

# BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## Newsletter

Summer 2007

### Reunion XVI

Our annual fall reunion is fast approaching. Included in this newsletter is an insert with the details. Please act quickly if you'd like to attend as our capacity is limited. First come, first served. Business manager **George Altison** has been hard at work planning a memorable event. Hope to see you there!

### Ralph McLeod

Artist Ronnie Joyner once again has contributed to our newsletter wonderful portraits of two beloved members of our Boston Braves Family – **Art Johnson** and **Ralph McLeod**. We had intended for Ronnie's artwork to honor two living players who've strongly supported the BBHA from its beginnings. Unfortunately, **Ralph McLeod** passed away on April 27 after having recently suffered a stroke. He was 90 years old.

It isn't often that a hero on the baseball diamond is a hero in real life. **Ralph McLeod** was one such individual. His big league career was brief – six games in 1938 – but memorable. His first major league hit, a pinch single, was off of Paul "Daffy" Dean of the Cardinals in the first game of a doubleheader on September 21, the day the Great Hurricane of '38 struck Boston. As **Ralph** often recalled, "Part of the outfield fence blew down. They had to stop the game and make up new ground rules. Balls hit to center ended up foul in left." The second game was subsequently called off before becoming official. Overall, in seven big league at bats, he averaged .286. In 1939, **Ralph** landed in Toronto with the Maple Leafs. A future Boston Braves hero, then a Pirates prospect, **Bob Elliott**, was also on the Canadian club, playing in the outfield. After a stint with Hartford in 1940, **Ralph** was drafted into the Army and served in the infantry, seeing significant action, including the Battle of the Bulge. As he sadly reminisced, "I lost a lot of good friends." His four years, ten months and twenty days of military service kept him away from baseball for five seasons – too long to restart a career after discharge from the Army. **Ralph** joined the Quincy, MA fire department and was a firefighter until retiring in 1980.

**Ralph** remained physically active throughout his life, playing in a seniors volleyball league. He would join us every fall for our reunions, modestly shunning the limelight but always welcoming fans and autograph seekers. One of his favorite photos to sign was a spring training picture where he was sitting on the back wheel of a steamroller being "driven" by Casey Stengel with six other Bees perched on the engine's hood. **Ralph** would remark that he was the surviving member of that group.

**Ralph** left a son, daughter, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. We offer our profound sympathy to his family.

### Looking Back at a Few Diamond Memories From Nearly 60 Years Ago with **Clint Conatser** and **Tommie Ferguson**

by *Mort Bloomberg*

**Clint Conatser** was a 26 year old right hand-batting outfielder selected by the Braves from the Detroit Tigers in the Rule 5 draft in November 1947. He played in the majors two years, both of which were with Boston. 1948 was his best season. Even though he was one of seven fly chasers on the roster that year for the pennant-bound Braves, he hit .277 in 90 games and exhibited a keen eye at the plate with a .370 on-base percentage. Drafted because of his ability to patrol all three outfield slots, **Conatser** made **Danny Litwhiler** expendable and prompted a trade with the Cincinnati Reds in May, 1948 for **Marv Rickert**, who batted from the left side of the plate. **Danny** asks **Clint** the same question today whenever the two ex-ballplayers get together. "Why did you come along? If it wasn't for you I'd have a '48 World Series ring."

Since he had three options left and was beset by nagging injuries, **Clint** was returned to the minors halfway through the 1949 season. Out of baseball by 1952, he then worked as both an air-conditioning and housing contractor followed by a thirty-year career in the thoroughbred horse business.

I originally met **Clint** at a Boston Braves reunion organized in 1988 by **Dick Johnson** from the New England Sports Museum. At the time golf was the passionate sport in his life that baseball had been 40 years earlier. But he loved to go into detail about his life in the big leagues and his friendly engaging personality made it great fun to talk with him. Fast forward to 2007; nothing much has changed. Although trips to the golf course have been curtailed, he is in excellent health and enjoys spinning baseball yarns as much as I do hearing them.

**Tommie Ferguson** was a longtime successful executive with the California Angels, Milwaukee Brewers, and Philadelphia Phillies. In 1948 he shared batboy duties with **Charlie Chronopoulos** and **Frank McNulty** – a trio that became as well known in Hub postwar baseball lore as the Three Little Steam Shovels and the Three Troubadours.

I met **Tommie** at our inaugural BBHA event in 1992. He was then, as now, very likable: full of life, fun-loving, and with a great sense of

humor. I'll never forget one of his favorite expressions: "Just remember Mort, it's not the steak; it's the sizzle." But there is another side to Tommie: warm and always there to lend a helping hand. He gave me the courage to go into baseball work when I was ready to leave college teaching. If not for him, I couldn't claim to be the oldest intern in Palm Springs Angels' history.

As a result of the opportunity to spend an entire day in their company recently, I was able to relive the ups and downs of the Braves march to the 1948 pennant, discover some new facts, and gain fresh insight into men who were my childhood heroes growing up in suburban Boston. Thanks guys.

There was optimism in the spring air when the Boston Braves arrived at their new training camp in Bradenton, Florida in 1948. Billy Southworth's opening speech went something like this: "Fellas we are going to win this. We have everyone in the United States pulling for us. You can't believe the postcards, letters, and calls I get from fans of the Braves." According to Conatser, "We were legitimate contenders. We had good pitching."

A story Tommie told about Bob Keely, erstwhile bullpen coach for the Boston/Milwaukee Braves from 1946 to 1958, may have contributed to the twirlers' success. "Keely would obtain a piece of leather across the street at the Commonwealth Armory and sew it into the catcher's mitt and only use that glove warming up a pitcher before his entry into the game. The ball would smack against the pocket of the glove, sounding like a bullet – pow! He made the hurler think he was throwing aspirins. And he would yell out, 'oh boy, you got it today!!' Somebody asked Bob why he didn't tell Rawlings. Obviously, this bit of bullpen trickery was not meant to share with outsiders."

"When I played center field you could really get a line on whether the ball should be fielded and very few balls up the middle got through secondbaseman Eddie Stanky or shortstop Alvin Dark." Clint smiled as he recalled Stanky's contribution to the team. "Eddie was a feisty little guy, who would hit the catcher's glove with his bat in order to get awarded first base on catcher's interference." The Brat or Stinky Stanky (he had additional nicknames, not as G-rated), compensated for his lack of ability with other tactics he had patented to win games. Noted Ferguson, "like on the basepath he would have two fistfuls of dirt, one in each hand, which he would fling at his opponent when sliding into second base in order to break up the double play and cause a bad throw to first." Tommy Holmes was another key player in the Braves chase for the 1948 NL title. His uniform number was 1, which symbolized his place in the heart of every fan who ever sat behind him in the right-field Jury Box. Clint remembered that "Holmes had real quick hands and by flicking the bat could hit line drives to left field."

The Braves forged into first place on June 11, backing up a solid four-man rotation of Johnny Sain, Warren Spahn, Bill Voiselle, and

Vern Bickford with a deep bullpen corps of Nelson Potter, Clyde Shoun, and Bobby Hogue together with timely hitting by Bob Elliott, Holmes, Dark, and Jeff Heath among others. By August 1, they held a comfortable five game lead over the second-place New York Giants, with the Brooklyn Dodgers (6 GB) and the St. Louis Cardinals (7 GB) rounding out the rest of the first division. But the ballclub began to tread water as their record over the next 19 games (most of them at home) was only 8-11. In Clint's view, "we hadn't been playing well. We weren't demoralized, but a little bit down." Sain's loss in the opener of a twinbill against the Dodgers put the Flatbush team on top by percentage points. But Spahn fanned eight batters in the nightcap on his way to a masterful four-hit 2-1 complete game triumph which enabled the Tribesmen to regain sole possession of first place over the Dodgers and the Cardinals. Then on a Sunday afternoon before a packed house of 33,151 fans at Ebbets Field came a turning point of the season. The game began as a battle between two frontline righthanders: for the Braves 29 year old Voiselle, a native of Ninety-Six, S.C. and for the Dodgers 23 year old Rex Barney. Manager Billy Southworth decided to tinker with his starting lineup that day, so Bill Salkeld was installed behind the plate instead of Phil Masi who had caught both ends of Saturday's doubleheader and Conatser was put in center field, even though Billy generally kept Clint on the bench unless a southpaw was on the hill. The Dodgers got the game's first run but the Braves rebounded in the fourth inning to knock Barney out of the box. Earl Torgeson received a base-on-balls (something that Barney surrendered very often in his career) and scored on Elliott's triple. Heath promptly singled Mr. Team home to put the visitors from Beantown ahead 2-1. Erv Palica took over the pitching chores and Clint recalls that "Billy left me in the game." The Brooks' right-handed reliever proved very effective, as he stymied Boston's attack for the next three innings. Meanwhile, Brooklyn went ahead again in the fifth when Marv Rackley walked, stole second, and scored on Jackie Robinson's single. #42 went to third on Gene Hermanski's single. Hermanski stole second and an intentional walk to Pee Wee Reese loaded the bases and set up the apparent play-of-the-game as the Dodgers engineered a triple steal which saw Jackie slide under Voiselle's pitch to the plate (his fourth steal of home in '48). The Dodgers swiped five bases that inning and at game's end had accumulated a total of eight stolen bases. The Braves answered back however. With one out in the top of the eighth, Palica weakened as Heath singled off his glove. Salkeld struck out, but rookie Conatser hit a two run drive over Duke Snider's head into the left-center field stands that turned what might have been a bitter defeat into a surprise win. Southworth then called upon Spahnie, who had gone the distance 24 hours earlier, to relieve Red Barrett in the home eighth with a runner on second and two outs. He retired the last four batters, two on strikeouts, to seal the victory for Barrett who had taken over mound duties for Voiselle in the seventh.

Clint's call of the game: "Stealing eight bases was like rubbing it in. They just ran us off the field. I can see Palica's pitch now. It was a ball low and outside and I pulled it to left field. Brooklyn was a small ballyard and they didn't have guys who could throw inside there effectively so they tried to keep the ball away. Anyway, I cranked the ball out. I didn't hit it that well, but good enough to clear the fence. I won what I think was the crucial game. That victory took the wind out of the Dodgers' sails and they never made another move all year." [Not quite true because the Dodgers recaptured first place briefly in late August and early September.] But Conatser's assessment of the Braves ability to retaliate against The Boys of Summer under pressure was right on target. Following this crucial contest, the Hub squad beat the defending NL champions 5 out of 6 times in head-to-head duels.

This memorable game afforded the Boston Braves a chance to treat their fans to an event that happened often throughout the 1948 campaign – late inning heroics. Tommie: "We pulled out games that were unbelievable that season." Clint: "We had the kind of a team that picked each other up. In the eighth inning somebody would step up to the plate and win the ballgame for us. The whole team contributed." *Retrosheet* statistics: the 1948 NL champions had the best run differential in the eighth inning among all senior loop teams. In that frame they pushed across 25 more runs than their opponents (92-67).

Tommie Ferguson's favorite game of the year was the Braves pennant clincher. It came on a Sunday afternoon at Braves Field in front of 31,172 jubilant fans a week before the season's end. Bickford, Boston's premium right-handed rookie pitcher, defeated Larry Jansen of the New York Giants 3-2, as Elliott swatted his 22nd homer of the season in the first inning after successive singles by Holmes and Dark. Bickford shutout the Polo Grounders until the eighth when they tallied twice. But bullpen ace Potter came in to halt that rally and mow down Johnny Mize, Willard Marshall, and Don Mueller in the ninth. The historic victory went to Bickford and gave Boston its final NL championship. Vern left the dugout to hear the game's finish in the clubhouse and was heard to say after the final out was recorded, "Whew, that's it."

Ferguson was a high school senior in 1948. "Winning the flag, especially at home, was our Super Bowl. There was a big celebration as the city of Boston opened their arms. People downtown couldn't do enough for us. I remember us batboys sitting on a trunk in the clubhouse after the game. McNulty was the Giants' batboy that particular day. He was still wearing his gray road uniform so the entire Braves squad kidded him about that. 'No, no my heart was here,' he insisted."

Conatser added an interesting twist to the events that unfolded in the aftermath of the Braves earning the right to represent the NL in 1948's Fall Classic. "Instead of staging a celebration

party in Boston where we won the pennant [note again it was clinched on Sunday, Monday was an off-day, and Tuesday began a six-day road trip to Gotham with three games against first the Dodgers and then the Giants], they wait until we go to New York and hold it at Al Schacht's restaurant without our wives and our fans able to enjoy it. I've often wondered what that was all about. Everyone else on the team was equally mystified. Why wouldn't they give the fans of Boston who were elated about our victory the chance to go to a big banquet hall and join in the festivities? Nobody ever gave me an explanation." Then perhaps Clint answered his own question. After pausing a moment he theorized that "it could have been to honor Billy Southworth's son – like a gift to him to arrange the party near the site where he died." Billy Jr. died tragically in a plane crash over Flushing Bay (near LaGuardia Airport) in February 1945. At the time he was conducting routine training flights for new pilots in the Army Air Corps after he had compiled a distinguished war record overseas. "Other players told me that whenever we played in New York he would go to the Flushing Bay pier, stand there, grief-stricken, and just gaze at the spot where the crash had happened."

"As for the banquet, it was a very commercial thing. Not a lot of exultation, like nobody is really having a good time. So Jeff [Heath was Clint's roommate in 1948] had broken his leg that day, which now that I think about it, may explain the lack of joviality. Anyway, he was in a Brooklyn hospital. When I called him on the phone, he said, 'God I'm really hurting; this morphine doesn't work.' So I told him I would be over to see him and grabbed two bottles of champagne. You should have known Jeff – I called him The Monster. I go to the hospital and can hear his painful cries before I even reach his room. As soon as I get to his bedside in no time at all he pops the cork from the first bottle, polishes it off, starts taking slugs out of the second bottle and by then is totally bombed. But his pain has now disappeared and in his big booming voice he wants to know 'where is that good-looking nurse? Go check the ward and bring her in here.' Then in a more serious tone he adds, 'Okay Clint you gotta do it roomie. It's up to you now.' I tell myself that I hope he plays me because I know I can hit righthanders, even though it's tougher if you are only seldom pinch-hitting against righties."

As readers might recall, there was a one-game playoff vs. the Indians in Boston to decide the AL flag winner. In an Associated Press report the day after the NL flag was wrapped up, a poll had Cleveland as the junior circuit team whom the Braves preferred as their World Series foe. "Don't think it is because of Municipal Stadium's huge seating capacity, a spokesman warned. "We're certain we can beat the Indians and we're shooting for the world championship. As far as the Braves players are concerned, the financial angle of the series is secondary to victory." Not so, Tommie declared to Rich Marazzi in a *Sports Collectors Digest* interview. "The Braves organization including the players and myself were all on the roof at

Fenway Park. They put out some of those folding chairs you'd see in a funeral home. We cheered like hell for the Indians. I did so because I wanted to take the train ride to Cleveland. The players wanted the Indians to win because the Indians had a big ballpark which would mean a larger player's share." From Clint's vantage point, "We as a team knew we would each make substantially more money if Cleveland won the playoff game. But wouldn't it have been great if the outcome had been different? Boston is a great town; I loved Boston and would have enjoyed being part of a City Series there in October."

The World Series was anticlimactic for Bostonians as the Indians prevailed in six games. The combination of superior pitching by the Boudreau men and the unavailability of Heath due to a broken ankle sustained during the season's final week against (who else?) Brooklyn made last ditch rallies by the Braves seem impossible. But in Game 6 with the bases loaded against relief pitcher Bearden and behind 4-1, Conatser, pinch-hitting for Rickert, smacked a fly ball to the deepest part of Braves Field that center fielder Thurman Tucker managed to track down. Holmes tagged up after the catch to make it 4-2. Masi's ringing double off the left field wall brought home Torgeson with the Braves third and as it turned out final run of the World Series.

Ironically, for that game Boudreau had started Tucker in center who "could run like hell," said Clint. Larry Doby had been positioned in center field for the first five Series contests and Conatser continued, "Doby played everyone shallow like Tris Speaker and never would have reached the ball." More irony – according to Don Crow, who wrote a book on Cleveland's last world championship baseball team called *The Forgotten Tribe*, Conatser's drive "was only two feet short of clearing the...fence for a grand-slam homer." Conatser reminded me, "If we had comeback to win that game Johnny Sain would have been given the starting assignment for us in Game 7." Clint heard later on the radio that "it was a well hit ball, a line shot that was really kissed hard. But I didn't see it because I had my head down. A ballplayer should never look at the ball until he rounds first base, at which time you can see the play in front of you. Then you pick up the third base coach who will signal you to stop at second base or go for a triple." Lou Boudreau later described it as the most important play in the Series." And Clint may have been the only person in attendance at Braves Field not to eyewitness what Conatser jokingly analyzed as "my little claim to fame."

A footnote: Nearly 60 years ago the Boston Braves each collected \$4,570 for their role in the World Series. In a fitting gesture the team voted to award the batboys a full share which was divided three ways. Tommie used his portion of the postseason prize money to buy his parents a 1949 Ford in Quincy, MA.

### **Billy Southworth, Scout**

After his troubled departure from the helm of the Boston Braves, **Billy Southworth** worked as a scout for the club. One of his assignments involved assessing the performance of a raw rookie performing for the affiliate Eau Claire Bears of the Class C Northern League. That first-year professional, Henry Aaron, went on to become the major's all-time Home Run King until recently deposed by Barry Bonds. In a September 29, 1973 column in the *New York Times*, Dave Anderson reproduced a 1952 letter that Southworth sent to Braves General Manager John Quinn:

*"Dear Mr. Quinn,*

*Henry Aaron has all the qualifications of a major league shortstop. He runs better than average, so I would have to call him fast but not very fast.*

*On the latest official Northern League averages, Aaron is hitting .345. He is a line drive hitter although he has hit a couple of balls out of the park for home runs. He has good hands, also quick hands, gets ball away fast and accurately. He gets a good jump on ball and can range far to right or left. I saw him go deep in the hole to his right and field a slow hit ball. He came up throwing and virtually shot his man out going to first. That was a big league play in my book because I did not think he had a chance to retire the man at first. He has a strong arm.*

*Aaron throws a lot like [Rabbit] Maranville, not overhand but more sidearm. His arm is strong and he does not have to straighten up to throw.*

*Aaron told me that he had turned 18 years of age last February, consequently I like his chances of becoming a major league player far more than I do Gene Baker, shortstop for Los Angeles, or James Pendleton of Montreal. First, because of the differences in ages. Then, too, I think he has better hands than either Baker or Pendleton. He has proven his ability in the short time he has been here.*

*Baker and Pendleton are faster men but this boy will outplay them in all departments of the game when he has more experience.*

*In the second game, on Aaron's first trip to the plate, he hit a long home run over the left-center field fence. He collected three hits for the evening and had three runs batted in. He had four chances with one error. Oh, yes, he also had one stolen base.*

*For a baby-faced kid of 18, his playing ability is outstanding.*

*I will send in this report now because regardless of what happens, it will not change my mind in the least about this boy's ability. Please don't get the impression from what I have said above that Aaron isn't a good runner cause he is fast and his running will continue to improve in the next couple of years.*

*(signed) Billy Southworth"*

## Take Me Out to the Wigwam in 1948

The book on the 1948 Braves and Red Sox seasons is making good progress toward a 2008 publication date. Biographies of the players, coaches, managers and others are nearing completion. One feature under consideration is a piece on the Braves Field experience – what it was like actually being there. In order to do this right, I need to hear directly from those of you who were fortunate enough to set foot in the Wigwam. While the focus will be on 1948, much of the Braves Field environment was fairly constant through the late '40s to the early '50s. It would be of great help to this project if you would jot down your experiences relating to going to and being in the ballpark. For example, how did you get there – cream and orange-colored trolley, bus or automobile? How did the MTA vehicle drop off and pick up folks at the ballpark? Did you participate in a group trip? Where was parking available? Do you remember how much any of these transportation alternatives cost? How and where did you get your tickets? Where did you usually enter and how were tickets taken and turnstiles operated? How were ticket takers and concession folks dressed? What do you remember of the ballpark concessions? Other than food and programs, were souvenirs sold? What was offered in the stands? What sights, sounds, smells, colors, etc., stand out to you regarding the stadium itself and its confines. What were the seating colors? Were you able to watch batting practice and get autographs easily? How were the sight lines? Obstructed views? Did you walk on the field to exit after the game? How about the soot that drifted from the railroad yard and the gamblers in the stands? Are there any Jury Box denizens still out there? Knot hole gang members? What other memorable observations do you have? Since deadlines are fast approaching, your immediate response to me would be greatly appreciated. Thanks!!

## Birth of the Rockettes

Bet you didn't know that the world famous Radio City Rockettes have a Boston Braves connection! This New York City attraction traces its roots back some 82 years to a Midwest dance troupe known as the Missouri Rockets. The female dancers would perform before movies at the Missouri Theater on Grand Avenue in St. Louis. The troupe relocated to the Big Apple and Radio City Music Hall in 1932. One of the surviving original dancers, 96-year-old Margaret Mowry, chose not to migrate east but stayed in St. Louis to marry another St. Louis native, Boston Braves outfielder **Joe Mowry**. "Best choice of my life" the nonagenarian recently remarked.

Joe played his entire three-season major league career in Boston, from 1933-35. In 192 games, he batted .233. Joe's dad was also an outfielder whose attempt to make the Phillies in 1911 was thwarted by a broken leg. Mowry attracted big league attention when he batted .348 and clouted 19 homers for Minneapolis in 1932. Judge Emil Fuchs of the Braves picked

him up after providing the Millers with two players and \$10,000. Harold Kaese in *The Boston Braves* compared Mowry to Wally Berger. "The only difference between Berger and Mowry was that the former could hit anybody but Carl Hubbell, while the latter could hit nobody but Hubbell." Joe Mowry passed away on February 9, 1994.

Margaret Mowry remained active in dancing through teaching until a recent hip fracture. She attended an induction ceremony on August 1 on the St. Louis Walk of Fame, where a Rockettes star was placed in the sidewalk between actor Buddy Ebsen's and city founder Pierre Laclede.

## In Memoriam

**Harold "Lefty" O'Connor** passed away at age 86 on June 16 following an accident at home. After graduating from Brockton High School in 1941, the Braves invited the young outfield prospect to travel with the club on the road. He had caught the eye of Braves scout Jeff Jones. Famed newspaper sports artist Bob Coyne featured O'Connor in a March 23, 1942 portrait. Coyne noted O'Connor's hitting power and his similarity in appearance to Ted Williams. He predicted that the lad was two years away from the majors. After playing in the minors in 1942, O'Connor enlisted in the Army Air Force. After the war, the Braves invited him back but with the intention of converting him to a pitcher. He declined and returned home where he eventually became a painting contractor. O'Connor retained his love of the game, playing and managing in the Cape Cod Old Timers' Softball League. His teams traveled to the Senior Softball World Series in Texas and in California. He only stopped playing three years ago.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of long-time member **Donald Clerkin** on February 23. Don was 79 and had been a sportswriter for the *Hartford Times* from 1955-65. He later became the sports information director at Central Connecticut State University. In 1990, he was inducted into the New Britain Sports Hall of Fame. He generously shared his Braves memories with us.

## Braves Books and a Program

One of our members has donated a number of great baseball books to us. Of particular interest to our membership are those that relate to the Braves. We have single copies of the following:

Fuchs and Soini, *Judge Fuchs and the Boston Braves*

Onigman, *This Date in Braves History*

Johnson, *Images of Sports: Boston Braves*

Maranville, *Run, Rabbit, Run*

These books will be part of our reunion raffle. Other baseball books will be offered at discount prices, with the proceeds going to the

BBHA operating fund. If you'd like a sales list when it becomes available in the late fall, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to me. My address can be found at the end of the newsletter.

Our generous donor is also offering our membership the opportunity to acquire a treasured piece of memorabilia – an authentic 1949 Boston Braves program in excellent shape. This magazine-sized program has a full color cover featuring the large Braves Field electric scoreboard. The one significant flaw in it is that the Braves portion of the scorecard is torn with a small piece of an advertisement missing. The Braves line-up is intact and undamaged. The scorecard has notations on it.

The program is for a game against the Brooklyn Dodgers that took place after Billy Southworth left the club, as John Cooney is listed as the acting manager. Since Billy the Kid departed on August 16<sup>th</sup>, and given the markings on the scorecard portion, this program would appear to be for the dramatic 12-inning game of August 19 when the Tribe lost to the Bums, 6-4. Joe Hatten of the Dodgers had a three-hit shutout going into the ninth when the Braves came back with four runs, tying the game on an Eddie Stanky hit. With two on in the 12<sup>th</sup>, Duke Snider doubled in the winning runs off of Red Barrett. Carl Erskine was the victor in relief. The game was played in three hours and eighteen minutes. The Dodgers line-up featured Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, Gil Hodges and Roy Campanella. The original owner of the program was one of 25,720 attendees at the game. The program is being offered on a "buy it now" basis for \$35 or you are invited to make a fair counteroffer. A copy of the game description and box score will be included. This offer will also be handled through your newsletter editor through my home mailing address.

### Sittin' in the Jury Box

Two former Boston Braves are being memorialized on the jerseys of the Atlanta Braves this season. The number 33 appears on the uniform sleeves of Tribesmen in tribute to **Johnny Sain** and **Lou Burdette**. Both wore that numeral during their Braves' careers – Sain from 1946-51 and as a coach in 1985-86; Burdette from 1951-63 and as a coach in 1973. The transfer of the numeral in 1951 was the result of a trade between the Braves and the Yankees with Sain going to New York and Burdette and \$50,000 coming to Boston. Both passed away last year. We were fortunate to have been graced by the presence of both gentlemen at our fall reunions.

The resumption of the "City Series" this season saw home and away three-game series taking place in Boston and Atlanta during May and June. The Braves came out on the short end, winning two while dropping four to their historic rival.

Our Reunion XVI Hall of Fame inductee, **Roland Hemond**, returned to the

Arizona Diamondbacks on July 26. He was appointed Special Assistant to the President. Roland had served as Executive Vice President of the club from 1996-2000. His previous assignment was with the White Sox as GM Ken Williams' advisor. The D-backs are now the beneficiary of Roland's 55 years of meritorious professional baseball experience.

During the years of the Great Depression, the Braves hungered for revenue. In some instances, the team would play a regularly scheduled day game at Braves Field and follow that up with an exhibition contest elsewhere. One such occasion took place on August 9, 1932. After a one-hour and twenty-five minute 4-0 whitewashing of the Pirates at the Wigwam, the Tribe headed south to Quincy, MA to Merrymount Park. In contrast to the meager attendance often recorded at Braves Field (the McKechnie-led fifth place team drew 507,606 for the season, dwarfing the eighth place Red Sox attendance of 182,150), some 15,000 fans crowded the field to see the "pride of Boston and all New England" play the Quincy All-Stars in a benefit game for the Sons of Italy and St. Ann's Church in Wollaston. News of the event made the front page of the next day's *Quincy Patriot Ledger*.

From time to time, we've read about the locker-room theft of equipment, even by players, given the hot memorabilia market. This type of larceny is not restricted to the present day. For example, on May 15, 1945, members of the St. Louis Cardinals, upon arriving at Braves Field, discovered that someone had broken into their dressing room and made off with 37 of their bats. Their missing lumber was quickly found before game time, not in the hands of a souvenir seller, but lying near a Brighton playground at the ready for a pick-up game by local youth.

Member **Daniel Papillon** of Charlesborough, Quebec, Canada was kind enough to send along information relating to this year's BBHA Hall of Fame inductee, Roland Hemond. Daniel points out that Hemond's cousin, Ray Lague pitched in the Braves organization in Quebec City in 1952-53 and later at Eau Claire in 1954. Lague was 14-7, 3.12 in 1952. The following year with the Quebec Braves, he recorded seven victories against ten defeats and an ERA of 2.65. Future major leaguers Ed Charles and Georges Miranda were also on those squads. At Eau Claire, Lague's performance declined to 4-6, 5.18. He crossed paths with fellow Rhode Islander Johnny Goryl, who was headed toward the majors and an eventual managerial slot with the Twins. Lague, now living in North Providence, RI, was originally signed by Branch Rickey for the Pirates organization. Daniel sent along copies of photographs of Lague with a youthful Hemond as well as with Quebec batterymate and former Negro Leaguer Stanley Glenn. We hope that Ray Lague will be able to join us in October.

This season's tributes to Jackie Robinson prompted staff writer Mike Burke of *The Republican* of Springfield, MA to recall an appearance that the Hall of Famer made at Holyoke High School's Class Day in May, 1967.

Robinson had been invited by the school's principal **Ed "Moonah" Moriarty**, a former big league infielder with the 1935-36 Braves. All told, Moriarty's career was brief, just fourteen games over two seasons, but he ended up with a batting average of .300. He had been a legendary athlete at Holy Cross College before signing on with the Braves. Moriarty deeply admired the courage that Robinson exhibited, having himself, as a Catholic, been on the receiving end of venom on the playing field from non-Catholic players of his era. Robinson spoke briefly but stayed to mingle with the students. He donated his speaking fee back to the school as a scholarship. Principal Moriarty passed away in 1991.

Hope you didn't miss the feature story on the Boston Braves that appeared in Boston's *The Phoenix*, a weekly publication, on May 11-17, 2007. The piece, entitled "Home of the Braves?" was written by Mike Miliard and covered the history of the Tribe in the Hub. Our Business Manager, George Altison, and member and New England Sports Museum curator, Dick Johnson, were quoted in the article. The story may still be retrievable on line at <http://thephoenix.com>. If not, I would be happy to send along a copy if you care to send me a self addressed, stamped 4 1/8 x 9 1/2 inch envelope. My address appears elsewhere in the newsletter.

Famed broadcaster Ernie Harwell, in a *Detroit Free Press* column of June 25 related a number of tales about fan encounters with **Babe Ruth**. Bud Manion of St. Claire Shores, MI provided the following: "I saw Babe Ruth with the Boston Braves in an exhibition game in Albany, NY. I got to the box-seat railing too late for an autograph. Undaunted, I hopped onto the field and sneaked into the Braves' dugout, sitting right beside the Babe. 'Can I please have your autograph, Mr. Ruth?' I asked him. I had heard expletives before in my boyhood, but never the ones the Babe uttered. I went scurrying out of the dugout after the Babe had just missed kicking at me with his spikes and just missing my fanny. I had other misses in my lifetime in the Pacific during World War II, but none as memorable and frightening as the near miss from Mr. Ruth."

Hub reporter Roger Birtwell once referred to **Sibby Sisti** as "The Embroidered Man." Sibby earned this distinction three days after the 1948 World Series when he reported to St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Brighton, MA for an appendectomy. The operation added twelve stitches to the 28-year-old's "embroidery" collection that reached a grand total of 75 stitches. Doctor's began repairing Sisti at age 12 when an accident between his bicycle and an automobile cut his left knee. The remaining battle scars were earned playing baseball – from a spiked left hand playing service ball with the Coast Guard to assorted injuries on the big league diamond. The biggest addition to the compilation occurred when Sibby severely separated his shoulder making a play at shortstop in 1947. Surgeons opened his left leg (24 stitches) to obtain tissue to tie his shoulder back together (20 stitches). Early in the 1948 season, Bobby Rhawn of the Giants spiked Sibby in the

right ankle sliding into second, addition a solo sewing. Sibby had deferred the appendectomy after having been taken to the hospital for observation during the summer. Fortunately, his health held up, enabling him to step in for Eddie Stanky when the latter went down with a broken ankle and play a key role in the Braves' pennant drive.

The appointment of Dave Trembley as Orioles manager once again brought forth recollections of **Judge Emil Fuchs'** tenure as Braves manager in 1929. Like Fuchs, Trembley is one of just seven men to have skippered a major league ballclub without any professional playing experience. Trembley's highest level of playing time consisted of Canadian summer league competition as a catcher in 1973-74. Other members of this exclusive club are Ed Barrow (Detroit Tigers 1903-04, Boston Red Sox 1918-20), Hugo Bezdek (Pittsburgh Pirates 1917-19), Ted Turner (Atlanta Braves 1977), John Boles (Florida Marlins 1996, 1999-2001) and Carlos Tosca (Toronto Blue Jays 2002-04).

When Arch Ward, sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, suggested putting together a dream game of stars from each league competing against one another, his idea was not met with universal approval in 1933. The scheduling of an All Star Game meant the loss of revenues from games cancelled to accommodate a Mid-Summer Classic. The last holdout was financially-challenged Braves owner **Judge Emil Fuchs**. In twisting the Judge's arm in a "Godfather-like" manner, Arch Ward informed Fuchs that "We're going to announce this game the day after tomorrow, and either we're going to say there is a game or that we almost had one because of you. Can you ... stand that kind of publicity?" Needless to say, Judge Fuchs capitulated and the All Star Game went on to become a baseball treasure.

On July 15, the Philadelphia Phillies reached the 10,000 defeat mark ahead of their closest competition, the Boston-Milwaukee-Atlanta Braves. At that point in time, the Tribe had a 9,662-9,681 won-loss record.

Former Boston Braves farmhand **Ray Cattaneo** was the subject of an article in the July 19<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Boston Globe*. Although retired from the post of director of Parks and Recreation in Quincy, MA in 1995, the 76-year-old Cattaneo continues to work four days a week, assigning athletic fields. Cattaneo turned down a scholarship to Duke University to sign with the Boston Braves in 1949. He made various stops in their farm system until being drafted into the Army in 1951. Cattaneo's first destination was in Owensboro, KY in 1949. With the KITTY League Oilers, he batted .308 and clubbed 15 homers as the club's regular third baseman. Future major league hurler **Ray Crone** was a teammate. Advancing to B-level ball, Cattaneo was assigned to the Evansville Braves in '50 where he batted .208 in 57 games. With Evansville again in 1951, he improved to .281 in 91 contests. In the military, Cattaneo participated in service ball, once playing against Willie Mays. Out of the Army, Cattaneo joined

the Jacksonville Braves of the Class A South Atlantic League in 1954 and batted .227 in 108 games. The league's best pitcher and BBHA reunion attendee, **Humberto Robinson** had a 23-8, 2.41 record for Jacksonville that year. Big league catcher and former Red Sox coach **Mike Roarke** was another teammate as was future Milwaukee Braves and Kansas City Athletics hurler **Bob Trowbridge**. With Ed Mathews entrenched at third base in Milwaukee, Cattaneo left baseball to enter his family's contracting business. He joined the parks department in 1972. Cattaneo is a member of the Boston College High School Hall of Fame and has had a dugout at Adams Field in Quincy dedicated in his honor. In 2001, he carried the Olympic Torch through Quincy as part of the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics.

Braves Field was truly a "Home of the Brave" once again on July 14. A sendoff ceremony was held at Nickerson Field for the 972<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company of the Massachusetts National Guard. The Company was heading for three months of training at Fort Dix, NJ before being sent for a year's duty in Iraq to train their police. In his remarks, MA Lt. Governor Timothy Murray recalled the site as old Braves Field where the Boston Braves once roamed. "Today, once again Nickerson Field is the home of the brave," Murray said.

On May 22, another historic landmark where Boston Braves history was made disappeared. McKechnie Field's combined old press room and visitor's clubhouse were demolished to make way for the continued renovation of this historic Bradenton, FL spring training site. The ballpark was known as Braves Field in the spring of 1953. It was in the press room that the first public announcement that the Boston Braves had officially received permission to transfer to Milwaukee was made. The field was renamed for city resident **Deacon Bill McKechnie** (Boston Braves/Bees manager from 1930-37) when the Milwaukee Braves left for West Palm Beach in 1963.

In a September 29, 1948 *Sporting News* article, writer Roger Birtwell estimated that the cost to the Three Little Steam Shovels of bringing the National League pennant to Boston amounted to \$3.5 million. The trio had acquired the club for \$750,000 in 1946. Their biggest single player expenditure was the acquisition of Eddie Stanky for an estimated \$100,000. Thousands of dollars were spent to lure Billy Southworth to Boston as well as to stock the club with the likes of Earl Torgeson, Bobby Hogue, Al Dark, Johnny Antonelli, Nels Potter, Jeff Heath, Mike McCormick and other lesser lights. The Steam Shovels did not scrimp when it came to upgrading the Wigwam either. They installed lights for night games, a modern electric scoreboard, sky view box seats and engaged in a variety of remodeling and painting efforts. The owners also acquired a number of minor league franchises outright. The return on their investment was to be short-lived, unfortunately. On Opening Day, April 18, 1949, the National League pennant was raised before a skimpy crowd of 9,195 loyal fans. Three seasons later,

the team could only attract 281,278 folks to the ball yard.

There are only some 75 individuals who have a perfect 1.000 major league batting average. One of them, **Steve Kuczek** of the 1949 Boston Braves, was featured in an article in the July 15 issue of the Albany, NY *Times Union*. Kuczek had been called up to the parent club from its Pawtucket affiliate in early September after batting .241 in 30 games for the Slaters. The 24-year-old shortstop was unable to break into the line-up with Al Dark, Connie Ryan and Sibby Sisti ahead of him. His one opportunity came on a wet and dreary day at the Wigwam during the second game of a doubleheader against the Dodgers. Losing 8-0 and out of the race, the ballplayers resented having to perform under such miserable conditions. One of the Braves lit a small bonfire in the dugout. In the home half of the fifth inning, Connie Ryan walked to the on-deck circle in full rain gear and was promptly ejected by umpire George Barr. Kuczek was called upon to face Don Newcombe, soon to be named the NL Rookie of the Year. On a 2 and 1 count, Kuczek drove the ball to right-center for a double. He was stranded on second as Newk struck out the side and the umpires immediately called the game after five innings. Kuczek became a "reverse" Moonlight Graham. While he got a chance to bat in the majors, he never played in the field on a big league diamond. Kuczek spent the following season with the Western League Denver Bears batting .301 in 89 games. While in the Mile High city, he played with **Chuck Tanner**, **Jack Dittmer** and **Virgil Jester**. Sold to the Atlanta Crackers for the following season, Kuczek rejected their contract offer and went on the voluntarily retired list. A World War II veteran, Kuczek won six battle stars in Europe. The Colgate graduate became a radiation protection technician for 33 years before retiring in 1985. He recently celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Kuczek has retained keepsakes from his career, including his glove and a scrapbook that includes his Braves contract. We hope to see Steve at this year's reunion!

Artist **Mark Waitkus**, whose various Boston Braves-related water colors have graced our reunions and our programs, was recently commissioned to paint a commemorative home plate for this season's All Star Game in San Francisco. On the dish is Mark's rendition of AT&T Park and it was used for the ceremonial first pitch by Hall of Famer Willie Mays. Mark followed up that achievement with a trip to Cooperstown to unveil his commemorative works on new inductees Cal Ripken and Tony Gwynn. Mark has done a lot of work for the Boston Red Sox and his prints can now be found for sale at the souvenir shop across from Fenway Park. He has also performed for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the New England Sports Museum, the Jimmy Fund, the Cape Cod Baseball League, Boston University, Harvard University and Holy Cross. An illustrated story appeared in the July 28 issue of the Worcester, MA *Telegram & Gazette*. The newspaper's website ([www.telegram.com](http://www.telegram.com)) also featured a video of

Mark at work. We look forward to Mark's appearance and contributions to this year's reunion.

The August 30, 2007 Milwaukee Braves Historical Association 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary gala celebrating the achievements of the 1957 World Champions has been sold out – at \$300 per ticket! Among those with Boston ties expected to attend are **Gene Conley, Johnny Logan, Del Crandall, Andy Pafko, Ernie Johnson, Ray Crone, Chuck Tanner, Hank Aaron** and **Felix Mantilla**. We'll report on the festivities in our next newsletter.

Congratulations to reunion attendee **Ernie Johnson** on his induction into the Atlanta Braves Hall of Fame this year. Ernie, a three-city Brave when you combine his playing and broadcasting days, started his big league pitching career in Boston in 1950.

Member **Diane Purdy Theriault** is an award winning actress, director and playwright. She has performed her "Rosie the Riveter Revisited" before many audiences. She regales attendees with stories on the lives of American women before, during and after World War II. Diane has a special tie to the Braves Family. She is the granddaughter of **Charlie Ganzel**, a catcher for Boston's National League entry from 1889 to 1897. Charlie was the brother and father of major leaguers – John Ganzel and Foster "Babe" Ganzel, respectively. John had a seven year big league career as a slick-fielding first baseman and managed the 1908 Cincinnati Reds and the 1915 Brooklyn Tip-Tops of the Federal League. Babe briefly appeared as an outfielder with Washington in 1927-28. Diane's email address is dianepurdy@playplus.com.

Member **Ben Mennillo** of East Hartford, CT generously shared his memories of **Ralph McLeod** with us. "I followed the [Hartford] team through radio accounts but couldn't attend many games as I was in high school and all games were played during the day. I did attend some of the Sunday doubleheaders. McLeod had a good year if I remember correctly. He played hard. One incident that stands out in my mind was once when he was attempting to steal home. Apparently, there was a mix-up of signals. As Ralph was charging towards the plate, the batter swung at the pitch! He fouled it off. McLeod held up by sitting on the ground and staring at the batter."

Member **Roger Levesque**, 83 years young, has firsthand knowledge of the exploits of Max West and Jim Tobin. Roger recalls reunion participant West clubbing home runs during his rookie season only to have manager Casey Stengel change his style and ruin a potentially great hitter. He also vividly remembers Tobin's no-hitters of 1944 and the pitcher's home run hitting exploits in 1942.

Former Boston Braves Knothole Gang member **Bill Dykstra** at 79 remains active in Chatham, MA hustling 50-50 raffle tickets during Cape Cod League games at Veterans Field. The former bank president recalls

sneaking on the subway to get to Braves Field and using his membership, purchased for a quarter at the beginning of the summer, to sit in the bleachers all season.

Member **Mert Bergman**, who describes himself as 89+, was also kind enough to share his memories of the Braves with us. His father took him to Braves games in the '20s. One of his earliest recollections was of left fielder Ed Brown, *a/k/a* "Glass Arm Eddie." A decent hitter (.328 in 1926 and .306 in 1927 with the Braves), Brown had a notoriously weak arm. Mert recalls that the shortstop would have to hustle out to short left field in order to retrieve Brown's throws. Mert is among the few still around who can personally remember seeing Rogers Hornsby in 1928 when he was the Braves player-manager, capturing the batting crown with a .387 average. Mert witnessed a long Hornsby home run over the distant left field fence at Braves Field. He attended Opening Day in 1935 and observed the return of Babe Ruth to Boston. The Babe celebrated with a circuit clout. Among Mert's favorite players were Wally Berger, Buck Jordan and Bill Urbanski. He recollects the team's pitching staff of Ed Brandt, Fred Frankhouse, Ben Cantwell and Huck Betts. Mert was fortunate to see great hitters such as George Sisler, Paul Waner and Al Simmons toward the end of their careers as they passed through Boston. In his teens, he used to assist the Braves Field ticket-takers by turning the turnstile for them for about twenty minutes before the start of the game. As a reward, he was allowed to go and sit in the grandstand. Mert followed the team through its glory days in 1948 and to its ignominious departure. His loyalties ended when the Tribe left town but Mert still regards baseball as a great game but diluted by expansion and cheapened home runs.

Don't look over your shoulder now but as the Yankees continue to gain ground on the Red Sox, should the Evil Empire overtake them, it would represent the second-biggest collapse in baseball history. The worst occurred in 1914 when the New York Giants blew a 15-game lead over the Miracle Braves. The 2007 Bosox had a 14 ½ game commanding lead over New York at the end of May. In comparison, the ill-fated '78 Sox saw a 14-game advantage evaporate.

Despite an impressive 11 total base hitting barrage (two homers, a double and a single) by Arizona's Micah Owings against the Braves on August 18, his exploit is still second best to Boston Braves pitcher **Jim Tobin** who accumulated 12 total bases in a 1942 game. Tobin blasted three homers in that game as member **Roger Levesque** previously recalled.

Someone at the *Cape Cod Times* needs a baseball history lesson. The paper reported the June 12<sup>th</sup> death of 94-year-old Charles Nagel in its June 19 edition and noted that the avid Red Sox fan "[a]s a young boy ... sold peanuts and popcorn at Fenway Park **when the team was the Boston Braves.**"

The *Tulsa World* ran a story on July 8 on the top 100 Oklahoman baseball players.

**Warren Spahn** was second on the list, topped by Mickey Mantle. Some would argue that those positions should be reversed! **Paul** and **Lloyd Waner** came in at numbers 4 and 9, respectively. It might be a bit of a stretch to claim "Little Poison" as he only appeared in 19 games for the Tribe in 1941 but older brother "Big Poison" donned the Braves uniform in 209 games in 1941-42. **Al "Blackie" Dark**, our 1948 Rookie of the Year, took 16<sup>th</sup> place on the list while right-handed pitcher **Jesse Barnes** (1915-17, 1923-25) claimed the 24<sup>th</sup> spot. The immortal **Jim Thorpe** (1919) can be found further down the list at # 49, close to a favorite reunion attendee of ours, pitcher **Gene Conley** (# 51). Outfielder **Roy Johnson** (1937-38) earned 53<sup>rd</sup> place, well below his brother and fellow outfielder, "Indian Bob" Johnson (# 33). In the back of the pack are Braves minor league slugger **Joe Bauman** (# 72) and right-hander **Ray Starr** (1933; #92).

Here's a trivia question, courtesy of Bill Ballou of the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*: What Hall of Fame shortstop hit the first grand slam in Fenway Park history? The answer is **Rabbit Maranville** who hit an inside-the-park grand slam against Hippo Vaughan of the Cubs on September 26, 1914. Rabbit hit a low liner to right that bounded over the outfielder's head and

rattled around the bleachers. The Miracle Braves borrowed the American League ballpark while their new home was being constructed down off of Commonwealth Avenue.

### Thanks!

We appreciate the contributions that you all kindly continue to make to help us preserve the memory of the Boston Braves. In addition to those mentioned in the newsletter, we wish to extend our appreciation to **Bob Fortier, Father Gerald Beirne, John Ahokas, Herb Crehan, Dave Prendergast, Bill Lyons, John Voiselle, Bob Gagnon, Bill Trudell, Jack Wholley, Helen Fuchs Meltzer** and everyone else that has taken the time to help us along.

For those of you interested in contributing your memories or those of an associate on Braves Field, obtaining a copy of the *Boston Phoenix* article, the baseball book sales list and/or acquiring the 1949 program, please write me:

**Bob Brady**  
**25 McAndrew Road**  
**Braintree, MA 02184-8245**

Thanks for your continued support. See you at the reunion!