected 102 hits, 12 doubles, 6 triples, 14 stolen bases, and a .358 average in 74 games.

In 1903, Childs signed on with manager Wilbert Robinson and Childs’s hometown Baltimore Orioles. The Birds were starting their inaugural season in the Eastern League. Childs came to spring training in good shape and played well. On April 28, the Orioles played an exhibition game against the University of Maryland baseball team at Oriole Park. The Orioles won the game 26–0, as Cupid was 3 for 5 with 2 triples and 3 runs scored. He played flawlessly at second base that day with 1 putout and 3 assists. “Childs made a sensational catch of a fly ball in the first inning,” wrote the Baltimore Sun in their comments on the game.

Childs was with the Orioles in spring training and through the first six games of the regular season. Unfortunately for Childs, his services had been reserved for the 1903 season by another team. The Montgomery, Alabama, club of the Southern League had engaged Childs prior to his signing with Baltimore. The Orioles tried to buy Childs’s contract back from Montgomery, but that club’s management refused to deal. It was reported that the Orioles offered a sum of four figures for Childs’s release. On May 4, Childs sent a telegram to Montgomery manager Lew Whistler stating that he would not play for the Montgomery team under any circumstances. Unfortunately for Childs, the final decision was made for him. On May 6, Eastern League President P. T. Powers wired the Orioles, saying that Childs would no longer be allowed to play in the Eastern League and that he must report to the Montgomery club. Childs was so distraught over the matter that he threatened to sign with the Johnstown team of the New York State League. Childs realized that he had no other alternatives, so he reluctantly boarded a southbound train for Montgomery.

Childs played the entire 1903 season with the Montgomery Legislators. He appeared in 108 games and had 104 hits, 7 doubles, and 1 triple, and finished the year with a .314 batting average. The Atlanta Constitution on June 17 reprinted a brief article about Childs from the Shreveport Times that described Childs’s work in glowing terms: “‘Cupid’ Childs is about one half of the Montgomery team. The way the old leaguer covers the ground and swats the ball reminds one of ‘Cupid’s’ palmy days when he was the ‘whole thing’ with the Clevelanders.”

In February of 1904, Childs was listed on the Montgomery team’s reserve list at second base, but
he does not appear in any of the Southern League statistics for the season.

Childs did play in the New York State League in 1904, appearing in 41 games combined for the Schenectady and Scranton teams. Cupid was now at the end of the line, and finished the 1904 season hitting just .245. Childs may have made some attempts to continue his baseball career in 1905. In August of that year, a brief line in a local newspaper reported that Childs attempted to catch on in the New York State League. Childs does not show up in league records that season and more than likely did not play any Organized Baseball after the 1905 season.

With his baseball career over, he began working as a coal driver in Baltimore City. As did many people of his generation, Clarence “Cupid” Childs died young after a lengthy illness, at age 45, on November 8, 1912, at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore. The cause of death was listed as Bright’s disease. His wife Mary and his eight-year-old daughter Ruth survived him. Childs had just recently bought a coal business and home that were located at 1800 West Pratt Street in Baltimore. Unfortunately for Childs, his debilitating illness had rendered him bedridden. Because of this he was no longer able to oversee the daily operations of his coal company. A few weeks before his death, a local paper had reported that the bank was ready to foreclose on his new house and business. When Childs passed away, his obituary stated that his funeral service would take place at his residence; the bankers may have worked out a last-minute deal to allow the Childs family to keep their home. Clarence L. “Cupid” Childs is buried in Loudon Park Cemetery in the southwestern section of Baltimore City.

A portion of Cupid Childs’s obituary from the Baltimore Sun, November 9, 1912, read: “Childs was considered the fastest second baseman and one of the heaviest hitters in the major leagues. He was the idol of baseball fans and although never playing on the old Oriole team in Baltimore, he was always given a warm welcome because he was a Baltimore boy.”

Cupid Childs played a total of 13 seasons in the major leagues. He appeared in 1,456 games, with 1,720 hits, 991 walks, 1,214 runs scored, 205 doubles, 100 triples, and 269 stolen bases. His .416 career lifetime on-base percentage is right below Stan Musial’s .417.

When one considers the era in which he played, Childs has to be deemed a far better than average second baseman. Cupid averaged 6.3 chances a game at second base during his thirteen-year major league career. That places him fifth on the all-time list for chances per game by a second baseman. Childs finished his major-league career with a .930 fielding percentage. Because of his outstanding offensive production and great range in the field, Childs should probably already be in Cooperstown. He compares favorably with most of the second basemen in the Hall of Fame. Maybe it is time to take another look at him.

Acknowledgments
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I would like to thank Cupid Childs’s cousin Linda Strain Pagter for contributing two photographs and other family-related information.

Sources
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T WAS a hot summer day in 1897 when hundreds of fans of the Federalsburg Club in Maryland gathered for a game. This small town of barely a thousand people was proud of their team. Little did they know that three of the young teenagers taking the field for them that day would soon be in the major leagues. Jack “the Whirlwind” Townsend was from across the border in Delaware, and had developed a blazing fastball throwing rocks to knock apples from trees. It was his way of enlivening the mundane chore of feeding the pigs on his father’s farm. Behind the plate was Bob Unglaub. Unglaub grew up two blocks from Oriole Park and worked his way from the knothole gang to bat boy and mascot of the Baltimore club. He learned the finer points of the game shagging flies for the likes of John McGraw, Hughie Jennings, and Wee Willie Keeler. Down on third base was Chappy Charles. He had left New Jersey as Charles Achenbach and turned up in Federalsburg as Raymon C. Charles. How and why did these three young men and future major-league players end up on the baseball team of this small, rural community, seemingly so far off the beaten track?

Baseball became a competitive sport among the towns of the Eastern Shore of Maryland soon after the “unpleasantness between the states.” It was supposed to pit the best young men each town had to offer against each other, and for a time, this amateur philosophy prevailed in these small towns. But accusations of the use of “imported” players, or “foreign men,” as they were often called, began to surface as early as the 1870s.

Baseball teams in country towns did not play a set schedule in the early years. They would send out “challenges,” sometimes by newspaper, letter, or telegraph. In 1873, Cambridge sent a “midnight wire” to challenge the team in Seaford, Delaware, the next day. When they arrived at 10:00 A.M., they found that the Delaware team would not take the field until 3:00 P.M., once the trains brought in their “imported” players.

In 1878, the Easton Club quietly inserted three Baltimore players into their lineup against St. Michaels, Maryland, in a “friendly game,” including the Baltimore battery of Tucker and Roche. When Easton faced Queenstown a few weeks later, it was the same Baltimore battery they employed against these self-styled champions of the Eastern Shore.

Opponents accused the Easton Club in 1884 of bringing in one of the best semipro pitchers from Baltimore. Easton defended the use of Mr. Jones, saying he recently moved to the area and was “engaged in farming.”

A few years later, Cambridge, Maryland, accused Easton of “putting up a trick” of using another Baltimore battery in their bitter rivalry, but Easton wasn’t the only guilty party. The game was delayed for several hours as the two sides negotiated which of each club’s professionals would be allowed to play.

But the attempted clandestine use of “foreign men” would soon give way to competition and economics. The beginnings of such open use came from an unlikely source.

Washington College is located in Chestertown, Maryland, situated on the banks of one of the many tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. During this era the college had a student body of but seventy to eighty young men. From 1865 to the late 1880s the usual opponents were local amateur nines, but they also began to develop a rivalry with St. John’s of Annapolis. The Maryland Intercollegiate Athletic Association was formed in the 1880s in order to determine a state champion in various sports. The little college soon found itself drawn into a more collegiate schedule competing against larger and more talented schools, such as Johns Hopkins University, Maryland Agricultural College (University of Maryland), Syracuse University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

There were no restrictions on paying college players at the time. One opponent, New Windsor College, was described as having players from all over the country and backed by a hired battery, while few of the players on the Deichman School squad were said to be enrolled there.

In 1891, the college was faced with an important game against their rival, St. John’s of Annapolis. Dick Hawke was making the rounds as an arm for hire on the local circuit, so the college “secured” his services for the St. John’s game. The faculty quickly imposed a rule that only college students be used, but when
their second baseman was injured, they allowed an imported player to fill the position. All pretenses were swept aside. Three years later Hawke, after pitching the first major-league no-hitter from the modern pitching distance, was holding out on the Baltimore Orioles, and it was fully expected that the college could secure his services for their season. Unfortunately for the college, Hawke and Baltimore reached an agreement.

In 1892, the college signed a local pitching star, Al Burris, and teamed him with the twenty-five-year-old catcher and assistant coach, Dave Zearfoss. Both would see action in the major leagues. Burris got his chance in 1894 in a one-game shot with the Philadelphia Nationals. He was made coach and athletic director when he returned, though still a student. As long as Burris was in charge, he continued using imported players. Newspapers speculated if a player would be “secured,” or when another might “arrive.” Local future major-league players like Homer Smoot and Jack Townsend were signed, as Burris found additional talent on local semi-pro teams like Chappy Charles and Bob Unglaub. While playing under his real name for a number of town teams and the college in the late 1890s, Bob Unglaub was paid $40 a month under his middle name of Alexander for the University of Maryland.

It was through the 1890s that the transition from amateur to openly professional teams took place. While the college was not the first on the peninsula to use imported players, they appear to have been the first to use them openly. One of the reasons baseball was of such high quality is that the region was not as isolated as one might first imagine from its geography. The Pennsylvania Railroad had bought up all the independent lines on the peninsula, and a fleet of steamboats plied the Chesapeake Bay, forming an efficient network of transportation. In the 1890s there were bumper crops of peaches and wheat, while new canning techniques had created a national and international market for seafood of the bay. These commodities were shipped by rail to Philadelphia and New York and across the bay to Baltimore by steamboat, and then westward via the B&O Railroad. While much of the country was mired in recession, the money in these rural towns was flowing and the citizens were willing to spend it on baseball.

Although running an independent professional team at this level was rarely a moneymaking proposition, most towns insisted on a top-notch team, not only for the local fans but also for the people and attention it could attract to their towns. Many towns on the bay advertised themselves as resorts to the people of Baltimore and Philadelphia, with beaches, bay breezes, swimming, fine food, and hotels. It may have been the same attractions that helped lure baseball players from nearby metropolitan areas and beyond.

THE TALENT
These country towns, avid for baseball and ranging in population from a few hundred to three to four thousand, found a number of sources for stocking their
rosters. Small towns were the first step for young teenagers venturing on a professional career. Areas known for the quality of their teams attracted their attention. Young aspirants would send their résumés to towns known for their quality teams. From Sadie McMahon in 1886, to Nick Maddox, Buck Herzog, and a host of others in the early 1900s, to Eddie Rommel in 1916, many youngsters traveled to the peninsula to begin their professional careers. After claiming the championship of Maryland and Delaware in 1907, Cambridge received over a hundred applications the following spring.6

Semipro players from nearby metropolitan areas were also drawn with either seasonal or short-term deals. The Eastern Shore drew much of its talent from Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, and Wilmington. Lefty High, Otis Stocksdale, Jimmie Mathison, and Stub Brown were among the many city semipro players and major-league participants who also played on shore teams. Major-league teams often dipped into these environs for quick-fix substitutes when needed while they were on road trips.

Another source of talent was the nonroster reserve players from the major-league clubs in the region. These players were not technically on the major-league roster but were kept close by if injury or poor play called for their services. In the 1890s there were major-league teams in Baltimore, Washington, and, by 1901, two in Philadelphia. Sometimes these players would appear on their own team such as the Baltimore “Yan-

nigans,” but nonroster players were often allowed to play for independent teams as a way to stay in shape. Charlie Gettig and Zeigler of the Giants both appeared on the shore in this fashion.

Nor was Organized Baseball known for its generosity in paying its players at any level, and many realized they could make as much, if not more, playing outlaw baseball. Many of the outlaw leagues were of minor-league caliber, but some players with major- or minor-league talent opted for town teams. Art Rooney, future owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, turned down a major-league contract because he could make more money playing semipro ball.7

Bob Unglaub sat out major-league baseball in a dispute over his minor-league contract and made almost double the salary he received in the major leagues while playing in the outlaw Tri-State League. Mike Cantwell pitched for Cambridge, Maryland, for two years in 1915 and 1916 before going to the big leagues. He returned in 1921, and many doubted his return, but a local paper reported, “But he is positively engaged. He’s pitching independent ball this year.”8

A three-year record of 1–6 and an ERA of over six runs a game may have influenced his decision. As late as the 1950s, local lore has it that Dickie Porter, a home-bred major-league veteran, was of the opinion that at least one of the regional semipro teams at that time was as good as most Class B minor-league squads of those years.

Independent teams were also an option for the dis-
grunted holdout. Many were of the minor-league variety, but not all. In 1917, Ty Cobb threatened to play for the independent professional team of a wealthy manufacturer if his salary demands weren’t met. His threat was taken seriously, possibly due to Home Run Baker’s precedent. At the peak of his career in 1915, Baker was locked into a three-year contract with the A’s while the Federal League was throwing around big money. Unable to extract a raise from Connie Mack, Baker chose to “retire” to his farms and “hit a few around with the boys.” Baker played for independent teams that year in Upland, Pennsylvania, and the Easton Diamondbacks in the newly formed independent Peninsula League. As if that weren’t enough, Baker played for several other town teams in what were billed as “Home Run Baker Days.”

Major-league players were sometimes given permission to play on such teams. Buck Herzog played for Seaford, Delaware, in a series against Cambridge, Maryland, in 1908 while playing in sixty-four games for the Giants that season.9

Cambridge tried to hire pitchers Joe Corbett and Dad Clarkson for a big game with rival Salisbury, Maryland, in 1896. But Corbett was scheduled to go against Cleveland, and it was reported that the journeyman Clarkson “had no idea of losing a reputation in a country town.”10

Small towns were not intimidated when trying to attract major-league talent for their fans.

Country ball was often the last stop of the professional journey for aging veterans. In 1904, Steve Brodie of the old championship Orioles was brought in to play for Cambridge in the waning days of the Eastern Shore League.11

In 1907, the town of Hurlock, Maryland, was looking for a way to quiet the bat of the torrid-hitting Frank Baker in their series against Cambridge, and found their answer was the crafty, soft-tossing, left-handed Frank Foreman. The “Waverly Wonder” had started his major-league career in 1884 and appeared in four of the five major leagues that had existed to that point.12

Through thirty years of quality country ball, the Eastern Shore of Maryland produced a number of homegrown products for the major leagues. After the brief stint of Al Burris in 1892, it was Homer Smoot and Frank Baker during the Deadball Era, including the brief two-game shot of Jim Stevens with Washington in 1914. By 1921, a new crop of talent was getting their start on these independent rural town teams, including Dickie Porter in Princess Anne, Maryland; Vic Keen in Snow Hill, Maryland; Frederick “Doc” Wallace of Church Hill, Maryland, and Washington College; Jake Flowers, in Cambridge, Maryland, and Washington College; and Jimmie Foxx in Goldsboro, Maryland, and Sudlersville, Maryland.

Between 1886 and 1921, nearly fifty future, former, and contemporary major-league players have been identified as having played on the professional town teams on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. This may be a conservative count, considering that many played under assumed names, either to protect their amateur status, or their reputation at a supposed higher level of competition. Some may have just lied to their parents about their summer job. Not all parents of that era wanted their sons to grow up to be ballplayers.

**THE TEAMS**

Baseball was arguably at its best on the Eastern Shore of Maryland between 1900 and 1921. Crumpton was a crossroads village of only a few hundred people. In 1902, their team was described as “a pitcher from Philadelphia, a catcher from Baltimore, and a team from God knows where.”13

Contemporaries usually referred to baseball in these towns as “amateur.” Later historians tend to lump it into the realm of semipro baseball. Actually, the teams ranged from purely amateur to partly professional to totally professional. It varied from town to town. It could change in a given town from year to year, month to month, even week to week, depending on finances and opponent. Perhaps the best description of country ball comes from a local newspaper in 1903:

> The prospects are that there will be more baseball seen on the Delaware and Maryland peninsula than ever before in the history of the national game. The country papers give evidence that from Wilmington to Cape Charles clubs are being formed in every town and village where nine players can be gotten together. . . . towns are making big preparations to put ball teams in the field, and some good sport can be expected. At some of the above mentioned towns only local men will be used, but in others foreign talent will be employed. Some of the people on the Eastern Shore are getting their baseball ideas so well up in “G” that they are not satisfied with local material. They want good baseball and enthusiasts are willing to pay for it. It is safe to say no better base ball is seen anywhere then on this peninsula, in towns of similar size and this season will not probably be behind former ones.14
While an obvious boast, there are a few teams whose quality warrants some attention. The previously mentioned Washington College featured future big-league players Al Burris, Dave Zearfoss, Chappy Charles, Bob Unglaub, Homer Smoot, and Jack Townsend through the 1890s and early 1900s. While the Salisbury and Cambridge clubs featured players from Philadelphia and Baltimore during the decade, they were hard-pressed to match the future success of the Federalsburg youngsters. But the 1900s brought an influx of talent up and down the peninsula.

The Ridgely Club of 1904–5 may have featured five major-league players with an all-big-league infield at one point. Their captain and second baseman was Baltimore native Buck Herzog, who went on to a thirteen-year major-league career and a managerial stint in Cincinnati. He conceded his natural position at short to his old teammate at the University of Maryland, Si Nicholls. Nicholls was playing in Ridgely after a brief appearance with Detroit in 1903, promising his parents he would give up the unsavory future of professional baseball. It was a promise he could not keep. Nicholls was starting at shortstop for the Philadelphia Athletics by 1907. Pitching and playing outfield was Sam Frock of Baltimore, who would later appear in Pittsburgh, including their 1909 World Series season. At first base was Baltimore and peninsula semipro stalwart Bill Kellogg, who would later see action in the big leagues as a utility infielder for Herzog in Cincinnati. Young Frank Baker was signed as a pitcher and outfielder but saw little action until the third baseman was injured. Matthews does not mention the year. Baker did not sign with Herzog and Ridgely until 1905. The author could find no Ridgely box scores for that season. Herzog, Frock, and Nicholls appear in the 1904 box scores. Kellogg was a stalwart of these town teams throughout the early 1900s, appearing for several, often in the same season, and could have played for Ridgely in ’05. Nicholls played for Piedmont, West Virginia, in ’05, and Frock for Concord of the New England League. However, this does not necessarily preclude their appearing for Ridgely that year as well. Nicholls also played in Pocomoke that year, and it was a fluid baseball environment.

Within three years, all but Kellogg were playing in the major leagues. The leap from country ball to the majors did not seem that far.

The Eastern Shore League of Maryland formed in 1904, attracting many quality players to the three participants in Easton, Salisbury, and Cambridge. Cambridge led the teams in major-league players with Al Burris and Pete Loos of Philadelphia, Buck Herzog, and Stub Brown of Baltimore, Chappy Charles of New Jersey, and former Oriole Steve Brodie, although all didn’t appear at the same time. Easton may not have had the numbers, but they had a former and future major-league pitching duo in Johnnie “Brownie” Foreman and Nick Maddox, both of Baltimore. Maddox impressed Pittsburgh in his tryout with the club and in his third game for them, on September 20, 1907, threw the first no-hitter in the club’s history. The next year he tied for the team lead with 23 wins with future Hall of Famer Vic Willis, who was from Cecil County on the upper shore. Maddox made significant contributions in the 1909 World Series.

A picture of the 1905 team from little Pocomoke, Maryland, shows Home Run Baker, Si Nicholls, Al Burris, Chappy Charles, and possibly Jack Townsend. Many players sold their services up and down the peninsula in the same season. Bob Unglaub appeared for Washington College, Federalsburg, Cambridge, and Crisfield, Maryland, the latter where he met his future wife. Financial mobility was one of the luring attractions of independent baseball. Many played for two or more peninsula teams while playing for metropolitan clubs as well. In 1921, Vic Keen pitched for five semipro teams, including his hometown club of Snow Hill, and it is estimated that he appeared in approximately fifty games while racking up as many as 450 innings, including a win over the Negro Hilldale Club of Philadelphia. He earned a contract with the Chicago Cubs in August and attributed his lackluster performance the rest of the season to a tired arm.

It wasn’t until 1915 that a local team could match the rosters of the first few years of the early 1900s. That was the year the independent Peninsula League formed. Home Run Baker was sitting out a year in a contract dispute, and one of the teams he played for was Easton. His teammates included future major-league players Jack Enright and Joe Knotts, both of whom also played with Baker for Upland, Pennsylvania, but Easton could only muster third place in a four-team league. Seventeen-year-old Eddie Rommel was the star pitcher for Seaford, Delaware; Doc Twinning was the star pitcher in Salisbury, Maryland.

THE PROOF

There were times when these country teams proved themselves against stiff competition. In 1878, the Wilmington Quicksteps of Delaware were a highly touted independent club who often played against National League teams as the latter traveled the circuit. The Quicksteps had won a number of these contests against major-league clubs. It was said they “came
down like wolves on the fold” to Salisbury for a best-of-three-game series with the Salisbury club. A witness later described the event, “The Quicksteps went out turning hand springs and throwing somersaults. They had padded their team with Lafferty, of the famous Athletics, and two or three other league players. They thought they had a picnic, and they had, but Salisbury had strengthened by getting Tucker, a curve pitcher, Roach, catcher, and Groves 2b, from Baltimore. In the presence of about 1,000 of our best citizens the battle began.”

Salisbury swept the overconfident Wilmington club in two games. The Quicksteps were so incensed with the losses they immediately proposed for a series on neutral grounds in Dover, Delaware. They would play for the then-princely sum of $500. Colonel Graham, a Salisbury backer, immediately met the bet, with the stipulation that the rosters be frozen to those who had just completed the games. Wilmington withdrew their challenge against the country town.16

During the 1870s and ‘80s, games with Baltimore-area teams were infrequent, and local teams were usually outclassed. But this quickly changed. By the 1890s, one local scribe went so far as to declare he was “fairly disgusted” with the quality of teams coming from Baltimore. Washington College clarified a rare 5 to 4 loss to a city team by saying they were beaten by the Lutherville–Johns Hopkins University–Baltimore City–State of Maryland–Base Ball Combination.17

In 1896, the semipro Starlights claimed the championship of Maryland in a Baltimore newspaper based on their recent exhibition victory over the world-champion Orioles. They were willing to take on all challengers, and Salisbury responded. When the dust settled on the Salisbury field, Starlight manager Jimmie Mathison conceded that Salisbury was indeed “hot stuff” and the best team in the state following a lopsided 14–0 loss. Pumped up by the victory, Salisbury boasted, “we are the best team in the state, excepting the Orioles, and we are not afraid to tackle them.”18

They then challenged the Baltimore Orioles to a game, with the enticement of a trip to the resort of Ocean City, Maryland. There is no evidence that the world champions accepted the offer.19

Next it was the Baltimore Yannigans in 1897, featuring nonroster reserves of the Orioles, including Elmer “Herkey Jerkey” Horton and Dan McGann, and managed by Wilbert Robinson. They didn’t expect the stiff contest offered by the Chestertown Club. The locals had imported a pitcher named Lattimore, also known as the “Virginia Wizard.” The Yannigans were leading 3–1 in the ninth when the local team rallied with men on the corners and one man out. The Yannigans then became embroiled in a protracted argument and walked off the field. “The truth of the matter was that Horton, a league pitcher, came over expecting a cinch and was disappointed and deter-
mined to end the game in a ‘kick’ rather than go home defeated by a country club.”

Peninsula teams held their own against highly touted barnstorming teams like the Nebraska Indians in 1906, the Cherokee Nationals in 1907, and the Chinese Nationals of Hawaii in 1913–14. There were also regional aggregations like the Stricker All-Stars and Kilduff’s All-Stars.

While teams from the Eastern Shore of Maryland continued to dominate metropolitan semipro and all-star teams through the early 1900s, it was in 1915 and 1916 that participants of the independent Peninsula League showed just how good country ball could be. Salisbury won the Peninsula League championship in 1915. They were met at the train station after their clinching victory by a brass band. The team presented sponsor W. Gordy with an autographed ball tied in ribbon of team colors of black and gold, and they were provided supper at the Elks Club. Mayor Bounds announced in his speech that all the players would always be welcome in the town. The young ladies of the town then presented the team with a twelve-foot-long orange and black pennant that read, “Peninsula League Champions 1915,” which was unfurled from the fourth floor of the B&L Building. But they weren’t done just yet.

They arranged to end the season with an exhibition with the Philadelphia Athletics, who featured Napoleon Lajoie. It finished the season with the dismal record of 43–109, but it was still a big-league team coming to town. Twenty-five hundred fans packed the stands at Gordy Park on an unusually hot September afternoon to watch Doc Twining pitch the local club to a 6–3 win over Connie Mack’s A’s. One of the Athletics players was heard to remark as he walked off the field that they “hadn’t played in front of a crowd that size at Shibe Park all season.”

A year later the Cambridge Club filled in an open date on the league schedule to play the high minor-league Baltimore Orioles. A local paper reported that Jack Dunn’s squad was “soundly clouted” in the 8–2 Cambridge victory.

THE AGRARIAN MYTH
Baseball’s roots lie in the rudimentary ball-and-stick games of an agricultural society, but the phenomenon, as we have come to know it, came out of the cities. Modern baseball gained definition in the New York Game and quickly spread to other metropolitan areas. Baseball, it has been argued, reflected the country’s new urban and industrial persona. By the early 1900s, however, the perception of baseball in our culture seems to have returned to its rural beginnings. Historian Richard Crepeau referred to it as the Agrarian Myth, but it may not have been a myth.

Popular and sporting publications of the era seemed to instinctively grasp the importance of baseball in rural communities and its subsequent impact on Organized Baseball. Many writers, well into the 1920s, pointed out that the best pitchers, past and present, as well as the better-position players, came from farms and rural towns. Off-season interviews with star players were as likely to depict the rustic setting as delve into the personality of the subject. Bozeman Bulger of the New York Evening World described his ten-hour rail trip to interview Home Run Baker in 1912, remarking, “those trains run by sight and stop whenever the engineer sees something of interest.” Bulger was greeted by Baker at the “little burg” of Cambridge with, “Somewhat to the bush, eh?”

It was well known among scribes that the best way to approach the taciturn Baker for an off-season interview was to catch him after a successful day of duck hunting. Rural communities, as reflected by their newspapers, considered baseball “their” game.

Even urban-born players seemed to cultivate this rustic image. Babe Ruth, the ultimate Baltimore bar rat, was one of them. The former city street urchin went to great lengths to portray himself at work on his Massachusetts farm, playfully posing at his chores for the media. Another Baltimore native, Buck Herzog, began his career as a young player-manager for the Ridgely club in 1904, where he married a local girl and later purchased a farm with his baseball earnings. There he sowed his own crops, raised chickens and purebred dogs, and enjoyed horseback riding and fox hunting. He was quick to point out that this was not a bit of posturing, and his was a real working farm. It was said his automobile rarely left the garage.

Steven Reiss’s doctoral dissertation may provide clues as to why people on the Eastern Shore of Maryland boasted that they had better baseball than other towns of similar size in the country, and why many believed in the agrarian myth.

Reiss provides a chart that indicates over thirty percent of major-league players of the era came from towns of less than a thousand people. Extending the towns to populations of five thousand show that 49.9 percent of the major-league players came from communities like those on the Delmarva Peninsula, while 24.4 percent came from cities of 100,000 or more. The region had an expanding economy and an avid baseball-fan base. This enabled the town teams to attract local and regional talent. The feature that made
the country ball on the Delmarva Peninsula different from many other regions was their location near the metropolitan areas of Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, and Wilmington. They were in a unique position to attract players from the two major demographic sources of talent for the major leagues.

Many believed that the most wholesome heroes of the game came from rural areas. Home Run Baker repeatedly told the press during his 1915 holdout that he was content working the family farms as he was playing baseball, and everyone knew he meant it. Five years later, he sat out another season in order to take care of his children following the death of his wife. Baker was admired as a man of integrity with the proper priorities. Such players were considered the backbone of our society, and the source of our nation’s virtues and strength. Urban players were influenced by this perception. Whether real or romanticized, many saw rural towns and country ball as the heart and soul of American society and baseball.

Notes

2. For the use of the three Baltimore players on Eastern Shore teams see “Base Ball on Friday,” Easton Star, 6 August 1878, and “Base Ball—Queenstown vs. Easton,” Easton Star, 24 September 1878.
4. For accounts from both sides see “Base Ball,” Dorchester Democrat-News, 20 August 1887, and “Base Ball,” Easton Star, 20 August 1887.
5. Untitled, Chestertown Transcript, 26 April 1894.
11. “Baseball This Week,” Salisbury Advertiser, 10 September 1904.
15. The possibility that all five played together comes from C. Starr Matthews, “Work and Win’ Is Motto of Clever Charley Herzog,” Baltimore Sun, 12 March 1911.
16. An unknown author wrote a series of articles on the history of baseball in Salisbury in 1903. The account of the series with the Wilmington Quicksteps appeared in “Gossip on the Diamond,” Wicomico News, 13 August 1903. Although the year of the series is not mentioned, this author has conjectured 1878 as when this game took place. It was a “fever season” when enthusiasm ran high, and the Baltimore battery of Tucker and Roche had appeared on at least two other Shore clubs that year.
17. “Base Ball,” Salisbury Advertiser, 15 August 1896. For the Washington College complaint see Chestertown Transcript, 14 June 1894.
21. The championship celebration is in the Wicomico News, 15 September 1915. For the game against the Athletics see “2,500 Turn Out to See A’s,” Wicomico News, 25 September 1915.
26. Steven Reiss, “Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974). The themes of Reiss’s dissertation on the Progressive movement tie in to the “agrarian myth.” If the “swing” cities of five to ten thousand are included in the rural calculations, over 54 percent of major-league players came from small towns. If included in the metropolitan equation, urban players total a little over 50 percent. See also David Quentin Voigt, American Baseball: From Gentleman’s Sport to Commissioner System (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).
KNOWING and living in the same household with my grandfather Bob Groom was an accident of fate but a gift of immeasurable value. His was and remains the strongest presence in my life. What I remember of him are the deeply felt, simple memories of a child, so discovering who he was to others took some work. Fortunately, he played in the Deadball Era, when oceans of ink covered sports pages, satisfying baseball fans’ curiosity about their favorite teams and players. Today’s electronic databases of that written record make it possible to learn things about him that I would never have guessed. Yet statistics and sports pages tell only part of the story. Ballplayers, however obscure or famous, are first and foremost people: sons, brothers, cousins, husbands, fathers—roles that affect their careers in ways that the public might never guess.

When “Grandma Kate,” Bob Groom’s wife, died just before I was born, my grandfather persuaded my parents to come and live with him in the big brick house that stood at the corner of 19th and West Main in Belleville, Illinois. Bob Groom’s house will always be the place I envision when I hear the word home. It was built in 1903 by my great-grandfather John Groom for his wife, Mary Catherine, to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1904.

My room was on the west side of the second floor and looked out into the branches of a large pear tree. Under the steeply pitched slate roof upstairs was my favorite haunt: an attic full of mysterious treasures. Its one large room had windows on the west and north, and in one corner was the remaining machinery of an elevator that had run from basement to attic and was installed because of my grandmother’s weak heart. My mother saw the elevator as a hazard in a household with a small child and insisted it be removed. A huge double cedar-lined wardrobe held Grandpa’s Knights Templar uniform and Grandma Kate’s beaded dresses for Eastern Star events, and hat boxes held a derby, a top hat, and feathered, flowered, and veiled ladies’ hats. On the other side of the wardrobe hung grey woolen baseball uniforms. Two massive brass-bound steamer trunks held a jumble of baseball caps, long wool socks, shoes with metal spikes, and baseballs—some so scuffed and dirty they were practically black and others, yellowing with age, with writing all over them.

Across the room stood a long bookcase with glass doors filled with scrapbooks of baseball clippings that my grandmother had kept, along with letters, photographs, and telegrams. Long before I could read anything, the photos began to tell me many things, including how different our house looked when it had a curved front porch decorated with Victorian spindles along its top edge. I saw my father, a curly-headed boy of four, standing with his cousin from San Francisco in front of what was in those days his grandfather’s house.

There were pictures of my great-grandparents, whom I never knew, and my grandfather’s brothers and sister, whom I knew well and loved. But though much was familiar, there was much the pictures didn’t tell.

Of my grandfather’s other life in baseball, no one in the family talked very much, perhaps because, as I would come to realize, my grandfa-
ther's "high profile" was a problem to my father. I learned of the baseball life indirectly. "Are you related to the ballplayer?" people would ask upon hearing my last name. Belleville people treated Grandpa with great respect, and I would come to understand that it was not just because of his major-league career. He was a rather prepossessing figure: tall, slender, uncommonly erect in posture and always very dignified in demeanor. I gathered hints of his baseball days from the visits and phone calls from friends who were baseball people: the St. Louis Cardinals owner Sam Breadon, and the baseball radio announcers Gabby Street and Dizzy Dean, who would mention visiting Grandpa in Belleville during their broadcasts. Grandpa treasured his lifetime pass to the players' box at Sportsman's Park, and brought me a milk-glass souvenir bank in the shape of a baseball from a game in the 1944 World Series.

Still, I wanted to know more about the members of Grandpa's family whom I would never know in person. In one picture from the 1880s, my great-grandparents are a young couple standing on either side of two children; here, in the mid-1890s, a sober-looking Bob poses in front of his willowy (and probably pregnant) mother one Sunday afternoon, his father's devilish expression so different from the faces of his serious wife and son.

I wanted to understand better where the Grooms fit into this town fifteen miles southeast of St. Louis. Belleville was a coal-mining center, and Bob's father and his grandfather were mine managers and eventually mine owners. As the county seat, Belleville was a political and banking center, and in my grandfather's day, the town's trolley tracks intersected at the Belleville public square. After 1902, the "electric train" (as the trolley was also known) ran several times a day from Belleville across the Mississippi River via the Eads Bridge and all the way to St. Louis in less than an hour.

Bob's baseball journey literally began on that trolley, which carried local teams of coworkers and some semipro teams that paid their best players to their games in the "Trolley League." Bob had a curve and was working on a blazing, if sometimes wild, fastball, and as his reputation as a pitcher grew, he was probably one of those who were paid. As a Senator in 1911, Bob recalled his Trolley League days:

I didn't have much but a wide curve, but oh, how it used to faze those lads trying to hit it. During the entire season before I entered organized ball, I averaged fifteen strikeouts to a game. I was billed as one of the Groom brothers battery, and people used to come to see us work. Alec Groom and Bob Groom got their names in the papers with great regularity. But Alec Groom wasn't my brother. He was my cousin; however, few ever knew that, and we passed for a long time as the Groom brothers battery.¹

Bob's baseball odyssey would start in 1904, the year all eyes were on St. Louis, and everyone was singing, "Meet me in St. Louis, Louis, meet me at the Fair." That March a well-known St. Louis baseball man, Jake Bene, signed a promising nineteen-year-old right-hander from Belleville named Groom to play for the professional Fort Scott, Kansas team in the Class D Missouri Valley league—the bottom rung of organized ball. The family coal business was slower anyway during the summer, and Bob signed his first contract for $60 a month for that summer. He was on his way.

His rookie season must have been a test of will for Bob and his team; it's a wonder he didn't quit or get fired, with a dismal record of 25 losses and just 8 wins.
Then, in the fall after that dispiriting season, his beloved mother died suddenly at 44. The family landscape was undergoing major changes: Bob’s older sister Mayme had married, but then died in childbirth in 1902. That left the widower John in the new “anniversary” house with his daughter Annie and sons Bob, Bill, and Ollie, the “caboose” born in 1898. It must have taken grit to continue the journey Bob had started, but in March 1905 he was traded to Springfield, Missouri, a better team in a better Class C league, the Western Association. In two seasons as a Springfield “Midget,” lanky Bob’s two seasons of 20 or more wins caught the attention of the legendary Walter McCredie, and in 1907 Bob signed with the McCredie family’s Portland, Oregon, team in the elite Class A Pacific Coast League. More than the cross-country trip, the move to Portland marked a new departure in Bob’s baseball journey. Despite the Beavers’ losing season, Bob gave the Beavers their first-ever no-hitter, beating the league-leading Los Angeles Angels 3–0 on June 16. “Declared by all the batters of the league to be the hardest twirler on the Western Slope to hit,” Bob next posted a 29–15 record for 1908 to lead the PCL in wins.

After July rumors about big league scouts and the Cleveland Indians looking to sign him, Bob signed with the Washington Senators in September 1908, and he would be followed by PCL pitcher “Dolly” Gray, a Los Angeles southpaw. Walter Johnson, with whom Bob would drive back to the Midwest after the close of seasons, had whetted Washington fans’ appetite for winning, and the two West Coast pitchers were hailed as promising new Senators. The Washington Post persisted in describing Bob Groom as “the elongated Californian who is showing up well in practice games,” but, rookie baseball cards and occasional heroics aside, Bob Groom’s first major-league season resembled his first in the minors. After a disaster of a debut and a string of early-season losses, he won a trio of games in early June but reverted to losing until the 7–6 win over Boston on July 5th that for many years was inexplicably listed as a loss.

The disheartening string of defeats that began after July 5 had one memorable hiatus. On July 16, Groom earned the nickname that would follow him through his career: “Long Bob,” which referred not to height but stamina. Though Deadball pitchers were expected to pitch complete games and Bob could go the distance, July 16 called for a bit more. In an 18-inning scoreless marathon against Detroit, he pitched the last 9⅔ innings after his PCL compatriot Dolly Gray pulled a muscle in his back early in the ninth. The game wore on and on. Despite players’ protests, the umpires called the game at 0–0 in the 18th because of darkness, and it appears to have stood as the longest scoreless tie until the advent of lighted parks. Gabby Street, who caught the entire game for Washington, called it the most memorable game of his long career. But after that game the losses continued until late September, adding up to a very shaky rookie season.

In 1910, Jimmy McAleer took over the Washington managing job from Joe Cantillon, and Bob began to get his bearings. In a game early that year in Detroit, he sat the great Ty Cobb down three times on strikeouts, two of them called. The sportswriters dubbed Bob “Tiger Tamer,” and Ty took a cordial dislike to him. Throughout their overlapping careers, Groom and Cobb seem to have respected the other’s fierce competitiveness, and Cobb named Groom to his list of toughest pitchers to face. Another name the writers had for Bob, “Sir Robert,” seems to have come from his authoritative, serious demeanor on the mound, for it literally made news when he smiled.

The 1910 and 1911 seasons saw Washington “rebuilding,” and Bob’s baseball journey was far from finished. In 1910, the Senators were called “awful,” compiling a 64–90 record and finishing seventh, which was not much to smile about. But Bob embarked on other important journeys during those two years. In 1910 he entered the St. Louis School of Medicine, and at the end of the 1910 season, on November 19, he married his Belleville sweetheart, Katie Birkner. My father, named Robert John for his father and grand father, was born in Belleville the following September.

Kate and young Robbie would live in Washington
during the 1912 and 1913 seasons, traveling back to Illinois when the Senators took western swings to play St. Louis and Chicago. Having a family in tow, however, was not necessarily such a good idea: Bob was scheduled to start the May 1, 1913, first game in a series in Boston, but Tom Hughes took over after the twenty-month-old Robbie decided to exit the Groom apartment via a window. The Post reported Bob caught up with the team via the Federal Express and that fortunately his son had not been so badly injured as first thought.

Many players pursued an education during the off-seasons, and for two years Bob played ball and studied medicine. But by 1912, he had reached the point when he was required to spend a solid year as an intern. That year the Senators had hired a young manager named Clark Griffith away from the Cincinnati Reds, and it was obvious that Bob could not intern and play ball at the same time. The road he was on was diverging, and he had to make a choice. He chose baseball, and his 1912, 24-win season would be his best. That August, the team president, Thomas C. Noyes, died unexpectedly, and the team posed in groups of two and three players for a panorama photograph. 4

Washington sportswriters had early on discerned two notable things about the lanky Bellevillean: that he usually got the better of Detroit and Chicago, and that he pitched much better ball on the road than at home. About the first, they had no real explanation, but about the second they noted that Washington fans were vociferously behind only one pitcher: Walter Johnson. They reported that Washington fans rode other pitchers for not equaling the awesome Big Train, and their taunts were something Bob took to heart. On the road, away from the bugging of the hometown fans, he was just fine, and on many occasions much better than just fine. Billy Evans, arguably the era’s most respected umpire and a Hall of Famer, said that Bob never got full credit for his ability. “He happened to be on the same team as Walter Johnson, who overshadowed everyone,” said Evans. “If he had been with some other club, I dare say Groom would have been regarded as a speed marvel.” Evans went on to say, “He had an overhand curve ball, the kind we called an out-drop when we were kids. I don’t believe there is a pitcher around today with the same type of curve. George Uhle is the last one I remember.” 5

In 1912 and 1913, Washington was indeed out of the doldrums, finishing second in the league in both years—their first appearance in the first division. But it was not a surprise to learn that, after five years of playing second banana, Bob Groom would leap at the chance to play for a St. Louis club, where his home-stands would literally be at home. Joining a team in
the “outlaw” Federal League was a gamble, but Bob wasn’t the only pitcher to see opportunities there. Walter Johnson’s dalliances with the St. Louis and Chicago teams are well documented, and in the end Clark Griffith only managed to keep the Big Train in Washington by buying out Johnson’s contract with the Chicago Whales, using money supplied by Charles Comiskey, who didn’t want the Washington star pulling crowds from his White Sox’s games.

Perhaps because Bob was usually among the last to send back his contract each year, stories published at the time of his defection attributed his move to the Federal League’s higher salaries. I suspect that this was not the real reason, since baseball was not his only (and probably not his primary) source of income, and that Bob’s perennial salary and contract los de deux with Washington had as much to do with his medical studies and family situation as wanting to get a bit more from the notoriously tight-fisted Griffith. His eventual move to the St. Louis Feds really had to do with his knowing who he was and where he belonged. Bob’s brothers, my great-uncles, were kind, generous men, but my great-grandfather knew that the running of his coal company would have to be done by Bob. A man who could face the bats of Cobb and Shoeless Joe would be uniquely equipped to face the miners’ union bosses and run a growing business. Young Robbie, at four, had already become the handful he would continue to be all his life, and though Bob Groom had literally played ball from coast to coast, Belleville would always be home to him.

In 1914, Bob would turn 31 years old and, looking back, one might say that his best baseball years were behind him. His best playing years, perhaps—but baseball would always be a part of his life: managing Belleville’s White Rose team in the 1920s and then helping run the Trolley League, from which he’d graduated, and founding the Belleville American Legion team in the 1930s. And finally taking a granddaughter to those Hilgards Legion games and explaining the Cardinals’ games as Harry Caray and Gabby Street broadcast them into the hot Illinois summer nights.

Notes
The author wishes to express her gratitude to SABR member John Stahl for his important work on the Bob Groom biography in Deadball Stars of the American League and on the BioProject article on Bob Groom.

1. “Battery of Brothers Were Really Cousins, but the Fans Didn’t Know,” Mansfield (Ohio) News, 15 July 1911, and several other newspapers.
2. From a Portland program, courtesy of Brian Campf.
4. In addition to Walter Johnson—who, alas, had not been cloned to produce Groom or Gray—the 1912 picture also includes a tough-looking customer named Arnold “Chick” Gandil, the infamous 1919 “Black Sox” linchpin.
5. Billy Evans’s quote is from the article “Fame of Bob Groom: His Death Recalls Record Game in Detroit,” by Sam Greene and dated 19 February 1948, in the National Baseball Hall of Fame clipping file on Bob Groom. No further bibliographic information is provided in the file.
The Class D Blue Ridge League—1918, the Lost Season

Minor League Baseball in the Midst of the War Effort and the Spanish Influenza

Mark C. Zeigler

The Great War in Europe had finally reached the shores of the United States in 1917, and when the time came for baseball leagues to plan for the following season, many able-bodied young men had already signed up to serve their country. With a shortage of players and finances, many leagues had folded by the time the 1917 season officially ended.

Blue Ridge: The Only Class D League Left Standing
When the 1918 season began, only ten leagues in all of the classifications started play. The Blue Ridge League was the only Class D league in operation. The other leagues remaining included the three Class AA leagues: American Association, International, and Pacific Coast; two Class A leagues: Southern and Western; three Class B leagues: Eastern, Pacific Coast International, and Texas; and one Class C league, Virginia.

Unfortunately, as the war effort continued, leagues were forced to suspend operations or disband due to lack of players and finances by the individual clubs. By September, the only baseball being played came from the two major leagues and the Class AA International League.

The Class D Blue Ridge League, under the leadership of James Vincent Jamison Jr. had many uphill battles to start the season, but with a little creativity and help from a few new sources, began the season that, unfortunately, would not last very long.

Blue Ridge League Loses Several Members
When the 1917 season ended, the financially insolvent Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, club ceased operations. With the addition of the Cumberland, Maryland, franchise in July of 1917, the Hanover, Pennsylvania, club complained about inconveniences and travel costs in trekking such a long distance to that Western Maryland town. With Gettysburg no longer in the league, Hanover soon dropped out, citing financial concerns and the lack of resources to properly field a team.

On March 6, 1918, the league moguls met at the Hamilton Hotel in Hagerstown, Maryland, to decide the fate of the league. With Hagerstown, Cumberland, and Frederick verbally committing to field teams, it was decided then to field four teams, with Martinsburg of West Virginia agreeing to become the fourth league club. The representatives of each club were Colonel N. W. Russler of Cumberland, Frank K. Schmidt of Frederick, J. C. Roulette, T. B. South, and W. C. Conley of Hagerstown, and C. A. Miller, E. C. Shepherd, and Max von Schlagel of Martinsburg.

With four clubs agreeing to begin play, the league looked like it would continue until two weeks before the beginning of the season. On May 10, Schmidt announced that the Frederick club would not be able to field a team for the 1918 season due to the lack of enthusiasm and financial support, because their supporters were concentrating efforts on the war overseas.

Scrambling to Field Enough Teams
With Frederick’s unexpected announcement, president Jamison was forced to scramble to find enough teams to continue the league. He had previously invited representatives from York, Carlisle, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to join the league, but they declined due to travel and financial concerns.

The Chambersburg team, who had moved their franchise the previous June 30 to Cumberland, was also touted as a possible replacement, but their home ballpark, known as Wolf Park, had been plowed up and was being used for agricultural purposes, leaving them with no place to play. Luckily for Jamison and the league, tiny Piedmont, located along the Potomac River in Allegany County, Maryland, near Westernport, agreed on May 13 to field the fourth team to keep the league alive. The league rescheduled their opening day for May 28, which gave Piedmont just two weeks to field a team and prepare a field to play.

The Managers on the Field
The four managers selected at the beginning of the season included veteran William G. “Country” Morris, who was starting his fourth season as manager of the Martinsburg club; Eddie Hooper, who managed the 1916 league championship team and part of the 1917 season in Chambersburg, until the club was transferred to Cumberland, and who returned to manage the Cumberland club; veteran pitcher Ernest “Doc” Ferris, who managed Hagerstown; and infielder Arthur
“Shorty” Smith, who managed the new Piedmont club. Piedmont tried to hire adopted native son and former major leaguer Bill “Baldy” Louden, but was caught in a dispute with his former club, Minneapolis, when they would not release him from his contract. When the AA club later offered Louden for $1,000, the Piedmont club said “No, thanks” and kept Smith at the helm.

DRYBUGS JOIN BRL RANKS
Hagerstown continued to use the moniker “Terriers” for the 1918 season, while Martinsburg stayed with “Mountaineers,” and Cumberland with “Colts.” The Piedmont/Westernport club decided to name themselves the “Drybugs,” for the nickname they used during their one season in the defunct Class D Potomac League in 1916. The team played their home games at Potomac Field on the Maryland side of the banks of the Potomac River, but the club’s offices were officially located on the West Virginia side. The “drybug” was supposedly an insect that was known to habitat in that region of the Potomac River.

1918 SEASON OPENS
When the league opened on May 28 in Hagerstown, it featured an entirely different look, as many players from the season before had signed up for the armed services or were playing on different clubs. Martinsburg’s Roy Myers won a rain-shortened season opener over the Terriers, 3 to 1, in a game that featured former Frederick Hustlers manager Tom Crooke playing for the Mountaineers. In the other season opener, the Colts defeated Piedmont 9 to 6 in Cumberland. The Drybugs were short one outfielder for the game, and “borrowed” Cumberland’s Joe Raley to play for the visitors. Eddie Hooper hit a home run for the Colts.

A FEW GOOD MEN
As the season started, several prospects started to emerge; however, the war effort quickly began to take its toll on the young men playing ball in the Blue Ridge League. Martinsburg’s top slugger, Fred “Buss” Hager, and H. “Ben” Mallonee of Cumberland both were called to active duty less than one week into the season, which followed a pattern that would plague the league’s officials in trying to field quality teams.

PIEDMONT DILEMMA
Trouble brewed just before the first week of play was completed for the new Piedmont club. After the fifth game of the season, Piedmont was in first place, but six members of the 13-man Drybugs announced to manager “Shorty” Smith that they were quitting the club to return home for higher-paying jobs. All these players were from the Baltimore, Maryland, area, including his top five players, third baseman Arthur Dove, outfielders Hiram Kurtz and “Roger” Maul, first baseman Elmer Williams, and pitcher Ben Schaufele.

One player, infielder Andy Creighton, did respond to Smith’s pleas to stay, and returned to the club after a two-game absence. Schaufele made appearances during the weekend games, winning a league-high five games, but the disruption caused discontent among the remaining players, which was a precursor of what was happening around the league at the time. For the next couple of weeks, the Drybugs roster looked like a revolving door of players, with only Smith and Creighton playing more than eight games.

PROSPECTS
Hagerstown pitcher Howard Victor Keen, an Eastern Shore teenager from Snow Hill, joined the Terriers, and instantly became a popular player in the Hub City, along with becoming one of the league’s better pitchers. In five starts, Keen led all pitchers with 33 strikeouts when the league disbanded in mid-June. The Terriers catcher, Douglas “Dixie” Parker, was also impressive, and along with teammates Keen and William D. “Snooks” Hanretty caught on with the Petersburg, Virginia, club of the Class C Virginia League after the BRL folded. When the Virginia League folded on July 20, Keen signed with the International League’s Baltimore Orioles. Before he played a game for the Orioles, Keen was called up by Connie Mack to pitch one game for the American League’s Philadelphia Athletics, when the club was in desperate need of pitching. Parker, an Alabama native, also went on to play four games in the majors with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1923.

Despite struggling both on and off the field, the Martinsburg club did feature a future member of the 1927 World Champion New York Yankees. Walter Beall, an 18-year-old from Washington, D.C., who made his professional debut in the Blue Ridge League as a 15-year-old in 1915, lost all four of his decisions with the last-place Mountaineers. Beall, who led the International League in strikeouts and ERA in 1923 by beating out “Lefty” Grove for top honors, would spend four seasons with the Yankees, from 1924 to 1927, and was a teammate of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

Piedmont’s Ben Schaufele had the distinction of being the only pitcher to win five games, despite pitching mainly on the weekends. Cumberland player/manager Hooper and third baseman Joe Brophy were among the league’s best batters, and second baseman Leo Seiffert was among the league’s best fielders.
One of the strangest games of the season was on June 1, when Cumberland scored three unearned runs in the first inning to defeat Hagerstown 3 to 1, despite getting only one hit off Terriers’ pitcher, George Zinn. Two of the best games of the season came off the arm of Piedmont’s “Stub” Brown, who tossed back-to-back shutouts. Brown won a 1–0 pitcher’s duel against Cumberland’s Charles Hammill on June 2, and came back five days later to toss a two-hit shutout at Martinsburg, defeating Mountaineers hurler “Robert” Fitch, 2–0.

Mysterious Ending
The Martinsburg club was on shaky ground financially when the season started. When they experimented with twilight game times they realized that their attendance at the gate did not improve, and their officials, realizing that they were in a losing proposition with a lack of attendance and increased travel costs, devised a plan that led to the demise of the league on June 15. As other remaining minor leagues began to feel the pressures to disband due to the war effort, the sentiment was similar to that of some of the officials in the Blue Ridge League.

The league was in its second week when Martinsburg called a meeting of the four member clubs in the West Virginia town. Piedmont, not realizing the urgency of the meeting, sent a proxy to league president Jamison, and Cumberland was not aware of the details of the meeting. That would prove fatal, as Martinsburg’s officials had planned to convince the discontinuance of the league less than three weeks into the season. Hagerstown club president J. C. Roulette was confined to his bed with a serious illness, and his vice president, Thomas B. South, was sent to represent the Terriers. Martinsburg officials took advantage of this situation, and convinced South to agree with them to suspend the remainder of the season due to the war effort. With Cumberland and Piedmont against disbanding, the final vote rested with President Jamison, who eventually agreed with Martinsburg that it would be in everyone’s best interest to suspend operations.

Piedmont and Cumberland’s Last Game
The weekend of June 15–16 turned out to be the last games of the season, and the last of Piedmont and Cumberland in the Blue Ridge League. On Saturday, June 15, Hagerstown defeated the Drybugs 4 to 3, while Cumberland defeated Martinsburg, 5–0 behind a five-hit shutout by “Lefty” Block. Piedmont defeated the Colts at Cumberland, in the league’s final game played on Sunday, June 16. The Colts (11–6) had the best record of the suspended season, but received no accolades, since the season would be considered incomplete, as the league had lasted less than three weeks.

Cumberland, still furious over the way Martinsburg “hoodwinked” the other league members to disband, announced that they would keep their club, and play independent ball for the remainder of the season. That resentment would run deep, as Colonel Nelson Russler vowed that his Cumberland club would never return to the Blue Ridge League.

Quiet at the Bat
When the season ended after the seventeenth scheduled game, Hagerstown (7–10) batters had the distinction of not hitting any triples or home runs during the 1918 season.

Martinsburg also did not hit any home runs during the season. Hooper, the Colts player/manager, led the league with three round-trippers, in a year where only five home runs were hit in the entire league. The other two came from Piedmont’s Arthur “Shorty” Smith and “Mike” Preston.

Where Do We Go From Here?
With the abrupt end to professional baseball in the Blue Ridge, those players and officials not signing to join the armed services had to find alternatives.

The area Industrial Leagues, especially in Hagerstown, Maryland, and Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, soon recruited several of the former Blue Ridge League players to work and play for their company teams. Among them included pitchers Chaiky McCleary, Hanson Horsey, Walt Herrell, and outfielder Bill Sykes. The Blue Ridge League’s demise was a boon to the area Industrial Leagues, who drew fans wanting to see good baseball.

Some players, including former Hanover infielder Toney Citrano, who played for the Baltimore Dry Docks, worked and played for the railroad-owned baseball teams in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Several others, like J. Roy Clunk and George W. “Buck” Ramsey, played in railroad leagues in central Pennsylvania. In some areas, the local church leagues also saw an increase of misplaced ballplayers on their teams.

In Cumberland and Piedmont, an independent league schedule was formed with the neighboring West Virginia towns of Clarksburg and Fairmont, to serve those communities’ interest in the sport. Manager Eddie Hooper was one of the few Cumberland players who left the club after the league folded, deciding to sign with the Binghamton, New York, club in the Class AA International League. He was one of several former Blue Ridge League players who found themselves on International League rosters, along with Hooper’s former
Chambersburg teammate from 1916, Karl Kolseth, and his former Hagerstown teammate from the previous season, Charles Dysert. Kolseth split time between the Baltimore, Maryland, and Newark, New Jersey, clubs, and Dysert spent a month with the Baltimore club. Several other players moved to the Class B Virginia League, which did not disband until later in the summer. Among them was Hagerstown pitcher “Vic” Keen, who was signed by Philadelphia’s Connie Mack, and pitched for four different leagues while making his major-league debut with the Athletics late in the 1918 season.

**NO BASEBALL IN 1919**

Though an attempt was made by officials of the Frederick and Martinsburg clubs to bring back the league, the after effects of the war, the flu epidemic that raged throughout the country during the latter part of 1918, and the limited resources and finances of the other former league towns kept the Blue Ridge League from returning in 1919.

**Class D, Blue Ridge League, 1918 Season Summary**

President: James Vincent Jamison Jr., Hagerstown, Maryland

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<th>Club</th>
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**Notes:** Drybugs also were referred to as Piedmont/Westernport (Md.). League folded on June 16.

**Battling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batting average</th>
<th>.343</th>
<th>Wm. “Joe” Brophy, Cumberland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home runs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eddie Hooper, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runs</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>H. L. Hinkey, Hagerstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hits</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Wm. “Joe” Brophy, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arthur Dove, Piedmont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triples</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leo Seiffert, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total bases</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Eddie Hooper, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slugging pct.</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>Eddie Hooper, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen bases</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>H. L. Hinkey, Hagerstown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacrifice hits</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Leo Seiffert, Cumberland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bases on balls</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Andy Creighton, Piedmont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit by pitch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>tied by several players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice flies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>tied by several players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games played</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>tied by several players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-bats</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>W. “Joe” Brophy, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runs batted in *</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Eddie Hooper, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand slams</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pitching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wins</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Ben Schaufele, Piedmont</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Win pct.</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>Ben Schaufele (5–0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Walter Beall, Martinsburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games pitched</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>by several pitchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games started</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>H. Victor Keen, Hagerstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete games</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Charles” Hammill, Cumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ben Schaufele, Piedmont</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Shutouts | 1 | tied by several pitchers |
| Innings pitched | 48 | H. Victor Keen, Hagerstown |
| Strikeouts | 33 | H. Victor Keen, Hagerstown |
| Bases on balls | 28 | Walter Beall, Martinsburg |
| No-hitters | None |

Umpires: Augustus “Gus” Boyne O’Day, Monte Cross, Harry E. Taylor

* Not an official statistic in the Blue Ridge League, Class D, in 1918.

32
### Former Blue Ridge League Players in Major Leagues Serving Their Country during World War I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Major League Club</th>
<th>Blue Ridge League Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ivan &quot;Pete&quot; Bigler</td>
<td>St. Louis Cardinals</td>
<td>Gettysburg 1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Cobb (Serafin)</td>
<td>Detroit Tigers</td>
<td>Cumberland/Cumberland 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Joseph Dykes</td>
<td>Philadelphia Athletics</td>
<td>Gettysburg 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Mardo Goodwin</td>
<td>St. Louis Cardinals</td>
<td>Martinsburg 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl Nycum Howard</td>
<td>St. Louis Cardinals</td>
<td>Gettysburg 1915; Hagerstown 1916–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Victor Keen</td>
<td>Philadelphia Athletics</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Harmon Lamar</td>
<td>New York Yankees</td>
<td>Frederick 1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Malone</td>
<td>Brooklyn Robins</td>
<td>Frederick 1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William H. Sherdel</td>
<td>St. Louis Cardinals</td>
<td>Hanover 1915–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Smallwood</td>
<td>New York Yankees</td>
<td>Hanover 1915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Known Former Blue Ridge League Players in Minor Leagues Serving Their Country during World War I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Blue Ridge League Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Marshall Allen</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Armstrong</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Enoch Baker</td>
<td>Gettysburg 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester Bangs</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1916–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clyde Lee Barnhart</td>
<td>Frederick 1915–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Frank Bedenken</td>
<td>Gettysburg 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Edward Benson</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Colley</td>
<td>Frederick 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doll Derr (L. D. Sahm)</td>
<td>BRL umpire 1915, 1916, 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur H. Dove</td>
<td>Piedmont 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Joseph &quot;Jack&quot; Dunn Jr.</td>
<td>Frederick 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Cormann Dysert</td>
<td>Chambersburg/Cumberland 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Gallagher</td>
<td>Cumberland 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernest &quot;Doc&quot; Ferris</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1916–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Wesley Freeny</td>
<td>Hagerstown 1915–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred &quot;Buss&quot; Hager</td>
<td>Martinsburg 1915, 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucian S. Hiner **</td>
<td>Martinsburg/Hagerstown 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George J. Holbig **</td>
<td>Hanover/Cumberland 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Koplin Hostetter</td>
<td>Martinsburg 1915, 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hanover 1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Killed in action
** Died from influenza

### Acknowledgments
Special Thanks to Mary Jo Foster, Frostburg State University Library; Marry Mannix and Darrel Batson, Maryland Room, C. Burr Artz Library, Frederick, Maryland; John Frye, Western Maryland Room, Washington County Public Library, Hagerstown, Maryland; Minor League Baseball, St. Petersburg, Florida; Lloyd Johnson and Miles Wolff, The Minor League Baseball Encyclopedia, 2d edition; Ken Malnar, 270net.com, www.newspaperarchive.com; Society of American Baseball Research and its members.
The geography that includes the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, central Pennsylvania, eastern West Virginia, and southern Delaware roughly defines the boundaries of the original chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research. Bob Davids, a Washington, D.C., resident, founded the Society in 1971. There are approximately 7,000 members worldwide, but this chapter alone has almost 500 members. This imaginary team has been assembled using the best players born within those boundaries. Hall of Famers are indicated by an asterisk. All-Stars are in solid caps.

### The All-Time Team of Bob Davids Chapter Natives

**D. Bruce Brown**

The geography that includes the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, central Pennsylvania, eastern West Virginia, and southern Delaware roughly defines the boundaries of the original chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research. Bob Davids, a Washington, D.C., resident, founded the Society in 1971. There are approximately 7,000 members worldwide, but this chapter alone has almost 500 members. This imaginary team has been assembled using the best players born within those boundaries. Hall of Famers are indicated by an asterisk. All-Stars are in solid caps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>PLACE OF BIRTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>JIMMIE FOXX*</td>
<td>Sudlersville, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>RAY DANDRIDGE*</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>FRANK BAKER*</td>
<td>Trappe, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>CAL RIPKEN*</td>
<td>Havre de Grace, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Butch Wynegar</td>
<td>York, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>VIC WERTZ</td>
<td>York, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>BABE RUTH*</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>AL KALINE*</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH</td>
<td>Harold Baines</td>
<td>Easton, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PH (r)</td>
<td>Judy Johnson*</td>
<td>Snow Hill, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PH (l)</td>
<td>Jud Wilson*</td>
<td>Remington, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PH (b)</td>
<td>Mark Teixiera</td>
<td>Severna Park, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Maury Wills</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PITCHING</th>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>PLACE OF BIRTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>Vic Willis*</td>
<td>Cecil County, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>Leon Day*</td>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>Bobby Mathews</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Eddie Plank*</td>
<td>Gettysburg, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>LEFTY GROVE*</td>
<td>Lonaconing, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Eppa Rixey*</td>
<td>Culpeper, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Steve Barber</td>
<td>Takoma Park, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Steve Farr</td>
<td>La Plata, MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Brendan Donnelly</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer</td>
<td>BRUCE SUTTER*</td>
<td>Lancaster, PA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENCH &amp; BULLPEN</th>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>PLACE OF BIRTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brady Anderson</td>
<td>Silver Spring, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu Blue</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Bullett</td>
<td>Martinsburg, WV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cupid Childs</td>
<td>Calvert County, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordy Coleman</td>
<td>Rockville, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delino DeShields</td>
<td>Seaford, DE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Foutz</td>
<td>Carroll County, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Gerhardt</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck Herzog</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Jordan</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Nicholson</td>
<td>Chestertown, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Short</td>
<td>Milford, DE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy Werber</td>
<td>Berwyn, MD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Listed as born in Havre De Grace, MD.

---

**Caption**
MUCH MORE than a booster of baseball locally, J. V. Jamison Jr., prominent Hagerstown industrialist and civic leader, was a moving spirit of professional baseball for most of the first half of the twentieth century. His influence reached not only his hometown and the state of Maryland, but the country.

Jamison was born in Luray, Page County, Virginia, on February 28, 1885. His family moved to Hagerstown when he was 12 years of age. Mr. Jamison’s interest in sports traced back to his public school days and to St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland. A natural athlete, he became a three-letter man in college, taking as well to tennis and football as he did to his favorite sport, baseball. His classmates named him best athlete of St. John’s graduating class of 1905.

While pursuing a career in manufacturing, he co-founded what is now known as Jamison Cold Storage Door Company in Hagerstown, Maryland, with his father when they purchased the Jones Cold Storage Company in 1906. Jamison kept up his interest in baseball, and was elected vice president of the semipro Tri-City League in 1914. This proved to be a training ground; Jamison was elected president of the Class D Blue Ridge League in May of 1916 by the league directors after original League president, Charles W. Boyer, who also owned the Hagerstown club, abruptly resigned because of a conflict of interest. Jamison developed one of the finest Class D minor leagues in the nation during his tenure with the league, which lasted through the 1930 season, the remainder of the league’s existence. The league was a proving ground for many major leaguers, including Hall of Famers Lefty Grove, Hack Wilson, umpire Bill McGowan, and noted players Bill Sherdel, Jimmy Dykes, Joe Boley, and Eddie Rommel.

His firm hand in dealing with controversy in the league and handing out swift punishment to those who violated the rules gave Jamison a reputation that was admired by his fellow league presidents and followers throughout the sport. Mr. Jamison served on a commission that elected Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis as the first commissioner of baseball in 1920. Jamison held many offices in the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, and served several terms on the Board of Arbitration and the Junior World Series. At one time, he was in charge of the intra-city series between the Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox.

In addition to his contributions on a national level, Jamison always contributed generously of both time and energy to the promotion of baseball in Hagerstown and Washington County, Maryland. He was instrumental in planning and building Municipal Stadium in Hagerstown in 1930, and was a key figure in effecting the return of Organized Baseball to Hagerstown by helping persuade Oren E. Sterling to move his Class B Interstate League franchise from Sunbury, Pennsylvania, to Hagerstown in 1941. Five years later, Jamison was elected president of that league, which experienced spectacular success during the postwar years.

Jamison was a founding member of the Hagerstown Rotary Club, and was active in the American Red Cross and in the state’s political arena as a prominent Democrat. He married the former Anna Elder Alvey, who died in 1908. They had two children, James Vincent Jamison III and Richard Alvey Jamison.

Jamison died in Hagerstown, Maryland, on August 28, 1954, at the age of 69.

**Sources**
Frank Colley, sports editor, obituary and article in Hagerstown (Md.) Morning Herald, 30 August 1954; Western Maryland Room, Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Maryland. Author’s note: Colley pitched in the Blue Ridge League for several years, including 1916, 1917, and 1922.
FANS CAME from miles around—families in wheezing Model Ts, farmers by horse-drawn wagons, folks of all ages on bicycles and on foot. Down flat, dusty roads past fertile fields of potatoes, melons, and corn ripening fast in the late summer sun. Their destination—the sleepy little town of Parksley, Virginia, hard by the Maryland state line on the Chesapeake Bay’s Eastern Shore. More precisely, they had come on this hot September afternoon in 1922 to watch a baseball game between their hometown Parksley Spuds, champions of the newly formed Eastern Shore League, and the Martinsburg Blue Sox, champions of the Blue Ridge League, in a battle for Class D baseball regional supremacy they were calling the Five-State Series.

By 3:30 game time, the ancient wooden grandstand was already overflowing with a crowd easily twice the size of Parksley’s 600 souls. They had filled the seats early and were entertained by the Onancock Band while waiting for league officials and other local dignitaries to join the two teams in a parade to the centerfield flag-raising ceremonies. By the time the Spuds took the field and home plate umpire Arthur Cloak called “play ball,” the fans had long been on their feet.

Few were giving Parksley much of a chance. Although Spuds manager Thomas “Poke” Whalen had put together a decent team that won the 1922 pennant by six games over Cambridge, the Spuds were decided underdogs. The swaggering Martinsburg team had bludgeoned their way to the Blue Ridge League title with sluggers George “Reggie” Rawlings and Lewis “Hack” Wilson terrorizing their opponents. The visitors had come to this isolated Eastern Shore village ready to show the upstart Parksley lads who really was the boss of Class D baseball in the Bay region. Time for talk was past and braggin’ rights were on the line.

The answer was quick in coming. Martinsburg rocked veteran Parksley right-hander Frank Hummer for four home runs and took a convincing 8–3 win in the opening game before a disappointed crowd of 1,445 fans. Blue Sox pitcher Hank Hulvey allowed the Spuds only four hits.

The next day was a repeat, with Martinsburg taking a 3–0 decision. Walter “Yap” Seaman doled out three measly singles and shortstop Johnny Brehany supplied the only needed run with a first-inning drive over the left-field fence.

The series moved to Salisbury on September 9, where a large crowd of 2,229 jammed Gordy Park to watch a close and exciting game go to Martinsburg 2–1 in eleven innings. Ross Roberts of Martinsburg and John Clayton of Parksley staged a classic pitchers’ duel, each allowing only six hits.

The Blue Sox winning run came when third baseman Joe Brophy scored on Brehany’s suicide squeeze bunt.

Two days later at Martinsburg, the Blue Sox completed a four-game sweep, again shutting out Parksley 4–0 behind lefty Kirk Heatwole. Rawlings’s home run and a triple play by the Blue Sox highlighted the action as rain shortened the game to six innings and held the home attendance at Rosemont Park to 1,196.

Martinsburg won the 1922 Five-State Series with clearly superior hitting and pitching. The Parksley club battled hard and kept the games close, for the most part. More importantly, Eastern Shore fans were solidly behind their team. The series drew a total attendance of 5,617, with the winning team players pocketing $176.92 each. The losers’ share was $117.92. Not bad for an extra week’s work in those days. It showed both leagues that a postseason series could be a financial success, something of real significance to struggling Class D baseball operators, not to mention the players.

THE BAY BASEBALL RIVALRY BEGINS

The Five-State Series originated as the brainchild of Baltimore Sun sports editor J. Edward Sparrow, who conceived the idea of promoting a “Baseball Championship of Maryland” in the summer of 1921. His proposal would feature the winner of the Blue Ridge League, a well-established circuit of towns in western Maryland and nearby parts of West Virginia and southern Pennsylvania, and the independent Eastern Shore League, long a hotbed of amateur baseball, eager to show it could compete on a faster professional level.

Sparrow’s idea was quickly taken up by J. Vincent Jamison Jr., a Hagerstown industrialist and president
of the Blue Ridge League. Jamison was an able administrator who had kept the league in business since 1916 and tirelessly promoted it as a model of Class D stability (no mean feat for the chronically underfunded small-town ball clubs). Jamison was also well known in Organized Baseball circles, serving as the smaller Class D clubs’ representative on the National Board of Arbitration of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues. He was a close personal friend of Commissioner Judge Kenesaw M. Landis, American League President Ban Johnson, and Philadelphia Athletics owner Connie Mack, whose son Earle managed Martinsburg to the Blue Ridge League championship in 1922 and 1923. Moreover, he was also advising Eastern Shore baseball interests on the process for gaining Organized Baseball recognition.

The *Sun* newspaper sponsored a 1921 series between Frederick, the Blue Ridge League champion, and tiny Princess Anne, representing the independent Eastern Shore League, the predecessor to the 1922 Class D league. Although largely ignored by Organized Baseball people, the series was a huge regional success. Frederick won this initial series four games to one, with the final game played on September 10, 1921, at Oriole Park in Baltimore, before an estimated crowd of 10,000 fans. The two teams played a meaningless second game that Sunday afternoon, which Frederick also won.

Although Princess Anne lost, its local hero Dick Porter was on his way to a major-league career. In fact, Porter had already been sold to Jack Dunn’s Baltimore Orioles and had been “loaned” back to Princess Anne for the series. It was not enough to keep Frederick from winning, but the excitement generated in the postseason matchup was enough to convince the *Sun* to continue its sponsorship. When Martinsburg and Parksley won their respective pennants in 1922, Sparrow realized it was no longer solely a Maryland affair and it became the Five-State Series, covering Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania as well as Maryland.

The Five-State series was well covered by the newspapers. Ed Sparrow, of course, was there for every game, writing for the *Sun*. Local papers like the *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, the *Hagerstown Morning Herald*, the *Dover Index*, and the *Cambridge Daily Banner* gave extensive inning-by-inning game summaries as well as daily and composite box scores of every game. Front-page headlines and player photographs were prominently displayed, especially when the home team won. In short, the Five-State Series was big news for local baseball fans.

This intense interest created well-received recognition. The players and the leagues not only gained badly needed revenues, but the winning clubs also received the Ned Hanlon Cup and the Ban Johnson Five-State Pennant for its achievements. Individual players received miniature gold baseball medals presented by the *Sun* newspaper. Medals were also awarded to the Most Valuable Player from both teams participating in the postseason games.

The Five-State Series also benefited from the appearance of many notable baseball figures. Commissioner Landis, Ban Johnson, Connie Mack, Jack Dunn, and Mike Sexton, the president of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, often attended games. Other major-league owners and scouts showed up to look for baseball talent on display. Although it was lowly Class D ball, the series (while it lasted) attracted an audience of fans and baseball people all out of proportion to its limited provincial base.

The series had several unique features that helped to widen its appeal. Games were often played at neutral sites in hopes of attracting more fans. Salisbury, the largest town on the Eastern Shore, was particularly favored, where Gordy Park drew the largest crowds. Games were also played at Easton in 1924 and 1926. Final deciding games were played on neutral grounds at Chambersburg in 1924, Baltimore in 1925, and Salisbury in 1927.

The leagues also permitted each team to add up to two additional players to their postseason roster. This was allowed to strengthen the lineup (pitchers were often in demand) or to compensate for late-season injuries. On more than one occasion, added players made a big difference. In 1924, a young catcher named Jimmie Foxx (spelled with one x in the box scores and stories of the era) played for Easton during the regular season. Picked up by Parksley for the postseason, Foxx wreaked havoc on Martinsburg, blasting four home runs and batting .391 in six games. Paul Richards, a future major-league manager and a Crisfield addition to the Parksley lineup in 1927, did even better, hitting .463 with five homers and winning three games single-handedly with his bat.

**THE BLUE RIDGE LEAGUE**

Although only a short distance from the bustling urban centers of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C., the Blue Ridge country was geographically and culturally a world away. Old factory, coal mining, and railroad towns occupied narrow valleys flanked by apple and peach orchards on the slopes of the surrounding Allegheny Mountains. It was a land only
a few generations removed from searing Civil War conflict at places like Gettysburg, Antietam, and South Mountain.

Hagerstown, the largest city in the region, lay at the hub of a network of rail and trolley lines that linked it to Martinsburg to the south, Frederick to the east, and Chambersburg to the north.

Early town baseball teams cemented these connections and fierce rivalries developed. The Blue Ridge League was formed in 1915 with Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland, Martinsburg, West Virginia, and Chambersburg, Hanover, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, as the original members. The compact little circuit prospered, faltering briefly in 1918 when Gettysburg left and Chambersburg was replaced by Cumberland, Maryland. It emerged stronger than ever in 1920 when Chambersburg returned and Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, joined. In a remarkable display of stability, the same six towns comprised the Blue Ridge League for the next decade without a change in franchises, an almost unheard-of feat at the Class D baseball level.

The success of the Blue Ridge League was due in large part to the guidance of President Jamison, whose firm hand kept quarrelling owners and unhappy players under control. Such was the respect for Jamison’s abilities that when he attempted to resign in 1924 to pursue other business interests, the owners quickly came to their senses, overcame their differences, and implored him to stay on the job.

Along with the league’s reputation for stability, its proximity to major East Coast cities and location at the center of a baseball-rich area meant major-league baseball clubs were always ready to stock Blue Ridge League teams with prospects. The league was the incubator for such early baseball greats as Lefty Grove, Jimmie Dykes, Joe Boley, Lu Blue, Bill Sherdel, and Hack Wilson. Later on, Joe Vosmik, Roger Cramer, Luke Hamlin, and Babe Phelps would get their starts in the Blue Ridge League. Connie Mack had a close connection with the Martinsburg team, often sending players down for added seasoning and acquiring others for his Philadelphia Athletics. Jack Dunn of the Baltimore Orioles also kept a close eye on Blue Ridge prospects.

THE EASTERN SHORE LEAGUE

In marked contrast to the well-established Blue Ridge League, the Eastern Shore League traveled a rocky road in its early years. Formed out of the same strong local baseball rivalries that existed everywhere in the early days of the century, the Eastern Shore League suffered from its relative geographic isolation and the incredibly small population bases of its league towns.

The Chesapeake Bay eastern peninsula, consisting of parts of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia, was an insular world in the 1920s, with its own unique set of customs and traditions, a land peopled by fishermen and farmers who spoke their own distinctive Tidewater dialect. Accessibility to its shores was primarily by ferry from Annapolis or Baltimore. The largest towns, Salisbury and Cambridge, claimed barely 10,000 residents, and time passed slowly along their streets in the lazy, hot summers.

Baseball was one of the few pastimes the local folks enjoyed. Every crossroads and village had a team. When the interested parties gathered at Salisbury in October 1921 to discuss the formation of a professional league, everyone wanted in. As a result, the small towns of Pocomoke City, Crisfield, and Parksley, with populations of less than 1,000, were admitted to the fold. Although baseball fever in these tiny communities was undoubtedly high, in time the small populations were the Eastern Shore League’s downfall. The fan support base simply was not enough, and ballclub owners lost money every year.

In 1922, the Eastern Shore League was sanctioned for play by Organized Baseball as a Class D circuit. The six original members were Salisbury, Cambridge, Pocomoke City, and Crisfield, Maryland, Parksley, Virginia, and Laurel, Delaware. Interested towns like Centreville and Easton, Maryland, and Milford, Delaware, were thought to be too far north of the league’s center. As a result, the league took on a more southern tilt, a geographic feature that eventually proved unworkable.

The league was plagued by a host of problems—on and off the field—in its early years. Fan rowdiness, teams failing to show for games, and disputes over poor umpiring were rampant. Violation of player salary limits and use of excessive numbers of “class” or more experienced players were commonplace. Owners tried to expand the league to eight teams in 1923, but that ill-advised experiment failed when Milford and Pocomoke City quit before the end of the season—Milford on July 14, Pocomoke City on August 21. League presidents, first Walter Miller, then M. B. Thawley and Harry Rew, tried to instill order but it was too little and too late. When the Great Depression arrived on the Eastern Shore ahead of the rest of the country, the league could no longer stay afloat, and in July 1928, the first Eastern Shore League closed its gates. It was later revived in 1937 and, except for the war years of 1942–45, lasted until 1949.

Despite its problems, the Eastern Shore League pro-
duced many future major-league players in its early years. Among these, in addition to Foxx, Richards, and Porter were Mickey Cochrane, George Selkirk, Clint Brown, and Red Ruffing. Frank “Home Run” Baker, a Shore native, played and managed at Easton in 1924, after his major-league playing days were over.

It could be argued that the Five-State Series did more than anything else to keep the Eastern Shore League going as long as it did. It brought in badly needed revenue to ease the clubs’ financial burdens. It sustained fan interest with exciting, competitive baseball in a spirited regional rivalry. Finally, especially when the Eastern Shore team won the series, it raised a glimmer of hope for fans that, maybe, next year on the Shore things would be a little bit brighter

1923—DOVER’S STUNNING COMEBACK

After the humiliating losses in 1921 and 1922, Eastern Shore League followers were beginning to wonder if they were in over their heads. Martinsburg, their most recent tormentors, were back again. The Blue Sox won their league title easily, finishing 15 games ahead of Waynesboro. Their opponent in this year’s series was the Dover Senators, a surprise winner who rode a late-August winning streak to overtake Cambridge for the shore championship.

The series opened on September 7 at Martinsburg’s Rosemont Park, with 1,380 fans on hand. Veteran Reggie “Doc” Rawlings homered twice to back Horace Ozmer’s six-hit pitching to give the Blue Sox a 5–4 win. Sloppy fielding hurt the Dover cause, and the local paper predicted a Martinsburg series win in five games at best.

The next afternoon Hank Hulvey outpitched Dover right-hander Ira Plank to give Martinsburg a 4–1 victory and a two-game edge in the series. Rawlings and George Quellich homered for the Blue Sox. As the teams left for Dover, it looked like the hometown newspaper folks might be right about a short series.

A sizeable contingent of Martinsburg fans motored down to Dover via Wilmington, confident of their team’s chances. Dobbins manager “Jiggs” Donahue called on local boy Fred Willey to take the mound for Game 3. Donahue’s choice proved a smart one, as Willey, with the vocal backing of Delaware Governor William Denney and 1,492 Dover fans, shut down the hard-hitting Blue Sox 4–1. The Dobbins’ defense sparkled in support of Willey.

First-game starters Ozmer and Charley Humphrey squared off again in Game 4. This time the result was different. Dover first baseman Harvey McDonald’s grand slam fueled a six-run rally in the fifth inning as the Dobbins took a wild 10–6 win to even the series. Dover catcher Frank King (aka Mickey Cochrane) was ejected for arguing a called third strike and grabbing umpire Sipple. His actions provoked a near-riot in the crowd of 1,315 and visibly rattled the visiting Blue Sox.

Game 5 was played at Salisbury, where the largest turnout of the series (2,320) saw Ira Plank handcuff Martinsburg on five hits to earn a 5–2 win. Dover played without King, who was suspended for the game and fined $25 for his outburst the previous day. Home runs by Leonard Schaeffer and Art Sullivan broke open a close game and gave the Dobbins the series lead.

Willow Lane Park in Hagerstown was the neutral site for Game 6 on September 14. Martinsburg manager Earle Mack used his entire roster in a vain attempt to stem the Dover tide. The Dobbins abused four Blue Sox hurlers for 11 hits in a 9–5 series clincher. Willey won his second game over a disappointed Martinsburg club.

The year 1923 was a pivotal year in the Five-State Series. A total of 9,115 fans attended the six games, nearly 50 percent more than the previous year. The surprising Dover win proved the Eastern Shore League could compete on the field with its more renowned sister circuit to the west. For Blue Ridge supporters it was a wake-up call. In the future, the Five-State Series would be a war—not a walkover.

1924—PARKSLEY GETS REVENGE

The 1924 series was a rematch of the 1922 participants. Martinsburg, under new manager Pete Curtis, continued its dominance of the Blue Ridge League, taking its third-straight crown.

It wasn’t easy this time as they nipped Hagerstown by the narrowest of margins—.002 percentage points. Parksley, too, had a fight on its hands, beating hard-luck Cambridge by one game.

Parksley didn’t take long to make a statement. Before 1,479 appreciative fans, the Spuds mauled Martinsburg 17–0 in the series opener. Catcher Jimmie Foxx blasted two long home runs to lead the Spuds assault. Veteran Frank Hummer allowed only four hits in, coasting to an easy shutout.

Martinsburg came back strong in Game 2 as lefty Charles Willis blanked Parksley 8–0 on two hits. The Blue Sox collected 14 hits off three Spuds pitchers. Rawlings homered and catcher Art “Woody” Woodring added a pair of doubles to lead Martinsburg. Rain held the crowd down to 949, and the game was called after eight innings.

Another postseason Parksley pickup, pitcher Tom Glass, tossed a six-hit, 7–1 win at Easton in Game 3.
A standing-room-only crowd of 1,748 watched local hero Foxx (who played with Easton during the regular season) launch a three-run homer in the first inning to give the Spuds all the runs they needed. Blue Sox starter Ed Andrews failed to last through the fourth inning and took his second loss in the series.

Back in the friendly confines of Rosemont Park on September 8, Martinsburg carved out an 11–4 victory to even the series. Willis was the beneficiary of a 17-hit barrage, sparked by home runs from Dave Black and Denny Sothern. Every player in the Blue Sox lineup hit safely as they scored in every inning except the first and fourth to secure an easy win.

A sparse crowd of 519 hardy fans braved the cold and wet weather on September 9, as Frank Hummer again showed his mastery over the Blue Sox in a convincing 8–2 triumph. Ralph Mattis’s three-run homer and five runs scored on Martinsburg errors in the ninth inning sealed the Parksville win. Ed Sherling’s two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth spoiled Hummer’s bid for a second straight shutout.

The series moved to Chambersburg for Game 6. The change didn’t help Martinsburg as Glass, with relief help from Hummer, gave Parksville a 6–3 clinching win and evened the Five-State Series at two wins apiece. Again wintry weather kept the crowd of 379 in overcoats. Spuds first baseman Charley Fitzberger had three hits and outfielder John Goetzel added a home run to lead a 16-hit attack on Blue Sox pitchers Steve Adamson and Ed Andrews.

It was a dramatic reversal from 1922. From the opening game rout, Parksville soundly outplayed its rival. With Fox batting .391 with four homers, Goetzel (.391, three homers), Fitzberger (.363), and Hiller (.360) all helping out, the Spuds were in complete control. Martinsburg had no answer to Hummer and Glass, who each won two games for manager “Poke” Whalen’s boys. When Parksville carried away the Ban Johnson pennant, the Five-State Series was dead even.

1925—HAGERSTOWN HOLDS ON

Two new faces took the field for the 1925 series. After three seasons as runner-up in the Eastern Shore League race, Cambridge finally broke through. Manager Ted Smith’s Canners beat Parksville by 3½ games as John Trippe, Tom Glass, and Carl Fischer headed up a strong pitching staff. Hagerstown represented the Blue Ridge League as manager Ray Werre’s Hubs held off second-place Frederick to qualify for the annual postseason battle.

The series opened at Hagerstown on September 10. A Willow Lane Park crowd of 1,419 saw the home team scratch out a 7–4 win behind right hander Joe Zubris. A three-run homer by manager Werre in the bottom of the eighth inning snapped a 4–4 tie. The Hubs had to overcome five errors to hand Tom Glass the loss.

Cambridge jumped on Hagerstown’s Al Kendricks for eight runs in the third inning of Game 2 en route to an 11–6 victory. Canner pitcher Curt Gordy homered to cap the early outburst. Outfielder Leo Strickler added four hits, including a pair of doubles and a home run. Gordy was credited with the win, pitching in relief of starter John Shellberg.

After his rough outing the previous day, Al Kendricks was back on the mound in Game 3. Hubs manager Werre’s move was vindicated as Kendricks went the distance, scattering eight hits in a 5–3 win. There were 1,147 in attendance as George Thomas’s double and home run accounted for three Hagerstown runs and his defensive plays in the outfield saved the day for Kendricks.

The teams took a day off to make the ferry crossing to Cambridge for Game 4. A large crowd of 2,027 cheered an 8–5 Canner victory to even the series. Glass won with late relief help from Trippe. Glass aided his own cause with a home run. Third baseman Bill Dressen also homered in a six-run, fourth-inning rally that gave Cambridge the lead for good.

The situation looked dark for Hagerstown when the Canners romped to an easy 10–2 win in Game 5. The Hubs, short of pitching, turned to outfielder Frank Roscoe, on loan from Hanover, but his mound success was short-lived and he was driven to cover in the fourth inning. Cambridge, with Dressen and shortstop Joe Nelson leading the way, continued its attack on reliever Nick Harrison, to the delight of 1,549 hometown rooters.

With their backs to the wall, Hagerstown called on Kendricks once more in Game 6. The big right hander came through, holding Cambridge to seven hits in a complete-game 4–1 victory. Solo home runs by Thomas and third baseman Joe Conti made the difference. Clutch defensive plays by Conti and Werre also kept the Canners at bay for the afternoon.

The deciding seventh game was played on September 17 at Baltimore’s Oriole Park. The announced crowd of 2,574 saw Hagerstown come back from a 5–4 deficit and score a wild 12–10 win to take the 1925 series. The Hubs took an early 2–0 lead, then fell behind, and retook the lead with five runs in the seventh inning, withstandng a late Cambridge surge to claim the win. Winning pitcher Joe Zubris staggered through six innings before catcher John Albert’s two-run double put Hagerstown ahead to stay.
The 1925 Five-State Series was the only one to go the full seven games. It featured two evenly matched teams with dramatic swings in momentum that kept the fans constantly on the edge of their seats. Hagerstown pitcher Kendrick was the hero, coming through with two crucial wins in Games 3 and 6. Ray Werre’s club had just enough hitting to prevail, as Cambridge could have easily won the Ban Johnson pennant with a break or two going their way.

1926—THE HUBS WIN IT AGAIN

With their big guns, Werre, Thomas, and Conti returning, Hagerstown cruised to a second-straight Blue Ridge League title by beating Frederick in a playoff series. Postseason pickups Chick Fullis (Frederick) and Dave Black (Martinsburg) made the Hubs an even stronger bet to take the Five-State Series again. Crisfield was the Eastern Shore League champion as the surprising Crabbers beat out Salisbury. Manager Dan Pasquella fielded a solid, hustling club, but the odds favored Hagerstown.

The series opened on September 13 in the bustling little seaport town of Crisfield, the “Seafood Capital of the World” at the end of the road in Somerset County. An overflow crowd of 1,682 was disappointed when Hagerstown’s Al Kruez belted a ninth-inning homer off Cecil Rose to lift the Hubs to a 4–3 win. Both teams used three pitchers in the tense duel as Kruez’s blast made Nick Harrison the winner.

Only 824 fans showed up the following day to watch Crisfield stage a four-run uprising in the eighth inning and take Game 2 by a 10–6 score. Crabber second baseman Paul Richards’s two-run triple highlighted the winning rally. Paul Smith, on loan from Salisbury, went the distance for Crisfield, despite nine hits and eight walks, while surviving a late Hagerstown comeback.

In hopes of drawing a larger crowd, Game 3 was moved to Easton on September 15. Crabber hopes were buoyed when lefty Leslie Signor shut down the Hubs on four hits in a 4–2 Crisfield win. Home runs by first baseman John Pasquella and shortstop Johnny Schofield gave Signor all the support he needed.

Back home the next day at Willow Lane Park for Game 4, Hagerstown evened the series with another close 4–3 victory. Harry Fishbaugh won it for the Hubs, overcoming home runs by Pasquella and Richards. Fishbaugh won his own game with a seventh-inning double off Bill Everham, driving in Kruez with the winning run.

In as exciting a game as local fans had ever seen, the hometown Hubs captured a heart-stopping 2–1 win in Game 5, scoring twice in the bottom of the ninth inning. Catcher Bob Harper’s two-out single-plated Joe Conti with the game-winning run. Crisfield scored its run in the first inning as Harrison and Smith waged a torrid pitching duel, until Harper’s hit ended the game.

Irvin “Stub” Rase, Hagerstown’s ace right hander, slammed the door on Crisfield in Game 6. Rase surrendered only three hits in giving the Hubs a 4–1 win and the 1926 series. Thomas’s homer off Signor broke a 1–1 tie in the sixth inning as Rase did the rest. Both teams turned in several outstanding defensive plays in another tense game between the two rivals.

The 1926 Five-State Series was arguably the most exciting of all. With the exception of Game 3, every contest was close and not decided until late in the action. The series turned on Game 5, with the last-inning Hagerstown win. Rase overpowered the feisty Crabbers in Game 6, but Crisfield came close to winning it all. The only downside was the dwindling crowds who came out to watch the well-played games.

1927—PARKSLEY WINS AGAIN

It would be the last Five-State Series, although no one would know it at the time. The Parksley Spuds won their first Eastern Shore League title since 1924, when they trashed Martinsburg in the postseason finale. The Spuds finished well ahead of Salisbury in the regular season. Meanwhile Chambersburg had to survive a split-season playoff with Martinsburg to capture the Blue Ridge League flag. Manager Mickey Kelliher’s Maroons added Martinsburg’s Reggie Rawlings to an already potent batting order for the series.

Henniger Field in Chambersburg was the scene for Game 1 on September 12. The visiting Parksley nine drew first blood when Clint Brown bested the Maroons 6–4. Paul Richards, added from Crisfield, blasted two homers and drove in four runs to lead the Spuds offense. A crowd of 1,266 saw a late Chambersburg rally fall short.

The Maroons knotted the series the next day when they sent six runs across the plate in the bottom of the eighth to snatch a 6–2 win. Chambersburg’s Robert Shatzer and Parksley’s Ray Perry hooked up in a classic pitcher’s battle before doubles by Kelliher, Russ Saunders, and Chet Horan allowed the Maroons to break through and hand Shatzer the win.

Game 3 was played at Willow Lane Park in Hagerstown before 1,250 fans. Poor fielding by Chambersburg betrayed pitcher Bob McIntyre as Parksley made an early lead stand up for a 6–4 victory. The heat affected the listless play of both teams as lefty Steve Toner pitched seven innings of strong relief to gain the well-deserved win.
After a day’s rest, while making the ferry trip across the Bay, Chambersburg bounced back to tie the series again in Game 4. Kermit Smith, with ninth-inning relief help from Charley Hamel, tossed a five-hitter to win 4–2. The largest crowd of the series, 1,441 in all, saw the Maroons take an early lead on shortstop Johnny Griffith’s double and Hamel squelch a ninth-inning Spuds rally.

Two home runs by Richards, his fourth and fifth of the series, and another round-tripper by Dave Davidson, was more than enough to give Perry a 7–3 win in Game 5. Horan and third baseman Whitey Bowman homered for Chambersburg, who outhit Parksley 13–9, but the Maroons wasted too many good scoring opportunities.

At Salisbury on September 19, Game 6 and the series ended early in a downpour as Parksley, behind the four-hit pitching of Toner, blanked Chambersburg 5–0. A final game attendance of 1,631 saw the Spuds break the game open with four runs off Mike Dodson in the sixth inning. An inning later the rains came, washing out any hopes for a Maroon comeback.

Parksley, led by the bats of Richards and Dan Pasquella and the pitching of Toner, all postseason additions, held a decisive edge in the 1927 series. The Spuds outplayed Chambersburg in every department, while Kelliher’s Maroons never showed the batting power that had carried them through the regular season. The Parksley win gave each league three wins apiece in the hard-fought series.

IT’S ALL OVER
By 1928, the Great Depression had settled in with grim determination on the Eastern Shore. Farmers and small-town merchants were the first to take hits. Families could barely pay their bills, let alone afford the 75-cent admission ticket to a ball game. Local ballclub owners, who rarely made money in the best of times, saw their losses steadily mounting. The Eastern Shore League opened briefly in 1928, but on July 10 the directors met at Salisbury and reluctantly decided to close the gates for good.

The Blue Ridge League soldiered on until 1930, when only four clubs managed to stagger through the season. President Jamison, ever the tireless promoter, arranged a brief postseason series with the Class C Middle Atlantic League. But it just wasn’t the same. The zest and excitement that had characterized the old Five-State Series was gone. The battle for baseball braggin’ rights in the Chesapeake Bay region between the Eastern Shore and Blue Ridge leagues was over.
THE ONLY player to appear in every inning of all nineteen World Series games played by the Washington Senators was born in Salem, New Jersey, on October 16, 1900. Rigorous farm work had matured Leon Allen Goslin into a muscular 185-pound young man, standing just a half inch shy of six feet. His early pitching exploits for DuPont factory caught the attention of umpire Bill McGowan; the two were close in age and became fast friends.

On McGowan’s recommendation, Zinn Beck signed Goslin to pitch for his Columbia, South Carolina, team of the Class C Sally League in 1920. The circuit upgraded to Class B as Goslin shifted to the outfield in 1921, and responded by hitting a league-leading .390. Jack Dunn, owner of the International League Baltimore Orioles, arranged to purchase Goslin for $5,000. Learning of the plan, Senators owner Clark Griffith rushed to South Carolina and hurriedly signed Goslin for $6,000. Contract in hand, Griffith watched his new player get conked on the head by a fly ball. Fielding mishaps aside, Goslin was called up by the Senators in the waning days of 1921 and hit .260 in 14 games. Goslin was nicknamed “Goose” by Denman Thompson of the Washington Star; the scribe observed the erratic way the young outfielder tracked fly balls, with flapping arms, long neck, and ample nose.

In 1922 Goslin contributed a .324 average in 101 games. In 1923, he rapped 18 triples, sharing the league lead with teammate Sam Rice, and his nine homers topped the Senators. After a sluggish start in 1924, the Senators caught fire and pulled into first place on June 24. Down the wire it was a three-team race, but the Senators ultimately took the AL flag. Goose hit .344 in 154 games, adding a league-leading 129 RBIs. His left-handed power resulted from an exaggerated closed stance—turned almost enough to see the catcher out of his left eye. He swung hard and from the heels, turning almost 180 degrees to complete his swing.

The World Series pitted the Nats against the New York Giants. The Series went seven, and the Senators prevailed by tying the last game when a bad hop grounder bounced over the head of third baseman Fred Lindstrom. In the twelfth, Muddy Ruel’s foul pop was dropped by rival catcher Hank Gowdy. Ruel doubled and Walter Johnson reached on an error. Earl McNeely grounded to third and, remarkably, another bad hop caromed, allowing Ruel to score the winning run, giving the victorious Senators their first world championship. The Senators repeated as American League champs in 1925, but the Pittsburgh Pirates took the series in seven. In 1926, Goose posted 108 RBIs, 17 homers, and a .354 average. Incredibly, not one of his 17 circuit blasts was hit in Washington. In 1927, Goslin batted in 120 runs, while hitting .334.

The year 1928 dawned with Goslin as a holdout. The volley with owner Clark Griffith continued until the end of February, when Goose signed and reported to Tampa. The training site was at the fairgrounds, a location providing ample diversion for the fun-loving Goslin. Clowning included challenging runners on opposing teams to impromptu footraces, which he generally won. A high-school track team was conducting workouts when Goose happened upon a group of teens practicing the shot put. He picked up a 16-pound weight and tossed it 20 feet further than anyone else. For the next 30 minutes, Goose delighted the boys by throwing...
the put like a baseball. The next morning, his right arm was so strained he couldn’t comb his hair.

The season started and the swollen, discolored arm did not improve. Treatments abounded in an effort to repair the ailing wing. Goose was sent to Atlantic City to soak in salt water. Next, baking soda was used as a remedy, followed by ice packs, massaging, complete rest, and a cast, although X-rays showed no break. Another diagnosis revealed that his collarbone was displaced, prompting a Michigan trip to visit a bone-setter. Nothing worked—and, much to the chagrin of Griffith, Goose’s throwing arm remained a liability. It became a ritual for infielders to run deep into the outfield to retrieve Goslin’s weak throws; he even practiced throwing left-handed. Despite his defensive woes, he remained a major offensive force at the plate, with his average escalating over .400 in late June.

The 1928 batting race went right down to the wire, with Goose’s .379 ultimately beating out the .378 mark posted by Heinie Manush of the St. Louis Browns. In The Glory of Their Times, Lawrence Ritter interviewed Goslin, who provided insight into his quest for the batting championship—right down to his last at-bat in the ninth inning. Goose realized that if he got a hit, he won; if he missed—he lost. Confronted with this dilemma, the outfielder asked manager Harris for advice; Bucky completely left it up to him. Goslin thought seriously about sitting it out, but his mates said he’d be accused of “being yellow if you win the title on the bench.”

The Goose decided to hit and quickly looked at two strikes. At this point, Goose had an idea: he decided to try and get thrown out of the game. Umpire Bill Guthrie read right through the ruse and told Goslin “he wasn’t getting thrown out no matter what he did.” The ump added that “a walk was out of the question too.” Back in the box, Goslin got what he felt was a “lucky hit” and won the title fair and square. All told, 1928 was arguably his best offensive season. In addition to the batting title, Goose poked 17 homer, which was nearly half the total for the entire team (40).

Goslin hit only .288 in 1929 and was shuttled to the Browns in a trade for Heinie Manush and Alvin Crowder on June 13, 1930. The move to St. Louis invigorated the slugger, as his average climbed to .322 and his homers increased to 30. Goslin hit 37 for the two clubs, the highest seasonal total of his career. In 1931, Goose’s 24 round-trippers were fifth in the league. Goose made headlines during the 1932 season when he attempted to use a camouflaged bat. The war club was unique in appearance, sporting black and white zebra stripes that ran the length of the bat. It was designed to annoy opposing pitchers, but the bat was ruled illegal. Switching to a conventional piece of lumber, Goose went 3-for-4 on the day. He produced 104 RBIs for the 1932 Browns.

Goslin was dealt back to the Senators on December 14, 1932. Joe Cronin was the new skipper in 1933, and the Nats greeted him by winning the pennant. Goslin never agreed with Cronin’s management style, and their differences were a reason the Tigers acquired Goose for the 1934 season. Teammate Elden Auker later recalled Goose as always one to clown around
and keep the players loose. “He was some character, a really great guy. He was just happy-go-lucky, always laughing and joking and pulling pranks.” Over the years, he and Ernie Lombardi, catcher on the Cincinnati Reds, “waged an ongoing feud over who had the bigger nose.” Goose would tease Lombardi that his nose was long enough to keep his cigar dry in the shower. Remarks like “you could get by on one breath a day” continually went back and forth.

The teams generally barnstormed north together. “One spring in our final exhibition in Cincinnati,” Goose swung so hard, he turned himself completely around as a runner was stealing second. Lombardi went to throw the ball and his right hand hit Goslin’s nose. As the Goose lay on the ground “bleeding like a stuck hog,” Lombardi said, “that settles it; you’ve got the bigger nose. You’ve got such a big nose, I can’t even throw to second base. You can’t get that nose out of the way.” Goose went to the hospital to get his nose set and the two remained close friends.

The 1934 World Series pitted the Tigers against the St. Louis Cardinals. The “Gas House Gang” defeated the Bengals 4 games to 3; Goose drove in the winning run in Game Two. Just before the start of the seventh game, Goose remarked, “Everybody seems to be mad at everybody else in this series, with all hands sore at the umpiring, which has been terrible, so watch out for fireworks today.” That prediction came true in the sixth inning, when Joe Medwick slid hard into Tiger’s third baseman Marv Owen, causing a near-riot among Detroit fans. When Medwick took his position in left field, the fans showered the field with debris. The Cards went on to win 11–0 and take the title.

The Tigers repeated as American League champs in 1935 and Goslin definitely provided a spark in the World Series against the Chicago Cubs. The Goose brought a rabbit into the clubhouse as a good-luck charm, thinking it would work better than just a rabbit’s foot. Indeed it did, as the Bengals prevailed over the Cubs, four games to two. Elden Auker recalled the decisive hit and series win. “I was sitting on the dugout steps at the start of our half of the ninth and Goose was sitting beside me. Goose hadn’t had a hit all day and was the fourth hitter due up that inning. He turned to me and said something I’ll never forget. ‘I’ve got a hunch I’m going to be up there with the winning run on base and we’re going to win the ballgame.’ Mickey Cochrane got on base and was moved to second on Charlie Gehringer’s groundout. Cochrane was on second when Goslin came up to the plate, facing left-hander Larry French. Goose fouled away a pitch—then lined the next offering to right-center, scoring Cochrane and giving the Tigers a 4–3 victory and their first World Series title. Auker and Goslin embraced, with Goose shouting, “What’d I tell ya? What’d I tell ya?” The home-plate umpire for the decisive seventh game was none other than Goslin’s old pal Bill McGowan. Detroit was bedlam after the Tigers’ victory, and Goose Goslin was the man of the hour.

Still with the Tigers in 1936, Goslin was solid, contributing a .315 average and a team-leading 24 home runs. In 1937, after hitting only .238, he was released by Detroit and signed with the Senators on April 3, 1938. He was hitting only .158 when age finally caught up with him. Batting against Lefty Grove, Goose wrenched his back and was unable to complete his plate appearance. It was the only time in his entire career a pinch-hitter was sent up in his place. Goose retired with a lifetime average of .316. His 2,735 hits included 500 doubles, 173 triples, and 248 home runs.

Goslin was player-manager of the Trenton Senators of the Class B Interstate League in 1939. In August of 1941, after Trenton lost 15 of 18 games, he abruptly quit as manager. Next, he essentially retired from the game to run his farm and boat business. After his wife died in 1960, Goose became reclusive, spending most of his days fishing and living alone on the Delaware Bay. He reportedly was disappointed when old rival Heinie Manush was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1965, leaving Goslin waiting. The Veterans Committee elected Goose on January 28, 1968.

The induction took place on Monday, July 22, of the same year. Commissioner William Eckert introduced Goose, who tearfully stated, “I have been lucky. I want to thank God, who gave me the health, strength to compete with these great players.” He then began to cry uncontrollably. Applause from the audience gave him the confidence to continue, “I will never forget this. I will take this to my grave.” Goose passed away on May 15, 1971, in Bridgeton, New Jersey, at the age of 70. He was buried at the Baptist Cemetery in Salem. Coincidentally, his death followed the passing of Heinie Manush by three days.

Sources


if you want the newspapers and web sites in columns, please cut text from story.
CURT FLOOD, Gene Conley, and Danny Ainge had nothing on Baltimore native Peck Lerian, who challenged the reserve clause and earned fame on both the basketball court and the baseball diamond. Showing great promise as the leading member of the Philadelphia Phillies’ young receiving corps at the close of the 1920s, he also stood out as the starting guard for the lauded Hagerstown Elks basketball team many years before the founding of the NBA or its precursors. Ultimately forsaking his basketball career to play major-league baseball, he joined the Phillies for the launch of the 1928 season and progressed from a seldom-used bench warmer and occasional pinch hitter to become the team’s primary backstop by mid-summer. At the conclusion of the 1929 season, just as he was coming into his own, his life and career were tragically cut short by an out-of-control vehicle.

Peck was descended from prominent German American community leader Jakob Lerian, who founded the dominant Lerian Meat Market and took a leadership role in the area’s German-speaking Lutheran congregation.¹

Jakob and his wife Elizabeth had five children, the youngest of which, Jacob, was Peck’s father. In 1898 Jacob left home and married Josephine Kaiser,² who, like her new husband, was a descendant of butchers who had emigrated from Germany. The couple settled in Baltimore while Jacob continued working with his brothers in the family business. Walter Irvin Lerian, their second son, was born on February 10, 1903.³ Peck, his older brother Henry, and younger brother Wilmer all grew to find success in their chosen fields, but Jacob would not live to see his sons’ achievements, dying in May 1909 at age 37⁴ and leaving Josephine to raise three small children as a young widow.

Josie, a devout Catholic, and her sons regularly attended Mass at St. Martin’s parish, the largest parish in Baltimore,⁵ and the small family became well known amongst its many parishioners. Henry and Peck had both started school before their father died, attending St. Martin’s Male Academy, a parochial school at St. Martin’s parish. Peck met some of his closest childhood friends at St. Martin’s, including Robert and William Ashton. He would often play with the Ashton children and became welcome at their home as if he were a member of the family.

When the older Lerian boys had matured enough to find employment of their own, Henry and Peck both started working to help pay for food. Henry continued to attend school as often as he could, while Peck dropped out entirely after the eighth grade and threw his energy into finding odd jobs, earning as much money as possible to contribute to the family’s meager income. The older boys insisted that Wilmer stay in school rather than work like they did so that, as he grew older, he would have a strong foundation for a good career. By the age of seventeen Peck had found regular employment, taking a job as a file clerk for a local bond company, while Henry worked as a pipe fitter in a Baltimore shipyard, allowing young Wilmer to continue with his studies.⁶

In his time away from the bond firm Peck made a name for himself as an athlete, playing guard for local basketball teams and starring as a catcher on the diamond. It was there that he received his nickname, using his cannon-like arm to throw out potential base stealers while still crouching or kneeling behind the plate. Gifted with exceptionally long, strong arms, he would reach back and rifle the ball to second base. While unleashing these bullet-like throws his right arm would stretch across his body on the follow-through, with his hand quickly brushing the dirt. When practicing his snap throws, making several tosses in rapid-fire succession, his friends said that the way his hand grazed the ground then snapped back up made him look like “a chicken peckin’ corn,”⁷ and the nickname “Peck” stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Peck’s baseball career began in earnest in 1919, when he tried out for and won the catcher’s spot on the St. Martin’s Catholic Club of Baltimore. The team, representing venerable St. Martin’s parish, boasted one of the most talented sandlot teams in the Baltimore area. Due to its prominent place in the Baltimore community and the caliber of its players, the St. Martin’s squad attracted a great deal of interest from local baseball enthusiasts. One avid follower was Billy Ashton, the father of Peck’s childhood friends Robert and William Ashton. In a pleasant twist of fate, Ashton was named...
vice president of the International League Baltimore Orioles in 1920, and as one of his first official duties with the team, he persuaded Orioles owner Jack Dunn to give St. Martin’s youthful backstop a tryout. Dunn agreed and liked what he saw in the tryout, signing the seventeen-year-old Lerian to a professional contract with the Orioles. Although under contract during the 1920 season, he did not jump directly to the Orioles—one of the finest minor-league teams of the day—but continued to refine his skills with St. Martin’s.

After showing steady improvement throughout the 1920 season, Peck was one of five new recruits invited to join the 1921 Orioles for spring training in Goldsboro, N.C. Several carloads of friends made their way to the Baltimore train station to bid Peck farewell. Before departing he was presented with a mitt as a gift from his teammates on the Baltimore Collegians and St. Martin’s basketball teams. He also received a badly needed new pair of baseball shoes, which had been secretly purchased with pennies donated by young parishioners at St. Martin’s. Young Peck was leaving home for the first time, having just turned eighteen, but he already had great expectations to live up to. After several years of playing competitive basketball and baseball, his juvenile athletic prowess had been so well documented that even the Orioles viewed him not as a typically fresh recruit, but as a more experienced veteran.

Lerian and his fellow recruits looked forward to learning all they could from the established players. The 1921 Orioles are generally considered to be the greatest of the dominant Orioles squads that played from the late ’teens through the 1920s. The Orioles 1921 entry boasted a lineup featuring second baseman Max “Camera Eye” Bishop, former New York Yankees third baseman Fritz Maisel, and double threat Jack Bentley, who went on to win the IL Triple Crown that season as a first baseman while also compiling a 12–1 record on the mound. Jack Ogden, who would win 31 games that year, and youngsters Lefty Grove (25 wins) and Tommy Thomas (24 wins) anchored the mound corps. No regular member of the staff, backstopped by former Athletics and Indians catcher Ben Egan, had a losing record in 1921.11

Spring training began with most of the Orioles players arriving in Goldsboro during the second week of March. Without delay Peck and the other rookies were put through strenuous workouts, as Jack Dunn, the field manager and team owner, looked them over. Following several days of arduous training Peck’s throwing arm was sore and badly in need of a day off. Sunday provided the first rest offered to the team, and after dutifully attending Mass with his fellow Catholics,12 Peck spent time with Orioles trainer Dr. Fewster to help get his arm ready for Monday’s practice.

Peck had been working extra hard on his throwing during the first week of camp, because Dunn had noticed a hitch in his motion when trying to pick runners off base. While playing sandlot ball Peck’s arm strength compensated for the slight delay in throwing the ball, but against top-level competition the hesitation provided a weakness that the faster, more sophisticated runners in the IL could exploit. He continued working with Dunn and Egan to eliminate the hitch in his delivery, but progress was slow and grueling as he spent hours each day reinventing his throwing motion.

He also took every chance to talk—and more importantly listen—to the fabled Orioles stars, and frequently
spent his time off the field discussing the finer points of the game with the veterans. Throughout spring training, Orioles fans in Greensboro could easily find Peck at the team hotel, as he often sat in the lobby discussing baseball with Egan and Dunn long into the night.

After the first few weeks of camp rounding into shape, the Orioles started their exhibition schedule in April. Equally as talented as many major-league teams of the day, the Orioles played exhibition games against several big-league teams during spring training. Peck's first action against major-league competition came in early April, catching for Jack Bentley and Jack Ogden as the Orioles lost a close game to the Brooklyn Robins in Baltimore. Dutch Ruether and Leon Cadore held Peck without a hit in four trips to the plate. Peck spent the balance of spring training with the Orioles, but the team already had Egan entrenched behind the plate, with Cal Davis and Wade Lefler providing capable support.

When the regular season began, Peck was assigned to the Waynesboro Villagers, members of the Class D Blue Ridge League. He played in 78 of the team's 97 games and was among the league leaders in fielding percentage by a catcher, with a .980 mark and earning honorable mention on the end-of-season All-Star team. Waynesboro would only finish third in the six-team league, but Lerian was one of many standouts on their star-studded club.

The Orioles were pleased with Lerian's inspiring performance at Waynesboro and assigned him to the Newark Bears for the upcoming season. After earning All-Star recognition while receiving $150 per month in 1921, Peck expected a sizeable raise upon moving up to Newark. When the team essentially renewed the previous year's conditions in his 1922 contract he decided to hold out, threatening to stay home in Baltimore rather than play for less than he had shown he was worth. The team would not budge and, as allowed at the time under the reserve clause, unilaterally renewed his contract, effectively barring Peck from playing Organized Baseball in 1922 unless it was for the Bears. Peck made good on his promise not to sign, playing sandlot ball all year instead of reporting to Newark.

Peck provided the steady catching and strong bat Brooks's team had lacked all season, just in time to face the club's arch-rival, a slugging team from Laurel, Maryland. When the club traveled out to Laurel, Peck first met Dutch Ulrich, a new pitcher the team also recently acquired, who would pitch for Brooks that day. Throughout the game Ulrich was up to the task, holding Laurel's powerful lineup to a single run while
Brooks's team brought home six. As the innings wore on Peck noticed that this new pitcher had much better control, movement, and speed than the other hurlers he had caught during the year and determined to become better acquainted with the young flamethower. The two became friends, training together in Baltimore and following each other's careers through the 1920s. 17

As the 1923 season dawned Peck, freed from the constraints of the reserve clause after sitting out Organized Baseball for the 1922 season, returned to York, where he had become a local celebrity playing with the ACCOs. During a road trip through the Philadelphia suburbs, Peck caught the eye of the Philadelphia Phillies, who tried to sign him away from his semipro team on a trial basis. As one of the most popular and talented players on the ACCOs, Peck was well compensated by the club and his salary was not far below the Phillies' meager offers. At the time, Peck was the sole economic support for his mother and younger brother, making him deeply mindful of his financial obligation to the family. A longer baseball season meant he would probably be unable to continue playing professional basketball in the off-season. Combining the funds earned from his basketball exploits with his salary from the ACCOs, Peck earned more money as a semipro star than he would as a trial player with the Phillies. In the end fiscal responsibility won out over the honor of playing in the major leagues, and he remained with York's semipro outfit. 18

Peck's return to Organized Baseball would not be delayed long, however. Hoping to capitalize on his immense local popularity, the York White Roses of the upstart Class B New York–Penn League 19 made Peck an offer that would bring him back to the minor leagues while allowing him to play professional baseball in the winter. Playing minor-league baseball again while remaining in York, which had become a second home to the young backstop, combined the best of both worlds for Peck, who happily affixed his signature to the contract binding him to the White Roses for the balance of the 1923 season. Just as the team had anticipated, Peck's loyal fan base followed him from the sandlots to the New York–Penn League, an easy transition for his admirers, since the White Roses shared a home field with the ACCOs.

The White Roses played a full schedule against the five other New York–Penn League teams, as well as hosting exhibitions with some of the finest Negro League squads of the day. A weekend series against the legendary Hilldale Daisies of the newly founded Eastern Colored League provided an early test of Peck's abilities. Hilldale featured a lineup stacked with some of the greatest Negro League players of the day, including third baseman Judy Johnson, catchers Biz Mackey and Louis Santop, speedster George Johnson, and player/manager Pop Lloyd. Hilldale won the first ECL pennant in dominating fashion, though York became the first white team to hand the Daisies two losses in a series. 20

The second game of the series featured a catching duel between Peck and Hilldale legend Biz Mackey. Throughout his sandlot and minor-league career, Peck had developed and perfected a ruse he called his Cigar Store Indian play. Standing, seemingly at rest, with his arms at his sides, he would spring into action just as a throw was about to reach him, snaring the ball and applying a quick tag. Every time he received a new mitt, he prepared the glove for this play by unstitching the leather, and cutting a ball-sized hole in the padding. Re-stitching the glove, he created a pocket that was just the right size for securing the ball.

With Fred Warfield at bat, Mirror Briggs on third base, and two down in the fifth inning, Peck got his first chance to try the play in a professional game. Warfield, well known for his ability to beat out infield hits, hit a high chopper to third base that was expertly fielded by York's Bill Batch. Without a chance to nab the speedy Warfield at first base, Batch instantly fired the ball to the plate where Peck stood placidly. Briggs barreled in, expecting to score easily, when Peck sprang into action, snaring the ball in his specially modified glove, and applied a quick tag. The stunned Daisy had no chance to avoid Peck's swiping tag, which earned roars of disbelief from the Daisies bench.

The Daisies were also busy on the base paths. With the speedy George Johnson on first and two out, weak-hitting Tom Allen stepped to the plate. Seeking to disrupt York's defense, Johnson took off on the first pitch. Without a trace of the hitch that distressed Jack Dunn, Peck reached back and, from his crouch, rifled the ball to second base in plenty of time to retire the surprised Johnson. 21 The Daisies remained fixed on their bases for the rest of the game.

Throughout the balance of the season with the White Roses Peck continued his stellar defensive play and frequently contributed at bat, but after reaching the high .300s as a semipro, his .252 batting average was a slight disappointment and something he vowed to improve the following year.

At the conclusion of York's season he returned home to Baltimore and resumed his professional baseball career as a guard for the mighty Hagerstown Elks. The Elks played in an East Coast professional league that was more a loose collection of professional
fives than a formal league. Several teams stood out above the others, and among the leaders, the Elks were generally considered the team to beat. Although Hagerstown, with a population of less than 30,000 inhabitants, was much smaller than the hometowns of other league members such as New York City, Buffalo, New York, or nearby Baltimore, their team was feared around the circuit. Much like his reputation in baseball, he was better known for his defense than his offense, though he could score for the Elks when necessary. With Peck and Maryland basketball legend Valentine Lentz both starring, the Elks were proclaimed by Baltimore Sun sports editor Paul Menton to be the “greatest team in the country” for cities of comparable size to the modest western Maryland village.

Peck’s characteristic role in the Elks’ attack was to contribute a handful of points, often distributed evenly between the floor and the free-throw line, and provide rock-solid defense. His primary assignment against the tough competition faced by the Elks was to shut down high-scoring opponents with what the papers often called “remarkable guarding,” leaving the bulk of the scoring to his teammates. Local sports editors hailed his skill at both stifling opposing scorers and setting up his fellow Elks on offense.

As the basketball season wore on, Peck received and quickly signed his 1924 contract offer from the White Roses in early January. The Elks used January to warm up for the championship series in which they would face off against defending champ Hendlers A.C. Just prior to the opening of the series Menton proclaimed Peck to be “the most improved basketball player in Maryland” during the 1923–24 season. The teams split the first two games of the series, with Peck making a strong contribution in both games. With the championship now hanging on the outcome of the tie-breaking third game, both teams ignored the need to settle the title, foregoing the decisive contest, sharing the championship. Peck continued playing for the Elks through February, when he began to prepare for spring training with the White Roses.

Back with York for the 1924 season, Peck started the year off on a high note, driving in the team’s first run of the season, while expertly handling duties behind the plate. Throughout the summer Peck built on his Opening Day performance, asserting his value both offensively and defensively. By early June he had boosted his average over the .350 mark, breaking into the top five in the New York–Penn League batting race and leading all White Roses hitters.

Peck had a brush with the law in York that summer, though it was hardly through any wrongdoing of his own, and in the end his true colors as an exemplary gentleman shone through once again. Before an afternoon game with the visiting Grays, he was riding downtown in a car driven by fellow White Rose Neal Dougherty. In an eerie instance of foreshadowing, Dougherty lost control of his vehicle and it jumped the curb, rolling up on the sidewalk in front of a local clothing store.

York plainclothes police officer Myers was present at the scene and detained Dougherty for questioning regarding the incident. Dougherty, perhaps not realizing that Myers was a police officer, was visibly and vocally upset at the interruption in his afternoon’s planned activities, loudly railing against the non-uniformed agent. Myers promptly took Dougherty into custody and transported him, along with Peck, to the police station.

Upon arrival downtown, the two White Roses were taken directly to appear before Chief of Police Buttorff, who reexamined the events surrounding the accident and subsequent outburst. Peck, ever the gentleman, offered his assistance in clearing the matter, explaining that, although the vehicle jumped the curb, it was simply an accident and that no malice was intended, nor any disrespect to officer Myers following the incident. Chief Buttorff was satisfied that, although Dougherty was out of line, no real harm was done, and released the players with only a stiff warning. Following the official chastisement, a sufficiently humbled Dougherty chauffeured Peck to the ballpark in time for the late afternoon game.

At the conclusion of the 1924 season Peck was named the most valuable catcher in the New York–Penn League, having batted a very respectable .310 while compiling a .991 fielding average to lead all backstops. The York press also tabbed him as MVP of the White Roses. His standout performance caught the attention of the Birmingham Barons of the Class A Southern Association, who drafted him for the 1925 season. Peck had made such a favorable impression with York’s fans that when they heard the news they took up a collection and presented him with a new watch and cash before he left town.

As he progressed through the minor leagues Peck also excelled on the basketball court, playing for competitive amateur and professional teams in and around his native Baltimore. Chiefly starring at right guard, he continued to play for the Elks, while also starring for the 104th Medical Regiment, St. Martin’s cagers, and Baltimore’s professional city team. Peck often shared the court with younger brother Wilmer, who had become an accomplished basketball player himself. By
1925, Peck was earning more money collectively between his professional basketball and minor-league baseball careers than he would have made by playing major-league baseball alone.

Early in the 1925 season, Peck played admirably for the Barons, catching the eye of George Weiss, general manager of the Baltimore Orioles and owner of the Eastern League New Haven Pros. Lerian’s tenure with the Barons would be short-lived, as Weiss, who had been watching his progress with interest, dreamed of adding Peck’s hot bat and steady glove to New Haven’s anemic lineup. He negotiated with Birmingham to purchase Peck’s contract rights, settling with the team in July.37

Weiss’s appraisal of Peck turned out to be prophetic, as Lerian immediately showed with both his bat and glove that he was ready for Eastern League competition. During his first trip through the league he caught several opponents by surprise with his Cigar Store Indian play, leading to more cautious base running and more diligent coaching around the circuit.38

Peck spent the 1926 season splitting time behind the plate with Johnny Berger, but as the 1927 season dawned Berger found a roster spot as a bullpen catcher for the Washington Senators, leaving the New Haven catching duty to Lerian. Peck responded with an impressive season at-bat. He took his place as the third batter in New Haven’s lineup, compiling a 16-game hitting streak in late May and early June. His bat did not cool off as the season progressed, and he was found leading the league in batting that summer with a .378 average, while continuing his commendable performance behind the plate.39

While Peck rose steadily through the minor leagues, William F. Baker’s Philadelphia Phillies were mired in the National League’s second division year after year. The forlorn team, starting a patchwork squad of hand-me-downs and young players signed to low-cost contracts, struggled to draw fans to the vacant stands at the Baker Bowl. As the team’s 1928 spring training camp opened, team captain Jimmie Wilson was slated to handle the majority of games behind the plate. However, in the first week of exhibition contests he injured his finger trying to catch a foul tip.40 The thought of entering the season with no better backup catcher than the untested Johnny Schulte and incapable Harry O’Donnell prompted new Phillies manager Burt Shotton to rapidly hunt for available, bargain-priced catchers. Just before the Phillies opened their City Series with the cross-town Philadelphia Athletics they selected Lerian, New Haven’s star backstop, whose salary requirements—enough to replace the money he would lose by “retiring” from basketball—still fit into Baker’s limited budget.41

Peck’s acceptance of Baker’s contract terms and decision to join the Phillies was solidified by Philadelphia’s geographic proximity to Baltimore, making it easier for him to visit and help his mother and young brother Wilmer during the season. In addition, his friend Dutch Ulrich, from Brooks’s All-Stars, was already a three-year veteran with the Phillies, having established himself as one of the top pitchers on the beleaguered mound staff.42 Sadly for all involved, Ulrich missed all of spring training fighting double pneumonia and, unbeknownst to Lerian or the Phillies, would never play again, succumbing to the disease in February, 1929.43

Peck quickly showed that he could be much more than a backup for the hapless Phillies. Although his hitting suffered to some extent against major-league pitching, his glove work behind the plate showed such promise that Baker started shopping the highly regarded but comparably expensive Wilson elsewhere, looking to acquire some cheap talent and much-needed operating capital.44

Peck rode the bench as the season started, learning the team’s signs and pitchers’ styles while the Phillies showcased Jimmie Wilson in hopes of eliciting trade offers. He made the most of his time in the dugout, creating what he called his “little black book,” a small pocket notebook in which he compiled the pitching techniques and penchants for each of the Phillies hurlers he would be catching along with the hitting preferences and tendencies of every batter the Phillies faced.45 On April 16, in the second game of the Giants series, Peck made his major-league debut in the seventh inning as a pinch hitter for starting pitcher Alex Ferguson. Trailing the Giants 4–0 with Bill Kelly on first base, Phillies manager Burt Shotton sent Lerian to face Giants hurler Bill Walker,46 who had been cruising through his first major-league starting assignment. Although Walker was beginning to lose his effectiveness, he retired Lerian without advancing the runner.

Peck’s next chance to face major-league pitching came just three days later in Philadelphia’s home opener, when Shotton again called on him to take the pitcher’s spot during a critical inning. As the sixth inning opened, “Jumbo” Jim Elliott and the visiting Robins held a 4–2 edge, spoiling the mood of the 12,000 fans who had come to welcome their Phillies home. With Pinky Whitney on second base after doubling against the Baker Bowl’s short right-field wall, Lerian stepped in against Elliott and collected his first major-league hit and RBI by knocking his own double
against the wall, scoring Whitney in the process. Shortly thereafter he scored his first run when Fresco Thompson drove him home. 47

Lerian’s role with the team changed dramatically on May 11. Without warning Shotton pulled Jimmie Wilson out of the lineup in the second inning of the Phillies’ game against the Cardinals and it was announced that the Phillies’ star catcher had been traded to the opposition. The Cards needed an established backstop to replace the recently dealt Bob O’Farrell, who had been sent to the Giants earlier in the month. Wilson, who was generally regarded as the best all-around receiver in the NL, fit the Cardinals’ requirements nicely. 48 In exchange, the Phillies received cost-effective youngsters Spud Davis and Homer Peel, who would have little impact on the Phillies’ success (or lack thereof) but more importantly would not further stretch Baker’s already constrained payroll. When Davis caught up with the Phillies in Cincinnati he was immediately handed the starting catcher’s job, but it would soon be Lerian who would show greater value as the Phillies’ new receiver. By the end of May, Peck had supplanted Davis in the Phillies’ lineup, starting most of the games behind the plate.

At the end of May, Peck found a perfect opportunity to again utilize his Cigar Store Indian play. The Boston Braves had purchased George Sisler’s contract from the Washington Senators on May 27. Sisler, who was approaching the end of his Hall of Fame career, joined the team in Philadelphia two days later to make his NL debut. When he stepped to the plate in the top of the first inning, Sisler received an enthusiastic reception from the Phillies crowd, anxious to see for the first time the man who owned the (since broken) single-season hits record in action. He did not disappoint the fans, collecting one hit and scoring two runs on the day—but he would have had another hit if not for Lerian. With runners on first and second in Sisler’s first at bat, he lofted a soft pop to short left field. Pinky Whitney and Barney Friberg converged on the ball but couldn’t reach it. Meanwhile, Peck raced down to third to cover for Whitney. Friberg picked up the ball on a bounce and fired it toward third, where Peck stood stoically. Just before Lance Richbourg reached safely, Lerian sprang to life, grabbing the relay throw and tagging Richbourg out. 49

Throughout June, Peck enjoyed a number of career firsts and established new monthly highs in virtually every offensive category. He commenced a modest five-game hitting streak and became a local hero in Philadelphia on June 19, driving in the winning run in the bottom of the ninth inning of the first game of a scheduled doubleheader against the Robins. With the score 10–9 in the Robins’ favor, Heinnie Sand on first, and Pinky Whitney on second with one out, Peck stepped to the plate. Brooklyn manager Wilbert Robinson tapped flamethrower Dazzy Vance to stop the comeback attempt. Vance started with a ball outside, then caught too much of the plate with his next offering, which Peck laced down the third base-line. Whitney and Sand both hurried home and Lerian ended up on third base with a game-ending triple. 50

Peck capped his breakthrough month with his first major-league home run on June 27. Down 7–4 in the top of the eighth inning against the Giants at the Polo Grounds, Phillies manager Shotton tapped Lerian to bat for pitcher Claude Willoughby. Facing Vic Aldridge, Peck wasted no time at the plate, promptly hitting a game-tying home run that sent Aldridge to the showers. 51 Peck’s offensive emergence, during which he batted .414, continued into early July, with three consecutive multi-hit games from June 30 through July 3.

Inevitably his production declined, and as Lerian’s bat cooled so did the Phillies, finishing the season in a 25–65 skid. Facing Pat Malone on September 26 in the Phillies’ last game against the Cubs, Peck had one final highlight, hitting his second career home run. 52 Almost inevitably, the Phillies lost the game, kicking off their final three-game losing streak of the season. 53

As the season mercifully ended Peck—along with fellow rookie Chuck Klein, who joined the team mid-season to take over right field for aging fixture Cy Williams 54—stood out as bright spots in a miserable season in Philadelphia. According to John Kieran of the New York Times, Rogers Hornsby called Peck “the best young catcher he has seen come up in quite a while.” 55

During the season, in addition to finding success on the diamond, Peck found love off the field. He met a young Philadelphia lady who swept him off his feet. As their relationship blossomed they began making plans to wed before the start of the 1929 season. At the close of the season Peck’s fiancée fell ill, and he delayed his return trip to Baltimore to stay at her side while she recovered. As the winter progressed, so did her illness, and she was unable to recover her health. In a tragic end to his romance, his fiancée died before they could wed, and Peck returned home with a broken heart to care for his mother and younger brother. 56

He stayed in shape the balance of the off-season by playing with the Baltimore All-Stars baseball team while also scrimmaging with the St. Martin’s squad. When it was too cold to play outside he moved indoors,
took up his old position at guard for the Baltimore city professional basketball team, and practiced with the St. Martin’s cagers.

In late February Peck packed his baseball gear in a trunk and, with a heavy heart, boarded the Phillies’ train as the team passed through Baltimore on February 28, on the way to Winter Haven, Florida. When the train arrived in Winter Haven the next day, it was discovered that Lerian’s trunk carrying his baseball shoes and catching gear had been lost en route. Although the railroad searched up and down the line between Baltimore and Winter Haven, no one could locate Peck’s belongings.

Without his baseball gear—especially his comfortable shoes—Peck could only offer encouragement to his teammates as they loosened up in the Phillies’ first-ever Sunday warm-up. In an effort to get their star catcher into the action, several of his teammates offered to loan him their shoes for the unprecedented workout, but none fit well enough for Peck to play. He finally resigned himself to purchasing and breaking in a new pair of “kicks” while borrowing the tools of ignorance from his counterparts until his equipment could be found. He’s Phillies had a day off on Tuesday, which allowed Peck to find a new pair of shoes and some catching equipment before the balance of the team arrived in camp.

During spring training, Peck remained very active in the Catholic Church, making time each day to attend Mass along with Catholic teammates Lefty O’Doul, George Susce, and Denny Sothern. While attending daily church services with new teammates O’Doul, who was acquired from the Giants during the off-season, and Susce, his new understudy behind the plate, Peck quickly developed a bond, in particular with O’Doul. During batting practice, Peck’s newfound friend had noticed a deficiency in Peck’s swing and offered some “help” with his batting. Trying in vain to follow Lefty’s suggestions, along with the lingering effects of a broken heart, Peck would endure a season-long slump at the plate.

With spring training drawing to a close the Phillies prepared to return north to face the A’s in Philadelphia’s City Series prior to the start of the regular season. Before the team left Florida, Peck disappeared from camp for a few days. None of his teammates or coaches had any idea where he went, but were relieved when he returned to Winter Haven just in time to catch up with the team on their journey home. Peck did not explain his absence to anyone until he returned to Baltimore. Upon visiting his mother and younger brother Wilmer, Peck told Wilmer that he had spent some time at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Realizing that his baseball career would support him as long as a typical career or trade, he looked into various programs to improve the outlook on his post-baseball working life. While there he also negotiated for the school to offer Wilmer, Peck’s superior on the court, a basketball scholarship. In exchange for arranging to send Wilmer to school, Peck, who wanted to become a sports writer after his baseball career ended, asked that his younger brother use his college education to find a good job so Wilmer could help finance Peck’s college attendance when he was no longer able to make a living playing baseball.

In the preseason City Series the Phillies played Connie Mack’s Athletics to a draw, each team winning two games before running out of time before Opening Day. Peck saw action in three of the four games, batting 1-for-5 with a double and a walk. With only a few days left between the close of the City Series and the start of the regular season, the Phillies played one last warm-up game against the Orioles in Baltimore. Warm-up turned out to be a misnomer for this contest, which was played in frigid conditions at Oriole Park. Peck’s catching suffered from the inhospitable conditions, allowing two passed balls on the day. The cold snap did not let up, and the Giants-Phillies opener scheduled for April 16 had to be postponed for two days due to the uncooperative weather.

The cold start to the season turned out to be an omen for the 1929 Phillies. The team broke out of the cellar, but still could not reach the first division, finishing in fifth place, 27 ½ games behind the Cubs.
Throughout the season, Peck was charged with primary catching duties, appearing in 103 games, with Spud Davis and George Susce providing backup.

Team struggles aside, as the year progressed, Peck took part in several memorable games and feats. On May 18, Peck’s home run and three RBIs helped the Phillies and Robins set a record (later broken) by scoring 50 combined runs in their doubleheader, splitting the games 20–16 and 8–6. During the July 6 doubleheader with the Cardinals, he rested on the bench after playing in the first game, watching the Phillies give up a post-1900-record 28 runs on 28 hits. Grover Cleveland Alexander earned his 373rd and last major-league win against the Phillies on August 10. Peck had a front-row seat to the postgame celebration, warming up on-deck as Tommy Thevenow made the last out. Alexander pitched four innings of relief to earn the win, which at the conclusion of the game was celebrated as the NL record, thought to have topped Christy Mathewson’s record by one. Later research showed that Alexander and Mathewson are actually tied at 373 wins apiece.

Peck’s last major-league game was another record-setting affair. In the first game of the Giants-Phillies doubleheader on October 5, Mel Ott and Chuck Klein entered the game tied with 42 home runs each. Klein homered off of Carl Hubbell to take the lead, after which the Phillies pitchers walked Ott six times to secure the title for Klein. With his 43rd home run, Klein broke Rogers Hornsby’s single-season NL homer record. Meanwhile, in the fifth inning of game one, Lefty O’Doul collected his 251st hit of the season, erasing another of Hornsby’s records. O’Doul collected three more hits on the day, finishing the season with 254. Peck ended his career going 1-for-3 for the day, raising his lifetime average to .246.

At the conclusion of the season, the New York Times named him the top-fielding catcher in the NL. Peck was also a leader in a much less desirable category, being one of only six players in the majors in 1929 to fail to score 75 percent of the times he reached base (while collecting at least 50 hits that year). Only Shanty Hogan, Dutch Hoffman and Johnny Gooch had worse scoring percentages.

Peck stayed in Philadelphia after the Phillies disbanded, watching the A’s defeat the Chicago Cubs in the World Series. On October 15, he returned home to Baltimore, where he quickly reunited with his sandlot acquaintances and began playing. Peck played his final game, an exhibition match on Sunday, October 20, between the Baltimore All-Stars and the Baltimore Black Sox, featuring Negro League stars Dick Lundy and Oliver “Ghost” Marcelle. He had one hit in a losing effort, but kept the speedy Black Sox in check, allowing just two stolen bases on the day.

On Monday, October 21, Peck attended a Redemptorist sermon at St. Martin’s Church. During the sermon, the preacher admonished attendees to live an honorable life, because no one knows the hour or day that the end may come. Following the service, Peck walked to the trolley stop at the corner of Fayette and Mount streets to catch a ride home. While he waited, a car driven by August Meyers nearly collided with a Hecht’s delivery truck, driven by Charles Lloyd. In an effort to avoid a collision, Lloyd swerved and lost control of his truck. The vehicle headed straight toward a group of children playing on the street. Given just a moment to act, Lloyd swerved again, missing the children. His truck jumped the curb, crashing through the trolley stop. Peck, without a moment to react, was caught as the truck plowed into a brick building.

The impact of the collision tore a hole in the building, and trapped Peck between the truck and crushed wall. It took over an hour to remove him from the
accident site. A passing motorist rushed him to Franklin Square Hospital,\(^59\) where Peck was diagnosed with severe body bruises, internal injuries, and multiple broken bones. His doctor optimistically described his condition as “serious.”\(^60\)

Upon hearing word of the accident, fifty men from St. Martin’s and six Baltimore firefighters lined up to offer blood for a badly needed transfusion.\(^61\) Two St. Martins donors were selected, and when the doctors felt that Peck was strong enough to withstand the transfusion, a risky procedure in those days, the donors each gave a pint of blood. Before the transfusion was completed, Peck succumbed to his injuries.

Over 1,000 mourners attended the funeral mass held at St. Martin’s, among them several major leaguers. John McGraw was said to have coveted Peck, trying to negotiate a trade with the Phillies before the accident. Truck driver Lloyd was convicted of manslaughter in December, 1929, and Hecht’s was ordered to pay Peck’s mother a settlement of $22,500. The Phillies, meanwhile, slid back down to the cellar in 1930, featuring one of the worst pitching staff records in history.

After news of his death spread, those who knew Peck provided a clear picture of the player, and the man. Giants manager McGraw called him “the future catching star of the National League,” while Rogers Hornsby said he was the top young catcher in the league. The Catholic periodical the Ligourian mourned the loss of an exemplary role model, eulogizing Peck as the “perfect Catholic gentleman.”\(^62\)

While Peck’s time in the major leagues may be largely forgotten, his place in Maryland baseball history is not. Peck was inducted into the Oldtimer’s Baseball Association of Maryland Hall of Fame in 1959,\(^63\) in recognition of his position as one of Maryland’s baseball greats—one whose life and career were cut tragically short. ■

Notes
1. Interview, Dr. Henry J. “Jack” Lerian, 31 August 2004.
2. National Baseball Hall of Fame Player Questionnaire.
3. 1900 U.S. Census.
4. Mrs. Olga K. Hutchins of the Zion Church of the City of Baltimore.
5. Interview, Father John Harvey, St. Martin’s Rectory, 4 September 2004.
6. 1920 U.S. Census.
10. “Oriole Official Follows the Career of His Protégé.”
21. Ibid.
24. “Shootin’ em,” Baltimore Sun, 1 January 1924.
27. “Shootin’ em.”
31. “Pennsy Fans Say He Will Deliver in Fast Society,” unknown newspaper, 1 April 1925.
32. “Peck Lerian, Catcher, Dies After Crash.”
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36. Interview, Mr. Walter Lerian, 30 August 2004.
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49. Philadelphia Inquirer, 30 May 1928.
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61. "Robins Win First 20–16; Phillies Take Final 8–6," Washington Post,
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63. "Alexander Sets NL Record; Cards Split 2," Washington Post,
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69. "Lerian, Catcher, Hurt as Auto Mounts Curb," Washington Post,
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IN 1922, the New York Yankees played the New York Giants in the World Series; the majors produced three .400 hitters; Rogers Hornsby won the Triple Crown; and Organized Baseball reached the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Baseball had long been a popular pastime on the Shore. Almost every town supported a team, and competition among the amateurs could be fierce. Baseball’s prosperity on the Eastern Shore needed no more proof than the fact that crowds at ball games sometimes doubled the town’s population.

Since most amateur players were farmers, chores like planting crops and harvesting strawberries complicated team schedules. Rain postponed games and farm work alike, placing pressure on good weather.

Impatient fans looked to the Class D Blue Ridge League in West Virginia and saw a firmer game schedule, ostensibly better umpiring, and apparently less rowdism. They believed they gazed upon better baseball.

As early as May 1921, the Salisbury Chamber of Commerce had proposed a six-team Organized Baseball league on the Eastern Shore. Each town that wanted a team posted a $1,000 forfeit fee as a guarantee of interest. As soon as officials of the Blue Ridge League learned of these plans, they sent league president J. Vincent Jamison to Salisbury to explain the working details of Organized Baseball and the features of Class D organizations. Thus, the Blue Ridge League played a major role in the establishment of Organized Baseball on the Eastern Shore. It not only served as an example but also helped to set up the league’s first set of rules.

The league formally organized in late October 1921, and began play in 1922. The original teams represented the Maryland communities of Salisbury, Cambridge, Pocomoke City, and Crisfield, along with Laurel, Delaware, and Parksley, Virginia. These towns formed a geographic wheel that simplified team travel. Easton, considered too far north of the hub, lost its bid for original membership. The league required every town with a team either to build a new ballpark or enlarge its current one.

Crisfield’s opening day that first season proved rather unforgettable—and a bit ominous. Many years later, Salisbury attorney Stanley G. Robbins, who played second base for Crisfield that season, recalled the game. I remember it vividly. We were hosting Parksley. Around the second inning, the umpire called a third strike on a Parksley batter. Boos rang from the crowd of 600 and then, lo and behold, this drunk ran out from the sidelines and clobbered the umpire. Players and some of the spectators ran out and pulled him off the ump, who was later taken to the hospital. He was pretty beat up, if I remember correctly, and the game was called at that point. It was certainly an unusual way to begin the season.

Despite various efforts, fan disorder remained a problem throughout the league’s history.

During the winter of 1922 and the spring of 1923, officials from each franchise tried to cover the league’s first year’s deficit by selling additional stock. This was a common method of raising money under an agreement most minor-league clubs had with the majors.

By terms of the agreement, the town baseball association was responsible for paying player salaries that ranged from the lower limit of $1,750 per month in 1922 to $2,250 per month in 1947. Major-league clubs then paid about $2,000 for exclusive rights to draft players from the Class D organization. On a working agreement basis, the major-league clubs were responsible for supplying players to their minor-league affiliates. Sometimes the major-league club would bear the entire financial responsibility for operating a minor-league team. Or one individual could financially support a team, which would operate independently of any major-league club. This was a risky arrangement that often proved costly. Arthur Ehlers, who owned the Pocomoke franchise in 1937–38, was the only man to take that risk in the Eastern Shore League. He later confessed to hocking his furniture on occasion to meet the team’s monthly payroll.

In 1923, eight teams comprised the league, which had elected a new president, M. B. Thawley of Crisfield, and accumulated more than $2,000 in debts. Conditions worsened in early July, when Milford, Delaware, refused to abide by the class-player limit of three (a class player was one who had played in more than 25 games in a higher-division
league). This rule, along with the monthly salary limit, was the basis for the league. Yet both were frequently violated and turned out to be instrumental in the league’s failure.

For violating the class-player limit, the team had to forfeit all the games it had won while that player was on its roster. These forfeitures could drop a team completely out of the pennant race early in the season and thus dramatically affect attendance. Milford chose to quit the league rather than submit to the indignity of forfeiting so many of its victories and playing the rest of the season to empty seats.

Dover won the 1923 pennant with future Hall of Famer Mickey Cochrane, who played under the name of Frank King to protect his amateur status. In mid-July, Dover played Martinsburg, West Virginia, in the “Five State Championship” series (featuring Class D teams from Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia) and won the best of seven games. Once again the playoff series was responsible for what money there was in the league’s treasury at the end of the season. Helping at the gate this year was the renowned commissioner of baseball, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who came to the Eastern Shore to witness the playoffs. On July 19, which had been dubbed “Landis Day,” Judge Landis watched Cambridge beat Laurel in Salisbury.

The commissioner’s blessing notwithstanding, the Eastern Shore League faced serious troubles. Burdened with debt and facing an unpromising financial picture, officials had to doubt that the shore could support an eight-team league. The 1924 season started on shaky ground—with yet another new president, Harry Rew of Parksley, and heavy debt, plus reshuffled franchises.

Except for pennant-winning towns, attendance-related problems plagued the league until finally, on July 10, 1928, at the Wicomico Hotel, directors disbanded the league by a vote of 4–2. President Rew, writing his treasurer, attributed the demise of the league to the fact that “every club was running heavily behind with no prospects of any better attendance.”

During the Great Depression, the Eastern Shore was without professional baseball. By 1936, however, the economy had improved and popular interest in reorganizing the league had mounted. All that was lacking was effective leadership, which finally came from Tom Kibler, baseball coach at Washington College. Kibler contacted the promotional director of minor-league baseball and promised to renovate ballparks that had been idle for six years. Eight towns pledged support for franchises—Federalsburg, Dover, Cambridge, Salisbury, Easton, Centreville, Chestertown, and Pocomoke City. To avoid another financial collapse, league members stressed the importance of adhering to the salary limits. Happily enough, the director agreed to resurrect the Eastern Shore League in time for the 1937 season.

That year the revived league offered fans a pennant race that received national attention. By June 18, the Salisbury Indians had compiled a record of 21–5. The following day, league president Kibler ruled that the Indians had been using an ineligible player and had to forfeit their 21 victories. Individual statistics, however, were not affected.

Kibler’s ruling threatened the league with another collapse. First baseman Robert Brady was the subject of the controversial ruling. At the time, no club was allowed more than two members who had played in a higher-class league. Brady had been under contract to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in the New York–Penn League for a year. He never played, however, and had been placed on the reserve list. Indians owner Joe Cambria objected, saying Kibler earlier had sanctioned Salisbury’s list of eligible players, including Brady. Under extreme pressure, Kibler remained firm and produced turmoil in the often-troubled league.

“Kibler... always impressed me as being level-headed, but in this case, he seems to have forgotten the words ‘common sense’ are in the English language,” said Cambria. When informed that the ruling might cause the league to fold for a second time, the steadfast Kibler responded, “Then that’s just the way it will be.” Not even his personal relationship with Salisbury manager Jake Flowers (who had played for Kibler at Washington College), deterred him from enforcing the letter of the league law. If the temporary setback rattled Flowers, he never showed it. “We’ve won 80 percent of our games so far and I don’t see any reason why we can’t continue to do that,” he told some skeptics.

Flowers had several reasons to be optimistic. In Cuban Jorge Comellas and Philadelphian Joe Kohlman, he had the league’s best pitchers. He also had the league’s best-hitting team. Before the forfeits, Comellas was 5–0, surrendering only 33 hits in 42 innings. Kohlman owned a 4–1 record and had allowed only 28 hits in 45 innings. Comellas was a crafty, 20-year-old right hander with a roundhouse curve. He had entered pro baseball after a revolution at home closed the University of Havana and ended his student days. Kohlman, a 24-year-old righty, had tried out for the Philadelphia Athletics in 1934 and 1935 and had played minor-league ball elsewhere before joining Salisbury. When questioned about his success, Kohlman replied, “I just mix them up—fastballs, curves, drops,
change of pace and an occasional screwball." Most Eastern Shore pitchers relied on one pitch; Kohlman had five in his repertoire.

“Comellas and Kohlman were just out of their league,” recalled Fred Lucas, who managed Cambridge in 1937. “Most of the players in Class D were fresh out of high school. Comellas and Kohlman had a wealth of experience and maturity compared to the rest of the league. Kohlman lost the second game of the season to us, 5–4. If a player hadn’t overrun second, the Indians would have won it. That turned out to be his only regular-season loss. That’s how tough he was.”

Immediately following Kibler’s June 19 ruling, Salisbury forfeited 21 games and fell to last place. The Indians then caught fire. They split their next four games, but Comellas and Kohlman provided a foreshadowing of their dominance with back-to-back wins on June 29 and July 1. Comellas struck out 21 Centre-ville hitters en route to an eight-hit, 11–5 decision and his ninth win of the season. Kohlman followed by fanning 18 Cambridge batters while tossing a three-hit shutout. Playing at a feverish clip, Salisbury moved out of last place on July 29.

From August 1 until the end of the season, the comeback Indians went 31–3. The club split a double-header with Pocomoke on August 6, giving the latter a 32–35 record and sole possession of fifth place. Three games later, the surging Indians reached the .500 mark after playing at a .790 clip following the forfeits. Once at .500, they immediately embarked on a 12-game winning streak that carried them into second place.

The pace of victory slowed slightly in August and September, but the Indians’ momentum continued. On August 19, Kohlman won his 20th consecutive game—a 9–1 decision over Centreville. The following day, however, Centreville snapped Comellas’ winning streak in a thrilling 2–1 game. Comellas was touched for seven hits, but two close calls proved crucial. Salisbury bounced back with three consecutive victories. In the third game, Kohlman made a relief appearance in the tenth inning and notched his 21st victory. That moved the Indians (47–36) just one game behind first-place Easton. A victory over Dover pushed the Indians into a first-place tie with Easton on August 27. The Indians maintained their momentum with back-to-back wins by Kohlman and Comellas.

With ten days remaining in the season, five of the league’s eight teams had a shot at winning the pennant. Salisbury appeared in trouble on September 1, after losing to Pocomoke, 4–3, while Easton won a pair of games. But a four-game winning streak moved Salisbury into first place by one and one-half games on September 3. In an important contest with Easton, Kohlman responded with a no-hitter and his 20th consecutive win. Salisbury then clinched the pennant by sweeping a doubleheader from Easton. Kohlman won the opener, 1–0, and Leon Revolinsky won the nightcap. The Indians had climbed from the cellar to win the pennant by three and one-half games.

For the regular season, the Indians had actually won 80 of 96 games for an amazing .833 winning percentage. That mark has never been equaled by any full-season minor-league club. Manager Jake Flowers was named “Minor-League Manager of the Year” by The Sporting News.

This heroic comeback, which featured 59 wins in the final 70 games, owed much to Comellas and Kohlman. But Salisbury’s offensive power certainly provided balance. On August 27, when Salisbury tied for first place, shortstop Frank Trechock was hitting .360, second baseman Jerry Lynn .344, and center-fielder Bill Luzansky .321.

The amazing Indians hadn’t finished yet. Salisbury entered the Eastern Shore League playoffs against Cambridge, while Easton played Centreville. The Indians defeated Cambridge behind Comellas’ 23rd win and Kohlman’s 26th consecutive victory. Centreville eliminated Easton in four games.

In the opening game of the best-of-five championship series, Centreville shocked everyone by shelling Comellas, 9–1. In game two on September 14, Centre-ville ended Kohlman’s winning streak at 26 when Lloyd Gross halted Salisbury, 3–2. Gross fanned nine, walked one and allowed just five hits. John Bassler rescued the Indians in the third game, beating Centreville, 6–3, with relief help from Comellas. Bassler came back to win game four by a 7–2 count to even the series. In a fitting finale, Kohlman threw another no-hitter as the climax to the Indians’ miraculous 1937 season.

While the summer of 1937 was the most memorable for Eastern Shore League fans (and one of the most unusual in baseball history), their heroes failed them in stiffer competition. Immediately following the playoffs, Kohlman, Comellas (who would not pitch in the majors until 1945), Trechock, Lynn, and catcher Fermin “Mike” Guerra reported to the Washington Senators, the team’s parent club. Fame proved brief for all but Guerra. Kohlman’s major-league totals show a 1–0 record in 27.7 innings during parts of two seasons, while Comellas closed at 0–2 in 12 innings with the 1945 Cubs. Trechock and Lynn each played in one game. Trechock went 2-for-4 and Lynn rapped two hits in three at-bats. Guerra went on to play nine seasons in the majors with the Senators, Philadelphia Athletics,
and Boston Red Sox. He compiled a lifetime batting average of .242.10

The Eastern Shore League between 1938 and 1940 was financially stable and lost only one franchise (Crisfield was replaced by Milford in 1938); future big-leaguers Mickey Vernon, Carl Furillo, Sid Gordon, Mel Parnell, and Ron Northey all provided glittering play that helped fill the parks. Yet league problems like rowdyism continued. When the Eastern Shore brought Organized Baseball to the area in 1922, community leaders had hoped to eliminate misbehavior at the park. Instead, higher stakes led to more rhubarbs, team fighting, and fan abuse of umpires.

On July 26, 1938, a game between Cambridge and Centreville came to a head when manager Joe O’Rourke took a swing at his Centreville counterpart Joe Davis while discussing the possibility of resuming the game. It had been halted in the bottom of the eighth with two Cambridge runners on base and no outs. Fans rushed onto the field, and as the melee worsened Francis O’Rourke, brother of the Cambridge manager and secretary to the club, was knocked cold and had to be carried away for medical attention.11

Less than a month later, when Cambridge beat Easton 8–3, a police escort was necessary to return the umpire safely home from disgruntled Easton fans. Two bad calls, according to Easton partisans, had ignited the incident. A similar fracas took place on July 21, 1940, when Cambridge beat Dover, 7–2. At one point, the umpire ejected Cambridge manager Hugh Poland, bringing fans out of their seats in anger. Only the peacemaking efforts of the Cambridge players kept them from spilling onto the playing field. Spectators quieted long enough to complete the game. But the umpires, even with the aid of local police, could not leave the park until the wee hours of the morning.12

American intervention in World War II took many of the brawling ballplayers overseas. In 1941, Dover and Pocomoke City dropped from the league, leaving a six-team circuit. Between Pearl Harbor and V-J Day, more than 350 major-league players served their country, and many regional players joined the exodus. The year 1941 was the worst financially for the league since 1937. Attendance dropped and only one or two teams showed a profit. An interesting season would have helped receipts, but Milford had led the league by as many as 15 games at one point and won the pennant handily, by four games.

Harry Russell, successor to Tom Kibler as the league president, nonetheless believed that the league could have continued had war not broken out. In any event, the league folded. Once again the Eastern Shore went without Organized Baseball.13

Naturally enough, baseball men began planning a league comeback even before the war’s end. Activists in each of the old franchise towns met to discuss the possibility in the winter of 1945. They included John Perry of Centreville, Dr. W. K. Knotts of Federalsburg, Dr. Walter Grier of Milford, and Fred Lucas of Cambridge. Harry Russell remained on duty with the army air corps, and coordination with major-league owners was weak. These owners, moreover, were wary of overbuilding their minor-league teams during those uncertain times. As in the past, the issue of renovated parks, or new ones, remained critical.

Cambridge, with its reputation as the best baseball town on the Eastern Shore, became a leader in talks with major-league owners. Fred Lucas, who had managed the Cambridge Cardinals as a farm team for Branch Rickey’s St. Louis Cardinals, set to work to try to persuade Rickey, who now co-owned the Brooklyn Dodgers, to support minor-league baseball in Cambridge—and to invest some $65,000 in a new ballpark.

Lucas had his baseball arguments well mapped out, but hunting and fishing proved the easier path to Rickey’s attention. “I began making trips to Brooklyn to talk to Mr. Rickey,” recalled Lucas. “He didn’t warm to my idea. He was an avid outdoorsman and would rather talk about fishing than Class D baseball. One day he asked me, ‘How are the fish biting in Cambridge?’ Without hesitation and without really knowing, I replied, ‘Great. Why don’t you come down and try your hand.’ ” Rickey was quick to accept the invitation.14

A few weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Rickey visited Cambridge and stayed with Lucas. The next morning Milford Elliott took him and the Rickeys fishing on the Choptank River. Within ten minutes, Mrs. Rickey landed a good-sized croaker. A few minutes later, Mr. Rickey did the same. By the end of the day, Lucas and the Rickeys had caught 96 fish. Delighted, Mr. Rickey wrapped 50 of them in old copies of the Cambridge Daily Banner and packed them in one of Lucas’ old suitcases. He then caught the Colonial Express out of Wilmington for New York, the fish stored in the train’s refrigerator car.15

The Eastern Shore’s natural resources continued to appeal to Rickey, who, when Lucas visited Brooklyn to talk minor-league baseball, always greeted the ex-manager with questions—not about baseball, but about fishing and duck hunting. Lucas invited him to go duck hunting in Dorchester County. Again Lucas made the arrangements, engaging Adrian Hynson of Hoopers
Island as a guide. Lucas made sure he would be with Rickey every moment, ready to mix business and pleasure. This time Rickey brought along his 31-year-old son. The day got off to a bad start on the water. When the hunters reached the blind they quickly realized it was going to be one of the coldest days of the year. With everyone shivering and generally miserable (they only shot one duck), Lucas did at least get in some talk about baseball.16

Rickey remained skeptical about backing a team in Cambridge and building a new ballpark there until Lucas proposed a money-saving idea. He suggested that the Brooklyn Dodgers could use the park as the site of a tryout camp before the class season opened, thus cutting the Dodgers’ operating expenses. Lucas believed Rickey was at least thinking about the suggestion and began to take heart. “A few days after Mr. Rickey returned to Brooklyn,” as Lucas told the story, “he called me and told me to pick out a site in Cambridge for the ballpark. I selected the Linden Avenue location in the center of town. Mr. Rickey and his organization spent $68,000 to build Dodger Park. It was rated as one of the top three Class D minor-league parks in the country. Just as we hoped, the move encouraged other major-league owners to support our Class D franchises.”

Following Rickey’s lead, other major-league teams jumped in to help their proposed farm teams fix up their ballparks. By 1946, each town had become affiliated with a major-league club.17

Thus the Eastern Shore League appeared, for the third time, in 1946. Tom Kibler again became president of an eight-team league, comprised of Cambridge, Centreville, Easton, Federalsburg, Salisbury, Dover, Milford, and Rehoboth. Centreville’s phenomenal fan support received national attention in 1946. Centreville’s postwar population stood at 1,100; in 62 home games, the team drew 42,500 fans, averaging nearly 700 fans a game. Sometimes the team drew 1,500. The largest crowd—for a playoff game against Dover, Delaware—numbered 2,550. Townspeople boastfully dubbed Centreville “Baseball Town U.S.A.” The Orioles’ outstanding play gave Queen Anne’s County fans plenty to cheer about. They fashioned an 88–37 record (.703) and won the pennant by 11 1⁄2 games.18

Rivalries fueled by betting and various player incentives also boosted attendance. Merchants frequently would offer $5 or $10 to any player who hit a home run, the amount climbing according to the importance of the game or even inning. Jack Dunn III, president of the Centreville Orioles, recalled how in 1946 Bunky Langgood collected quite a treasure for a home run against Milford, Delaware.

“We had just knocked Milford out of first place when they visited us in late July. The game drew 1,500 fans and the tension ran high as a pitchers’ duel developed,” he recalled. After nine innings, the game was tied 1–1. Then the fans started to get into the action. Since many were dairy farmers, a quart of milk was a common prize.

“When it was all over, the fans of Centreville, Chestertown, Queenstown and Stevensville had raised an unusual kitty. I don’t know if that was the incentive or not, but Langgood delivered an inside-the-park home run in the bottom of the eleventh inning for a 2–1 win. He won 64 quarts of milk and $100 for his game-winning blow.”19

Reminiscent of the Salisbury miracle of 1937, the 1946 Orioles won 31 of their final 34 games. By the end of July, the Orioles were in first place by four games. Many of the Centreville players had just come out of the service. They had the maturity that many younger Class D players lacked. The team also boasted great pitching, speed, solid defense, and good hitting.

The Orioles had three pitchers who won 15 games or more. Late in the season the team obtained Al Heuser, who went 6–0. Three of his wins came in the playoffs. The outfield of Langgood, Nick Malfara, and Fred Pacitto hit well over .300. Langgood and Malfara each drove in more than 90 runs. Washington College graduate Jimmy Stevens was always a favorite with Centreville fans and established the Eastern Shore League record for stolen bases in a season with 80.

Neither bonuses nor winning seasons gave the Oriole players or management the rewards they fully deserved. Team president Dunn, for example, had to wear many hats during his first year as a club official. Early in the season, catcher Lou Isert got suspended for fighting on the field. He had a habit of throwing dirt into the batter’s shoes and that started a melee against Seaford. Dunn, as he recalled in an interview years later, filled in for the catcher for a while and hit .465 as a reserve player. He got a chance to direct the club when manager Jim McLeod went into the hospital with a bad knee. Dunn took over in early July with Centreville in second place. When McLeod returned at the end of the month, Dunn was able to give him back the reins with the team in first place. If the groundskeeper was sick, Dunn laid the foul lines and took care of the field. He got up at 5:30 a.m. to wash the team’s uniforms. “I was one of the few playing club presidents,” he said later (he went on to become a vice president of the American League Baltimore Orioles). “I always tell friends that I ended my playing
days when I went in and asked myself for a raise and the request was denied.”

Although the 1946 Centreville Orioles won the league championship and playoffs, they had almost nothing to show for it. The reward for winning the playoffs was $500—split 20 ways. Then, despite the Orioles’ success, the parent club (the International League Baltimore Orioles) declined to return the club to Centreville in 1947. The Baltimore AAA team had payroll problems of its own and was unable to afford the luxury of a farm system at the Class D level.

Playing in Class D minor-league baseball certainly offered few immediate material benefits. Caroll Beringer, who pitched for Cambridge in 1946 and 1947, going 22–6 in the latter campaign, and later served as bullpen coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Philadelphia Phillies, recalled the conditions.

He signed his first contract at age 17. The Dodgers offered him 90 dollars a month and he was a little hesitant. But when they said they would pay his way home at the end of the season, he said nothing could have stopped him from signing. At the time, Class D players received a dollar-a-day meal money. To stretch it, they frequently asked the bus driver to stop near a watermelon field when they were returning from a game. Several players would run through the field and grab what they could. The team would feast on watermelon for dinner.

Neither living accommodations nor playing conditions boosted their spirits much. Players never stayed overnight in a motel, because all league teams were less than two-and-a-half hours away. Three other players and Beringer stayed in $4-a-week rooms at a house just a few blocks from the ballpark. On the road, the crowds were typically hostile.

Visiting pitchers learned to throw while keeping an eye out for the occasional flying tomato. Umpires took a great deal of abuse, just as before the war. Only two who worked the 1946 season returned in 1947. When it became harder and harder to find major-league clubs to support Class D teams on the Shore, Milford and Dover were dropped from the circuit after the 1947 season.

In 1948, the Salisbury Cardinals had little trouble capturing the pennant, but the league itself was having trouble surviving. Fred Lucas, the league’s new president, faced perennial problems—failure to obtain working agreements with major-league clubs, poor attendance in some towns, and the lack of financial backing. At winter meetings after the 1949 season, officials of the Eastern Shore League desperately attempted to strengthen it.

By December, survival was dubious at best. Baseball enthusiasts on the Shore discussed possible changes to insure continuation of the league. Some observers suggested expanding Class D ball to the Western Shore, with eight teams and four-day road trips.

Extending the geographical base of the league would spark new interest and involve larger towns such as Frederick and Hagerstown. Supporters argued that league attendance would increase. Others suggested fewer games, shorter seasons, fewer players, and lower salary limits. Lucas supported an internal reorganization of the league. In fact, as he would maintain years later, his plan became the basis of the “All-Rookie Leagues” established across the country in the mid-1950s.

Lucas, however, was ignored. Major-league executives and baseball organizers on the Eastern Shore failed to share his vision, and the Eastern Shore League died for the third time after the 1949 season.

Notes
1. *Salisbury Times*, 19 May and 31 October 1921.
2. Ibid., 14 June 1972.
5. Ibid., 9 April and 19 July 1923.
6. Harry Row to league treasurer, 14 July 1924, collection of Fred Lucas; see also *New York Times*, 1 May, 11 July, and 13 September 1923.
8. Ibid., 3 May and 1–21 June 1937.
9. Ibid., 21 June 1937; see also author’s interview with Fred Lucas, 10 January 1971.
12. Ibid., 17 August 1938 and 22 July 1940.
14. Author’s interview with Fred Lucas, 10 January 1971.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. *Daily Banner*, 13 May 1946; *Queen Anne’s Record-Observer*, 1 September 1946.
19. Author’s interview with Jack Dunn III, 2 June 1977.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
23. Author’s interview with Fred Lucas, 10 January 1971.
24. Ibid.
MOE BERG
One day when the senators were on the road, Al Schacht called Moe Berg in his hotel room to tell him he was with two ladies who wanted to meet him.

“Moe, this is Al. I’ve got a couple young ladies down here in the lobby. I’ve been telling them about you being the ‘Don Juan’ of the team and they’re hollering for you. Can you come right down? I can’t hold them any longer.”

Berg bathed, shaved, put on his best-pressed suit, and went down to the lobby. There was Schacht holding the hands of a nine-year-old and an eleven-year-old.

“They want your autograph, Moe.”

WALTER JOHNSON
When Walter Johnson managed the Senators (from 1929–1932), he would sit by himself in the hotel lobby and read the newspaper. When fans recognized him, they would approach him and tell him of their memories of seeing the Big Train when he pitched. One fan interrupted to tell him, “I saw you pitch your first-ever game thirty-five years ago.” Johnson told the fan he appreciated him sharing his memory, but when the fan walked away Johnson did the math and thirty-five years ago meant he pitched his first game when he was seven years old.

A few minutes later, another fan interrupted the Big Train. “That sure was tough, Walter, to lose a 1–0 game in game seven of the 1925 World Series.” Johnson didn’t have the heart to tell him he lost by a score of 9–7. “It sure was,” he replied with a smile.

GRIFFITH’S FIRST HONESTY LESSON IN BASEBALL
While growing up in Vernon County, Missouri, Clark Griffith played baseball with the other kids around the county. Their field was by the hanging tree, and as the boys played, Griffith would peek at the condemned to see if he knew any of them.

The boys played their games with homemade baseballs, but one time they were able to save enough to buy a ball from an older lad. The first time someone batted the ball it went flat, and Griffith and the others spent the rest of the day looking for the dishonest vendor. The next day the crook showed up—swinging from the hanging tree. “That was my first honesty lesson in baseball,” Griffith would often say.
TELEGRAMS
When the Washington Senators returned home after losing game seven of the 1925 World Series, Bucky Harris received a telegram at the train station from Ban Johnson, the President of the American League. Johnson’s telegram criticized the Senators manager for not relieving Walter Johnson, who gave up nine runs on fourteen hits in a 9–7 loss. Harris immediately sent a telegram to the League president to explain that he had no alibis for going down with his best.

Nick Altrock, the comical coach of the Senators, also received a telegram, this one from an angry fan.

“I took your advice and bet fifty dollars on Washington. Please lend me fifty dollars on my seven-jewel watch.”

CLOWNING HAS A PRICE
Clowning could be a dangerous business. Washington coaches Nick Altrock and Al Schacht, both known for their clowning more than for their coaching, used to perform their zany skits before games. One time their act called for Schacht to whip baseballs across the diamond to Altrock. Mixed in with the baseballs was a rubber ball for Schacht to throw, and for Altrock to let it hit him in the head. Before Schacht threw the rubber ball he was to signal to Altrock by tugging his belt. But Altrock thought he saw the sign and took a baseball on the noggin. He was out like a light, and when he came to, he had a big lump on his forehead.

Altrock got even when the two comedians mocked a boxing match, using first-basemen mitts for boxing gloves. During the match Altrock hit Schacht with a right hook that gave him a bloody nose and knocked him on his can. “Now we’re even,” Altrock told him.

CAN HANK GREENBERG HIT? JUST ASK DAVE HARRIS
The Senators arrived a day early in Detroit for their series with the Tigers during the 1933 season. After checking into the hotel, they went to Nevins Field to see the Tigers battle the Athletics. When a rookie first baseman for the Tigers named Hank Greenberg came to the plate, Dave Harris, a reserve outfielder for Washington, said, “This guy couldn’t even hit the ground,” although Greenberg had homered against the Senators twice already earlier that season. Greenberg swung and crushed the ball, and sent it for a long ride beyond the left field fence.

Harris’s teammates turned and looked at him. The Senators outfielder took a swig of his coke, then sat back and said, “I still say this guy can’t hit.”

The next day Greenberg hit two homers against Washington, including a walk-off homer to beat the Nats. That gave him three homers in two games. Not bad for a guy “who couldn’t hit the ground.”

GOSLIN WINS THE 1928 AMERICAN LEAGUE BATTLING TITLE
One of baseball’s most colorful umpires was Bill Guthrie. He was known as the “Bull” because of his bowlegged, barrel-chested physique. He was also known as “Dese-Dem-Dose” for his ability to butcher the English language that often left players, coaches, and managers speechless. Most of all, he was known for saying, “it’s either dis or dat.”
Guthrie was the home-plate umpire when Goose Goslin stepped up for his last at-bat of the 1928 season, with the batting title on the line. Goslin was the American League’s leading hitter, leading Heinie Manush by a single point. If Goslin made an out, he would lose his title. Before he knew what happened, he watched two strikes go by to put his title in trouble.

Goslin stepped out of the batter’s box and looked at Guthrie. He knew the Bull had a short fuse, and was quick to throw a player out of the game. With this in mind, Goslin decided to start an argument so he would be ejected: he wouldn’t be charged with the at-bat, and his title would be saved.

“Why, those pitches weren’t even close,” Goslin told Guthrie. 1

“Listen, wise guy,” Guthrie said, “there is no such thing as close or not close. It’s either dis or dat.”

After hearing this, Goslin acted like he was mad. He began to yell, and he stepped on Guthrie’s big feet.

“Okay, are you ready to bat now?” Guthrie asked.

“You’re not going to get thrown out of this ballgame no matter what you do, so you might as well get up to that plate. If I wanted to throw you out, I’d throw you clear to Oshkosh. But you’re going to bat, and you better be swinging to. No bases on balls, you hear me?”

Goslin heard him, all right.

He hit the next pitch and lifted a fly ball into right-center field. Outfielder Beauty McGowan, knowing if he made the catch Manush would win the title, ran hard, extended his glove hand, but couldn’t get to the ball in time, and when the ball landed on the outfield turf, Goslin won the batting title.

**THE SENATORS WON AN AMERICAN LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP?**

It is hard for some to believe, but the Washington Senators won three American League pennants—in 1924, 1925, and 1933. After winning the 1933 American League pennant, the Senators bottomed out. From 1934 to 1947 the Nats had just three winning seasons. During the 1948 season, with the Senators heading for 97 losses, the team went to a theater one night to see “The Babe Ruth Story,” starring William Bendix. During one of the scenes, as Miller Huggins is hearing it from Colonel Ruppert about the Yankees’ poor showing in 1925, the Colonel says, “The Washington Senators won the pennant in 1925. Of all teams.” Upon hearing this, the entire Senators team laughed.

**BATTER UP!**

During August 1933, the Senators were on a thirteen-game winning streak, and were in great spirits as they waited for their next train, bound for Detroit. Cronin stepped up to an imaginary plate and held his umbrella like a bat. “Throw something,” he said. Goose Goslin grabbed John Kerr’s hat off his crown and
pitched it. Cronin hit it and the hat landed in someone’s cereal bowl. Suddenly everyone pitched their hats, with Clark Griffith pitching his own, and Dave Harris throwing General Crowder’s. Cronin swung, and in his follow-through he knocked a lamp off a table that hit the floor with a loud crash.

A few minutes later, as the team stood on the platform, Buddy Myer decided to restart the game. He swiped Luke Sewell’s hat, and the Washington catcher responded by pulling Myer’s bowtie off of his collar. Myer looked at this finger and noticed he had cut it. Team trainer Mike Martin, annoyed, had to dig through his luggage to find a bandage for Myer.

A CONVERSATION WITH JOE CRONIN AND SHIRLEY POVICH
Joe Cronin didn’t want to say who his pitcher would be for the first game of the 1933 World Series. Shirley Povich, longtime writer for the Washington Post, kept badgering him for an answer.

Povich: “What’s the dope, Joe?”
Cronin: “Dope, there is no dope. I may start Whitehill. I may start Stewart. I may start Crowder. I will let you know at 1:30 on Tuesday. I told you that the other day, didn’t I?”
Povich: “Yes, Joe, but, no kidding, who do you like at this time?”
Cronin: “I like ’em all, they will all be ready. Drop around and see me Tuesday about 1:29. I’ll have some news for you.”
Povich: “Who is going to pitch the opening game?”
Cronin: “Scram, Povich!”

GOSLIN’S MYSTERIOUS ARM INJURY
Goose Goslin was the only outfielder that had the privilege of having his own caddy. In 1928, he had injured his arm during spring training. While practicing at Plant Field in Tampa one day, Goslin looked beyond right field and noticed a high-school track-and-field team throwing a shot put Intrigued, Goslin wandered over to the high-school field and joined the practice. While trying to throw the shot put as far as he could, he didn’t use the proper form, and the next morning he couldn’t lift his arm above his shoulder.

Goslin’s arm injury affected his throwing, but not his hitting, and since the Senators needed his big bat in the lineup, he played every day at his usual position of left field. To compensate for his lame arm, shortstop Bobby Reeves was required to sprint into left field whenever the ball was hit there, and he would take Goslin’s lob, then make the relay throw—thus giving Goslin his own caddy.

Goslin went on to hit .379 to win the American League batting title, but for all the runs he helped produce, he gave them back by his inability to throw, and this allowed other teams to take an extra base whenever Goslin was forced to handle the ball.

How did Goslin cure his arm? After the 1928 season, he met Ed “Strangler” Lewis, the world heavyweight wrestling champion, who had once suffered a similar injury. He told Goslin he cured it by going on a meat-free diet. Goslin thanked him for the advice, did not eat meat for the rest of the year, and, sure enough, the shoulder healed. In 1929, Goslin’s strong arm returned to full strength, and no longer did opposing teams dare to try for an extra base.1

Notes
2. But see Cort Vitty, “Goose Goslin,” The Baseball Biography Project, http://bioproj.sabr.org: “In 1929, his stickwork suffered and his arm was definitely not back to normal.”
MARYLAND has produced five of the top 53 major league–leading career home-run hitters through the 2008 season:

Babe Ruth (b. Baltimore) 714 career HRs
Jimmie Foxx (b. Sudlersville) 534 HRs, no. 16
Cal Ripken Jr. (b. Havre de Grace) 431 HRs, no. 38
Al Kaline (b. Baltimore) 399 HRs, no. 44
Harold Baines (b. Easton) 384 HRs, no. 53

Marylanders dominated HR hitters for the decades of 1910, ’20, ’30, and ’40. Ruth is the leading home-run hitter of any of the decades from 1900 to 2008 (1920–29 = 467 HRs); Foxx is second for any decade (1930–39 = 415 HRs). Frank Baker (born and died in Trappe) is no. 2 for the Deadball period of 1910–19 (76 HR and no. 1 AL; Gavy Cravath, with 116 HRs, led the majors for the decade of the ’10s). Bill Nicholson (born and died in Chestertown) is no. 3 in MLB and no. 2 NL = 211 HRs for the ’40s. (Ted Williams is no. 1 in MLB for the ’40s = 234 HRs; Johnny Mize led the NL with 217.) (See table 1.)

Bob Robertson (b. Frostburg)—115 HRs (hit three HRs and drove in five runs for the Pirates in Game Two of the NL playoffs in 1971).

That means Maryland is the birthplace to 10 of the top 325 all-time homer hitters (Nicholson with 235 is tied for no. 222).

A little about each of the Old Line State’s native sluggers:

What more can be said that hasn’t already been written about Babe Ruth? His legend, more than 110 years after his birth and more than 60 years following his death, continues to grow. I daresay Ruth’s name and image appear in the media today more than any other person’s, save the president of the United States. He is the most famous baseball player of all time. He was born and raised in Maryland’s largest city, went to “school” there, broke in with the International League’s Baltimore Orioles, and has a museum at his birthplace, 216 Emory Street, Baltimore, a few blocks from Orioles Park at Camden Yards. His single-season record of 60 homers in 1927 stood for 34 years, and his career HR record of 714 lasted for 39.

Jimmie “the Beast” Foxx was born and raised on a farm outside the tiny town of Sudlersville on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. There is a statue of Jimmie in the center of Sudlersville (population 390);
the town honored him in 2007 on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth.

Foxx won baseball’s Triple Crown in 1933. He batted .356 with 48 homers and 163 RBIs. He nearly had three TCs: in 1932, he led the AL with 58 HRs (his career high) and 169 RBIs. He narrowly missed the batting title, as his .364 (a career high) was second to Dale Alexander’s .367. The third assault on the TC came in 1938, when he drove home a career-best 175 runs and batted .349 for league leads, but his 50 circuit clouts were second to Hank Greenberg’s 58. He was named Most Valuable Player in those three years—1932, ’33, and ’38.

Cal Ripken Jr., a living legend, is, of course, best known for his consecutive-games playing streak, 2,632 games. He played his entire major-league career—21 years—with the Orioles. The record streak may never be broken. He is now owner of the Class A Aberdeen (Maryland) IronBirds, an affiliate of the Orioles in the New York–Pennsylvania League. The IronBirds play in beautiful 6,000-seat Ripken Stadium. It’s a hard ticket to an IronBirds game; every home game has been sold out since 2002.

Cal is from a Maryland baseball family. Brother Bill played in the majors for the Orioles, 1987–92 and ’96, and for three other AL teams (Texas, Cleveland, and Detroit), spanning 11 seasons (he hit 20 HRs in 912 games). Father Cal Sr. was a player, scout, coach, and manager for 36 years with the Baltimore Orioles organization. He managed the big club in 1987 and part of ’88. He is also credited with managing one game in 1985. He died in 1999 at age 63.

Al Kaline never played in the minors. His 22 years with the Tigers tie him with Mel Ott of the Giants and Stan Musial of the Cardinals for the second-longest career with one team. (Brooks Robinson and Carl Yastrzemski lead, with 23 years.) He won the AL batting title in 1955, .340. He is still in the Tigers organization.

Harold Baines likewise played 22 years in the majors, but with five teams, belonging to two teams more than once (Baltimore and White Sox three times each). He is presently coach for the White Sox and still makes his off-season home in St. Michaels, a picturesque fishing village and tourist destination on the Eastern Shore.

Only one of these three sluggers—Ripken, Kaline, and Baines—ever hit as many as 30 home runs in a season; Ripken cracked 34 in 1991. (See table 2.)

| Table 2. Maryland’s Best MLB HR Hitters, by Decade, 1950s–2001 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Al Kaline       | Harold Baines   | Cal Ripken     |
| Born in Maryland | (City and Date) | (City and Date) | (City and Date) |
| Baltimore       | 1934            | Easton          | 1959           | Have de Grace |
| Career HR       | 399             | 384             | 431            |
| and MLB Rank    | 44 (tie)        | 53              | 38             |
| HR by Decade    | 1950s–125       | 1980s–189       | 1980s–204      |
|                 | 1960s–210       | 1990s–184       | 1990s–198      |
| Elected to Hall of Fame | 1980 | — | 2007 |

Frank “Home Run” Baker’s name says it all. Playing third base in the Deadball Era (before 1920), when a home run was a novelty, he led the AL in HRs four times and RBIs twice (see Table 1). He got his nickname by hitting a dinger in two successive World Series games in 1911, one a game-winner, the second a game-tier for the victorious Philadelphia Athletics. He discovered Jimmie Foxx and recommended him to Connie Mack.

It may come as a surprise that Bill “Swish” Nicholson was a leading home-run hitter of the 1940s, when there
were other sluggers around (besides Williams and Mize), such as Ralph Kiner, Hank Greenberg, Rudy York, Ott, Joe DiMaggio, Keller, and Stan Musial. But Big Nick was the only one of these big hitters to play all 10 seasons of the ’40s. Swish clouted more round-trippers—96—than anyone else during the four World War II campaigns, 1942–45. He edged out Ott, who had 95 big ones, and York from the AL, who hit 91 in the war years. Bill’s small hometown (population 7,500 in 2000) is only about 18 miles from Foxx’s home. Nicholson and Double-X were on the same team, the 1944 Cubs, and Nicholson has a statue, too.

Brady Anderson, he of the long sideburns, had his big year while batting leadoff for the Orioles. This was a spike in his career; his next-best season for homers was 24, less than half as many as his big-output season. (Other batters also “spiked” in their playing days.) He played for the Birds for 14 years, 1988–2001, with partial seasons with the Red Sox in 1988 and the Indians in 2002.

Mark Teixeira is carrying the torch for Maryland home-run hitters today, as the only native of the state hitting ’em out regularly. He debuted in 2003 with Texas and hit 43 HRs for the Rangers in 2005. He was traded from the Braves to the Angels in 2008, and the 29-year-old signed an eight-year deal with the Yankees before the 2009 season.

Charlie “King Kong” Keller (he never liked the nickname) was born in Middletown (present population 2,670), a village in north central Maryland near Frederick. His best year for the long ball was 1941, when he cracked 33 for the powerful world champion Yankees. He knocked three out as a rookie for the victorious Yankees in the ’39 Series. He was the brother of Hal Keller, another major leaguer. Following his playing days, he founded Yankeeland farm outside Middletown and was a successful horse breeder. Born in 1916, he died in 1990, at age 72.


Bob Robertson had his 15 minutes of fame in the Pirates’ 1971 postseason. He walloped six homers in 11 contests, hit .317, and batted in 11 runs for the world champions. His best HR year was 1970, when he swatted 27 for the Bucs. He played first base for 11 years with Pittsburgh, Seattle, and Toronto from 1967 through 79, missing 1968 and 1977.

At least one of the 12 players discussed here has been on a major-league roster every one of the past 100 years, from Baker in 1908 through Teixeira in 2008.

What is it about Maryland homer hitters? Is it the water? Maryland has plenty of that! ■

Sources
Wikipedia.org.
DURING a five-week span in 1932, minor-league legend Buzz Arlett accomplished the Herculean feat of twice blasting four home runs in a game. That season, he wore the uniform of the International League Baltimore Orioles and led the loop with 54 round-trippers. It happened in the year immediately following his one and only bittersweet trip to the major leagues. It was also the year when he made his last desperate attempt to earn a trip back to the big show.

Russell Loris Arlett was born in Elmhurst, California, on January 3, 1899; he was the youngest of four baseball-loving brothers. Oldest brother Al was a member of the Oakland Oaks in 1918, when Russell arrived one spring day as a walk-on. Urged by his mom try out, he took the mound and proceeded to mow down veteran hitters with a dazzling spitter, fast ball, and curve. His ability to “buzz saw” through the opposing lineup earned him his nickname. The 6 3 185-pound youngster was signed, and from 1919 to 1922, the righthander blossomed into the ace of the Oakland staff, posting an overall 95–71 record. In 1920 alone, he won 29 games, while toiling 427 innings.

By 1923, the massive workload—nearly 1,500 innings in four seasons—had irreparably damaged his pitching arm. Arlett was considered one of the better-hitting pitchers in the league, so he was shifted to the outfield. Because his bad right arm inhibited his swing, he learned to switch-hit, and posted a .330 average. But he was slow to learn the intricacies of playing the outfield, and a reputation as a poor glove man would persist throughout his career. Buzz’s fielding would improve when playing for a winner; on a losing team, his concentration would drift. Scouts noticed this phenomenon and referred to it as his “lack of gameness.”

The Buzzsaw continued to put up big numbers, hitting .382 with 25 home runs in 1926. In 1927, Buzz led Oakland to the PCL pennant with 123 RBIs, 30 home runs, and a .351 batting average. Toward the end of that season, Oaks manager Ivan Howard commented that Buzz made perhaps the greatest play he had ever witnessed. After a long run in right field, Buzz dove, made the catch and rolled several times before triumphantly rising to his feet with the ball secured in his glove. The year 1928 marked another fine season; Buzz hit .365, poked 25 home runs, and added 113 runs batted in. The ’29 campaign was even better; in the 200-game PCL season Buzz chalked up 270 hits for an average of .374, with 39 homers, 189 RBIs, and 22 stolen bases. Movie-star handsome and popular with fans, the cordial Arlett was clearly a major star in the minor leagues; he earned a high salary, and when big-league suitors hovered, “the Oakland club set a prohibitively high price on his services.”

Early in 1930, Buzz was reportedly as good as signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers when an altercation with umpire Chet Chadbourne resulted in a serious cut above his left eye. Brooklyn needed a healthy player and withdrew its offer. Buzz recovered and returned to the Oakland lineup, to hit .361 with 31 homers and 143 RBIs.

With the initiation of the major-league draft, the Oaks realized they’d better entertain any legitimate offer for their aging star and ultimately sold his contract to the Philadelphia Phillies late in 1930. After a poor spring, Buzz started strong when the 1931 season opened. The 32-year-old rookie became the most talked-about player in all of baseball. Newspapers
across the country carried stories about the career minor leaguer finally being given his big chance. Six weeks into the season, Arlett led the league with a .385 average and placed second with 11 homers. It looked as if he’d proven his worth as a major leaguer—until injuries dragged him down. His performance deteriorated, and his old lackadaisical attitude returned. He probably sealed his fate on a hot August day, when he misplayed a routine fly to right. Pitcher Jumbo Jim Elliot was livid with the miscue and recommended an on-field rocking chair for the aging player. Buzz had ballooned to 230 pounds, and playable drives hit in his direction often dropped for hits.

Arlett finished 1931 with a .313 batting average, 18 homers, 72 RBIs, and a slugging percentage of .538, but Philadelphia placed the big outfielder on the waiver list. Phillies star Chuck Klein had played out of position in left field, and management wanted to move him back to his natural spot in right, making Arlett expendable. Depression-era owners decided to cut rosters from 25 to 23 for 1932, further limiting the value of an aging, out-of-shape player. Phils manager Burt Shotton bluntly explained why he agreed with the move: “He would have to hit .613 to be any use in our park.” Add Buzz’s high salary into the mix and the Phillies made an understandable business decision. After no other big-league club claimed him on waivers, Buzz was traded to the International League Baltimore Orioles for outfielder Russell Scarritt.

Unhappy at being “railroaded” out of the majors, Arlett worked hard to get into top shape for the 1932 season, stating that “he intended to prove his worth as a major leaguer.” Off to a fast start, he exhibited his power in Buffalo on May 5, when he reportedly hit a drive that sailed over the right field fence and through the window of a home where neighborhood ladies had gathered for an afternoon of bridge. The unsuspecting homeowner was struck on the head by the towering drive. Arlett reportedly once hit a homer that rocketed out of the park and through the front window of a house where a funeral was in progress. It’s said that the deceased was a baseball fan, and the ball ultimately stopped rolling at his casket.

On Wednesday, June 1, 1932, Buzz enjoyed a four-homer day at Reading, Pennsylvania, hitting three from the left side and the last one right-handed, as the O’s posted a 14–13 victory over the Keys. Arlett scored five runs and batted in seven. He hit his first three round-trippers off of right hander Clayton Van Alstyne. His last homer, served up by lefty Carroll Yerkes, was the game-winner. All four homers were hit over the right-field fence.
He followed this outstanding performance with another explosive day at the plate that gave new meaning to Fourth of July fireworks. The big slugger again destroyed the Reading Keys with a four-home-run outburst. In the first game of a doubleheader, Buzz initially struck out. Then in the second inning, he hammered a grand slam from the right side of the plate, against Carroll Yerkes. He hit his second dinger of the day off of right hander Emery Zumbro in the fifth inning. His next two homers were also hit left-handed, served up by right-handed pitcher Buck Newsom. The Orioles defeated the Keys 21–10.

As an encore, in his first at-bat of the second game, Arlett again connected off righty Clayton Van Alstyne, giving Buzz a total of five circuit blasts for the day. He later added a double, providing the offense leading to the Orioles’ sweep of the Keys. This gave Buzz an amazing 41 homers after only 82 games. The major leagues started to call again; this time it was the New York Giants showing interest in the big slugger, but it wasn’t meant to be.

On August 1 against the Newark Bears, Arlett caught his spikes while racing into catch a pop fly hit by Red Rolfe; Buzz fell and landed heavily on his shoulder, putting him out of the lineup. Despite missing almost a month, Arlett’s totals during the 1932 campaign included league-leading numbers in home runs at 54, runs at 141, and runs batted in with 144. His batting average stood at .339. Buzz stayed with the Orioles until the end of 1933, posting a league-leading 39 home runs and contributing 135 runs scored, while hitting .343.

In 1934, his contract was purchased by the Minneapolis Millers of the American Association. Buzz entertained the Minneapolis fans on May 27 with his hitting and fielding. Buzz smacked a homer and two doubles to lead the club to victory over the Toledo Mud Hens at Nicollet Park. But it was a spectacular running barehanded catch that earned him several minutes of deafening cheers. The Minneapolis Tribune noted that this was “from a man whose fielding supposedly kept him out of the big leagues.” In 1934, he led the loop with 41 homers, while batting .319.

Age and injuries caught up with Buzz, and by 1936 and he was relegated to part-time status with the Millers. His last appearance as a player came with the Syracuse Chiefs in 1937, when he went hitless in four plate appearances as a pinch hitter. After his playing career he managed in the low minor leagues and scouted for the Yankees, Reds, and Dodgers.

In retirement, Buzz operated a successful restaurant in Minneapolis. He passed away on May 16, 1964, after suffering a heart attack. All told, during his minor league career, he hit 432 home runs in 2,390 games, with a .341 lifetime batting average. He was clearly one of the game’s most talented switch-hitters and the first major-league player with significant power from both sides of the plate. In 1984, the Society for American Baseball Research voted him the all-time greatest minor league player. Contemporary Lefty O’Doul once offered a sobering commentary on Buzz’s career: “Had Arlett been in the big show, five years earlier, he would’ve been the Babe Ruth of the National League.”

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In April 25, 1933, the Senators and the Yankees engaged in one of baseball's most celebrated brawls.

As Ben Chapman stood on first base, Buddy Myer, Washington's second baseman, wondered what Chapman's next move would be. Chapman, the aggressive outfielder for the Yankees, had spiked him the day before and once during the previous season. Myer knew there was a good chance he would get spiked again, and as a precaution he moved closer to the second-base bag in case he had to cover the base on the next play.

There was friction between the Senators and Yankees that had started on the Fourth of July of the previous season. Since then the anger had begun to intensify to the point that there was no doubt that something would give in the form of a bench-clearing brawl.

The feud began on July 4, 1932, at Griffith Stadium, when the two teams met for a doubleheader. Before the game Yankees catcher Bill Dickey was warned by his skipper, Joe McCarthy, to be on guard. The day before in Boston, Dickey was knocked down by Roy Johnson of the Red Sox on a play at the plate. Johnson plowed into Dickey so hard that he knocked him flat on his back. Dickey was dazed, and had lost consciousness for a few seconds. In addition, as the New York Times reported the next day, one of his teeth was "loosened." "Dickey," according to McCarthy, "said the next man who roughed him up had better watch out."

In the seventh inning of the first game, the Senators had runners on first and third when Johnny Kerr attempted to bunt, and missed the ball. The third-base runner, Carl Reynolds, had danced a bit too far off the third-base bag, and Dickey fired the ball to Joe Sewell, the Yankees third baseman, in an attempt to pick off Reynolds. As Reynolds retreated back to the base, the ball hit him in the back and bounced toward the third-base dugout. As Sewell ran after the ball, Reynolds broke for home, and Dickey got ready for a play at the plate by taking off his mask and stepping in position to block the plate.

Sewell retrieved the ball, then threw to Dickey, and the throw and Reynolds both arrived at the same time. Reynolds came in standing up and bowled Dickey over for the second-straight day. The ball rolled back to the screen, and the runner from first base, who had made it safely to second on the play, was now on his way to third base. But Dickey did not go for the ball. Instead he trailed Reynolds, who was on his way back to the dugout, with his right fist clinched.

Reynolds shook the batboy's hand, and then thought he may have missed the plate during the collision and decided it might be best to walk back to the plate and touch it to be sure. As he made an about-face, he was greeted by a right-cross from Dickey. Both benches cleared in a heartbeat. The two teams congregated at home plate, but no punches were thrown.

Meanwhile 17,000 Washington fans were in an uproar. "Why not put your mask back on, you have all your other equipment on!" an angry fan shouted. Three fans ran onto the field. Two were headed off, while one made it to the meeting at home plate. He was arrested.

After being punched, Reynolds stumbled back and was caught by a teammate before he hit the ground. He lost his senses, and when he recovered, one umpire was warning him against retaliating, while another umpire was telling Dickey he was disqualified. A player ejected from the first game would be ineligible to play in the nightcap.

Reynolds was taken to a hospital, where X-rays were taken and revealed a broken jaw. After his jaw was wired, he managed to open his mouth to form words and said, "The only regret I have is I did not get to hit Dickey back."

The Yankees were not through with Myer. In the fourth inning Gehrig made a hard slide into second
base and knocked him down. In the bottom of the inning Myer retaliated by purposely chopping one to the pitcher, and then slid into first base with his spikes in the air, and his cleats ripped Gehrig’s trousers. He then quickly came to his feet in anticipation of a fight, but Gehrig just looked at him with a good-natured smile. An inning later it was Ruth who knocked Myer down with hard slide. Fed up with the Yankees going after Myer, Manush made a hard slide into third base that sent Joe Sewell back-peddling ten feet.

The Nats went on to win the nightcap for the sweep; afterward the question was: what would happen to Dickey? He was suspended indefinitely the following day, then a few days later American League Commissioner Will Harridge made his verdict. He suspended Dickey for thirty days and fined him $1,000 for his “malicious and unwarranted attack.” McCarthy and Yankees owner Jacob Ruppert were amazed. They protested over the severity of the penalty, and made their appeal, but the American League Board of Owners backed the decision.

When the injury healed, Reynolds was reactivated against the Yankees on August 13. In the tenth inning of a 1–0 game, he came up in the ninth as a pinch-hitter. As he headed toward the plate he was swinging two bats, and moved close to Dickey to the point where he was described as being “dangerously close.” When he put down one bat and stepped into the batter’s box, Dickey took a step forward and leaned in to say something to Reynolds. Was it an apology? “Ask Reynolds,” Dickey told reporters after the game. “Ask Dickey,” Reynolds said when asked.

Reynolds hit a long fly ball to bring the crowd to its feet, but Earle Combs ran it down for a long out. The next day Reynolds appeared again as a pinch-hitter, with the bases loaded, but struck out. “Lefty Gomez made Reynolds look as foolish with three hooks as Dickey did with one,” quipped a New York sportswriter.

The Senators and Yankees had five more meetings after the fireworks on the Fourth of July. With Will Harridge in the stands to make sure there was order, the players were on their best behavior, although there were some angry remarks made, and Chapman did take the opportunity to spike Myer on a play at second base.

When the Senators and Yankees met for the first time in 1933, the two teams resumed the feud. The first game was played without an incident, but not the second game. Early in the game Ruth was caught in a rundown between home and third, and as he lumbered back to third he made a hard slide at Cronin, who hit the Babe with a hard tag. While on the ground, Ruth looked up at Cronin and made a remark about his glorious ancestors. A few innings later Chapman carved a four-inch gash into Myer’s calf to go along with the one Chapman had engraved the previous season. Then Heinie Manush retaliated by making a sprawling slide into first base that Gehrig was able to sidestep in time.

Before the game the next day, Myer spoke about Chapman, and promised he would “wreak vengeance immediately” if Chapman dared to spike him. In the fourth inning Chapman singled, and Myer wondered what Chapman’s next move would be. With Tony Lazzeri, a right-handed hitter, at the plate, there was a good chance he would hit the ball to the left side of the
infield, thus making Myer cover second base as the pivot man in a double-play attempt. Myer moved closer to the second-base bag to give him time to receive a throw and make the relay.

Sure enough, Lazzeri grounded one to the shortstop, and after Myer took the throw from Cronin, he stepped toward the infield to give Chapman a clear path to the base. The Yankees left fielder was no less than three yards from the base when Myer had the ball, but Chapman kept running, then lunged forward with a hard slide, and aimed his cleats at the second baseman’s right foot.

Myer stumbled and was unable to make the throw. He felt the pain, looked down, and noticed he was spiked so hard the heel was separated from the sole of his shoe.

That was it! Payback time. This meant war.

As Chapman sat on the ground after his slide, Myer wheeled around, swung his foot, and kicked him in the back of his thigh as hard as he could. He swung his foot and booted his enemy a second time. He kicked him again, and again. Chapman quickly came to his feet. Myer threw his glove away. The two seized each other and began to throw punches. Both dugouts emptied, and Cronin and umpire George Moriarty, who were closest to the fight, tried to separate the two players. Players from both teams swore and exchanged insults when they arrived on the scene. They pried the two players apart, and a few of Myer’s teammates pulled him away from Chapman.

Myer didn’t wait to be informed that fighting was an automatic ejection. He trotted toward the tunnel in the Nats dugout, which led to both teams’ clubhouses, as eight thousand hometown fans applauded.

Chapman remained on the field and surveyed the Senators as if he were looking for another fight. After being ejected, Chapman walked to the New York dugout to a salvo of boos. On retrieving his mitt, Chapman headed to the Washington dugout, since this was the only route to the Yankees clubhouse, and this meant trouble.

After sending both teams back to their dugouts, the two umpires, Moriarty and Harry Geisel, were so engaged in listening to Cronin and McCarthy scream over which players should be ejected, they failed to notice that Chapman was unescorted as he headed toward the Washington dugout. Chapman’s roommate, Dixie Walker, did notice, and he joined Chapman to make sure he made it to the safety of the Yankees clubhouse. As they approached the dugout, Chapman heard it from the Senators. “You’re yellow! That’s right, you are yellow!” they told him, but he hardly noticed their taunts. Instead he focused on Buddy Myer, who was waiting for him inside the tunnel; when Myer saw Chapman, he charged. Then, for whatever reason, Myer halted and remained in the tunnel.

After Chapman entered the Washington dugout, he encountered Earl Whitehill, who had something to say and blurted it out. Chapman resented whatever was said and threw a right hook that connected with Whitehill’s mouth. Whitehill grabbed Chapman and the two began to duke it out. Chapman connected with another punch, sending Whitehill to the floor. He toppled onto the hurler and, realizing whose dugout he was in, he covered up. The Washington players pulled him off of their teammate and began to punch him. Walker came to his roommate’s aid, while the rest of the Yankees cleared their dugout and stormed across the field.

Gomez grabbed a bat, and Dickey, whose life was not safe in Washington, grabbed one of Ruth’s 54-ounce clubs. A few of the Yankees grabbed him, pulled him back into the dugout, and told him to stay there for his own safety.

The Yankees rampage across the diamond incited the fans behind the Washington dugout, and several of them spilled onto the field. Fearing a riot was about to erupt, a call was made to Washington’s Second Precinct police station.

One New York reserve slugged a fan in the face, knocking him to the ground. Lazzeri punched his way through a crowd. “Don’t let Tony Lazzeri get in there, he’ll kill somebody!” yelled a young female fan. Lazzeri heard the compliment and laughed. “I didn’t realize I was supposed to be such a tough guy,” he said later with a smile. “I didn’t kill anybody, but I threw a few good punches, and for a minute I had a lot of fun.”

Chapman, buried under a sea of bodies, punched away for his life. He heard a voice say, “I’m going to throw you in jail!” Realizing he was socking a policeman instead of a Senators player, he replied, “All right, but take me to the clubhouse so I can change my clothes.”

Gomez was placed under arrest after striking a detective (wisely with his fist instead of his bat). He was handcuffed, and as the two officers walked him toward the right-field gate, an executive from the Senators front office came out of the stands and convinced the two officers to release him.

A fan on top of the dugout roof jumped into the melee and the police arrested him along with another fan that got too involved.

After the war ended, the Yankees headed back to their dugout, and Chapman made it to the safety of the clubhouse (and did not encounter Myer on the way),
another fight broke out in the stands down the right-field line, this one involving two fans by the name of George. The George who won the fight lost the decision, and he became the third fan to be arrested.

During the fireworks, Ruth and Gehrig remained in their dugout and enjoyed the action as if it were entertainment. When asked why he did not participate, Ruth’s reply was that his “cold was too bad to mix in anything like that these days. It might make my nose run more.”

When he received word of the brawl, Will Harridge announced he intended on making a full investigation. He suspended Chapman, Myer, and Whitehill indefinitely. He left his home in Wilmette, Illinois, and headed to the East Coast to interview players from both teams. His first interview was with Chapman, who asked him, “what would you do if I, a trained athlete, called you the name Whitehill called me?”

“I’d punch you right in the nose,” Harridge replied.

“That is what I did to Whitehill,” said Chapman.

When Harridge interviewed Myer, the second baseman told him that Chapman had spiked him the day before the brawl, and once last year. He also mentioned that the Yankees had been out to get him and that Allen had thrown at him ten times last season, and had plunked him twice.

When Harridge finished his investigation, he made the anticipated decision, based on the fact that he was more fed up with the hostility between the two teams than with who was right and who should get the harshest punishment.

“In my decision I felt Myer had provoked Chapman by kicking the Yankee outfielder. I did not get any report from our umpires Messrs Moriarty and Geisel that Chapman has deliberately spiked Myer. Apparently it was a play such as we see very often—an effort by a runner to prevent a double play.

“I also did believe that Chapman’s assault on Whitehill had been provoked, but with all that, Chapman had no right to strike either Myer or Whitehill.

“With all facts evening themselves out, I decided that a warning, five games and one hundred dollars would be sufficient punishment.”

When asked how he felt about the decision, Myer replied, “the president of the league has made his decision, and it is not for me to make any comment.”

Clark Griffith, president of the Washington Senators, had plenty to comment about. “Chapman should’ve been suspended for a total of the amount given to Whitehill and Myer. He was the one who provoked the affair at second base, and he started the business in the dugout.”

Griffith also had something to say about the umpires. “If they had been on the job there wouldn’t have been a riot. And if they said in their report to Mr. Harridge that Chapman didn’t go out of his way to spike Myer, then they either didn’t see the play or they are trying to make themselves look good. The things that are done by our umpires wouldn’t happen if they didn’t try to protect themselves. Whenever they make a report to the league president they are thinking about their jobs, and you could quote me!”

There were no more brawls between the two teams for the reminder of the 1933 season, but there were plenty of heated exchanges and some pushing and shoving. The two teams battled it for the American League penthouse, and when Washington took control of the pennant race, the feud came to a quiet end. As for Chapman and Myer, they buried the hatchet in mid-August. Before a game at Griffith Stadium Chapman was walking by the Senators dugout and spotted Myer.

“Hey Buddy, we sure could’ve bought a lot of gasoline for that $100 we were fined,” yelled Chapman.

“Yeah, that’s for sure. There goes that bird dog I was saving up for,” Myer replied. ■
FORMER Washington Senators pitcher and pitching coach Sidney Charles “Sid” Hudson dedicated 19 seasons as a player and coach to the national pastime in the nation’s capital. Unsung and scarcely remembered in the city in which he lived and worked all those years, Hudson nevertheless holds an exalted place in the hearts of the people he tutored and befriended during his years in Washington, D.C.1

One former Washington Senator who played during Hudson’s tenure as pitching coach, Del Unser (center fielder, Washington Senators, 1968–71)2 explains the esteem Hudson earned in the capital city. “He’s a gentleman, that what he is, a Texas gentleman,” Unser said.3

Hudson first took the mound for Washington on April 18, 1940. The tall, lanky, rawboned rookie, 6’4” and 180 pounds4 of nerves, was the losing pitcher in Washington’s 7–0 defeat against the Boston Red Sox.5 Hudson finished his rookie season with a 17–16 record, 252 innings pitched, and a 4.57 ERA for the woeful 60–94 Senators. He led all major league rookies in starts (31) and complete games (19). He Hudson soon became the club’s top pitcher, earning berths on the 1941 and 1942 American League All-Star teams.6

Hudson played a major role in the 1941 Mid-Summer Classic. He surrendered Arky Vaughan’s first home run, launched to the right-field upper deck of Detroit’s Tiger Stadium (then Briggs Stadium) in the seventh inning. Hudson’s performance helped set the stage for Ted Williams’s legendary game-winning homer off of Claude Passeau with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning.7

Hudson and Williams crossed paths again in Boston during the last week of the 1941 season. Hudson’s Senators hosted the Red Sox. Teddy Ballgame intercepted Hudson on his way out of the Washington clubhouse. According to Hudson, Williams asked, “You pitching today?”8

Hudson replied, “Yeah, I am. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, I’ll throw you nothing but fastballs unless I’m in a jam and then you’re on your own.”9

Williams looked at him and said, “You wouldn’t do that.”10

Honest to the core, Hudson kept his word. He recalled, “I got him out three out of four times. The center fielder had to take a couple off the wall, but he didn’t get a hit. Of course, he got six or seven hits the last day of the season [to hit above .400].”11

The two would face each other and work together many times in the future.

In October 1942, 27 years old and poised to enter his prime as a ballplayer, World War II intervened. Hudson served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Force for three years, serving at the Waco Army Air Base and in the Pacific theater.9 He came back an older and less effective pitcher. In his first three seasons, Hudson never pitched fewer than 239.3 innings and earned a 40–47 record for Washington teams that never won more than 70 games. On his return, he never pitched as frequently (237.7 innings in 1950 was closest) or as well (64–105) when he returned from war.10

In 1952, the Senators traded Hudson to Boston, reuniting him with Williams. The veteran pitcher enjoyed having baseball’s best left-handed hitter as a teammate. He described his favorite memory of their three seasons together, September 17, 1953:

“Ned Garver of the Tigers was pitching against me. In the eighth inning the score was 1–0 in favor of Detroit. We have one man on first and it’s Williams’s turn to hit. He patted me on the fanny and said, ‘Go on and get your shower. I’ll hit that little slider of Garver’s into the right field seats.’11

“And he did. He was something.”12

Hudson retired as a player in 1954, but soon returned as a scout for Boston. He joined the new Washington Senators organization in 1961, serving as the team’s pitching coach for manager, former teammate, and life-long friend Mickey Vernon, who died September 24, 2008.


One season, he watched a right-hander in the San Francisco Giants’ farm system pitch with poise and pinpoint control. Hudson learned the impressive hurler’s name—Dick Bosman. He said, “He looked like a veteran. I told our organization that if we had a chance to
get this kid, why, don’t hesitate. That year (1964), the Giants left him off the roster and we got him.14

“He learned how to move [his] pitches, how to pitch to different hitters, and became a good pitcher. He threw a sinking fastball, a slider, and he could really spot it.”

Bosman, the expansion era Senators’ (1961–71) most successful pitcher, with 49 wins,15 credits Hudson for refining his mechanics. He said, “Sid was really the first pitching coach I ever had. He taught me a lot of the physical parts of pitching. How you spin this curveball, how you make this ball sink, how you hold it.”16

When he became a pitching coach himself for the Baltimore Orioles (1992–94) and Texas Rangers (1995–2000),17 Bosman often visited his mentor and friend for counsel and to catch up on old times. Bosman, who now instructs minor-league pitchers in the Tampa Bay Rays organization, explained, “[Sid’s] style, his modus operandi of coaching and teaching is a lot of what I do.”

Former Washington relief pitcher and SABR member Dave Baldwin, who threw with a sidearm motion, also praised Hudson. He said, “Sid was a side-arter. He knew how a side-arter should grip and release the various pitches. Sid also understood when I was slinging the ball. In order for my ball to move, I had to have an awful lot of arm action, a really flexible arm, and a real snap on the ball in order for the ball to sink or for the curve to curve or for the screwball to screwball. Sid watched me very carefully. He would tell me, ‘you’re beginning to sling the ball again, you’re beginning to sling.’”18

Baldwin also remembered a unique device Sid Hudson invented to teach pitchers the proper grip for a curve ball. The “Hudson Harness” included an elastic band that held the pitcher’s thumb behind the ball. Once a pitcher learned the proper grip the ball spun faster and had, according to Baldwin, “greater deflection,” making the pitch more difficult to hit. Ever generous, Hudson shared his unique device with other major-league and college pitching coaches. A photograph of the Hudson Harness appears in an article by Baldwin, Terry Bahill, and Alan Nathan entitled “Nickel and Dime Pitches” in Baseball Research Journal 35.19

In 1969, when Senators owner Bob Short persuaded Ted Williams to become the team’s manager, the Splendid Splinter decided to keep his old foe and teammate on the coaching staff. Twenty-eight years after their conversation outside the visitors’ clubhouse at Fenway Park and 15 seasons after they played together in Boston, the two men joined forces again.

Hudson said Williams “just turned the pitchers over to me. He called me into his office and said, ‘Sid, I’ve known you for a long time. You have all this experience. I’ll just turn it over to you and if I don’t like what you’re doing, why, I’ll tell you so.’”

Williams rarely needed to say a word to Hudson. In 1969, Senators pitchers turned in a 3.49 ERA, fifth-best in the American League.20

Hudson’s service to Williams included some unpleasant collateral duties, like weighing in massive slugger Frank Howard. Hudson recalled, “Frank got pretty heavy back then. I could never get him on the scale, so I begged him and begged him. Well, one day he finally got on and topped it at 300 right on the button.”

Howard said, “Sid could never get me on the scale because I was always overweight.”

Howard, known for his kindness to teammates and fans alike, gives Hudson high praise. “Sidney Hudson is an outstanding man,” Howard said.21

Hudson went out of his way to introduce new members of the Washington organization to the joys of living in the D.C. Metro area. Senators broadcaster Ron Menchine (1969–71) fondly recalls the kindness and generosity of the southern gentleman. Menchine recalled many instances when Hudson invited newcomers out for dinner or showed them the best place in the area to rent an apartment or get a tasty, affordable meal. The Senators pitching coach also helped a
August 20, 1997

Dear Mr. Hudson,

I am a 35 year-old Father of two young boys who love baseball. My earliest and fondest memories of baseball are of the 1969 Washington Senators. With Ted Williams managing and you as pitching coach, the Senators had their first winning record in years.

Many pitchers on that team, Dick Bosman and Casey Cox, to name a few, had their "breakout" seasons that year. Do you have any special memories of an event or a pitcher from that staff?

Being a rookie manager that year, how much did Ted Williams rely on Nellie Fox for help? Many people think Nellie Fox was one of baseball’s best strategists.

I have enclosed an SASE if you would like to reply. Thank you for helping to provide some fond memories that I can pass on to my boys.

Sincerely,

Steve Walker

Dear Steve,

I was responsible in getting Dick Bosma’s from the Giants organization.

I was proud of Dick. He was a fine pitcher. He had very good control of all his pitches. He threw a sinking fastball, slider, and change. He once beat the angles 1-0 and threw only 12 pitches. He is now the pitching coach of the Texas Rangers.

Casey Cox pitched for us that year. He’s a good sinking fast ball. A hard slider, a good competitor. He was a good pitcher. He gave hard. I think Ted Coleman was with us that year. He was a good looking pitcher with a good arm. He and Williams did not get along very well. And became a good pitcher.

Nellie Fox was a good coach, and a great guy. Williams relied on Nellie’s judgment because he knew the game of baseball inside and out, and a good instructor. He was in the Hall of Fame where he belongs.

All our pitchers were eager and wanted to learn how to pitch.

Sincerely,

Sid Hudson
rookie broadcaster cope with baseball’s constant travel. Menchine said, “Sid introduced me to the top restaurants in major-league baseball.”

Menchine said that Hudson made him and countless others feel connected to the team, welcome and valuable. “Sid was a classy guy all the way. He was one of the greatest men I ever met in my life,” he said.22

Like most coaches, Hudson enjoyed the camaraderie that developed between members of Williams’ staff—Nellie Fox, Wayne Terwilliger, Joe Camacho, George Susce, and Doug Camilli.23 He especially enjoyed pitching batting practice to Fox and Williams in the morning hours before players and fans arrived at RFK Stadium. He tried to throw pitches between belly laughs as the two Hall of Famers exchanged good-natured debate over who hit better. Hudson said, “Boy, we had a lot of fun.”

When Short moved the Senators to Texas for the 1972 season, he retained Williams as manager. Hudson followed the Splendid Splinter to Texas to coach the Rangers pitchers. He remained with the Texas organization until 1986 After leaving the Rangers, Hudson coached Baylor University’s pitchers for seven seasons. In 1993, he retired with 56 years devoted to baseball. “I figured 56 was enough,” he said.

Of those five and a half decades, Hudson contributed more than a third to Washington baseball. Other than the 1969 season, when the Senators thrilled the city with an 86–76 record, Hudson usually knew defeat on the ball field or watched it unfold from the dugout or bullpen.

He refused to let losing diminish his generosity or blunt his desire to play and teach the game. Hudson dedicated his life to baseball, sharing his craft, inventions, experience, knowledge, and oral history as a labor of love, day after day, season after season. His longevity and quiet dignity won him honor from peers, students, and friends. Though few Washington baseball fans remember him, Hudson made lasting contributions to the history of the game in this city. When baseball greatness is measured in kindness, faithfulness, creativity, and zeal to help others, Sid Hudson stands near the top of Washington’s all-time best.

Notes
3. Author’s interview with Del Unser, 18 March 2008. On October 10, 2008, Sid Hudson, who had been living in Waco, Texas, died there at the age of 93.
8. Author’s interview with Sid Hudson, 29 May 1998. In the last week of the season, in the game (it was at Washington) in which the Red Sox faced Hudson, Williams got a double, going 1-for-3. Hudson may have conflated his memory of that game with the game of August 17 (also at Washington), the first time the Red Sox faced Hudson since the All-Star Game; on this earlier occasion, Williams did go hitless, 0-for-3, against Hudson.
13. Retrosheet, Sid Hudson.
17. Retrosheet, Dick Bosman.
22. Author’s interview with Ron Munch, February 2005.
The Catcher Was a POW

Mickey Grasso

He loved kids and despised umpires. Since he was a genuinely nice guy, youngsters followed him like the Pied Piper. Grasso’s vendetta against the men in blue was attributed to his resentment of authority, courtesy of vicious beatings inflicted by World War II POW guards.

Newton Michael Grasso was born on May 10, 1920, in Newark, New Jersey. The 1930 census lists him as the middle son of Carmen and Lena Grasso. He played ball on the sandlots of Newark and was voted All-City catcher as a fifth-grader. Grasso grew up to stand over six feet tall, while weighing in at 195 pounds.

In 1941, Newton’s uncle arranged a tryout with the Trenton Senators; the youngster beat out 200 prospects to make the team. Signed as a second baseman, he was shifted behind the plate when the regular backstop was injured. His teammates christened him Mickey, based on a remarkable resemblance to Hall of Fame catcher Mickey Cochrane. He appeared in 52 games and hit .234 for Trenton, in the Class B Interstate League, in 1941— and then Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7. Mickey enlisted in the army on January 20, 1942, and reported to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Grasso was assigned as a sergeant to North Africa with the 34th Infantry Division, where he was taken prisoner by Rommel’s retreating army on February 17, 1943. Sergeant Grasso’s unit was surrounded by 10,000 Nazis, all heavily equipped with tanks and howitzers. According to Burton Hawkins of The Sporting News, the lieutenant in charge quizzed his sergeant: “Mickey, shall we fight or go along with ‘em?” Grasso answered: “Man, don’t be crazy.” Taken prisoner, they were flown to Italy, then transported by rail to Furstenberg, Germany, and settled into Stalag 111B, where they were held captive for over two years.

In the early part of the war, German prison camps were run in the same efficient manner as the German army. Captured soldiers were systematically sent to camps based on branch of service. Once interned, the prisoners were separated according to rank. The prison camps varied in size; all were equipped with a parade ground, where prisoners gathered twice a day to be counted.

The Germans and Americans had both signed the Geneva Convention, which stipulated proper conduct toward all prisoners. The Germans adhered to the code and generally treated those captured in accordance with the rules and regulations. Exercise and recreation was encouraged and the parade area was generally ample size for games of baseball or softball. POWs had access to sports equipment, courtesy of the Red Cross. Massive numbers of gloves, bats, and balls were collected in the States and shipped overseas, ultimately making their way to prison camps. Mickey and his mates at Stalag 111B made frequent use of the equipment.

Prisoners felt it was their duty to escape. Grasso was involved in three failed attempts, each resulting in a brutal beating at the hands of the guards. Mickey finally managed to successfully escape on Hitler’s birthday—April 20, 1945. The Russian army was closing in on German forces near the camp, and the captors ordered prisoners moved farther from the ground fighting. By now, the German army was short of personnel, and most guards were poorly trained old men. On the evening of the evacuation, Mickey was one of ten prisoners who simply ran off while the guards snoozed. The escapees marched through towns, led by a prisoner fluent in German. When stopped by German officers, the leader merely explained it was a work detail; the explanation seemed plausible and the trip resumed. Happening upon a dilapidated boat, the group climbed aboard and paddled across the Elbe River to the safety of the American side, where they were met by GIs. It took some convincing, but finally the American forces, with rifles drawn, believed the interlopers were prison-camp refugees. At the time he was liberated, Mickey weighed 60 pounds below his normal playing weight.

Although frail and behind his contemporaries in terms of lost playing time, he returned stateside and resumed his profession. In 1946, after a brief trial with the New York Giants, Mickey was assigned to their Jersey City farm team, hitting .228 with 13 home runs. He became the [Jersey City] Giants’ regular catcher in 1947, posting a .268 average. This resulted in his sale to the Pacific Coast League Seattle Rainiers for the then staggering sum of $20,000.

At Seattle in 1948, Mickey could proudly boast of...
having the largest fan club in the league, with 5,000 active members. Mickey commented that he “made 1,000 friends by giving away 1,000 baseballs that belonged to the club.” He hit .261 with five homers. Defensively, Grasso led all league catchers with 81 assists.

In 1949, still with Seattle, he hit .251, while contributing seven home runs, leading league receivers with 74 assists and 18 errors. He was ejected 23 times, drawing $1,100 worth of fines. Grasso thought umps were “thick-headed and thin-skinned.” He once got the hook for flinging his shin guards into the air, with one landing on the head of umpire Ira Gordon, resulting in a $200 fine.

This aggressiveness caught the attention of Washington manager Bucky Harris, who recommended that his club purchase the fiery backstop. Signed to a Senators contract for the 1950 season, Grasso would go on to hit .287 in 75 games. In 1951, Grasso played in 52 games, while hitting .206 for the Senators.

Mickey and umpire Larry Napp had a confrontation in the spring of 1952. Napp was assigned to travel with the Senators when his car broke down. Since the players had to travel on the team bus, Mickey offered Larry the use of his new car as transportation to a game in Fort Myers. During the game, Grasso argued a strike call and Napp tossed him. After the contest was over, Mickey boarded the team bus and saw Larry getting into the car. Grasso shouted, “I hope you get a flat tire,” when he suddenly came to his senses and said: “What am I saying? It’s my car.”

On May 14 in Boston, Mickey was presented with an award by the American Prisoners of War Association, just before the game. The slightly embarrassed
Grasso slowly sauntered out to home plate and received a lifetime membership in the organization as recognition for his time served as a POW. Mickey ultimately posted a .216 batting average in 1952, appearing in 115 games.

During spring training 1953, Mickey had a little fun with young Clark Griffith, son of team vice president Calvin Griffith. After batting practice Mickey told the eleven-year-old to “roll up those stockings” and “look like a big leaguer.” Mickey, with a twinkle in his eye, said: “Listen to me, I’m telling him what to do and someday he’s going to be my boss.”

Mickey’s batting style caught the attention of Senators’ owner Clark Griffith. Although he hadn’t managed in 33 years, Griffith took the liberty of trying to tutor his catcher through field manager Bucky Harris. “Stanley, tell that big galoot to stop swinging for home runs,” he said, and added, “I mean Grasso.” Harris agreed and diagnosed the problem as Mickey lunging to take a big swing, when he could just as easily use his arms to poke more singles and doubles in the spacious Griffith stadium. The 1953 season ended with Mickey hitting only .209 in 61 games.

Early in 1954, Mickey was traded to the Cleveland Indians. Washington Post sportswriter Shirley Povich lamented, “With Grasso in there, the Nats were never a dull team. He was a good catcher too, a bundle of fire behind the plate and an arm that held terror for all base runners in the league.” News of the trade was unpopular with fans, including Calvin Griffith’s nine-year-old daughter Corinne. Griffith commented, “Mickey wasn’t much at the plate, but he sure hit it off in the personality league with the kids and the women.” During spring training 1954, Mickey broke his left ankle and ended up catching only four games for the Indians. Sportswriter Bob Addie of the Washington Post pointed out how Grasso spent much of his tenure in Washington visiting hospitalized patients. “Now it was time for fans to reciprocate by sending a card to a nice guy who always took time out to help others.”

Mickey later appeared with the Indians in the 1954 Fall Classic. He remains the only player in major league history to have been a POW and play in a World Series, albeit only in one game, and without a plate appearance. Mickey drifted to the New York Giants in 1955, but was cut after eight games. He made minor league stops at Indianapolis, Chattanooga, and Miami before calling it a career after the 1958 season. In a big-league career spanning parts of seven seasons, the right-handed hitting catcher posted a .226 average in 322 games. In retirement, he ran several restaurants and worked at a Florida racetrack. He passed away on October 15, 1975, in Miami.

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A S THE American League’s pecking order of the 1950s was established, the Washington Senators (or Nationals) suffered greatly from the lack of a strong beak. Even with the 1960 season—the final campaign of the original franchise—tossed in for good measure, teams from the nation’s capital consistently played in a manner that inspired ridicule in an enduring jingle (“First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League”), satire in a popular novel (Douglass Wallop’s *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*), and amusement on the stage and screen (*Damn Yankees*).

Despite the club’s mediocrity during this period, the accomplishments of a number of Washington’s players should not be ignored. The presence of these men in Senators’ uniforms made baseball in the nation’s capital interesting in the latter part of the Truman administration and during the Eisenhower years, despite the absence of involvement in a pennant race, and enabled otherwise frustrated fans to derive pleasure by focusing upon the achievements of these “gems in a bowl of rocks.”

Players of note can be considered chronologically by order of their appearances on American League All-Star teams, although the first two individuals mentioned under such an approach failed to gain the stature of other men who would later display their talents in Griffith Stadium.

Cass Michaels was the lone player from the fifth-place team of 1950 to be selected to appear in the Midsummer Classic. Because he had been traded to the Senators by the Chicago White Sox only six weeks before the All-Star Game was played in his former stomping ground (Comiskey Park), Michaels was actually rewarded for solid play while with the Pale Hose. His batting average had been .312 in 36 games with the Chisox but dropped to .250 at season’s end, after donning Washington flannels. Following a respectable but less-than-sensational season in 1951, he was traded to the St. Louis Browns in May of 1952.

Connie Marrero was the only representative of the Washington franchise in the 1951 game. Less than four months shy of thirty-nine years old when his career as a major-league pitcher began, the 5’ 7”, 165-pound right hander from Cuba pitched for the Senators from 1950 through 1954, but was most successful in 1951 and 1952. He posted a record of 11–9 and an earned-run average of 3.90 in 1951 with a supporting cast that finished the season in seventh place, and then won 11 and lost 8 in 1952 with an ERA of 2.88. His best performance? On April 26, 1951, a fourth-inning home run by Barney McCosky of the Philadelphia Athletics was the only hit he allowed in a 2–1 Washington triumph.

Jackie Jensen and Eddie Yost were named to the 1952 team. The promising Jensen had begun the season with the Yankees but was traded to Washington on May 3. He proceeded to steal 17 bases as a National (he had swiped one sack as a Bronx Bomber) and trailed only Minnie Minoso and Jim Rivera among American League base thieves. He hit at a .266 clip the following season and stole another 18 bases (again finishing third in that category behind Minoso and Rivera) before being dealt to Boston on December 9, 1953, in exchange for Mickey McDermott and Tommy Umphlett. (That trade did not turn out well for the Nats!)

Eddie Yost is much more prominent in Senators’ history than Michaels, Marrero, or Jensen. Yost played in 838 consecutive games from August 30, 1949, until he was sidelined on May 12, 1955, with tonsillitis, tied the American League with 36 doubles in 1951, and topped junior-circuit third basemen in putouts a record eight times. But, despite his durability and dependability, Yost became best known for an exceptional ability to draw bases-on-balls—a skill that earned him the nickname of “The Walking Man.” (While with the Nats, he led the league in free passes in 1950, 1952, 1953, and 1956 and, with Detroit, in 1959 and 1960.) His phenomenal talent for reaching first base without putting a bat on the baseball disguised his effectiveness as an offensive influence: his on-base percentage peaked at .440 in 1950 and was impressive throughout his stay in Washington.

Yost was a star of considerable magnitude, but when he threw the ball across the infield from third base, the man who caught it had an even longer resume. When Mickey Vernon—who had been the American League’s batting champion in 1946 with a .353 average—became the only Nationals’ player to travel to Cincinnati for the 1953 All-Star game, he was...
in the middle of a season that would culminate in a second batting title (albeit a controversial one, due to questionable and perhaps intentional base-running lapses by teammates Mickey Grasso and Kite Thomas on the final day of the season). He also produced 115 RBIs in 1953, one of eleven years in which he knocked 80 or more runs across home plate.

Vernon was selected to six All-Star teams (1946, 1948, 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956), and he led the league in doubles in 1946, 1953, and 1954. In 1953, he ranked third behind Al Rosen and Yogi Berra in voting by members of the Baseball Writers’ Association of America (BBWAA) for the American League’s “Most Valuable Player” award.

Vernon’s most memorable moments on a baseball field may have occurred on the opening day of the 1954 season with President Dwight Eisenhower in attendance. Having been held hitless in four plate appearances, Vernon came to bat against Allie Reynolds in the bottom of the tenth inning with the Senators and Yankees tied, 3–3. (Yost was on first base after having received—what else?—a base-on-balls.) Vernon delivered a Washington victory with a home run that became memorable in the city’s baseball history and gave new life to a popular belief that Vernon was Ike’s favorite player.

Vernon was not one of baseball’s most prominent long-ball threats (he pounded 172 homers in his twenty-year major-league career), but his 20 round-trippers in 1954 established a new club record for left-handed hitters. Fellow infielder Pete Runnels was on base when he hit several of those four-baggers, and the line-drive-hitting Runnels—who took advantage of Griffith Stadium’s generous dimensions in the power alleys to record 15 triples in 1954—was an important contributor to solid Washington infields in the first half of the 1950s.

Vernon was accompanied by pitchers Dean Stone and Bob Porterfield to the “clash of the leagues” in 1954, and developments in the final two innings of that contest in Cleveland would ensure Stone’s place in trivia books forever. The 6’4”, 205-pound rookie left hander received credit for the pitching victory without officially facing a single batter. When Stone was brought into the game to relieve Bob Keegan, with two out in the eighth inning and Red Schoendienst on third base for the senior circuit, the National League had hopes of increasing its tenuous 9–8 lead. After Stone had thrown only two pitches (a ball and a strike) to Duke Snider, Schoendienst attempted to steal home. Stone nailed him at the plate with a throw to catcher Yogi Berra and then became the winning pitcher when his teammates for a day scored three runs in the bottom of the eighth inning.

With the Senators, Stone registered more victories (12) in his initial major-league season of 1954 than in any other, although he started only 23 games that year. His record dropped off in 1955 to 6–13, but it should
be noted that seven of those losses came in games in which a zero appeared next to the word “Washington” in the final score.

But Dean Stone was not the only Senator pitcher to suffer the fate of losing seven shutouts during the decade, for Bob Porterfield had been linked to the same dubious distinction in 1952! Porterfield, a right hander, was nicknamed “Hard Luck Bob” for good reason. He posted a record of 13–14 in 1952 despite an earned-run average of 2.72 that was the seventh-best in the American League. He hurled three shutouts that season, but his offensive support was often absent: Porterfield was the victim of a no-hitter by Virgil Trucks, a one-hitter by Mickey McDermott, two-hitters by Allie Reynolds and Billy Pierce, and three-hitters by Mel Parnell, Pierce, and Eddie Lopat.

Porterfield’s luck and record improved drastically in 1953. He won 22 games while losing only 10, leading the league not only in victories but also with a very impressive total of 9 shutouts. (Casey Stengel was criticized in many quarters for failing to include Porterfield when he chose pitchers for the ’53 All-Star team.) He then tied with Bob Lemon for the American League lead in complete games in 1954 and finished that season with a 13–15 record. A review of Porterfield’s statistics reveals that, while he won more than 13 games in only one season, he was usually effective on the mound and maintained an earned-run average of 3.14 during a three-year period extending from 1952 through 1954.

Any listing of Washington’s greatest baseball stars must include a slugger who represented the franchise on All-Star teams in 1956, 1957, and 1959. Roy Sievers was obtained from the Baltimore Orioles on February 18, 1954, and wasted no time in becoming a favorite in the District of Columbia. He tagged 24 home runs in 1954 to break the previous club record, and drove in 95 or more runs in each of his first five seasons in a Senators uniform.

Sievers led the American League with 42 homers in 1957 and, with 114 runs batted in, became the first Washington player to top all sluggers in RBIs since Goose Goslin in 1924. He blasted a ball over Griffith Stadium’s fence in six consecutive games during that ’57 season and the sixth (off of Al Aber of the Tigers) won a 17-inning game on August 3. At season’s end, he finished third—behind legends Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams—in voting by the BBWAA for the American League’s Most Valuable Player. He maintained a similar level of performance in 1958, hitting 39 home runs despite an early-season slump. He slammed a total of 180 homers in six years as a Senator.

The slow start in 1958 cost Sievers a place on the All-Star team, and Rocky Bridges—who was hitting approximately .300 when selections were made—received the honor. (Bridges would ultimately post an
unremarkable batting average of .263 in his only full season as a Washington infielder.) A colorful and quotable player who always had a big wad of tobacco in his mouth, Bridges possessed, on the field, ordinary ability.

Yet another member of the Senators generated quite a stir and plenty of curiosity during the ’58 campaign. Albie Pearson, standing all of 5’5” and weighing 140 pounds, had a batting average of .275 and received 14 of the 24 votes in the polling of BBWAA members for the AL Rookie-of-the-Year Award. But, unfortunately, Pearson’s tenure in Washington was brief; his batting average had tailed off to .188 by May 26, 1959, when he was sent up the road to Baltimore.

After the number of annual major-league All-Star games was doubled in 1959 to generate additional revenue, Sievers and a young Harmon Killebrew represented the Senators in the meeting in Pittsburgh of baseball’s best. And, with expansions of rosters permitted for a second game in the Los Angeles Coliseum, they were joined in Southern California by Bob Allison, Camilo Pascual, and Pedro Ramos.

Killebrew had been the first bonus player signed by Clark Griffith’s club, having placed his signature on a Nationals’ contract in June of 1954, ten days before his eighteenth birthday. His progress and assignments within the organization were affected not only by his ability but also by rules applying to “Bonus Babies” of his era. By 1959, he was prepared for stardom. He secured his spot in the starting lineup by knocking two of his era: Mickey Mantle ripped one of Pedro’s pitches off of the right-field façade in Yankee Stadium on May 30, 1956; Ramos surrendered league-high home-run totals of 43 in 1957 and 38 in 1958. He led the league in losses from 1958 through 1961.

Despite these unfavorable marks, Ramos’ skill and the fact that he was severely handicapped by poor support were obvious. He never reached the heights attained by Pascual in terms of respect from hitters, but he complemented Pascual very capably.

Pascual’s manager in ’68 was Jim Lemon, another former Senators star who had been an All-Star player eight years before. Lemon’s record as a slugger was thankfully much more impressive than his tenure in the dugout: the club he managed finished last in a ten-team league during modern America’s most torrid summer.

Lemon displayed power at the plate, speed on the bases, and a strong throwing arm during his All-Star year of 1960. Although he struck out more times than any other American Leaguer for three consecutive seasons (1956–58), the aforementioned qualities enabled him to rank high among his peers from 1956 through 1960 in home runs, runs batted in, slugging average,
and total bases. The 6’ 4” free Swinger tagged three homers in consecutive turns at bat against Whitey Ford on August 31, 1956, and had two round-trippers and six RBIs in the third inning of a game with the Red Sox on September 5, 1959. He posted an impressive total of 30 triples between 1956 and 1960 and, as an outfielder, participated in six double plays in 1956.

To the chagrin of fans typified by the fictitious Joe Boyd in Damn Yankees, the Senators finished in the second division of the American League every year from 1950 through 1960, while placing last in four of those eleven seasons. However, despite the club’s consistent futility, the men previously mentioned as well as several others—outfielder Jim Busby (a smooth-fielding outfielder with base-stealing ability), southpaw pitcher Chuck Stobbs (who lost his first 11 decisions in 1957 on the way to an 8–20 record), and manager Charlie Dressen (who led Brooklyn Dodger flag-winners in 1952 and 1953 before posting a 117–212 mark in slightly more than two seasons at the helm of the Senators)—gave their losing teams a certain “star quality” and enabled the Senators to remain relevant in individual categories even as the club dropped precipitously in the standings. Furthermore, as this article concludes like one of relief pitcher Dick Hyde’s 18 saves of 1958, it should be emphasized that not one of these faces from the past sold his soul to the devil in the process! ■

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MAJOR LEAGUE Baseball returned to Baltimore on April 15, 1954, when the city welcomed its new team with a parade, a chest-thumping display of civic pride, and an opening-day crowd of more than 46,000. Fans can be fanatical, but pitchers have to be realists. Right-hander Duane Pillette thought, “How can they be so happy getting the St. Louis Browns? Don’t they know we lost 100 games last year?” The new Birds played like the old Browns: They lost 100 more in ’54. Their leading “slugger,” third baseman Vern Stephens, hit eight home runs and batted in 46 runs. Broadcaster Ernie Harwell cracked, “We called them the Kleenex team. They would pop up one at a time.”

Before the season mercifully ended, Orioles president Clarence Miles went looking for a savior. He found his man in Chicago. White Sox manager Paul Richards was a tall, thin, poker-faced Texan who taught Sunday school in winter and terrorized umpires and ballplayers in summer. Richards and general manager Frank Lane had revived the faded Sox franchise, producing four-straight winning seasons for the first time since the Black Sox were banned in 1920. The Orioles wanted Richards to replace manager Jimmie Dykes, but “the Wizard of Waxahachie” demanded more: total control of baseball operations. Miles and his fellow owners were desperate enough to give it to him.

Arriving in Baltimore in September 1954, he declared, “I’m running the show.” Except for Connie Mack, who had owned and managed the Philadelphia Athletics, no manager since John McGraw had been granted such broad authority. In all other organizations the owner and/or general manager made personnel decisions, while the manager’s role was to run the team on the field. Even the most successful pilot of the era, Casey Stengel, complained that Yankee general manager George Weiss sometimes made trades without consulting him.

Like Richards’s home state, the Orioles had a lone star: Bullet Bob Turley, a twenty-four-year-old right-handed fireballer who was hailed as the new Bob Feller. In 1954, he led the American League in strikeouts, held opposing hitters to a league-low .203 batting average, and somehow managed a 14–15 record.

Richards traded him.

On November 17, the Orioles and Yankees announced the biggest deal in major-league history. Seventeen players changed teams in a deal completed on December 1. The key pieces were Turley, smooth-fielding shortstop Billy Hunter, and twenty-five-year-old right-handed pitcher Don Larsen going to New York for outfielder Gene Woodling, a mainstay on Stengel’s championship clubs; shortstop Willy Miranda; and two promising Triple-A catchers, Gus Triandos and Hal Smith, who were blocked behind Yogi Berra and Elston Howard. The teams exchanged several minor leaguers to round out the trade.

The news hit Baltimore like bombs bursting in air. One fan told the Associated Press: “When my son saw the papers he groaned so loud I thought his best friend had died.” Paul Menton of the Baltimore Evening Sun turned gray sky into purple prose: “Even the clouds were weeping as if to reflect the city’s mood at the startling news that Bob Turley had become a Yankee.” Richards had a ready answer: “If we hadn’t been willing to trade Turley, we would have had to start next season with the same lineup which finished seventh in 1954.” He was applying Branch Rickey’s guiding principle: Out of quantity comes quality. The Orioles’ farm system had no quality players; the Yankees had more than anyone else.

The head of the Orioles’ farm and scouting system, Jim McLaughlin, was the only St. Louis Browns executive who survived the move to Baltimore. Soon after Richards took over, he summoned the forty-year-old McLaughlin to a breakfast meeting. “It was supposed to be my last meal,” McLaughlin said. “When I got there, he must have expected me to defend the farm system, but I told him the truth: it was horseshit. We didn’t have anything, because we hadn’t been able to spend enough money. But I showed him how we might turn things around, and so he kept me on—and a few weeks later at a sports banquet I heard Richards give this speech about the farm system, and it was word-for-word what I’d told him. He just left out ‘horseshit.”’

McLaughlin was as arrogant, opinionated, and stubborn as Richards, so they were not destined to be friends. McLaughlin was determined to bring a scien-
tific approach to scouting young players. He ridiculed the old-school scouts who believed “they could tell about a kid’s makeup just by looking at him”—what they called “the good face.” He pioneered physical and psychological testing of players. He devised a circular chart that he labeled “The Whole Ball Player.” The top half of the circle covered the player’s speed, arm strength, hitting, and other visible tools. McLaughlin instructed his men to learn about the bottom half of the circle, traits that “cannot be seen with the eye”: intelligence, desire, “teachability,” family background, habits. He brought in FBI agents to teach scouts how to conduct a background investigation. He sent minor-league managers to seminars designed by Dale Carnegie, the author of How to Win Friends and Influence People, to improve their communications skills. “This may sound strange,” said one of the scouts, Hank Peters, “but he didn’t have a great love for baseball. He wasn’t a guy who liked to go and sit at ball games.” McLaughlin was an administrator—a bureaucrat—who insisted on central control and was one of the first to use cross-checkers rather than betting on the opinion of a single scout. Another scout, Jim Russo, said, “He was years ahead of his time, a brilliant baseball guy.”

Most important, McLaughlin hired and trained the young men who would build the winning Orioles teams of the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. They included future Baltimore general managers Hank Peters and Harry Dalton; future major-league managers George Bamberger, Billy Hunter, Cal Ripken Sr., and the incendiary Earl Weaver, who led the Orioles to their greatest heights without taking the Dale Carnegie course.

The Orioles owners had promised to spend “whatever it takes” to build a winner. Richards took them up on it. In April 1955, he signed his first “bonus baby,” Jim Pyburn, a twenty-two-year-old third baseman and outfielder who had been an All-Southeastern Conference end (wide receiver) on Auburn’s football team. Pyburn said he was paid $48,000 in a combination of bonus and two years’ guaranteed salary. The signing revealed Richards’s preference for tools over skills, in the language of scouts—youngsters with great athletic ability rather than baseball know-how. “Toolsy” players were Richards’s weakness. He signed many, but few succeeded. In his first two years he spent an estimated $700,000 on bonuses. The team’s accountant, Joe Hamper, remembered: “Overnight, we went from a conservative organization to a very aggressive and, in some respects, reckless organization. It was a complete change in philosophy and a nightmare for those of us on the financial side, but the end result was the mentality that we were competitive and weren’t going to back off.”

The bonus boys not only cost money, they displaced major-league players. In a futile effort to hold down bonuses, baseball rules required any amateur player who was paid more than $4,000 to spend two years on the big-league roster. They seldom got into the lineup, but “Richards wanted us working out all the time,” infielder Wayne Causey recalled. “The bonus babies would have to come in and work out on the morning after night games, or when the team was coming off road trips.”

Only one of Richards’s first crop went on to a significant career: Causey played eleven major-league seasons, mostly as a utility man. Unnoticed among the gaudy contracts, the Orioles’ most important signing in 1955 cost them just $4,000: a skinny infielder from Arkansas, Brooks Robinson.

Richards improved the Orioles’ record by just three games in his first season—they lost 97—and attendance fell by 20 percent from the club’s first season in Baltimore. A discontented fan complained, “Why should I pay big-league prices to see a high-school team play?” But Richards had warned that building the organization could not happen overnight. While he waited for the farms to bear fruit, he loaded the major-league roster with so many shopworn veterans that Baseball Digest called the team “Richards’s Deluxe Retreads.”

When the Browns moved to Baltimore, their farm system was the least productive in baseball, yet they had one of the largest organizations, with thirteen teams, according to contemporary accounts (though some sources give the number as eleven or twelve). Jim McLaughlin recommended dropping some of the affiliates and putting the money into scouting, and Richards agreed. McLaughlin had established a minor-league spring-training base in the piney woods near Thomasville, Georgia, at an abandoned rest home for war veterans. It had eight military-style barracks with space for thirty cots in each, an administration building, a kitchen and dining hall, and four diamonds. Hundreds of hopefuls practiced together, wearing hand-me-down uniforms and numbers that rose into the triple digits. This was not a new idea; Branch Rickey originated it with the St. Louis Cardinals and Brooklyn Dodgers. The atmosphere was all baseball, all the time. Two ping-pong tables provided the only entertainment. There was nothing to do but play and talk baseball.

Dozens of non-prospects had to be culled from the final rosters of the nine remaining farm clubs. The managers met with McLaughlin every evening at 7:00 to
make the cuts. Gathered in a conference room called the “Bird’s Nest,” they graded each player on a scale of one (the best) to four in hitting, pitching, running, throwing, and power, but the grades were not exactly scientific. Weaver said, “Often one of us would rate a player one while two others would rate him a three or four in the same category.” When the group decided to release a player, one of the managers had to give him the bad news. “Some of them cry, others get mad, a few go crazy,” Weaver said. “One pulled a knife on me.” The sessions, over beer and cold cuts, lasted deep into the night, a time for the managers, scouts, and coaches to shoot the breeze and bond. “Some of those Thomasville days were the best days of my baseball life,” McLaughlin’s assistant Harry Dalton remembered.

Minor-league manager Cal Ripken Sr. said Richards prepared a “very small baseball manual” for the instructors. Dalton, Weaver, Ripken, and others later expanded it into a bigger book that guided the club’s player development for decades. The bible came to be called “The Oriole Way,” though those words did not appear in the original. A later Baltimore catcher, Elrod Hendricks, said The Oriole Way meant “never beat yourself. And that’s why we won so many close games. We let the other team make mistakes and beat themselves, and when the opportunity came we’d jump on it.” It was the gospel Richards preached throughout his career: Most games are lost rather than won.

Richards had earned a reputation as a master teacher of young players, especially pitchers, beginning when he was a wartime catcher with the Tigers. He got most of the credit for transforming a wild, hot-headed young left hander, Hal Newhouser, into the American League’s Most Valuable Player in both 1944 and 1945. He developed another left hander, Billy Pierce, with the White Sox, and turned Nellie Fox and Minnie Minoso into stars. Orioles scout Jim Russo said Richards believed in “teaching, teaching, teaching, 24 hours a day.” But if he was a father figure to the youngsters, he was a tough and distant one. Oriole infielder Fred Marsh said, “There was a look fathers used to give their kids, where you just backed off when you saw it. Richards had that.”

Tension between the McLaughlin and Richards fiefdoms hung thick over the Orioles’ organization and spilled into Thomasville. Weaver recalled, “Richards, in his day, would bring the minor-league managers down to spring training and show us how he wanted things taught, so the instruction was all the same at every level.” But scout Walter Youse said, “Every year Richards would send a representative down to the minor-league camp in Thomasville, Georgia, and have him teach the players to do things Richards’s way. But over on another field McLaughlin would be teaching them a different way.” Despite continual conflict, McLaughlin stayed in the key player-development role for six years. “Where Richards and I saw eye-to-eye was on pitching, the priority it ought to have in building the farm system,” he said. McLaughlin’s mission was to find promising young pitchers; Richards’s passion was to develop them into winners.

The Orioles reached .500 only once in Richards’s first four seasons. In the winter of 1957–58 McLaughlin hung a sign on his office wall: “Home grown by 1960.” By the end of the 1958 season he seemed to have won the front-office war. The owners, a group of local business leaders, expected employees to follow orders, but Richards made his own rules. Accountant Joe Hamper remembered: “The owners would talk to each other and say, ’We can’t let him do this.’ But they never talked to Richards about it. He intimidated them.” Richards was forced out as general manager and replaced by Lee MacPhail, who had worked in the Yankee front office. MacPhail later said the owners wanted “someone to say no to Richards when he chose to ignore the budget.” Club president James Keelty Jr. insisted Richards voluntarily gave up the general manager’s job, but he was only softening the blow. “Richards is the best manager in baseball,” he said.

The rebuilt farm system began to produce in 1959; The Orioles climbed first place for one day, June 9, and remained above .500 until the end of July before dropping to sixth place. In August, Richards and MacPhail made a decision. “We were going with the kids,” MacPhail said. “It was time.” Brooks Robinson took over third base, twenty-year-old right hander Milt Pappas won fifteen games, and another twenty-year-old, Jerry Walker, won eleven.

In 1960, the lanky Ron Hansen took over at shortstop, hit a team-leading 22 home runs, and was named American League Rookie of the Year. Twenty-two-year-olds Chuck Estrada and Steve Barber joined twenty-one-year-olds Milt Pappas and Jerry Walker in the starting rotation; they were called the “Kiddie Korps.” A first baseman acquired from the Dodger organization, Jim Gentile, added 21 homers as a left-handed platoon player. Baltimore kept pace with the Yankees until mid-September, when New York swept the Orioles in a four-game series and went on to win their last fifteen in a row. The Orioles won 89 games and finished second.

Jim McLaughlin had made good on his promise of a home-grown winner, but his clashes with Richards had worn out his welcome with Lee MacPhail. “It got
to the point where you were either a ‘McLaughlin player’ or a ‘Richards player’ in the organization, and there were decisions made on that basis,” MacPhail said. “Paul and Jim just never could get along.” Richards was considered the indispensable man, so MacPhail fired McLaughlin. “I hated to do it,” he said years later.

Harry Dalton said of his mentor, McLaughlin: “His legacy was organizing the farm and scouting department, and helping establish a strong pride in the organization.” In addition to signing key players for Baltimore’s pennant winners of 1966, 1969, 1970, and 1971, McLaughlin created a farm system for future general managers, including Dalton, Hank Peters, Lou Gorman, John Hart, and John Schuerholz. When Dalton became the Orioles’ general manager, he brought McLaughlin back to the organization as a scouting supervisor.

After the close race of 1960, the team papered Baltimore with bumper stickers reading “It Can Be Done in ’61.” It couldn’t. The Yankees slugged a then record 240 home runs—including 61 by Roger Maris and 54 by Mickey Mantle—and won 109 games. The Orioles won 95, but dropped to third place behind New York and Detroit. Before the season was over, Richards moved on to another building project as general manager of the expansion Houston Colt .45s in his native Texas.

Richards and McLaughlin left the Orioles with five regular position players and five established pitchers under age twenty-eight, plus a farm system brimming with prospects. Despite their mutual loathing, they complemented each other. Richards provided the high-profile leadership that persuaded the owners to commit to his building plan and stick with it, while McLaughlin supplied most of the scouts and players. More importantly, they laid the foundation for an organization that became baseball’s best. From the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, the Orioles won more games than any other team; from 1965 to 2000 they won 3,079 games to the Yankees’ 3,065. Harry Dalton said, “The Orioles became well respected, not only because of their success on the field, but a lot of baseball people thought the organization was run very well.”

The Richards/McLaughlin legacy endured into the twenty-first century. The last product of the Oriole Way was Cal Ripken Jr., whose father taught him the lessons learned in Thomasville.

This article is adapted from The Wizard of Waxahachie: Paul Richards and the End of Baseball as We Knew It, by Warren Corbett (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2009 [forthcoming]).
WHAT’S in a name? If it’s a baseball team’s name, there’s a story in it.

The story of what to call Washington, D.C., baseball teams (except “last in the American League”) began in confusion and remained that way for almost a hundred years.

Professional league baseball began in Washington in 1871, with the Olympic Base Ball Club entering the newly formed National Association. Thus they were referred to as the Olympics, although locally they were known as the Blue Stockings. The following year they were usually called the Washingtons, a common form of identification in those days. Somewhere about that time, the tag “Nationals” came into use. The league disbanded after the 1875 season.

Expansion baseball was launched in 1884 with two 13-team leagues; the Union Association, which lasted one year, competing against the already established American Association. Washington, although one of the smaller cities in the nation, ambitiously fielded teams in both leagues. And that began the confusion. Since its first professional team had been known as the Nationals before its demise, it seemed appropriate to continue using that moniker.

But for which team? The answer, in the political tradition of the city’s principal business: both.

The Union club was sometimes the Unions, sometimes the Washingtons, sometimes the Nationals. The AA team was also called the Nationals. Readers of the Washington Post, confronted with headlines like “The Nationals Win and the Washingtons Lose,” had to read on to discover who did what.

There being nothing official about any of these tags, the newspapers exercised a journalistic fielder’s choice. When the capital entered the National League in 1886, the Post revived the Nationals; the Evening Star chose to call the team the Statesmen. By 1888, Senators began replacing Nationals.

But they were still losers, by whatever name. In 1890 the entire roster decamped for Buffalo in the Players League, leaving D.C. with no professional team until they took a one-year lease on the American Association’s basement in 1891. Game accounts continued to use both “Nationals” and “Senators,” sometimes in the same paragraph, even the same bank of headlines.

Washington rejoined the National League in 1892. When the season opened on April 12, the Post tried to stay with the Nationals, but other papers would have nothing to do with it. The Post headline read: “The Nationals Yield to the Superior Work of the Bostons.”

The Boston Globe’s read: “Boston Cools the Marrow in Senators Bones.”

A week later the Post surrendered, and from then until the club once again expired after the 1899 season, the Senators reigned in the papers, if not in the standings.

When the American League declared war on the National League in 1901, they moved the Kansas City franchise to the vacant Washington territory. Underfunded and undermanned, the club began life with AL president Ban Johnson running things behind the scenes. To differentiate between the leagues, newspapers used such terms as “Boston Nationals” and “Boston Americans.” Calling the new American League Washington team the Nationals just wouldn’t work. Besides, “National” was a dirty word to Ban Johnson. From opening day they were the Senators in most papers.

A year after the two leagues ended their war in 1903, Ban Johnson persuaded two newspapermen in Washington to take the team off the league’s hands. Thomas C. Noyes was city editor of the Star; Scott C. Bone was managing editor of the Post. It took until
1905 to completely extricate the league from the operation of the team.

The new owners wanted to end all confusion and come up with a single universal team name. In March 1905 they asked the fans for suggestions that would clearly identify the team with the nation’s capital. The replies, like the results of a psychologist’s word association test, ranged from Diplomats to Grafters. A committee of local writers favored the old original Nationals. The new owners preferred Senators. Left to the fans to choose between them, the overwhelming winner was Nationals.

But the issue was never really settled to anyone’s satisfaction. And perhaps that is what most truly identifies the team with the nation’s capital. For the next 55 years, the local papers used Nationals or Nats while the rest of the world continued to call them the Senators. Bowing to the marketplace, in 1954 the Putnam series of team histories published The Washington Senators, by the Post’s Shirley Povich, while his paper’s sports pages were still using Nats. The same is true of other histories and biographies, from Morris A. Bealle’s Washington Senators in 1947 to biographies, by Cecil Travis (2005) and Sam Rice (2007), of “the Senators.”

And then they packed up and moved to Minnesota. Their replacement in D.C. continued the name “Senators” until they packed up and moved to Texas in 1971. By the time the latest version was reincarnated in 2006, nobody wanted anything to do with the tag “Senators.” Or maybe they just didn’t want any name tag that might identify them with that particular group of one hundred. Under the Lerner ownership, the team is now officially the Washington Nationals Baseball Club LLC.

Notes
In 1954, the Washington Senators were an abominable team.

They finished the season ensconced in sixth place in the American League, with a 66–88 record. The previous year, they were a fifth-place ballclub, completing the campaign at 76–76. In 1952, they also ended up in fifth place, with a 78–76 mark. In mid-decade, Ernest L. Barcella, a Washington-based political writer and avid Senators fan, observed, “The Washington fan is a strange breed—eternally optimistic, long-suffering, but readily forgiving. ‘You can’t win ’em all,’ he shrugs. Let the team win four in a row . . . and the rooter lovingly labels his heroes ‘Super Nats.’”

Rarely did the Nats win four in a row in the 1950s—and none of the regulars on that 1954 club are enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame. (Harmon Killebrew, he of the tape-measure home runs, debuted that season, but appeared in just nine games. In thirteen at-bats, the eighteen-year-old had four hits.)

But there was hope for the Senators—at least in the world of fiction, the world of baseball fantasy. That year, a writer by the name of Douglass Wallop—a perfect name for the author of a baseball book—published The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, a comic-melodramatic novel about baseball, sex, and restored youth. In the story, the mighty Bronx Bombers, who just completed a still-unprecedented five-year run as World Series champions, are dethroned by a Washington Senators nine led by an unlikely phenom: Joe Boyd, a portly fan-atic who makes a pact with the Devil and is transformed into Joe Hardy, a strapping home-run hitter and savior of the D.C. baseball club.

A half-century later, wrote Jonathan Yardley in the Washington Post, Wallop’s story “is by now as deeply embedded in American legend as is Goethe’s ‘Faust’ in German legend.”

In 1956, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant was transformed into a hit Broadway musical, Damn Yankees: a title that remains melodious to the ears of Yankee-haters of all eras. Two years later, Damn Yankees was adapted to the screen and released by Warner Bros.

The story that evolved into Damn Yankees was the brainchild of Wallop, a Washingtonian, University of Maryland graduate, and long-suffering Senators fan. A journalist as well as a novelist, Wallop, who was born in 1920 as John Douglass Wallop, authored 13 novels. Among them were Night Light—his first, published in 1953—and his last, The Other Side of the River, which came out in 1984, a year before his death. Baseball: An Informal History, his one work of nonfiction, hit bookstores in 1969. Inarguably, however, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, which Wallop wrote after Night Light, remains his most celebrated and enduring work. On his death, the novel had sold over 2.5 million copies.

Wallop’s yarn opens on July 21, 1958, four years in the future. The Bronx Bombers are solidly ensconced in first place, on their way to their tenth consecutive pennant. (Clearly, the story was penned before the Cleveland Indians won the ’54 AL flag.) It was the Yankees’ style, according to Wallop, “never to patronize or belittle the opposing team . . . They courted you with good fellowship and then beat your brains out.” On that July day, the Senators are a sixth-place ballclub, closer to falling to seventh place than rising up to fifth.

Joe Boyd is a 50-year-old real-estate salesman, an Average Joe who lives quietly in the Washington suburb of Chevy Chase. An armchair player-manager-coach, Boyd agonizes as his beloved Nats wallow in the second division. On that midsommer evening, after offhandedly declaring that he would sell his soul in exchange for a slugger who would reverse his team’s fortunes, he is recruited by the glad-handing, nattily attired Mr. Applegate, aka the Devil. In exchange for selling his spirit to Applegate—but with an escape clause, allowing him to opt out of the deal by September 21—the years peel off Boyd and he is transformed into Joe Hardy, strapping 22-year-old Boy Wonder.

Hardy is quickly signed by the Senators and, in less than two months, bashes 48 homers and compiles a .545 batting average. He becomes a celebrity, a national phenomenon. But Joe is lonely. He misses his home and his devoted wife, Meg. In order to lure him into keeping the contract, Applegate provides him with a companion: the lovely Lola, a seductress and Applegate underling who once was the ugliest woman in
With Hardy leading them, the Senators become a top contender to wrest the AL flag from the Yankees. But further complications arise as Gloria Thorpe, a skeptical sportswriter—and, given her gender, a rarity for the era—investigates Hardy’s personal history. Meanwhile, Applegate not only schemes to hold Boyd to the contract but plots to have the Yanks edge out the Senators for the flag.

Although The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant is pure whimsy, Wallop does include real-life baseball references. At one point, for example, the Yankees come to Griffith Stadium to play the Nats. In one of the games, Joe Hardy smashes a “titanic clout” that soars over the center-field wall. Previously, Wallop reports, only three other major leaguers had achieved this feat: Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Larry Doby.

Granted, Wallop had been a lifelong Senators fan, but not all sports enthusiasts, even those who are professional writers, come to author classic baseball stories. Wallop readily admitted that he conjured up the plot on nothing more than “inspiration, a brainstorm.” According to Mark Judge, the grandson of Joe Judge, the writer based the Joe Boyd/Joe Hardy character on the longtime Nat who manned first base in 1924, the year they won their lone world championship. “For several years in the late 1940s, Wallop dated Judge’s daughter, my Aunt Dorothy,” he noted in 2004. “Now in her 70s, she recalls that Wallop ‘was steeped in Senators history’ and would spend hours exchanging stories with her father at their house in Chevy Chase, Maryland.” Judge added, “My grandfather apparently watched baseball games and talked back to the television, indignant at the Senators’ poor play. That scene is recreated in the opening of the Broadway and Hollywood productions of Damn Yankees. ‘That man was my father,’ my father would say whenever the film was on TV.”

It took Wallop three months to pen The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, which he finished in one draft. Conversely, he had labored over Night Light for four years. Sunken Garden, the novel he wrote after The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, took him three years to complete.

On June 14, 1954, the New York Times announced that “Big-league baseball and the Faust theme are the ingredients of a novel by Douglass Wallop that Norton will publish July 13. The protagonist is a tired, middle-aged, fattish and fervid fan of the Washington Senators. Through the offices of the Devil, he becomes ‘the greatest and most unnatural’ outfielder in baseball history. The story, which begins with the Yankees well on ‘their despised way’ to a tenth straight pennant, has been titled ‘The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant.’”

The novel earned sparkling reviews. Charles Poore, writing in the New York Times, raved, “Mr. Wallop’s breezy fable is the best use of the legend of the man who sold his soul to the devil since Thomas Mann, and the best baseball story since Ring Lardner.” Added Gilbert Millstein, also in the Times, “In an era when the handling of humorous fantasy is . . . pretty generally humorless and almost certainly fantastic, [this book] stands out as authoritative as a .400 hitter on the Pittsburgh Pirates. Through the extremely complex devices of writing well and refusing to make
his point more than once, the author has avoided the excessive archnesses and the groaning injunctions associated with a project of this kind.”

The book sold briskly, and was snapped up by the Book-of-the-Month and Reader’s Digest mail-order book clubs. References to it began appearing in the media. On September 19, an anonymous New York Times writer humorously noted, “Last week, as the Cleveland Indians were bringing to an end the Yankees’ five-year hold on the American League pennant and world championship, there were dark mutterings among Yankee fans that some of the Cleveland players had been playing all season like men possessed. But there was no real evidence, at least nothing that would stand up before a hearing before the Baseball Commissioner. As for the Senators, their hands were clean. They were still in sixth place.”

That same month, Harold Prince, a rising young stage producer-director, happened upon Wallop’s book. Most recently, Prince, along with Frederick Brisson and Robert E. Griffith, had co-produced the hit musical The Pajama Game, which had opened on Broadway in May. The Pajama Game had settled in for a lengthy run at the St. James Theatre; Prince, along with the show’s composer and lyricist, Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, was poring through dozens of books and manuscripts, vainly searching for a follow-up project. As he immersed himself in The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, Prince became convinced that he had found it. One September evening, during a performance of The Pajama Game, Prince excitedly described the story to Adler and Ross. The duo crowded together in the back of the theater, and began looking over the book. They were as enthusiastic as Prince, and, before the end of the final act of The Pajama Game, the trio agreed to transform the book into a musical.

On September 28, it was revealed in the New York Times that Wallop’s book had been optioned for the Broadway stage. Brisson, Griffith, and Prince would produce the show. George Abbott, the legendary theatrical producer-director who had co-authored and co-directed The Pajama Game, would adapt the novel with Wallop. Abbott would direct, and Adler and Ross would pen the score.

Transforming the novel into a stage show was no simple process. “In writing the book,” Wallop explained, “the plot kept running away with me.” According to Abbott—who described the work-in-progress as the “first musical about baseball in Broadway history”—the novel was far too plot-laden for the stage. It needed to be pared down, with all excess story elements eliminated. He divvied up the sections of the book, assigning some to Wallop and keeping others for himself. Occasionally, the two labored over the same sequence.

Furthermore, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant was too long a name to fit on a Broadway marquee. It was Abbott who conjured up the title Damn Yankees, which he felt was dramatic and to the point. In 1955, the phrase “damn Yankees” was not uncommon. For example, in December 1954, reported The Sporting News, “Bob Turley, who had received a new automobile and $1,000 [because of his regard among fans] as a member of the Orioles last season, discovered how quickly his popularity dwindled when he walked outside his home the morning after he was traded to New York. Inscribed on the dust of his automobile trunk, the right-handed hurler found the words, ‘Damn Yankee.’”

Adler and Ross began work on the score when the final script was still a jumble of disjointed scenes. At their disposal was an outline penned by Abbott, Wallop’s book, and the constantly evolving script. The first song they completed was the first in the show: “Six Months Out of Every Year,” in which Meg Boyd and other baseball wives lament their husbands’ inattention during the baseball season. Even though the story told in Damn Yankees is pure fantasy— as much for the fact that the Washington Senators become a first-division ballclub as for its Faustian element—the show’s creators agreed to keep the narrative anchored in the real world. Thus, the New York Yankees remain the New York Yankees, and do not become the New York Knights (the fictitious team in Bernard Malamud’s The Natural). The Washington Senators are the Senators, and not the Representatives. The opening number references Willie Mays, who may not have been a Bronx Bomber—but it was easier to rhyme the Say Hey Kid’s surname. In the song, “Mays” is rhymed with “pays” and “plays.” It might have taken an Ira Gershwin or Lorenz Hart to conjure up a clever word or phrase to go with “Mantle.” Additionally, once the show reached Broadway, the voice of Mel Allen was heard onstage broadcasting several games—and describing the heroics of Joe Hardy.

The other Adler-Ross songs were employed to develop the characters, or communicate their feelings and views. They reflected on the spunk and spirit of the pre-Joe Hardy Senators (“Heart”), explained the “history” of Hardy (“Shoeless Joe from Hannibal, Mo.”), irreverently presented the coquettish Lola (“Whatever Lola Wants [Lola Gets]”), and allowed Applégate to revel in his devilish past (“Those Were the
Good Old Days”). In most musicals, the love songs involve passion between two young people. Adler and Ross found especially challenging the penning of the romantic songs in Damn Yankees, as they explore the emotions of Joe and Meg Boyd: a middle-aged couple, married for two decades, and their longing for each other after they are separated.

In addition to The Pajama Game, Adler and Ross, both native New Yorkers, had penned songs for the Broadway revue John Murray Anderson’s Almanac, which opened in 1953. They authored “Rags to Riches,” which became a number-one hit for Tony Bennett. But Damn Yankees would be their final collaboration. A few months after the show made its Broadway bow, Ross died of bronchiectasis, a lung disorder. He was twenty-nine years old.

In early January 1955, it was announced that Damn Yankees would open at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre on May 5. In mid-month, the casting of Ray Walston as Applegate was announced. Walston was then appearing on the New York stage in House of Flowers, a musical. He would leave the show in early March, when rehearsals for Damn Yankees would begin.

From the outset, all the behind-the-scenes personnel agreed that one actress, and one actress alone, could play Lola: Gwen Verdon, who had won acclaim in Cole Porter’s Can-Can in 1953. The red-haired Verdon could dance up a storm, and was sufficiently sexy to play a siren. She was to emerge from Damn Yankees a full-blown star. Stephen Douglass, who had replaced John Raitt as the male lead in The Pajama Game, was cast as Joe Hardy.

Bob Fosse, who choreographed The Pajama Game (and married Verdon in 1960), signed on to stage the dance sequences. Murray Schumach, writing in the New York Times, reported that Fosse “had to work out a ballet for baseball players, using movements from the game. A baseball fan—partial to the Cubs because he was born in Chicago—he considered, for a time, working in the liquid movements of the double play. He found this impractical, though theatrical. However, with the hoedown rhythm dictated by the music he worked in the motions of batting, pitching, fielding and sliding and tossed in a sort of juggling act with baseball bats.”

William and Jean Eckart, the show’s set and costume designers, created a grandstand section and the Senators’ dugout and locker room by researching at the New York Public Library and from images provided them by the Senators ballclub. The Eckarts also designed a show curtain consisting of 1,645 major-league baseballs attached by colored cords.

The principal actors began rehearsals on March 7. All went smoothly and, prior to opening on Broadway, Damn Yankees played out-of-town previews—the theatrical equivalent of spring training—in New Haven and Boston. In mid-April, the Yankees were battling the Red Sox in Beantown, and it just so happened that Damn Yankees was playing there. To drum up press for the show, the Yanks were invited to attend a preview. Quite a few of the players showed up, including manager Casey Stengel. Soon afterward, when asked to venture an opinion about the show, the skipper barked, in pure Stengelese, “I ain’t gonna comment about a guy which made $100,000 writin’ about how my club lost.”

It was around this time that an outlandish-sounding musical number was deleted from the show. Reportedly, it was a ballet featuring a gorilla garbed in a New York Yankees uniform and dancers dressed in Baltimore Orioles–like bird costumes.

The Damn Yankees company returned to New York and, on the first of May, Murray Schumach described the scene as the show “went into the final phases of frenzied change and rehearsal”:

On the stage, accompanied by a pit piano with the drive of a pneumatic drill, singers chorused almost by the syllable. Behind them, indifferent to the music, dancers spun, leaped and shouted with wanton energy. In the lobby, actors belowed lines up wide staircases to the lofty roof of the echoing theatre. Up and down the aisle, between stage and lobby, raced the resonant voice and long legs of Mr. Abbott, shaving off minutes from the show as a boxer sweats off ounces as the bout nears.

Damn Yankees premiered on Broadway on May 5. The opening night tickets were designed to resemble tickets to a ballgame, complete with date, gate, and seat numbers, and even rain-check specifications. Just as Wallop’s novel, Damn Yankees received rave reviews. Lewis Funke, writing in the New York Times, began his critique by noting that the show was “as shiny as a new baseball and almost as smooth.” He ended his first paragraph by pronouncing, “As far as this umpire is concerned you can count it among the healthy clouts of the campaign.” Funke dubbed Verdon “alluring” and “vivacious,” described Walston’s performance as “impeccable,” and “authoritative and persuasive,” and noted that Douglass made “a completely believable athlete.” He declared that Adler and Ross “have provided a thoroughly robust score” and
that Fosse’s dance routines “are full of fun and vitality.” And he added, “But even the most ardent supporters of Mr. Stengel’s minions should have a good time.”

Writing in the New York Daily News, John Chapman called Damn Yankees “a wonderful musical. In it, Miss Verdon appears as a splendid comedienne, an extraordinary dancer and just plain fascinating person.” He added, “Old Manager Abbott, the Casey Stengel of the music-show business, has kept control of the whole show. His casting is unerring, as usual.”

Not all the show’s reviewers were professional theater critics. “The music and dancing routines are as slick as a Dark-to-Williams-to-Lockman double play,” pronounced Russ Hodges, the New York Giants’ play-by-play man, “and the lyrics have the wallop of a Ted Kluszewski.” Shirley Povich, the celebrated Washington Post sports reporter and columnist, noted that the show’s producers “got more baseball onto a stage than was believed possible. The dugout scenes are downright amazing for their faithfulness to the majors, even down to the correct piping of the suits.” The real Washington Senators, in fact, had donated game-worn jerseys that were employed as costumes. Povich added, “They do a shortstop ballet in ‘Damn Yankees’ that ought to win a pennant in that league.” Of the show’s female star, he commented, “Gwen is both the pennant and the World Series of Broadway play-acting.”

Povich took a more contemplative tone when he observed that New York theatergoers who found the show frivolously entertaining “wouldn’t understand, naturally, that ‘Damn Yankees’ is not a jesting term and that it is actually full of hate for the Yankees. They would understand. If they were Washington baseball fans. The play . . . is not a joke in two acts. The true Washington fan lives and dies and lives again with ‘Damn Yankees.’”

Povich added, “How can you challenge the authenticity of Joe Boyd? [Is] there a Washington fan, middle-aged or otherwise, who has not yearned for that long-ball hitter for the Senators, or who has not envisioned himself as the Walter Mitty who could deliver that long ball and beat the dratted Yankees at their own game? There is a Joe Boyd in every household in Washington, or maybe I should amend that to say in every household worth calling a home.”

Not long after the show opened, the Nats came to New York to battle the Yankees—and the players were invited to see Damn Yankees. “They liked the show,” according to Povich, “especially Gwen Verdon, the devil’s damsel who puts on the locker room dance that the late Judge Landis would have outlawed.” Washington skipper Chuck Dressen was asked to take a bow from the stage. Years later, Mickey Vernon, the team’s first-sacker and one of its few quality players, recalled that he and Dressen went backstage and had their picture taken with Gwen Verdon.

The Yankees, meanwhile, were collectively oblivious to the show. On September 14, 1955, New York Times columnist Arthur Daley reported that, even though the Bronx Bombers were mired in a mini-losing streak, “none of the ballplayers seemed to notice” when tunes from Damn Yankees began filling the air during batting practice at Yankee Stadium.

A month before, the Damn Yankees cast played a team representing Silk Stockings in a Broadway Show League ballgame, and lost by a 13–6 score. The Damn Yankees actors played the same positions as their characters, but with one exception. Stephen Douglass begged off participating, because he never before had played baseball.

The Broadway cast album of Damn Yankees became a best-seller. And the show earned seven Tony Awards, most significantly as Best Musical. Verdon was named Best Actress in a Musical. Walston and Douglass were pitted against each other as Best Actor in a Musical, with Walston emerging victorious. Russ Brown, cast as Benny van Buren, the Senators’ crusty manager, was named Best Featured Actor in a Musical. Fosse won for his choreography, as did conductor-musical director Hal Hastings and stage technician Harry Green. Rae Allen, playing Gloria Thorpe, was nominated as Best Featured Actress in a Musical.

Damn Yankees ran for 1,019 performances, closing on October 12, 1957; during its Broadway run, it moved from the Forty-sixth Street Theatre to the Adelphi. Meanwhile, the show’s national company traversed the U.S., with the celebrated stage clown Bobby Clark starring as Applegate.

Back in the 1950s, hit stage musicals regularly were adapted for the screen—and Damn Yankees was no exception. Warner Bros. purchased the rights to film the show with the studio, according to different sources, paying between $500,000 and $750,000. The celluloid version was codirected and coproduced by George Abbott and Stanley Donen, a veteran helmer of screen musicals. Frederick Brisson, Robert Griffith, and Harold Prince, the trio who mounted the stage show, were listed as associate producers. Abbott earned sole screenplay credit, The Eckarts designed the production and costumes, Fosse did the choreography (and also appeared on-screen as a mambo dancer), and most of the original Broadway cast recreated their roles. The major exception was Tab Hunter, who replaced Stephen Douglass as Joe Hardy. At the time, Hunter was a hot commodity in motion
pictures—unlike Walston, Verdon, and the supporting players.

Interiors for Damn Yankees were filmed at Warner Bros’ Burbank studios. Ballyard scenes were shot on location over ten days at Los Angeles’ Wrigley Field. According to Jonathan Yardley, a self-described “devout Yankee hater,” the minor-league ballyard was made up to look “for all the world like good old Griffith Stadium.” Meanwhile, in-game footage was filmed during the 1957 season when the Senators took on the Yankees at the real Griffith Stadium. This footage is edited onto the staging of the pennant-deciding game, and watching it today is great fun for Baby Boomers. Could that be Camilo Pascual on the mound for Washington? That must be Yogi Berra catching a foul popup. In the sequence, Joe Hardy/Joe Boyd makes a game-saving catch off the bat of none other than Mickey Mantle.

Hunter was cast primarily to ensure a healthy box office. But the film’s marketing campaign spotlighted the presence of Gwen Verdon. Its tagline was, “It’s a picture in a million! Starring that girl in a million, the red-headed darling of the Broadway show, Gwen Verdon!” Originally, the publicity featured Verdon posed in a baseball uniform. But in the mid-1950s, bats and balls did not necessarily translate to box-office gold. So the promotion was changed to emphasize the star’s sex appeal, with the theatrical poster highlighting a leggy, skimpily clad head-to-toe image of Verdon. In a number of non–U.S. venues, the film’s title was changed to What Lola Wants because foreign audiences would not understand the meaning of Damn Yankees.

As to plot, the film version adheres to the stage show. However, three musical numbers were deleted: “Near to You,” a love ballad (which was replaced by the similar “There’s Something About an Empty Chair”); “A Man Doesn’t Know,” a profoundly moving song that reflects on the feeling that lovers abuse love, and do not appreciate one another until after they are separated; and “The Game,” a semi-risqué comical routine in which some of the Senators recall how their sexual exploits are interrupted by thoughts of remaining true, pure, and in training.

For baseball fans, one of the highlights of the screen version of Damn Yankees is the dancing in the “Shoeless Joe from Hannibal, Mo.” number. Here, Bob Fosse’s expressive choreography incorporates pounding gloves, fielding grounders, tossing balls, and sliding into bases with the dance steps. Aficionados of classic 1970s television will savor hearing the distinctive voice of All in the Family’s Edith Bunker on-screen. Jean Stapleton, who also appeared onstage in Damn Yankees, employs it in her role as Meg Boyd’s friend, Sister Miller. She is a delight as she gets all aflutter upon meeting Joe Hardy—the Joe Hardy—and, later, sings a few verses of “Heart.”

The screen version of Damn Yankees premiered on September 26, 1958. Its reviews were favorable, with New York Times critic Bosley Crowther lauding Gwen Verdon as “the sort of fine, fresh talent that the screen needs badly these days” and adding that the production “has class, imagination, verve.” Variety, the show-business trade publication, described the film as “sparkling” and noted that “it does loom as a cracking musical comedy hit in the domestic markets for Warner Bros.”

All this success served to forever change the life of Douglass Wallop, the man who conjured up the saga of Joe Hardy. Now he was a celebrity, and was in demand as an after-dinner speaker at baseball banquets. When Damn Yankees was packing in audiences on Broadway, he purchased stock in the Washington Senators, explaining that he had wanted to do so for the longest time. Ever the optimist, he declared in a February 1956 interview that he had not yet earned “all the privileges of being a stockholder yet, but I hope it entitles me to buy tickets to this year’s opening game (against the Yankees) and to World Series tickets when Washington wins the pennant—maybe in 1958."

Wallop was in a more reflective mood on the first anniversary of the show’s Broadway run when he admitted that, almost immediately after handing The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant in to his publisher, he decided that penning it was a blunder. For after all, he wanted to be a serious writer. He desired to explore issues, examine the human condition. To his way of thinking, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant was a fantasy, a trifle. How could a book about baseball be in any way significant?

Furthermore, he felt he was succumbing to the lure of fame. “It wasn’t long before my wife began to suspect that I, too, had sold my own soul to Applegate,” he noted. “The fact is, I, too, began to think that I was hearing Applegate’s voice. ‘In a couple of weeks or so,’ he’d say, ‘you can go back to the life of a writer, but it’s such a humdrum, boring life that I personally don’t see how you can stand it.’” Wallop also ruminated on the price of fame. Even though he was determined to author a “serious book,” “people asked, when are you going to write another book like ‘The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant?’ Write a book that will make another musical. Write a funny book. Be funny.”

Wallop never again was “funny.” None of his other books were transformed into Broadway shows, let
alone hit ones. But in the parlance of the theater, *Damn Yankees* certainly had legs. Scant weeks after it closed on Broadway, Casey Stengel and Fred Haney, the respective managers of the New York Yankees and Milwaukee Braves, were each offered $1,000 per week to appear in *Damn Yankees* in a Las Vegas nightclub. The skippers, who had just squared off in the 1957 World Series, both politely refused.

Across the decades, the show frequently has been revived on college campuses and in community and dinner theaters, and in venues from Melbourne, Australia, to Schenectady, New York. In 1967, NBC broadcast a made-for-TV version starring Phil Silvers as Applegate and Lee Remick as Lola, with Joe Garagiola appearing as himself. In 1981, Joe Namath played Joe Hardy at the Jones Beach Theatre in New York’s Nassau County. Five years later, 99-year-old George Abbott—who lived to the age of 107—directed a revival at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey, that featured Orson Bean as Applegate.

A version that began life at San Diego’s Old Globe Theatre, toplining Bebe Newirth as Lola and Victor Garber as Applegate, opened at Broadway’s Marquis Theatre on March 3, 1994. The show’s creative talent worked in conjunction with Abbott, who was present at some of the rehearsals. This version ran on the Great White Way for 718 performances, closing on August 6, 1995. Before the final curtain went down, Jerry Lewis took over as Applegate. He went on the play the part in venues from Washington’s Kennedy Center to San Francisco’s Golden Gate Theatre to London’s Adelphi Theatre.

In 2002, Dan Duquette was fired as general manager of the Boston Red Sox. A year later, he resurfaced in a Pittsfield, Massachusetts, production of *Damn Yankees*, playing Benny van Buren. The show was presented in the town’s minor-league ballyard, 111-year-old Wahconah Park. In 2005, Washington’s Arena Stage revived the show. “With the Nationals as a new neighbor, the theater has a perfect excuse for a baseball musical,” wrote Peter Marks in the *Washington Post*. He added that, for “transparent reasons,” an “actor playing a stadium vendor sells both Senators pennants and Nationals programs”—even though the setting is the 1950s. Another version, presented at the North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, Massachusetts, in 2006, substituted the Boston Red Sox for the Senators. Then in 2007, the show was further reworked in a version mounted in Los Angeles and directed by Jason Alexander. Here, the story was updated to 1981, and the Los Angeles Dodgers replaced the Nats as the team forever thwarted by those damn Yankees. And in 2008, the show enjoyed a brief summer run at New York City Center with Sean Hayes and Jane Krakowski starring as Applegate and Lola.

In 1964, W. W. Norton published a second edition of *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. Most recently, the book was reprinted in 2004, with an introduction by Bill James. A year earlier, Harvey Weinstein, then co-chairman of Miramax Films, announced plans to remake *Damn Yankees* and film the 1970s Broadway hit *Pippin*. “Now, with *Damn Yankees* and *Pippin*, the ghost of Arthur Freed [the famed lyricist and legendary producer of musicals at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] is alive at Miramax,” Weinstein pronounced. Neither project ever made it to celluloid.

The saga of Joe Hardy has enjoyed great success in its various forms, and it may be a Washington Senators fan’s fantasy-come-true. But of course, it is fiction, pure and unadulterated. In 1955, as *Damn Yankees* lit up Broadway, the ballclub from the Bronx made it to the real Fall Classic—yet again. Even though they lost to the Brooklyn Dodgers, it was little solace to Senators supporters. That season, the Washington club came in dead last in the American League, winning 53 and losing 101.

In 1956–57, Chuck Stobbs, a Senators pitcher, lost sixteen straight games before notching a victory. He ended the 1957 campaign with an 8–20 record, and his team again held up the AL rear. As a rejoinder to Benny van Buren’s counsel to his players that they “gotta have heart,” Cookie Lavagetto, who replaced Chuck Dressen in May as the Nats skipper, moaned, “Believe me, brother, you gotta have a sense of humor.”

It was around this time that Harmon Killebrew often found himself compared to Joe Hardy. At one point, when “the Killer” was slumping, Washington sportswriter Bob Addie kidded the ballplayer by asking him, “What happened to Joe Hardy?” Then he noted, “Now you’re starting to hit like Andy Hardy.”

In 1958, the year Douglass Wallop’s Yankees lost the pennant, the real Bronx Bombers won the AL flag and bested the Milwaukee Braves in the World Series. And what of the Senators? Predictably, they finished the campaign at 61–93—in the American League cellar.

### Sources

#### Books


Damn Yankees: Original Stage Production
 Forty-sixth Street Theatre, New York City, May 5, 1955–May 4, 1957
 Adelphi Theatre, New York City, May 6, 1957–October 12, 1957

Producers: Frederick Brisson, Robert E. Griffith, Harold S. Prince, in association with Albert B. Taylor. Director: George Abbott. Music and Lyrics: Richard Adler, Jerry Ross. Book: George Abbott, Douglass Wallop, from Wallop’s novel The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant. Musical Director: Hal Hastings. Music Orchestration: Don Walker. Dance Arranger: Roger Adams. Dances and Musical Numbers Staged by: Bob Fosse. Scenic Designers/Costume Designers: William and Jean Eckart. Sound Designer: Harry Green. Primary Opening Night Cast: Stephen Douglas (Joe Hardy); Gwen Verdon (Lola); Ray Walston (Applegate); Rae Allen (Gloria Thorpe); Richard Bishop (Welch); Shannon Bolin (Meg Boyd); Russ Brown (Van Buren); Nathaniel Frey (Smoky); Del Horstmann (Lynch, Commissioner); Elizabeth Howell (Doris); Janie Janvier (Miss Weston); Jimmie Komack (Rocky); Al Lanti (Henry); Albert Linville (Vernon); Bob Fosse (Mambro Dancer); Elizabeth Howell (Doris Miller); Robert Shafer (Joe Boyd); Jean Stapleton (Sister).  

Damn Yankees: Screen Version
(1958) Warner Bros. Color. 110 minutes. Directors-Producers: George Abbott, Stanley Donen. Screenplay: George Abbott, based on the musical play Damn Yankees, book by Abbott, Douglass Wallop (from Wallop’s novel The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant). Music and Lyrics: Richard Adler, Jerry Ross. Cinematographer: Harold Lipstein. Production/Costume Design: William and Jean Eckart. Art Director: Stanley Fleischer. Film Editor: Frank Bracht. Sound: Stanley Jones, Dolph Thomas. Set Decorator: John P. Austin. Makeup Supervisor: Gordon Bau. Choreography: Bob Fosse. Music Supervisor: Ray Heindorf. Associate Producers: Frederick Brisson, Robert Griffith, Harold Prince. Principal Cast: Tab Hunter (Joe Hardy); Gwen Verdon (Lola); Ray Walston (Mr. Applegate); Russ Brown (Benny Van Buren); Shannon Bolin (Meg Boyd); Nathaniel Frey (Smoky); Jimmie Komack (Rocky); Rae Allen (Gloria Thorpe); Robert Shafer (Joe Boyd); Jean Stapleton (Sister Miller); Albert Linville (Vernon); Bob Fosse (Mambro Dancer); Elizabeth Howell (Doris Miller); William Fawcett (Postmaster Hawkins)

Periodicals
———. “Chuck Trying Conga Contingent in Effort to Quicken Nats’ Step.” The Sporting News, 1 June 1955.

INTERNET
Internet Broadway Database: http://www.ibdb.com/index.php
Internet Movie Database: http://www.imdb.com/
Every so often there comes a phenom who streaks across the baseball sky like the flash of a comet, leaving only the faintest of light in its wake. Among them are Mark Fidrych, “Super Joe” Charboneau, and Bob “Hurricane” Hazle.

Remember to add the Washington Senators’ Joe Hardy to that list.

Hardy, born Joe Boyd in 1934 in Hannibal, Missouri—exact birth details are frustratingly missing, something that Hardy/Boyd today attributes to sloppy record-keeping at the city clerk’s office, exacerbated by an understaffed municipal government during the throes of the Great Depression—played just one year, 1956, for the Senators. But what a year it was!

Coming seemingly from out of nowhere, exhibiting talent that made it seem as if he had made some kind of deal with the devil, he helped the perpetually second-division Senators—“first in war, first in peace, last in the American League”—make a stunning run at the New York Yankees’ hegemony atop the junior circuit.

It may be that, with some 160,000 minor leaguers to track, the Society for American Baseball Research just hasn’t gotten around to it yet, but like his birth formation before it, Hardy’s minor league records are missing from the SABR Minor Leagues Database.

Because he joined the club midseason, Hardy—the erstwhile “Shoeless Joe from Hannibal, Mo.,” as he was enshrined in “Damn Yankees,” the stage and movie musical that told his story—never accumulated the minimum number of plate appearances needed to qualify for the batting title, nor did he tally big enough numbers to be listed among the season’s leaders in any cumulative category, but the 22-year-old Hardy was an instant hit.

“Came upon the scene, fresh as Listerine,” noted one scribe. “Arms of steel, like Hercules, fleet of feet, as Mercury’s,” rang the hosannas to Hardy’s talents as a sleepy nation’s capital awoke to its first real pennant chase in more than a decade. Hardy’s .354 batting average, coupled with 27 homers—an astounding number given the cavernous dimensions of his home ballpark, Griffith Stadium—and 78 RBIs not only made the team better by his presence, he also made his teammates play better.

“They’ll build a new wing for you in that baseball museum in Cooperstown,” declared “Mister Applegate,” Hardy’s self-styled representative. Hardy seemed to shun Applegate but didn’t come close to disowning him and his assertions until near the end of the season. Maybe it was because Hardy was too busy smacking extra-base hits and ranging deep within the nether regions of Griffith Stadium to chase down fly balls as the Senators began their long, Sisyphean climb up the AL standings. It was more likely due to allegations that Hardy was really Owen “Shifty” McCoy, a career bush leaguer who had once thrown games in the Mexican League. Although Hardy had a hard time proving who he was at a hastily called inquiry during the season’s final weekend, he had a much easier time proving who he was not, and was cleared to continue playing.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum never did establish a separate shrine to Hardy. Still, his feats remain the stuff of lore that no four walls could contain.

In fact, it was during the season’s final game—as fate would have it, against the Yankees—that Joe Hardy made an exit that no four walls could contain. Charging after a fly ball off the bat of pinch-hitter Bob Cerv—in which a hit meant a pennant for New York and an out meant a pennant for Washington—Hardy seemed to visibly age before a packed Griffith Stadium crowd as he ran after the spheroid. Somehow, he caught up to the fly, speared it at knee height, then kept on running—through the groundskeeper’s gate, down a tunnel, and out the stadium, where, still in uniform, he caught a cab to an unknown destination.

Few, if any, spectators would have believed that Hardy’s exit from the ballpark also represented his exit from the sport. He sent a telegram to Senators management saying he was retired. “I’ve fulfilled my dream,” Hardy wrote. “Now it’s time to be an average Joe again.” Fans would never accept that Hardy approximated average. But the retirement stuck. The Senators, without Hardy, were swept in the World Series and returned almost immediately to their jocular, but predictable, losing ways.

Not even the spirit or memory of Joe Hardy could help the team in later years, as it bade farewell to the
District of Columbia to take up residence in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region of Minnesota as the Twins. Nor did it help the second, expansion incarnation of the Senators, who also lost with consistent frequency and turned tail to Texas after the 1971 season.

In a 1973 interview, Hardy’s manager, Benny Van Buren, said, “Y’know, I always thought you’ve gotta have heart to play this game, but that Joe Hardy played with both heart and soul. To this day, I never seen a ballplayer with as much natural skill.”

There was speculation that Hardy was being distracted not only by Applegate, but by a “baseball Annie,” Lola, or “Senora McCoy,” who even dared to enter the Senators’ locker room—which, a half-century ago, was still a sacred, men-only spot. But whatever charms Lola might have had, Hardy did not ultimately succumb to them. Rather, Hardy settled down and married Meg Boyd. One irony is that Boyd bore the surname Hardy had when he was born. Compounding the irony is that Boyd’s first husband was also named Joe, and that he was a passionate Senators fan who apparently had deserted Meg after watching yet another Washington loss on television.

But Joe Hardy and Meg Boyd, two lost souls on the highway of life, lived the prototypical happily-ever-after story. “A man doesn’t know what he has till it is no longer around,” Hardy said in a post-retirement interview. “I didn’t know what I had till I said ‘Goodbye, old love.’”

Hardy said he was snuck into the 46th Street Theatre on Broadway to see a matinee show of “Damn Yankees.” “The last thing I wanted or needed was to be treated like a celebrity. That’s why I gave up after one year in the majors,” he said. He remembers sitting in the third row and watching Gwen Verdon as Lola dancing seductively around Stephen Douglass, who landed the role of Joe Hardy for the Great White Way. He also recalls not leaving his seat during intermission, in part to keep from being spotted but also to soak in his one amazing year as it was being retold as a musical comedy.

“It’s not like they gave some kind of veto power over the script,” Hardy said. “They never gave me any money for my life story, which I guess is OK since I never thought anybody would pay attention to a Broadway show about baseball, much less about me and baseball.” “Damn Yankees” ran two-and-a-half years—1,019 shows in total—on Broadway, a feat that still makes Hardy shake his head in amazement. “My goodness,” he said upon being told the numbers. “I didn’t know there were that many guys who hated the Yankees that much in New York City. Must’ve been a lot of Dodgers and Giants fans who brought their wives with them to the show.” By coincidence, the show concluded its run just as the Dodgers and Giants announced they were deserting the Big Apple for the West Coast.

Verdon, Ray (“My Favorite Martian”) Walston as the devilish Applegate, and some other cast members from the Broadway show made the trek westward as well, reprising their Broadway roles in a film version of “Damn Yankees” that hit the silver screen in 1958. Hardy said he was asked to join a promotional tour for the film as it debuted in a host of downtown movie palaces throughout the country, but demurred. Instead, he waited until it came to the old Newton Theatre in northeast Washington, where he settled after his brief but brilliant career. The Newton was a second-run movie house that now houses a drugstore.

Hardy also keeps his own counsel as to whether he preferred the Broadway or Hollywood version. “I tell you one thing,” he chuckled, “I don’t know if Gwen Verdon’s legs looked better from 12 feet away or blown up to two or three times their real size.”

But he does admit to catching the occasional high-school or community theatre production of “Damn Yankees.” “They may not be the most talented actors on earth, but they put so much enthusiasm into what they do. When the guys in the locker room sing ‘You’ve Gotta Have Heart,’ that’s what makes me smile more than anything. It reminds me more of myself when I was playing, and it’s nice to take that trip back in time when I was young and innocent. I’m not as young today, but I hope I’m close to being that innocent.”

Asked where his travels might take him in the near future, Hardy replied, “Oh, hell.” He paused for a moment, and then added, “Everybody asks me that question.”

Sources
IN THE six seasons following the transfer of the St. Louis Browns’ franchise to Baltimore, the pattern of losing that had been established in the Midwest was not broken. From 1954 through 1959, the Orioles attained a winning percentage as high as .500 only once (in 1957) and never finished in the first division of the American League. In 1959, the club posted a record of 74–80 that placed them 20 games behind the league-leading Chicago White Sox and in the sixth spot in the league’s standings for the third time in four years. Baltimore’s pitching staff in ’59 was solid, but the team was unimpressive offensively and defensively.

In the summer of 1960, however, the short-term and long-term prospects of baseball in Baltimore suddenly improved, and a tradition of competitiveness that would eventually produce championships was born. The drastic improvement of 1960 was unanticipated, because the contributions of several key players were considerably more significant than expected given their youth, lack of major-league experience, or past performances. In retrospect, the swift evolution from second-division status to pennant contender can be explained by the maturation of five young pitchers within a one-year period, the simultaneous emergence of a free-swinging slugger, solid play by a rookie at the crucial position of shortstop, and the coming of age of a future Hall of Famer. Analysis aside, the team’s surprising success and the appearance of new stars created a level of excitement unprecedented in Baltimore’s modern baseball history and fostered a new attendance record for the Orioles.

Magazines on newstands in the spring of 1960 did not lead readers to expect a reversal in the Orioles’ fortunes. Sports Illustrated predicted that the team would again finish in sixth place and commented that “the Orioles are now fully committed to their youth program. . . . It will pay off—someday.” Dan Daniel, a prominent sportswriter of the time, wrote in Street and Smith’s 1960 Baseball Yearbook that he foresaw a fifth-place finish. A panel of representatives convened by Sport Scope Magazine did the same and said that “if the Orioles could add some offensive punch to their infield, [Manager] Paul Richards would have something to look forward to.” Sports Forecast magazine also predicted a fifth-place finish while commenting that “Richards needs more surprises at the plate to crash the first division.”

Paul Richards himself predicted that his club “should be vastly improved” due in large measure to the acquisition of Jackie Brandt in center field. Brandt had been obtained in a trade with the San Francisco Giants on the previous November 30.

Whether Richards actually sensed that improvement was on the horizon or was merely expressing optimism as a “managerial duty,” his prediction was more accurate than those of the presumed experts from the world of journalism. And which players were to deliver the “vast improvement” that Richards either believed or hoped was coming?

The young pitchers: Chuck Estrada, Milt Pappas, Steve Barber, and Jack Fisher. This quartet, with all members under 23 years of age, became known as the “Kiddie Corps,” as it accounted for nearly two-thirds of the Orioles’ 89 wins. Brooks Robinson would say that “Pappas, Estrada, Barber, and Fisher . . . all came in at the same time (and) threw as hard as any four guys I ever saw on one team.”

The free-swinging slugger: “Diamond Jim” Gentile. Purchased from the Los Angeles Dodgers’ organization after the 1959 season, the big first baseman, who had toiled for eight years in the minor leagues, hit .292 with 21 home runs and 98 RBIs. Several of his homers were “tape-measure shots.”

The rookie shortstop: Ron Hansen not only tagged 22 home runs and drove 86 runs across the plate, but also participated in 110 of the Orioles’ 172 double plays as necessary improvement was noted in the team’s defense. He was named “Rookie of the Year” by the Baseball Writers’ Association of America (BBWAA) on 22 of 24 ballots. (Gentile and Estrada split the other two votes.)

The future member of the Hall of Fame: Brooks Robinson. The 1960 season was Robinson’s sixth in the major leagues, but it was his “breakout year.” His offensive production (14 home runs, 88 runs batted in, and a batting average of .294) and defensive talents justified the 211 votes that he earned from members of the BBWAA for the American League’s “Most Valuable
Player” award. Only Roger Maris with 225 votes and Mickey Mantle with 222 surpassed Robinson’s total.

Other than finishing in first place,
Nothing is more exciting than a first pennant race.

The road followed by the Orioles in 1960 featured twists, turns, and an occasional bump. But, between the conclusion of spring training in Miami and the end of the regular season, their path was generally smooth and enjoyable, until a serious roadblock was encountered late in the journey.

The regular season began in Baltimore on April 19 with a 3–2 victory over the Senators. All but one of the position players in Richards’ starting lineup on Opening Day would remain very important to the team’s success throughout the year: Gentile at first base, Marv Breeding at second, Hansen at shortstop, Robinson at third base, Gene Woodling in left field, Brandt in center, and Gus Triandos behind the plate. The only exception was Johnny Powers, the starter in right field who hit .111 in ten games before being sent to Cleveland on May 12 for the waiver price. Al Pilarcik and Gene Stephens (who would be obtained in a June 9 trade with Boston) patrolled right field for the rest of the season. Walt Dropo, Jim Busby, Clint Court-}

ney, and Dave Nicholson came off the bench to fill utility roles. Hal “Skinny” Brown and Hoyt Wilhelm more than supplemented the “Kiddie Corps” on the pitching mound.

The Orioles came out of the gate slowly but, with five consecutive victories capped by Brown’s 2–1 win over the Yankees on April 29, their winning percentage passed the .500 mark. The month of May then brought better results and elevation in the league’s standings. Despite the loss of Triandos for five weeks following surgery on May 8 to address a pinched nerve in his throwing hand, the team moved into the first division to stay on May 14 and, with a fifth straight win on May 16 (a 2–1 victory in Kansas City in which Brandt and Hansen each hit solo homers), the Birds claimed sole possession of the top spot in the standings for the first time in franchise history.

After moving between first and second place for ten days, the Orioles returned to the top of the mountain on May 27 with a 3–2 win in Yankee Stadium, but that victory and the jump into first place were overshadowed by a headline-grabbing innovation by Paul Richards: a catcher’s mitt 50 percent larger than the standard glove that could be used to handle Hoyt Wilhelm’s dancing knuckleball. The introduction of the revolutionary concept seemed to be an act of
genius, especially when Clint Courtney allowed no passed balls as Wilhelm pitched all nine innings to defeat the Bronx Bombers on that day in May.

The outlook appeared more promising the following week when the Yankees traveled to the city of Babe Ruth’s birth only to lose three games. The decisive run in the May 31 contest resulted from a sacrifice fly by Courtney; Hansen tagged a three-run home run and Brown hurled a one-hitter in a 4–1 Orioles’ victory on June 1, and Gentile, Woodling, and Robinson homered in a 6–5 win on June 2. With the three-game sweep, Baltimore led the league by two and a half games.

The lead didn’t last long. On June 9, with the third of four consecutive losses to the Detroit Tigers as the Orioles dropped out of sole possession of first place. Dependence on the combination of veterans and youngsters was still producing positive results, however, and that mixture was never more evident than in a double-header in Detroit on June 19. In the opener, Wilhelm pitched a two-hit shutout and rookies Gentile and Hansen each hit solo homers in a 2–0 win. In the nightcap, a ninth-inning sacrifice fly by Robinson drove in the game’s only run and rewarded Pappas for a three-hitter by enabling him to edge Don Mossi in a tight pitching duel.

Between June 8 and June 26, the team moved in and out of first place. On the latter date, Estrada fired a two-hitter in Kansas City and Gentile hit two home runs (a three-run blast in the sixth inning and a grand slam in the seventh) off the Athletics’ Dick Hall.

The Orioles’ success at midseason was reflected by Hansen’s designation as the starting shortstop on the American League’s All-Star team based upon a poll of players, managers, and coaches, and by the selections (by AL manager Al Lopez) of Estrada to the pitching staff and of Gentile and Robinson as reserve infielders. But, just prior to a break for All-Star games in Kansas City’s Municipal Stadium and at Yankee Stadium, the club fell four games behind and into fourth place by losing five straight home games—two to the Yankees and three to the Washington Senators.

One month later, on August 13, the Orioles and Yankees were tied for first, but the O’s trailed the Bombers by four percentage points following an eight-game winning streak. But on the heels of that encouraging stretch, the Birds lost four in a row (including two one-run defeats in the “House that Ruth Built”) and fell to third place, two and a half games behind the Yankees.

All that came before would be merely a prelude to the pressurized circumstances and intense emotional swings that would lie ahead in September. The real drama began on September 2 with the first of three Oriole wins over the Yankees in Baltimore, as Pappas out-pitched veteran Whitey Ford to assure a 5–0 victory. Jack Fisher matched Pappas’s performance the next day, scattering seven hits and posting another shutout as Robinson drove in both runs (one with a homer) in a 2–0 victory. Then, in the finale, Estrada and Wilhelm combined to post a 6–2 win. With these victories, and with the four wins over the Chicago White Sox and Cleveland Indians that preceded them, the Orioles again climbed into the league lead.

If the reality of the pennant race had not registered with the team previously, the Orioles were aware of the circumstances when they took the field in that key series with the Yanks. Under a bright spotlight and before a total of 114,604 fans, however, the club withstood every challenge in a very impressive manner. At the close of play on Labor Day—after a 3–1 win over the Senators at Washington’s Griffith Stadium in which Brown pitched a three-hitter and struck out 11—the Orioles led the Yankees by one game and the White Sox by four.

The success in New York was not sustained. Baltimore had fallen into second place by September 10 after losing three of four games. Tension increased as a final, four-game series with the Yankees approached. Recent results did not bode well for the Orioles: the fellows in pinstripes had won seven of 11 games since leaving Baltimore nearly two weeks before, while the Birds dropped five of nine during that time frame.

When the series began in the “Big Apple” on September 16, the two teams were separated in the standings by a percentage differential of .001. Either team would gain an obvious advantage by taking three of the four games, and a sweep would place the losing club at a considerable disadvantage for the rest of the season. At this time and in arguably baseball’s most majestic setting, the “experience factor” finally surfaced. Whitey Ford got the best of Steve Barber by a 4–2 score in the opener, and the Yankees proceeded to take the three other games by margins of 5–3, 7–3, and 2–0. A crowd of 53,876 witnessed a Sunday doubleheader that featured the final head-to-head match-ups of the teams in 1960, observing a group of Orioles who competed well but were ultimately unable to make the “big play.” Richards would admit that his players were “out-pitched, out-hit, out-fielded, and (the Yankees) got all the breaks.” And Casey Stengel was apparently linking impatience on the part of the Birds to their youth when he asked reporters at the conclusion of the series, “Did you notice they didn’t get many bases-on-balls?” Stengel went on to say that
the Baltimore club “swung at anything.” (The Orioles received ten bases-on-balls in the four games, while the Yankees strolled to first base 19 times.)

The Yankees had at last taken control of the pennant race with only eleven games left on their schedule, and they locked up the flag by winning every one of those remaining contests. Nearly 50 years later, record books fail to indicate how competitive the Orioles were for most of the 1960 season, simply stating that the Yankees captured the American League flag by eight games.

The Orioles of 1960 deserve to be recalled in a more favorable light than as a team that lost a pennant by such a margin. Their winning percentages were impressive both at home (.571) and on the road (.584), and they won 64 percent of their one-run games. After suffering severe late-season disappointment from the devastating losses in New York and falling—with the loss of the second game of the September 18 double-header—into a tie for second place with the White Sox, they rebounded to win six of nine remaining games to snatch the runner-up spot from Chicago. (The Chisox’ record was 4–5 after September 18.)

Notable individual feats were achieved during the season by veterans and young players alike. Not to be outdone by the experienced Skinny Brown’s one-hitter against the Yankees in Memorial Stadium on June 1, Steve Barber registered a similar result on the same field against Kansas City on July 28. (Both bids for no-hitters were spoiled by current or former Yankees: Mickey Mantle’s home run was the only hit off of Brown, and Hank Bauer’s single for the Athletics marred Barber’s effort.) And, while former Yankee Gene Woodling hit .283 at the age of 38, fresh-faced Jack Fisher did not allow a run over 29 2/3 innings from late August through mid-September.

How should the Orioles’ 1960 season be summarized? The Birds won more often than they lost against every team in the league except the Yankees and the fifth-place Senators. (They compiled a record of 11–11 against the Nats.) The outcomes of games against the Yanks were actually predictable despite a reasonable division of victories: the Orioles won nine of 22 games, but their only win in Yankee Stadium was posted on the day that Courtney first used the oversized catcher’s mitt. Regardless, as significant as those games against New York were, it is important to note that, while the Yankees won four more games than the Orioles in head-to-head competition, New York won the pennant by eight games. The season consisted of much more than the showdowns in Memorial Stadium and the Bronx.

Why did the Orioles fail to win the pennant after coming so close? Lack of experience was undoubtedly a factor in the crucial closing series with Yankees. So
was the general lack of offensive production by outfielders, and especially a lack of power from the fly-chasers. (Brandt, Woodling, Pilarcik, and Stephens combined for only 35 home runs—a number that was surpassed by the three most active outfielders on every other team in the league except last-place Kansas City.) And, given the team’s lack of collective power and the fact that the dimensions of Memorial Stadium were not conducive to a strategy built around the long ball, one may conclude that the Birds should have been more aggressive on the base paths and that Richards should have been more faithful to tactics that might have generated runs in small batches. (Their 37 stolen bases equaled the number swiped by the hard-hitting Yankees and exceeded only the totals of the Red Sox and Athletics; their 72 sacrifice hits placed them seventh in the league in that category.)

The 1960 season remains significant to Baltimore’s baseball history not only because it produced excitement at the time and memories decades later. It also provided evidence that a franchise that had lingered in the second division for many years was finally prepared to contend for pennants. And, by an interesting coincidence, this significant period of transition to a higher competitive level occurred six years before a world championship would be celebrated along the Chesapeake Bay—in 1966! ■

Sources
Books

Periodicals and Websites
1966 Baseball Register (The Sporting News).
1969 Baseball Dope Book (The Sporting News)
Retrosheet
Sports Illustrated: 11 April 1960
Sports Illustrated: 10 April 1961
The Sporting News
Sport Scope Magazine (summer 1960)
Sports Forecast (May 1960)
HOMERS IN WASHINGTON BALLPARKS

SWAMPoodle GROUNDS
First HR: George Wood, 29 April 1886, Phillies
Last HR: Hardy Richardson, 21 Sept 1889, Beaneaters
Total hit in park: 137
Visitors
King Kelly 4
Danny Richardson 4
Jim Fogarty 3
Buck Ewing 3
Home
Billy O'Brien 19
Paul Hines 11
Ed Daily 7
Total
Billy O'Brien 19
Paul Hines 13
Ed Daily 8
Sam Wise 5
John Morrill 4
King Kelly 4
Danny Richardson 4

BOUNDARY FIELD
First HR: Deacon McGuire, 18 April 1891, Senators
Last HR: Tom O'Brien, 14 Oct 1899, Giants
Total hit in park: 392
Visitors
Ed Delahanty 6
Joe Kelley 5
Hugh Duffy 4
Herman Long 4
Jimmy Ryan 4
Ed McKeen 4
Fred Clarke 4
Jake Beckley 4
Home
Bill Joyce 21
Deacon McGuire 19
Kip Selbach 19
Buck Freeman 19
Charlie Abbey 16
Total
Bill Joyce 22
Kip Selbach 20
Deacon McGuire 19
Buck Freeman 19
Charlie Abbey 16

AMERICAN LEAGUE PARK I
First HR: Frank Foutz, 30 April 1901, Orioles
Last HR: Billy Sullivan, 26 Sept 1903, White Sox
Total hit in park: 166
Visitors
Nap Lajoie 8
Socks Seybold 7
Bill Bradley 6
Jimmy Collins 4
Jimmy Williams 4
Hobe Ferris 4
Home
Jimmy Ryan 13
Boileryard Clarke 9
Ed Delahanty 9
Bill Keister 7
Bill Coughlin 6
Mike Grady 6
Total
Jimmy Ryan 13
Boileryard Clarke 9
Ed Delahanty 9
Nap Lajoie 8
Bill Keister 7
Socks Seybold 7

GRIFFITH STADIUM
First HR: Eddie Collins, 6 May 1911, Athletics
Last HR: Billy Bryan, 17 Sept 1961, Athletics
Total hit in park: 2,126
Visitors
Babe Ruth 34
Joe DiMaggio 30
Mickey Mantle 29
Jimmie Foxx 27
Rocky Colavito 24
Home
Jim Lemon 88
Roy Sievers 80
Harmon Killebrew 39
Mickey Vernon 32
Goose Goslin 31
Total
Roy Sievers 91
Jim Lemon 88
Harmon Killebrew 41
Goose Goslin 38
Mickey Vernon 34
Babe Ruth 34
**ROBERT F. KENNEDY STADIUM**

First HR: Bob Johnson, 9 April 1962, Senators
Last HR: Chase Utley, 22 Sept 2007, Phillies
Total hit in park: 1,733

Visitors
- Harmon Killebrew: 25
- Boog Powell: 22
- Willie Horton: 14
- Bob Allison: 13
- Leon Wagner: 13
- Norm Cash: 13
- Jim Northrup: 13

Home
- Frank Howard: 116
- Don Lock: 51
- Ken McMullen: 46
- Mike Epstein: 35
- Jim King: 32

Total
- Frank Howard: 116
- Don Lock: 51
- Ken McMullen: 47
- Mike Epstein: 35
- Jim King: 32

**NATIONALS PARK (2008)**

First HR: Chipper Jones, 30 March 2008
Total hit in park: 148

Visitors
- Chipper Jones: 4
- Dan Uggla: 4
- Ryan Howard: 4
- Carlos Beltran: 3
- Jose Bautista: 3
- Brian Schneider: 3

Home
- Ryan Zimmerman: 7
- Ronnie Belliard: 7
- Lastings Milledge: 7
- Elijah Dukes: 7
- Cristian Guzman: 4
- Aaron Boone: 4
- Ronnie Belliard: 4

Total
- Ryan Zimmerman: 7
- Ronnie Belliard: 7
- Lastings Milledge: 7
- Elijah Dukes: 7
- Cristian Guzman: 4
- Aaron Boone: 4
- Ronnie Belliard: 4
- Chipper Jones: 4
- Dan Uggla: 4
- Ryan Howard: 4

**HOMERS BY WASHINGTON TEAMS**

### NATIONALS/SENATORS (1901–1960)

**First HR:** Billy Clingman, 27 April 1901
**Last HR:** Bob Allison, 28 Sept 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batter</th>
<th>HR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roy Sievers</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Lemon</td>
<td>144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goose Goslin</td>
<td>127</td>
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<td>Mickey Vernon</td>
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<td>Eddie Yost</td>
<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmon Killebrew</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td>Joe Judge</td>
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<td>Buddy Lewis</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Stan Spence</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Joe Kuhel</td>
<td>5</td>
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### MOST FOR TEAM, BATTER (CAREER)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batter</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank Howard</td>
<td>1969 48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don Lock</td>
<td>1968 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Howard</td>
<td>1970 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Epstein</td>
<td>1967 36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NATIONALS (2005–2008)

First HR: Terrmel Sledge, 4 April 2005
Total: 521
Home: 219
Away: 302

### MOST FOR TEAM, BATTER (SEASON)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batter</th>
<th>Year HR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfonso Soriano</td>
<td>2006 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Johnson</td>
<td>2005 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Church</td>
<td>2006 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Guillen</td>
<td>2007 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WASHINGTON NATIONALS (2005–2008)**

First HR: Terrmel Sledge, 4 April 2005
Total hit in park: 521

Visitors
- Chipper Jones: 4
- Dan Uggla: 4
- Ryan Howard: 4
- Carlos Beltran: 3
- Jose Bautista: 3
- Brian Schneider: 3

Home
- Ryan Zimmerman: 7
- Ronnie Belliard: 7
- Lastings Milledge: 7
- Elijah Dukes: 7
- Cristian Guzman: 4
- Aaron Boone: 4
- Ronnie Belliard: 4
- Chipper Jones: 4
- Dan Uggla: 4
- Ryan Howard: 4

Total
- Ryan Zimmerman: 7
- Ronnie Belliard: 7
- Lastings Milledge: 7
- Elijah Dukes: 7
- Cristian Guzman: 4
- Aaron Boone: 4
- Ronnie Belliard: 4
- Chipper Jones: 4
- Dan Uggla: 4
- Ryan Howard: 4

**MUST FOR TEAM, BATTER (SEASON)**

<table>
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<td>Alfonso Soriano</td>
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<td>2006 34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jose Guillen</td>
<td>2007 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the owner of the Washington Senators, Clark C. Griffith occasionally visited the White House. Sometimes during the early 1950s, Griffith brought along a guest.

“It was a tradition every spring,” said Clark Griffith, a great-nephew of Clark C. Griffith, “to present the president an annual pass to our grounds [Griffith Stadium]. Several times he took me along. I got to meet Truman and Eisenhower.

“The most memorable time, I was probably around ten years old, we were in the Oval Office, [and] I took a bottle opener off the president’s desk. President Truman saw me take it. He told me that I could keep it.”

More than fifty years later, the bottle opener sits on Griffith’s desk in his Minneapolis office. The bottle opener is just one memento for Griffith, who was exposed to the family business of baseball as a teenager in the nation’s capitol.

At an early age Griffith, who was born in 1941, talked baseball with a great-uncle—his namesake, Clark C.—and an uncle, Joe Cronin, who are now in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and two other uncles, Sherry Robertson and Joe Haynes, who also played major-league baseball. Griffith’s father, Calvin, took over running the Senators for Clark C. Griffith.

“The thing is, [you] certainly grew accustomed to talking baseball,” recalled Griffith. “You were expected to have a sufficient knowledge of baseball. The way you watch the game changes. Sitting with Hall of Fame players, you watch the game with a new intensity. You watch every game that way.”

In a family of baseball players, Griffith gives a lot of credit to his mother for his knowledge of the game.

“My mother [Natalie] had grown up going to [minor-league] games in Charlotte with her father,” said Griffith. “She had a faultless ability to evaluate players.”

Griffith’s mother also made sure that young Clark Griffith got to know his great-uncle, Clark C., before the man died in 1955, less than a month shy of his eighty-sixth birthday.

“I was fourteen, a freshman in high school, when he died,” said Griffith. “My mother, in her infinite wisdom, took me to his house to visit him. I’d sit on a sofa, and he’d sit in his big chair. He told about his life in Missouri and on the frontier in the 1870s [Clark C. Griffith was born in Clear Creek, Missouri, in 1869]. He had met Jesse James as a kid. He took care of Jesse’s horse. Jesse had dinner at his house. Growing up in Missouri, he had to shoot his breakfast a lot.

“He talked about Montana [Clark C. Griffith and his brother owned a ranch there] and riding horses and hunting. I have a rifle—an 1894 Winchester—mounted in my office that was his.”

Clark C. Griffith had been a successful pitcher in the National League in the 1890s and played a big role in the formation of the American League in 1900. In 1912, he became a minority owner of the Senators.
“He once threw 353 innings [for the Chicago Cubs, called the Colts back then, in 1895] and he was a big union guy,” said Griffith. “The Major League Baseball Players Association once told me that they accepted me because I was a descendant of a union organizer.”

Griffith’s uncles all shared their baseball knowledge and experiences with him.

“All four knew it [baseball] in subtle ways,” said Griffith. “I used to sit with Clark at games, I was maybe ten years old. He’d have a big stogie in his mouth. He’d say to me, ‘the third baseman just moved, why did he move?’ What I learned was that he moved according to the situation and you have to pay attention to these things. To this day, when I watch a game, I watch several players at a time. That’s what you’re supposed to do.

“Joe Cronin liked to talk strategy of hitting. He had a .301 lifetime batting average [in a major-league career that lasted from 1926 to 1945]. He talked about pitchers tipping off pitches and trying to pick off signs. He’d give you a running commentary about how the situation changed on every pitch.

“Sherry was a good ballplayer. [He spent ten years in the major leagues.] He always liked to tell me the story about the time he almost hit a third home run in a game at Fenway.” On August 18, 1950, Robertson hit two home runs—the only two he hit that year and, as it turned out, the last of his career.

“Joe Haynes liked to talk about pitching,” Griffith continued. Haynes won 76 games in a 14-year major-league career. “But he’d also want to talk about the time he hit a home run.”

By the time he was fourteen, in 1955, Griffith had started working in concessions at Senators home games.

“I loved baseball,” said Griffith. “It was a time in my life where I was focused on school and academics, social life and going to games in the summer.”

Griffith also played baseball. One American Legion game is still memorable for Griffith.

“In the late ’50s, 1958 or 1959, we played an American Legion game on a field on the Ellipse. There were four baseball fields on the Ellipse. There were probably 5,000 people watching our game. They were lined six-deep all around the field. The game ended at dusk. After the game ended we went to the Senators game and there was nobody there. One guy, who had been at both games, told me there were people at the legion game,” said Griffith.

Griffith fondly remembers being around Griffith Stadium and the team in the late 1950s.

“Sherry ran the minor leagues,” said Griffith. “He took over for Ossie Bluege [who had spent 18 years in the major leagues, exclusively with Washington], who was better as an accountant. The team always had great relationships with its scouts. We developed players like Harmon Killebrew, Jim Kaat, Zoilo Versalles, and had pretty good teams by the late 1950s.”

The Senators’ final season in Washington was in 1960. In October of 1960, Calvin Griffith announced he was moving the franchise to Minnesota. Washington was quickly given an expansion team, which began play in 1961.

“When old Clark was in charge,” said Griffith, “baseball was a small business. The stadium that changed everything was County Stadium in Milwaukee. It changed everything [when it opened in 1953]. It was a big place. It was like the HMS Dreadnought, the first real battleship. Everything changed after that.”

As the Senators were leaving Washington for Minnesota, Griffith went off to college at Dartmouth. After college, Griffith worked for his father and the Minnesota Twins. Today, Griffith, a lawyer who works in business law, is still connected to baseball as the commissioner of the independent Northern League.

Sources
Interview with Clark Griffith, September 2008.
The Baseball Biography Project, SABR.
In 1969, his first season as manager of the Washington Senators, Ted Williams worked wonders. He gave instant celebrity status to a team formerly mocked and ignored, even in its own city. With essentially the same roster as the 1968 team that finished 65–96, the worst record in Major League Baseball, Williams’ Senators won 86 games in 1969. Only the world-champion New York Mets (73–89 to 100–62) showed greater improvement in the standings that season.¹

Williams shook his Washington club out of the doldrums. The 86 victories marked the best record for a Washington baseball team since 1945. For the magic he worked during his first season in the nation’s capital, the Associated Press named Williams the 1969 American League Manager of the Year.

Under Williams, the team improved in nearly every statistical measure. The 1968 club had an on-base-plus-slugging percentage (OPS) of .623, 14 points below the league average. In 1969, Senators batters had an OPS of .708, 18 points above the league’s .690. The Senators drew 630 walks in 1969, compared to 454 the previous season. Even with the rule changes that lowered the pitcher’s mound and tightened the strike zone—and the addition of the expansion Seattle Pilots and Kansas City Royals—the Senators showed an astounding improvement of 176 free passes, more than one per game.

Williams understood the power of the walk. The pitchers improved under Williams as well. They listened to his daily spring-training sermons on hitting and used that knowledge against their American League opponents. In 1968, the Senators ERA of 3.64 was 66 points above the league average (2.98). The next season, Washington’s pitchers reduced their ERA to 3.49, 14 points below the rest of the AL (3.63).²

Relief pitcher Casey Cox explained how Williams helped him to outsmart hitters. “If you turn around everything he’s talking about hitting, if you can go 180 degrees, well you’re taking advantage of what he’s saying against the hitters. That’s the way I looked at it,” Cox said.³

Williams expressed his opinion of his 1969 team in the 1988 edition of his autobiography, My Turn at Bat. Yet few know what his players thought of their manager. A legendary, yet sometimes polarizing, figure, the men Williams led held a wide range of views about the Splendid Splinter. Some befriended Williams, others avoided him. Some thought him a genius, others a bad manager. Some felt he was a masterful communicator, others an ineffective leader. Some felt he was the world’s best hitting coach. Others believed his philosophies failed to work unless you possessed his unparalleled abilities. All enjoyed his enthusiasm—until it waned, when the team failed to repeat its fine 1969 performance.

Four men associated with Williams’s first team—outfielder Brant “Bruno” Alyea, catcher Jim French, pitcher Bob Humphreys, and radio broadcaster Ron Menchine—remember the friendships they forged with Williams. Alyea said, “Ted was a wonderful man. He took a liking to me and we talked on the planes a lot. He’d find me and say, ‘Come on over and sit down next to me, I want to talk to you.’”

“We’d talk about hitting. We’d talk about the future. We’d talk about clothes. We would talk about everything. But one thing Ted never talked about was his days in the war as a pilot.”⁴

Unlike most players on the 1969 Senators, who respected and feared Williams too much to tease him, back-up catcher Jim French often engaged his manager in good-natured ribbing. French said, “Williams always made fun of my clothes. My retort was that he dressed like a bum—ratty sports coat, slacks and golf shirt. I always told him he must get his clothes free from Sears. He said, ‘Yep! And all my fishing gear, too.’”⁵ Williams, a longtime spokesman for Sears, received a handsome sum, as well as plenty of clothing, from the retail giant.

Humphreys, an seven-year veteran by the time Williams arrived in Washington, also felt at ease around Teddy Ballgame. “I had no problems with him,” Humphreys said. “I would rag on him and he would give it right back. He would say, ‘The only thing dumber than a pitcher is two pitchers.’”

“I would respond back to him, you hit .400, right? He would say ‘Yeah,’ like he’s proud of it.”

“I would say, I’d like to have a job where I could fail six times out of 10 and be a star. You hitters make outs seven out of 10 times and think you’re good. I’d tell him, I’d have liked to pitch to you.
“He’d reply, ‘Yeah? With the [stuff] you got I might have hit .600.’”

Menchine’s relationship with Williams began in spring training, 1969. As a first-year broadcaster, he was the junior member of the team headed by Shelby Whitfield, a club employee owner Bob Short dubbed “the Voice of the Senators.” Menchine interviewed Williams often and built a rapport with him. He said, “Ted was really a very easy guy to get along with, but he had a short fuse. So you knew when to stay away from him. You used discretion, let’s put it that way.”

In contrast to those who befriended Williams, pitchers Darold Knowles and Dick Bosman respected their manager, but felt suspicious of his disdain for their ilk. Knowles said, “I say this with the greatest respect, he was probably the poorest manager I ever played for. I didn’t think he handled pitchers very well. He knew hitting extremely well and he felt like he knew pitching, but he knew [it] from the hitters’ standpoint. I don’t think when he first managed he understood the aspects of rest, that [you] can’t pitch a guy every day, and how to use pitchers. But he got better as he went along and [others] said he did learn to handle pitchers, so I think that’s a tribute to him.”

Dick Bosman enjoyed his breakout year as a pitcher in 1969, compiling a 14–5 record. He gleaned tremendous knowledge from Williams. He said, “Most of what I know and have learned about the mental part of pitching, the cat and mouse game, so to speak, between the pitcher and the hitter, is what I’ve learned from Ted.”

He felt a bit shortchanged, however, by Williams’ reluctance to help him and the other pitchers improve their hitting. “If we would have had the chance to spend more time with Ted in talking about hitting and the mechanics of swinging the bat, I think a lot of us would have been a little bit better hitters. But, while he would talk to you about pitching, he kind of considered us non-athletes. We were banished to the back field to bunt and field ground balls while he spent hours and hours with the guys hitting on the other field in spring training. I’m not faulting him for that. It was kind of wishful thinking more than anything,” Bosman said.

The men Williams led on the 1969 Senators also held contrasting views on his managerial abilities. Utility player Hank Allen felt Williams displayed exemplary leadership. He said, “His approach in dealing with people would have been equivalent to anybody in any corporation today that made them successful.”

Senators star Frank Howard echoed Allen’s opinion. Howard remarked, “Ted Williams doesn’t show any partiality. I don’t care whether you’re hitting 45 home runs for him or you’re only hitting five. He’s going to treat you the way you should be treated. He’s going to treat you the way that you treat him. If you show him respect and you’re busting your [butt], shoot, Ted Williams will never say a thing to you. He’ll admire you.”

Allen felt Williams communicated poorly with him. “Once when I was hot,” Allen said, “I expected to play. I didn’t expect not to be in the line-up. But then I didn’t get to take batting practice with the regulars. Ted was late getting the line-up in and he decided to play Lenny Randle at second base. It just about drove me crazy, things like that. Not getting to play for no reason.”

Senators’ centerfielder Del Unser felt that Williams’ passion for managing waned somewhat after the 1969 season. He said, “I think after a while coaching there—because he was talked into it to begin with by Bob Short—he wasn’t as excited about it. [In 1970 and ’71] we were a bad club. Then [Short] made the deal for McLain and he was kind of a disruptive influence, trying to turn a lot of players against Ted. Some of the chemistry, the craziness, the fun was gone. So were some of Ted’s instinctive moves. And not winning. I think he just got tired of it a little bit.”

Most of the 1969 Senators credit Williams for their marked improvement in hitting and getting on base that season. They note how Williams emphasized the mental aspects of hitting, how to outthink and prepare better than the opposing pitcher. Unser, who improved his OPS from .560 in 1968 to .731 in 1969, recalled Williams’ rapid-fire instructions.
Unser said, “He always liked to ask guys, ‘What pitch is important for the count? If you’ve never seen this pitcher before and he starts you off with a curveball, what are you going to look for next pitch? You’ve never seen this guy before. Now, what are you going to look for next pitch? He missed with his curveball. Now, is he going to throw you a fastball? You got to look for the curveball. That’s the only pitch you’ve seen, right?’

“He imparted so much knowledge, directly and indirectly. Later, I became a hitting coach and I used a lot of his theories.”

Williams transformed Howard’s approach to hitting as well. Howard improved his OPS by 86 points from 1968 to 1969 (.890 to .976). Howard said Williams helped him discover a hitting epiphany during spring training. “He took a completely undisciplined hitter with an enormous strike zone and tightened the strike zone up. I went from 54 walks to 132 walks in two years without it taking my aggressiveness away. It made me more disciplined at the plate. My value to the ball club went up. I scored runs. I drove in runs and my on-base percentage went up.”

Williams proved he could work with singles hitters as well as sluggers by the transformation he wrought in Senators shortstop Ed Brinkman. A notoriously weak hitter, Brinkman never had a batting average above .229, until Williams arrived. Using an altered approach where he attempted to hit line drives and grounders instead of home runs, Brinkman raised his batting average to a career-high .266.

Brinkman said that Williams’ persistence remade him as a hitter. “He didn’t do a lot with me physically. It was all mental with me. I was a little guy and he tried to get me to hit the ball line drive down all the time. He’d be all over me, ‘Hit the ball line drive down, line drive down.’

“It was constant. He was always around the cage and you couldn’t mess around. A lot of times during [batting practice] we used to goof off a little bit, but when Ted was around the cage, you didn’t do that. He was strictly business around the hitting cage.”

The late Arthur Lee Maye, who joined the Senators via a trade with the Cleveland Indians in June 1969, said, “Ted would talk about hitting all night. Ted was a student of hitting. He studied the pitchers. He studied the ball. He tried to keep the edge on his side.”

McMullen argued that Williams failed to understand that his players lacked his talent and stature with the umpires. “He would always tell us to take the first pitch, but, like Frank Howard said, that’s fine for Ted Williams, he didn’t get too many called strikes. That approach might not work for mere mortals.

“Ted did get us to think a lot more about who we were facing and our approach to hitting. Ted would say, ‘You got a good swing.’ He instilled confidence.”

The 1969 Senators agreed Williams possessed an uncanny ability to motivate and inspire. Knowles said, “He was a guy I couldn’t wait to get to the ballpark to listen to. He was the most interesting, charismatic man I’ve ever been around.”

Howard echoed those sentiments. “I’ve met a lot of great individuals in my lifetime. But, I’m going to tell you, Ted Williams is his own man. He’s very charismatic. He’s electric. I don’t care whether it’s at a ballpark, a banquet hall, or wherever it is, he’s going to light that room up.”

With his strong, larger-than-life personality and ironclad opinions, Ted Williams made it impossible for others to stay neutral about him. Some remember him fondly, others would rather forget him. Yet, in 1969, Williams inspired a team that knew only losing to play the best baseball Washington had witnessed in the last forty years.


Notes
3. Author’s interview with Casey Cox, 7 November 1998.
5. Author’s interview with Jim French, 23 May 2007.
6. Author’s interview with Bob Humphreys, 6 June 2007.
7. Author’s interview with Ron Menchine, February 2005.
10. Author’s interview with Hank Allen, 14 November 1998.
11. Author’s interview with Frank Howard, 9 February 1999.
15. Palmer and Gillette, 675.
17. Palmer and Gillette, 315.
19. Palmer and Gillette, 81.
22. Author’s interview with Arthur Lee Maye, 18 November 1998.
23. Interview with McMullen, 4 January 2007.
HAVE YOU ever wondered why Willie McCovey and ten other Padres were identified on their 1974 Topps cards as “Washington National League”?

The history of the American League in Washington was not among the more glamorous chapters in baseball. In 71 seasons, two franchises called the Senators combined for only three American League pennants and only one World Series championship, in 1924. By contrast, the original American League Senators, who moved to Minneapolis–St. Paul in 1960, ended 24 of 60 seasons in seventh or eighth place. Only once, in 1946, did either Washington franchise draw better than one million spectators. As elected representatives and government officials comprised a fair representation of the fans at Griffith and RFK stadiums, there were likely at least as many cheering for the visiting teams. An expansion franchise was awarded to Washington in 1961, and after eight second-division finishes, the Senators showed flashes of brilliance in 1969 by winning 86 games for new manager Ted Williams. Earlier that year, the team was sold for $9 million to Minneapolis hotelier and Democratic National Committee treasurer Robert Short. The 1969 Senators proved to be a one-year wonder, returning in 1970 to their habitual doormat as “first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League.” Despite high-profile trades, which brought Curt Flood and Denny McLain to the District of Columbia in 1971, the Senators finished 63–96. Only the presence of the Cleveland Indians spared them last place in the American League East.

High ticket prices to see a mediocre team, and an unsafe neighbourhood, kept fans away to augment the losses on Short’s financial statements. The result—a September announcement that Short was moving the Senators to the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex. Washington fans saved their worst for September 30, the final American League game played in Washington, when unruly behavior caused umpire James Honochick to forfeit a 7–5 lead to the visiting New York Yankees.

The city of Washington and its business leaders spent the next 33 years courting existing and expansion franchises to return Major League Baseball to the nation’s capital. Before the American League approved a bid to dispatch the Senators to Texas, it received a counteroffer from supermarket magnate Joseph Danzansky. Although he pledged to keep the Senators in Washington, his offer of $8.4 million was deemed “insufficient immediately” by American League owners and baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn. Also in 1971, Cleveland restaurateur Vernon Stouffer announced that he was selling the Indians. Had Danzansky’s bid succeeded, he would have transferred the Indians to Washington before Opening Day in 1972. However, the American League chose to approve a sale to lawyer Nicholas Mileti, who kept the team in Cleveland.

Commissioner Kuhn devised a plan in 1975 that would see every major-league team play two home games at RFK Stadium, but it didn’t happen. When the American League decided to expand in 1976, Washington was one of the finalists slated to join Seattle before junior-circuit owners voted on Toronto.
Edward Bennett Williams purchased the Baltimore Orioles in 1979, rumours persisted that the noted criminal lawyer would move the team to Washington until taxpayers voted in 1988 to approve the construction of a new stadium at Camden Yards. Professional baseball did return to the Washington area in 1984 with the arrival of the Prince William Pirates of the Carolina League. Minor-league clubs were subsequently awarded to the Maryland communities of Frederick and Bowie. When the Nationals played their first game in 2005, they ended a 106-year hiatus of National League baseball in Washington. However, the San Diego Padres in 1974 were the most likely candidate to relocate to the District of Columbia. During that summer of streaking, odd/even gasoline rationing, and a presidential resignation, Washington nearly fielded a team featuring Willie McCovey and Dave Winfield in its lineup and a pitching rotation bolstered by Randy Jones. To borrow a Bob Prince aphorism, they missed “by a gnat’s eyelash.”

The San Diego Padres initially capitalized on the city’s proud history as a Pacific Coast League franchise by sweeping the Houston Astros in its first three games. As the Padres sat atop the National League West, Coach George “Sparky” Anderson thought the Padres could play the 1969 season undefeated. Batting instructor Wally Moon reminded Anderson that “come August, we’ll be so far out, a search party couldn’t find us.” Moon was correct. Over the ensuing five years the Padres never won more than 63 games, finished within 28½ games of the divisional lead, escaped last place, or drew even one million fans. Tying the Montreal Expos for the worst National League record in 1969, at 52–110, the Padres were awarded first choice in the June 1970 amateur draft, and selected Mike Ivie, a young catcher from Atlanta. After turning professional, however, Ivie developed a mental block behind the plate. He had no trouble making the throw to third base or throwing out base runners at second, and he was equally adept at making the throw to first base, but what he couldn’t accomplish was throwing the ball back to the pitcher. Rick Monday compared Ivie’s catching skills to “a $40 million airport with a $30 control tower.”

Whenever the cellar-dwelling Padres developed clever promotions, it backfired. When the San Francisco Giants visited for a weekend series in September 1969, future Hall of Famer Willie Mays was sitting on 599 lifetime home runs. Giants’ manager Clyde King told Padres president E. J. “Buzzie” Bavasi that Mays would rest the first game, on a Monday night. The Padres’ front office decided to open the left-field bleachers for the second game of the series, offering a new Chevrolet to any fan lucky enough to catch Mays’ 600th home run. More than 1,200 tickets had already been sold when King called on Mays to pinch-hit in the top of the ninth on Monday. Facing Mike Corkins, Mays hit his 600th home run into a sea of empty bleachers. Promotion ruined.

The Padres were owned by banking magnate C. Arnholt Smith. The son of a German baker, Smith was born in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1899, and was raised in San Diego. Quitting school at age 15, he rose up the ranks from messenger and grocery clerk to purchase a controlling interest in the United States National Bank in 1933. Over the next two decades, Smith’s empire grew to include the Westgate Hotel and other real-estate properties, transportation companies, silver mines, and a tuna cannery. The man known as “Mr. San Diego” bought the Padres, then a Pacific Coast League franchise, in 1955 for $30,000. When the National League awarded an expansion franchise to San Diego in 1968, Smith produced the $10 million fee to purchase the big-league club. As a major-league owner, he was unwilling to spend the money neces-
sary to fund player development.

After the Irvie fiasco, the Padres drafted infield prospect Doug DeCinces. Potentially an anchor at third base for years to come, DeCinces asked for a $6,000 bonus to finance his college. When the Padres could offer only $4,000, DeCinces signed with the Baltimore Orioles. In one of the last interviews conducted before he died, Bavasi blamed a lack of television revenue as a source of the Padres’ cash flow problems. “From 1969 to 1971, we were never featured on Game of the Week, so we never received any TV revenue.” At one point, San Diego management asked its players to wait until Monday to cash the checks they received on Friday. The Padres were able to sign bona fide prospects like Dave Winfield by 1973, but by then, the writing was on the wall.

One might wonder how a successful businessman such as C. Arnholt Smith was unable to pay his players and lose a star like Doug DeCinces over a $2,000 differential. In the spring, the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency forced Smith to step down as the chairman of the U.S. National Bank. At the time, Smith owned 28 percent of the 200,000 shares outstanding. According to Time magazine, the bank loaned greater than the legally permissible 10 percent of its assets to companies controlled by one individual, who happened to be C. Arnholt Smith. Meanwhile, the U.S. National Bank showed losses and uncollectible loans of $143 million, a majority of which were represented by bad debts on Smith’s companies. Smith also owed the Internal Revenue Service over $22.8 million in unpaid taxes, plus interest. A staunch Republican and personal friend of Richard M. Nixon, Smith was also being investigated for illegal contributions to the President’s 1972 campaign. The National League made it perfectly clear that they wanted no part of C. Arnholt Smith, and after the U.S. National Bank declared insolvency, he was forced to sell the Padres. In 1979, he was convicted of tax invasion and grand theft, and served seven months of a one-year sentence. He died in 1996, at the age of ninety-seven.

On May 27, 1973, Joseph Danzansky presented an offer of $12.5 million, which Smith accepted. Danzansky paid a $100,000 deposit in exchange for a pledge that Bavasi would not conduct any player transactions without his approval. With Danzansky installed as the de facto owner, general manager Peter Bavasi soon announced that the Padres were bound for Washington in 1974. In 2005, broadcaster Bob Chandler told reporter John Maffei, “[Bavasi] told everyone to be quiet, not to tell a soul. Of course, it was on the news that night and in the papers the next morning. Two weeks later, we were in Philadelphia and since it’s two hours from D.C., the ballpark was crawling with media.” Meanwhile, the Padres continued to pare its roster to meet its debt obligations. In order to minimize the debt, Danzansky asked Bavasi to deal pitcher Fred Norman to the Cincinnati Reds, and infielder Dave Campbell to the St. Louis Cardinals. Bavasi overruled trading pitching ace Clay Kirby, a Washington native who could be a gate attraction.

As the 1973 season progressed, San Diego baseball fans continued to display their apathy toward the Padres by drawing as few as 1,413 spectators on September 11. Washington interests were so certain of acquiring the Padres for 1974, the nickname “the Stars” was chosen. Haberdashers designed a sky-blue road uniform with “Washington” emblazoned across the chest, in red block letters. The Stars cap featured a red W, a golden star on a white peak, and a blue background (similar to the Atlanta Braves caps of the era). The Bavasis considered hiring Minnie Minoso and Frank Robinson to manage the Stars, while Topps jumped the gun on its 1974 cards by identifying several Padres as “Washington National League.” For one Padre, reality set in with a visit to the San Diego Stadium clubhouse in December of 1973.

“Everything in the office was boxed and taped shut,”
remembers Randy Jones. “I’m a Southern California guy. Grew up in Orange County, played at Chapman College. Now the team was moving across the country. I was bummed.” History has demonstrated that the Washington Stars never played an inning in the National League. Moreover, when play resumed in 1974, the Padres remained in San Diego. What happened?

As the clubhouse contents were ready to be shipped, the City of San Diego filed an $84 million lawsuit against the Padres for breaking its lease on San Diego Stadium. With Smith out of the picture, it became Buzzie Bavasi’s task to find an alternate ownership group committed to keeping the Padres in San Diego. He found one headed by Marjorie Everett, the principal stockholder in the Hollywood Park racetrack. Everett’s group, which included songwriter Burt Bacharach, matched Danzansky’s offer of $12.5 million.

Opposition to the Everett consortium was vocal among National League owners. John Galbreath of the Pirates and Joan Payson of the Mets were particularly vociferous by expressing negative feelings over Everett’s dealings in the racing industry. Other owners became suspicious when Everett’s father was tied to a political scandal in Illinois. After the Everett group announced that it would only commit itself to San Diego for “a couple of years,” National League owners rejected her bid, 8–3. Ironically, the alternative bid prompted by the lawsuit may have been enough to keep the team from moving to Washington. Danzansky refused to indemnify the lawsuit, and demanded the refund of his down payment. The ownership saga was finally resolved on January 25, 1974, when the Padres were sold to McDonald’s magnate Ray Kroc for $12.5 million.

Three decades passed before Major League Baseball returned to Washington with the transfer of the Montreal Expos. Their expansion sisters remain in San Diego to this day.

Sources
ANY SABR members have dreamed of starting up and running a baseball team. Their fantasies have run the gamut from building a ballpark, to recruiting a manager and his coaching staff, to attracting a talented group of players with the potential to play professional baseball. Bruce Adams has accomplished just that, and this article is meant to share his experience with you. This is the story of the Bethesda Big Train summer collegiate baseball team, located in Bethesda, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C.

THE INSPIRATION
Bruce Adams had held a position of prominence in Montgomery County, where Bethesda is located, for a long time before he made a move into baseball, having served on the Montgomery County Council for eight years. In 1997, he coauthored, with his wife Peggy Engel, a Fodor's travel book entitled Baseball Vacations. The book covers their experiences traveling to minor and major league towns all over the United States. That experience would serve Adams well in envisioning how a baseball entertainment package could be put together to entertain a crowd.

During the course of his travels, Adams and his family visited Oneonta, New York, to see a game played by the Yankees’ Class A affiliate. While there, his five-year-old son became engaged in conversation with some of the players, who told the boy of their summer in the Valley Baseball League in the Shenandoah Valley, not far from Washington, D.C. The Valley League presented summer collegiate baseball using wooden bats. Adams went to observe the Valley League’s New Market Rebels and decided to adopt their operating style as his model. Upon further exploration, he discovered the Clark Griffith League, which had been around the Washington, D.C., area since 1945. The Griffith League—originally named the National Capital City Junior League—also featured wooden-bat baseball played by college players from around the country. From its beginnings until 1966, the League’s games were played on the Ellipse, just behind the White House. Clark Griffith, the Washington Senators’ owner and Hall of Fame pitcher and manager, had provided considerable support to the League in the form of bats, balls, and gloves. When Griffith died in 1955, the League was renamed in his honor.

Adams realized that the Griffith League would be a natural place to enroll a new team of summer collegiate players. He spread his enthusiasm among people he knew, including John Ourisman, a top executive for a chain of local auto dealerships. Ourisman agreed to become the cofounder of the baseball organization as well as its chief fundraiser.

WHAT GROUND ZERO LOOKED LIKE
Adams envisioned using a baseball field at Cabin John Regional Park in North Bethesda, Maryland. There was a field available, but it had a very limited capacity for seating fans who wanted to watch a game. Some bleacher seats existed, as well as an ancient press box, but there was certainly no readily available ballpark, in the sense of a stadium with fan-friendly facilities. Also, at the inception of Adams’s idea of starting a team, there was no manager or coaching staff. And, of course, there was no team.

Historically, this brand of baseball had been unsuccessful in busy suburban/urban settings. Many of the minor league teams Adams had visited, and all of the successful summer college teams he researched, were located in towns that could not be considered large cities. Bethesda had a reasonably large population, and was located next door to Washington, D.C., where there would be a load of competing activities for summer entertainment. Summer collegiate baseball was virtually unknown in Montgomery County; the conventional wisdom was that a collegiate baseball team would not draw crowds in a place like Bethesda. But Adams felt that a high-quality program had a chance to be successful in Bethesda, in part because the families of the hugely popular youth baseball program in the area—Bethesda–Chevy Chase Baseball—would be a significant part of the fan base.

DEVELOPING THE BUSINESS MODEL
Bruce Adams and John Ourisman decided that the enterprise should stress the involvement of the community. The team was to be owned not by private
individuals, but by a nonprofit entity named the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club, with the spelling of “Base Ball” being a nod to the history of the game. A major purpose of the enterprise was a charitable one—to use any profits for fixing up youth ball fields in Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. As a youth baseball coach, Adams had learned that where ball fields were under the purview of school systems and parks departments, the local government often did not allocate sufficient funds to maintain the fields in satisfactory playing condition. A pressing need existed for the kind of financial assistance that a successful community ball club could offer to area youths who wanted to play baseball. Because of this charitable component of the program, the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club was granted Section 501(c)(3) status by the Internal Revenue Service.

Another goal of the club’s business model was to seek capital funding from a broad range of sources to build the ballpark and run subsequent operations. The baseball games would be presented as entertainment packages (the same as with minor-league games), so there would be revenues not only from admissions, but from concession-stand operations, souvenirs, and programs. A nightly raffle for baseball-related souvenirs would bring in additional revenues. An annual auction and dinner would be held to raise a significant amount of money to support improvements to youth ball fields. Game-night sponsorships would also bring in revenues, as would advertising in the nightly game programs and in the annual souvenir program. Summer baseball camps would be held, providing the players with paying jobs for instructing the youngsters and bringing in additional revenue for the club.

On the expenditure side of the business model, most of the labor would be performed by volunteers, keeping the number of paid positions to a minimum. In the Montgomery County school system, students are required to perform a certain number of hours of community service in order to graduate. The club’s 501(c)(3) charitable status allowed it to be registered with the school system as a preapproved provider of services, permitted to grant credit hours to students for volunteering. By attracting volunteering adults and students, the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club could staff every game with nearly 40 volunteers—not including the players, who as college athletes could not be paid.

Another goal of the business model was to provide a wide array of family entertainment. The club wanted to generate an atmosphere that would attract families and give a feeling of community. (This had been the key to the revival of minor league baseball that Bruce Adams and Peggy Engel had celebrated in their Fodor’s book.) Accordingly, the club has featured celebrities at each game, stunts between innings, a pair of mascots (a dog named Homer and a puppy named Bunt), guest singers to perform the National Anthem, and sometimes singing groups, including a barbershop chorus. The club has built a picnic pavilion where birthday parties can be held; the club provides special events to the party-goers, such as honorary first pitches for the birthday kids and the opportunity for the honorees’ friends to run out onto the field when the Big Train players are introduced. In line with the family atmosphere, the club does not permit alcohol or tobacco on the property, nor does it tolerate offensive language. To give a sense of the old-fashioned purity of the game, the ballpark has a hand-operated scoreboard modeled after the one at Ebbets Field.

INITIAL FUND-RAISING AND PARTNERSHIPS
Substantial donations were raised through personal contacts with local people of means who appreciated the benefits of community baseball. To reinforce the community spirit of the organization, John Ourisman insisted that no single family or business would dominate the fund-raising. Many fans willingly paid for their names to be placed on nameplates on the backs of the ballpark seats and on bricks in a commemorative wall erected in front of the stadium.

The Montgomery County Parks Department and Montgomery Parks Foundation entered into a partnership with the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club; as part of the agreement, the Parks Department funded new lights and an irrigation system for the field. As was the case with the preexisting field, once the ballpark was built, the new field was to be available to a variety of local amateur leagues, as well as to the Big Train collegiate team. The Parks Department now controls the scheduling for the use of the field and is responsible for maintaining the field.

Many local firms contributed their labor and materials for the construction of the ballpark and for some of the administrative operations. A concrete-construction company, Miller and Long, built the grandstand. Sandy Spring Builders built the clubhouse. Hopkins and Porter built the hand-operated scoreboard, the dugout benches, and the bullpen benches. The Floyd E. Davis Company funded the picnic pavilion. Euro-Motorcars funded the concession stand. Long and Foster Real Estate funded the souvenir shop. Numerous other construction firms also lent a hand. Lawyers at Lerch, Early, and Brewer donated their time to draft
PLANNING AND BUILDING THE BALLPARK

Peter Kirk, who as owner of the Frederick Keys, Bowie Baysox, and Delmarva Shorebirds ball clubs oversaw the construction of their ballparks, served as a significant mentor in the planning of Big Train’s ballpark. It was Peter who proposed the idea of major league-quality seats on a concrete grandstand. He then responded to numerous requests for advice on how to build a fan-friendly ballpark. Alan Sparber of AIA and Associates labored long hours as the club’s architect to produce a jewel of a ballpark; the park was to have features that conjured up thoughts of other ballparks, such as an entrance similar to that of Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, a scoreboard reminiscent of Ebbets Field, and a dark green seat and red brick motif similar to Camden Yards.

Because the field was already being used during the spring and summer baseball season, construction of a ballpark on that site would need to take place during winter and early spring. The ground-breaking occurred on December 18, 1998. By April 1999, the 606-seat grandstand was ready, and amateur teams began to play on the field. By June 4, the ballpark had been completed, with a total seating capacity of 756—including 150 seats in the bleachers—and fans were moving through its front gate to attend the first Big Train game.

It was decided to name the ballpark in memory of Shirley Povich, the noted Washington Post sports reporter. Members of the Povich family were present at the ground-breaking ceremony, and continue to make appearances at Povich Field. Povich Field is also the home of the Georgetown University baseball team.

RECRUITING MANAGEMENT OF THE TEAM

The Big Train team was named after Walter “Big Train” Johnson. Johnson, one of the first inductees into the Baseball Hall of Fame, is a revered figure in Montgomery County and throughout the baseball world. A local high school is named after him, and he lived just a couple of miles from where Povich Field was erected. He is buried in a cemetery in nearby Rockville. The first general manager of the team was Hank Thomas, Walter Johnson’s grandson. Thomas is a SABR member and authored a comprehensive biography of Johnson. Thomas and Chuck Carey coauthored an article, “The California Comet,” that appeared in Joe Wayman’s 1995 Grandstand Baseball Annual. The writers received the Macmillan-SABR Research Award for the article.

In seeking a manager, Bruce Adams wanted someone from the local area who, in addition to being qualified to lead the ball club and teach the players, would be willing to run a baseball camp so that the coaches and players would have job opportunities for the summer. The first team manager was Derek Hacopian. Hacopian had played in the Clark Griffith League for three years. He was a star at the University of Maryland, where he batted .490, hit 23 homers and 83 RBIs in 1992, and won the Atlantic Coast Conference’s Triple Crown. He spent five years playing in the minors, and performed well. He was a League All-Star three times and he batted .311 with 60 homers and 251 RBIs for his professional career. A knee injury cut short his career before he had an opportunity to make the majors.

Hacopian came to the Big Train with coaching and teaching experience. He ran the Derek Hacopian Baseball Academy in a nearby suburb, and had served as a high-school baseball coach. Once Hacopian became the team’s initial manager, he recruited the assistant coach and pitching coach.

Sal Colangelo was the initial assistant coach. His background included being an assistant coach of a varsity high-school team and an instructor at a baseball school. He was an associate scout for the Anaheim Angels. (Angels fans may recognize his last name; former Angel Mike Colangelo is Sal’s brother.) After Derek Hacopian moved on following the 2004 season, Colangelo became the manager of Big Train and remains in that position today.

The initial pitching coach was Kelton Jacobson. Jacobson pitched minor league ball for four years in the Detroit Tigers and Seattle Mariners systems.

SELECTING THE LEAGUE AND GAINING ENTRY

The Clark Griffith League was the oldest and most notable summer collegiate baseball league in the Washington, D.C., area. In 1966, after 21 years, the League moved off the Ellipse and away from the White House to Northern Virginia. In 1993, the League underwent a major upgrade by introducing wooden bats and play in professional and collegiate ballparks. However, going into 1999 there were only four teams in the League. With a solid business plan and the design for a top-notch stadium, the Big Train team was welcomed into the League as the fifth team.

The Big Train played in the Clark Griffith League for six years. After the 2004 season, the Bethesda team
collaborated with other Maryland teams and formed the Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League, leaving the Griffith League. Cal Ripken Sr. had spent a lifetime developing young baseball players, so the Ripken Foundation agreed that establishing a summer collegiate league in his name would be a suitable fit.

BUILDING EXCITEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

It takes more than assembling a team to gain a crowd of fans. People have to know about it. So the organization undertook advertising donated by the local Gazette newspapers. It set up an exhibit at the local shopping mall, put together a mailing list, and sent out brochures and the season schedule. It briefed members of the media and gained some favorable newspaper articles. And it set up a special event one evening at Walter Johnson High School to launch the team and recruit volunteers.

As John Ourisman took responsibility for recruiting the major donors who funded the lion’s share of the ballpark’s construction, Bruce Adams realized that it would be important to start developing a fan base early on. In the fall of 1998, Adams sold seat plaques for each of the 606 Camden Yards–style seats. Each family and business that bought a seat plaque also received a 1999 Inaugural Season Pass and a copy of either Adams’s Fodor’s book or Hank Thomas’s biography of his grandfather, Walter Johnson. The seat plaques sold out quickly, and Adams began selling commemorative bricks that are now displayed at the Povich Field entrance.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

It is important not only to have volunteers, but also to establish a clear understanding about the various roles. Host families are needed to house the players and coaches who do not live nearby. Game volunteers include ticket sellers, ushers, public address announcers, official scorers, scoreboard operators, scoreboard communicators (to let the operators know the ball and strike count), mascots, concession-stand operators, souvenir sellers, National Anthem singers, batkids, and general helpers with between-inning stunts, retrieval of foul balls, mascot security, and clean-up during and after the games.

In the first year, a few volunteers did double duty on some of these jobs, but in the ensuing years, the organization became more specialized in its use of volunteers. In its third season, the organization started using a volunteer coordinator and set up a more formal staffing schedule for each game. In addition, the Booster Club meets monthly to plan the operational aspects of running both the ball club and its charitable activities.

In an area attached to a large city, there are people with the talent to score games, sing in public, and announce with authority. Those are probably the most skilled of the team’s volunteer jobs. Many such people are willing to volunteer their time to offer these skills; the trick, of course, is to find them. The team uses the Big Train website, volunteer job descriptions filed with the County’s Volunteer Center, announcements during the game, and messages in the game programs to induce potential volunteers to get in contact. The team also actively makes contact with people who might be interested in volunteering and who can offer the needed skills.

THE FIRST YEAR’S TEAM

Big Train players are primarily recruited by the manager through his contacts with college coaches around the country. College coaches are always looking for their best players to get additional training during the summer and to experience high-level competition in wooden-bat leagues. The 1999 Big Train team consisted of 28 players from 22 different colleges and universities. One of them, outfielder Charlton Jimerson, went on to gain major league playing experience with the Houston Astros and Seattle Mariners. Nine other players from that team would later play professional baseball in the minor leagues.

The 28 players came from hometowns in 13 different states, with many from Maryland and Virginia that first year. Others came from distances as far as California, Florida, and Maine. As the years have rolled by and the program has become more widely known, the team has come to recruit from an even broader geographical range.

The Big Train team was successful from the outset, defeating the All-American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA) national champion Arlington Senators in its inaugural game. It finished the first half of the 1999 season in third place with an 11–9 record, merely two games behind the leaders. Big Train finished the second half of the season in second place with a 12–6 record.

After the regular season ended, Big Train competed for a berth in the National Amateur Baseball Federation (NABF) College World Series. The team won the berth and went on to win two games in the NABF World Series before being eliminated in the semifinals.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The fans have embraced Big Train baseball and constantly say how much they appreciate the family-
oriented atmosphere at its ballgames. Over the ten-year period of Bethesda Big Train’s existence, about 150,000 fans have been to Povich Field to see the games. In 2007, attendance per game averaged more than 700 for the Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate League games.

Volunteer participation has been highly successful. Every year, the team has enlisted a sufficient number of host families to house the players and coaches. Over one thousand people have worked at the games on a voluntary basis. As many as 40 volunteers staff the ballpark for many of the games.

Exciting action has occurred on the field. The team executed a triple play. Dirk Hayhurst, who is now with the Toronto Blue Jays system, struck out 18 batters in one game. Four pitchers have hurled no-hitters over the years. Adam Redd played all nine positions in one game. We hosted seven League All-Star games and two games against the U.S. Military All-Stars, as well as numerous League playoff games.

The Bethesda Community Base Ball Club has raised and dedicated around $500,000 for the improvement of youth baseball and softball fields. They built Jackie Robinson Field in the District of Columbia for the Fields of Dreams after-school program and a replica Povich Field for age-12-and-under teams right next door to Povich Field. Each year, they collect sneakers, gloves and other equipment and send them to needy kids in Manny Mota’s Campos de Sueño (Fields of Dreams) project in the Dominican Republic. In 2008, the club financed the home run fence for a new Bethesda Little League team.

During regular-season play, the team has won 256 games and lost 148, for a .634 winning percentage. In 2004, the team won the regular-season race and the championship playoffs of the Griffith League. In 2005, the team won the Ripken Senior League regular season and was co-champion of the playoffs. In 2006, the team won the regular season race.

As of June 1, 2009, five former Big Train players have played in the major leagues, including John Maine, Charlton Jimerson, Steve Schmoll, Bobby Livingston, and Dirk Hayhurst. Seventy-six of the team’s former players have appeared in the minor leagues and/or independent pro baseball. Many of those whose playing careers have ended have gone into baseball-related occupations, such as coaching in schools or baseball academies.

The Big Train experience has been integrated into the lives of the local community. At each night game the ballpark features a nonprofit organization. Representatives of the community organization are introduced during the pregame ceremony on the pitching mound. The team provides them with 100 free tickets to the game and a table near the grandstand where they may display their brochures and poster boards. Through participating in these kinds of events, the nonprofits are able to attract additional volunteers and donors. The team also donates season passes to local school auctions.

The local media have been kind to Big Train. Two magazines—the Washingtonian and Bethesda Magazine—have lauded the Big Train experience as an excellent form of entertainment for families. Marc Fisher, a columnist for the Washington Post, penned an article headlined “For Baseball that Feels Right, Try Bethesda,” and said about Big Train baseball:

In a video game world, this is as retro a summer’s eve as most kids will know, and they can’t get enough of it. . . . It makes you forget about all the politics and the money and the wrangling that have soiled the big league game. This is the real thing.

Although the operation has been successful thus far, the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club does not rest on its laurels. It uses the Booster Club, consumer surveys, and discussions with fans to uncover weaknesses that may need correction and to generate new ideas for improvements in its second decade of community baseball.

Notes
1. Baseball-reference.com credits Hacopian with 58 homers and 246 RBIs.
2. Baseball-reference.com lists the Tigers system but not Seattle-affiliated teams for Jacobson. According to their records his last year was 1997, with Kalamazoo of the independent Frontier League.
3. Hayhurst was claimed off waivers by the Toronto Blue Jays on October 6, 2008, but was released four months later before the season started, before re-signing with the Jays to a minor-league deal.