

Boston Braves Historical Association Newsletter

Summer 2009

www.boston-braves.com

George Altison

1930 - 2009

It is with a very heavy heart that I must inform the membership that on June 19, 2009, our Business Manager **George Altison** passed away. His sudden death was a shock to his family and to all of us. A beloved husband, father and grandfather, George was also one of the greatest fans of the Boston Braves. He was a founding member of the BBHA and almost single-handedly ran its operations. The highly successful series of annual reunions resulted from a near Herculean effort on his part and benefited by the exhaustive contributions of his entire family. We extend our deepest sympathies to his family and to his many friends. George's passing was noted in several newspapers, including *The Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald* and *The Milford Daily News*. We thank **Marvin Pave**, **Saul Wisnia** and **Lenny Megliola** for writing such kind words in George's memory. The obituaries have been reproduced on our website: www.boston-braves.com/whats_new.htm. Below is an extended version of a piece that Executive Committee member Saul Wisnia penned for the June 24th edition of the *Herald*.

George Altison, 79, Kept Memories of the Boston Braves Alive

by
Saul Wisnia

Last Friday night, the Atlanta Braves whipped the Red Sox, 8-2, at Fenway Park. Nobody would have relished the moment more than George Altison, who had passed away earlier the same evening. As a Brighton native and longtime Marlborough resident, Altison, who was 79, didn't have anything against the Sox. But his heart was always with the Braves -- the *Boston Braves*.

The National League team he rooted for as a kid left town (for Milwaukee) due to sagging attendance and mounting debts in March, 1953, while Altison was stationed in Okinawa with the Air Force. He couldn't know it at the time, but he would wind up doing more than probably any individual to rekindle -- and preserve -- memories of the Braves, who called Boston home from the NL's maiden season in 1876 through '52.

Altison was co-founder and business manager of the Boston Braves Historical Association (BBHA), which held annual reunions starting in 1992 for the club's ballplayers and fans. A retired electrical supervisor for Raytheon who operated the BBHA on a shoestring budget, he built membership to more than 500 from Maine to California and even into other countries. The organization produced a top-notch newsletter, established a Hall of Fame, and in recent years started

up a website (www.Boston-Braves.com). A tour of Braves Field preceded each get-together; raffles for Braves memorabilia ended it. "This wasn't just a banquet, it was like bringing back family ever year," said **Gene Conley**, who pitched for the Braves in Boston and Milwaukee and attended many reunions. "George was such a sweet guy, you always wanted to come even if you weren't feeling up to it."

Several former All-Stars did come, including pitching greats **Warren Spahn** and **Johnny Sain**, shortstop **Johnny Logan**, and outfielder **Tommy Holmes**. Other members of George's "family" who made the annual pilgrimage were role players like utilityman **Sebastian "Sibby" Sisti** and **Art Johnson**, the Winchester left-hander whose promising hurling career was curtailed by a sore arm and World War II. Everybody got a big welcome, even the former batboys.

"It got tougher every year, as guys got older or passed away, but George kept the tradition alive," said Walpole native and former Red Sox manager **Joe Morgan**, who was signed by his hometown Braves out of Boston College in 1952 but didn't make the majors until the club was in Milwaukee (from where it would also move, to Atlanta, in 1966). Morgan helped emcee the reunions for years, as did the legendary Red Sox broadcaster **Ken Coleman**. But when reporters and historians wanted to reach old Braves, they called George.

Running the group gave Altison, who grew up just two blocks from Braves Field -- the remnants of which are now part of Boston University's Nickerson Field -- a chance to honor and befriend his boyhood heroes. As a kid he was able to attend countless games at the old ballpark through the team's "Knothole Gang," and he spent the summer after his graduation from Brighton High School in 1948 working there for concessionaire **Harry M. Stevens**. Altison's timing couldn't have been better, as the Braves took home the '48 NL pennant thanks largely to Spahn and Sain. Fifty years later, this duo would highlight a 50th reunion of the champions spearheaded by the guy who had served them coffee during their heyday.

George preferred to give the spotlight to others, but his classy touch was behind everything the BBHA did. When 1950 Rookie of the Year **Sam Jethroe** was left destitute by a fire, Altison spearheaded a fundraising drive among Association members for Boston's first African-American ballplayer; when former Patriots owner **Billy Sullivan** was being vilified in the early 1990s for the demise of his old team, George inducted him into the Braves Hall of Fame for his innovative baseball publicity work a half-century before.

"I grew up with them, and they're still a part of my life," Altison once told the *Herald* of his affinity for the

Braves. Thanks to him, they stayed -- or became -- a part of many more lives as well.

Altison leaves his wife of 55 years, Christine (Sidoti); two sons, Brian of Holden and John of Hubbardston; a daughter, Dian McGovern of Marlborough; and three grandchildren. Burial with full military honors took place at Marlborough's Evergreen Cemetery.

Honoring George

The Altison family has requested that memorial donations be made either to the Dana-Farber's Jimmy Fund Tribute Program, 1 Harvard St., Brookline, MA 02146 (www.jimmyfund.org) or to Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association, P.O. Box 502, 99 Cherry Street, Milford, CT. They also wish to express their gratitude for the numerous condolences that have been sent to the family. The Altison's note that a guestbook in George's memory remains on the website of the Boston Globe where you are cordially invited to sign in and provide a remembrance. The site is at: http://www.boston.com/sports/baseball/articles/2009/06/23/george_altison_co_founded_boston_braves_group/?comments=all.

The BBHA will honor George in other ways. Artist **Ronnie Joyner** has sketched a wonderful portrait of him that is included in this newsletter.

While a permanent memorial at Braves Field (*i.e.*, Nickerson Field) for George is not possible, the current Home of the Braves does provide us with an opportunity to mark his loyalty and service to the Braves. The Atlanta version of the Tribe has created the Atlanta Braves Foundation Legacy Brick Paver Program where individually inscribed bricks can be placed in Turner Field's Monument Grove. I've advanced a donation to secure a paver to honor George's devotion to the Boston Braves. The brick reads:

**George Altison
Boston Braves
#1 Fan**

Installation is in process. The Atlanta Braves will provide us with a Certificate of Acknowledgement and a replica brick, both of which we intend to present to the Altison family. If you'd like to be included in this memorial to George and be listed as one of George's "Royal Rooters" as part of the presentation to the Altisons, please consider making a donation to the fund that we've established for this purpose. You can mail a check made out to the Boston Braves Historical Association at our new mailing address: **P.O. Box 67195, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-0002**. Once we learn where the commemorative paver is placed at Turner Field, we'll be asking any of our membership that passes through that area to send us a photograph of the plaque to be used as an additional memento for the Altison family and for our archives.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Members of the BBHA's Executive Committee have been actively discussing the Association's future direction in light of the loss of our irreplaceable leader. It's clear that conducting a reunion this fall is beyond our capacity as a significant effort is required just to relieve the Altison family of the Association's records

and other materials, to set up an orderly transition and to establish a new leadership structure.

Your input is respectfully requested. We'd like to survey the membership to identify individuals interested in more active roles with the BBHA, whether it be as a member of the Executive Committee, as a contributor of services and/or as an advisor. Not surprisingly, the current Executive Committee lacks a successor to George in terms of taking over 100% of the group's operations. Your editor, **Jonathan Fine** and **Gary Mastas** have assumed the title of acting business managers until a permanent solution is reached. This is a temporary patch undertaken to get this newsletter to you and to seek your help.

George did an outstanding job in keeping the ship afloat and acted as a jack-of-all-trades. With his passing, we need to shift operations to a location closer to Executive Committee members so that we have responsibilities sufficiently backed-up on an ongoing basis. This entails moving our operations from Marlborough, changing our banking relationship, finding a new printer with an ability to upgrade our publications for quality illustrations, opening a new permanent post office box, establishing a relationship with someone with computer skills to assist in record-keeping automation (*e.g.*, membership and mailing lists/labels, inventory, sales, *etc.*) and accounting and legal advice. And this list is not all inclusive. Whether we're able to sustain the BBHA and thereby honor George's memory and preserve the history of Boston's Braves will be dependent upon the willingness of our membership to lend a hand.

Back in the early days of the BBHA, we had a similar crisis that jeopardized the Association's viability. It was George Altison who rose to the occasion then and led us for the next 17 years. Your Executive Committee is fully committed to continuing the role of preserving the memory of the Boston Braves. Our membership has always responded positively in the past. Now is the time to act. Let's not recreate in 2009 the events of the spring of '53 and find ourselves in a position where it becomes too late to "save our team." Please respond to this request with your thoughts and offers of participation and assistance. Note the change in our mailing address below. You are also invited to respond via email at bbraves@beld.net.

**Boston Braves Historical Association
Post Office Box 67195
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-0002**

Thank you for your support and encouragement during these trying times.

One More Reunion in 2010?

Despite the wonderful reunion in 2008, it had become apparent to George and to the Executive Committee that the aged and declining base of living Boston Braves (35 at the time of this newsletter - *see In Memoriam* section) would soon make the annual player/fan format of these gatherings impracticable, if not impossible, to conduct. Of this population, only a handful were willing and/or able to travel to Boston for the affair. An undertaking this year is beyond our capacity. The question arises as to whether to conclude this facet of our program now and invest our efforts in other areas.

Some on the executive committee have suggested that we should end this chapter of our operations with one final player/fan reunion in 2010 to allow members of the Braves Family and BBHAers a final opportunity for an in-person reminiscence. To do so, however, would require commitments, support and active participation in its planning from our membership base. If you are interested in such a proposal and willing to work on a grand finale, please get in touch with us so that a working group can be put together. Alternatively, a lack of expressions of interest will let us know that it's time to move on.

Other options are being considered. For example, the prospect exists for the BBHA to partner with the Boston Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) on a program commemorating the Boston Braves. We have a number of dual BBHA/SABR members. It was the Boston Chapter that put together that outstanding publication, *Spahn, Sain and Teddy Ballgame: Boston's almost Perfect Baseball Summer of 1948*. This type of event would be different from our typical reunion in that the emphasis would be on presentations and discussions about the team, its players and the ballpark. It would not be associated with a banquet and player appearances would be the exception rather than the rule. SABR meetings also are normally conducted on a much smaller scale than our banquets although they are more frequently held. This would be a one-time affair and may or may not include an in-person tour of Braves Field -- a "virtual" tour via photos, slides and a presentation is a possibility.

A tour of the Sports Museum of New England at TD Garden along with a discussion of the Boston Braves might also be worthy of pursuit.

Any other suggestions are certainly most welcome.

BBHA Reunion Honor Roll

Now would seem to be a perfect time to reminisce upon the many honored guests that have graciously attended BBHA reunions over the years. Our inaugural reunion was held on October 4, 1992 at the Eilberg Lounge in Boston University's Case Center. The windows of the room looked out onto the remains of Braves Field. We migrated to the Jacob Sleeper Auditorium in BU's College of Basic Studies for a time and held a joint meeting with the Atlanta Braves 400 Club at the Westin Hotel in Boston to coincide with the beginning of inter-league play, before settling at the Brookline Holiday Inn for the last several years. Over the course of 17 years, we've welcomed a significant number of representatives from the Braves Family, their relatives and other members of the baseball fraternity. Below is an attempt to list these honored guests.

Players and Bat Boys

**Johnny Antonelli
John Benson
Dick "Bo Bo" Breck
Lou Burdette
Hank Camelli
Charlie Chronopoulos
Clint Conatser
Gene Conley
Del Crandall
Al Dark
Bob "Ducky" Detweiler**

**Dick Donovan
Tommy Ferguson
Elbie Fletcher
Sam Gentile
Bob Giggie
Roy Hartsfield
Tommy Holmes
Sam Jethroe
Art Johnson
Ernie Johnson
Ray Lague
Danny Litwhiler
Bobby Loane
Johnny Logan
Felix Mantilla
Ray Martin
Ralph McLeod
Frank McNulty
Joe Morgan
Chet Nichols
Andy Pafko
Mike Roarke
Humberto Robinson
Norm Roy
Johnny Sain
Manny Salvo
Sibby Sisti
Warren Spahn
Chuck Tanner
Max West
Carlton Willey
Ace Williams
Ed Wright**

Front Office

**Bill Cousins
Bob Fuchs
Roland Hemond
Jack Rogers
Billy Sullivan**

Representatives from the National Pastime

**Bill Bartholomay
Dick Bresciani
Mike Cather
Ken Coleman
Walt Dropo
Bob Feller
John "Spider" Jorgensen
Stan Kasten
Ted Lepcio
Frank Malzone
Mickey McDermott
Sam Mele
Lennie Merullo
Ken McBride
Kevin Millwood
Bill Monbouquette
Eddie Pellagrini
Johnny Pesky
Mary Pratt
Buck Rodgers
Bob Savage
Mickey Vernon**

In addition, family members representing **Tom Earley, Gene Moore, Doc Gautreau, Bob Elliott, Lou Tost, Skippy Roberge, Lou Perini, Joe Maney, Earl Torgeson** and umpire **Bill Stewart** have been in attendance. **Adacie Fox Allen**, a member of the

entourage of super fan **Lolly Hopkins** has been a reunion regular. A memorable moment occurred during the 1994 reunion when **Sid Barbato**, a surviving member of the Troubadours played "Has Anyone Here Seen Kelly" for **Tommy "Kelly" Holmes**. When "Jimmy" of the Jimmy Fund emerged from years of obscurity in Maine, we invited him to come to Boston and mingle with some of the Braves that were at his bedside during **Ralph Edwards'** famous national radio broadcast in 1948. **Einar "Jimmy" Gustafson** graced us with his presence a couple of times before passing away. And who could ever forget revisiting Braves Field under the expert guidance of **Ralph Evans**?

Braves Field 1937

Opened in 1915, Braves Field celebrated its 22nd birthday during the '37 season. Of course, by then it wasn't called "Braves Field." When the Fuchs regime exited the scene, the new ownership consortium attempted to exorcise years of poor performance through a simple name change. The Tammany Hall-inspired "Braves" nickname was abandoned and replaced by the "Bees" tag. In turn, Braves Field became National League Park.

In the summer of 1937, *Chicago Tribune* columnist **Edward Burns** embarked upon a series of articles designed to educate his readership on the histories and idiosyncratic layouts of ballparks outside of the Windy City. His first stop was in Boston and his inaugural piece on June 6 was entitled "We're Off on Visit to Foreign Ball Parks -- Fans, Meet the Bees!"

One of Burns' first observations was of the titling of Boston's Senior Circuit playing grounds. With tongue firmly implanted in cheek, Burns explained that the preferred name, the "Bees' Hive," drew an objection from "some Harvard purist" who felt that the term was exclusively reserved to describe an apiary. Burns also noted the proximity of the field to the world-renowned university: "George Washington could have stood in the left field bleacher ... and hit the Harvard campus with a silver dollar, or almost hit it."

Even at this time, Boston's ball parks were unique in the majors as neither the home of the Bees nor the Red Sox featured a second deck. The grandstand roof housed the press box which Burns nicknamed "Earache Alley," because of its reputation as the league's noisiest.

Burns found the park to have another feature unique from its counterparts in both leagues. Under the stands behind home plate was the "only concession stand in the majors which carries a full line of chewing tobacco." This is one bit of nostalgia that current fans and clean-up crews don't miss!

"Infested by pigeons and gamblers" was the notation Burns placed on the right field pavilion on his crudely drawn sketch of the park that accompanied his article. Burns informed his readers, however, that the betting crowd in the uncovered grandstand had dwindled a bit with the legalization of gambling at horse races at Narragansett Park, some forty miles away.

A major change to the right field pavilion occurred before the '37 season. Last year, the grandstand jutted out over the foul line and straightened out as it approached the Jury Box. This configuration required a batter to poke a 376 foot shot in order to reach the

seats. During the off season, the projecting part of the pavilion was removed, shifting the foul line. At the time of Burns' visit, a batter had to slug the horsehide some 410 feet and clear the ten foot screen in front of the Jury Box. Center field extended 407 feet from home plate at its furthest part, while the left field foul line reached the bleacher section at 368 feet.

In portraying the park's outer confines, Burns took the opportunity to regale his readers with the home team's earlier futile attempt to reshape the field to the advantage of its sluggers. Some seven or eight years ago according to Burns, the home of the Bees was the only one of the only ballpark that had a ground rule "making a homer a two base hit." The rule existed for several weeks during the season.

Seeking to increase the team's home run total by capitalizing on the batting prowess of **Les Bell** and other left field pull hitters on their roster, the Braves "decided to make the left field stands purely a papier mache bit of scenery, constructed in front of the real stand, ridiculously close to the home plate." The effort backfired. Opponents' right handed hitters, even including pitchers, immediately took advantage of the shortened distance while Bell and his Tribe counterparts didn't. Management quickly recalled the contractors to disassemble their creation but encountered delays as the workers expressed their displeasure at the destruction of their "masterpiece" by "taking their own sweet time." Games continued to be played at Braves Field, causing the adoption of a ground rule that provided for any ball hit into the skeleton of the aborted home run garden to be adjudged a double.

Burns' critique of National League Park even extended into the dugouts. He found them to be "commodious" but noted that the locker rooms for the home team and visitors strangely adjoined each other. Burns rated the dressing rooms as "not the best." In this regard, he offered the Bees a suggestion should they ever desire to make improvements -- "get **Lon Warneke** sore enough." When he was with the Cubs a few seasons ago, the Cardinal rightly became upset at himself for a defeat at the hands of the Braves and set about to make some renovations to the clubhouse. Included in Warneke's barrage of destruction was the room's stove. Warneke was billed \$25 for the destruction of the stove, which had been appraised by the junkman that carted it away as being worth \$1.75.

2009 Baseball Season & The Braves

From time to time over the course of the baseball season, events take place that are somehow linked to the Boston Braves. Below are a few that have happened to date.

When **John Smoltz** finally took to the mound for the Red Sox, he became one of only three pitchers that spent at least twenty seasons with one franchise before donning the uniform of another. Coincidentally, all three spent two decades with the Braves before moving on. Smoltz joined our own **Warren Spahn** and **Phil Niekro** in this rare achievement.

The travails of this year's Washington Nationals team brought back memories of the 1935 Braves. The Nats' early season inability to win appeared to put them in a position of establishing an ignominious record -- having one of its players out-homer the club's season victory

total. Slugger **Adam Dunn** seemed to have had a shot at surpassing the Nationals wins until the club's performance picked up a bit later in the campaign. No player has yet to accomplish this feat but two swatters have come within four circuit clouts of doing it. The first was none other than **Wally Berger** of the '35 Braves. Berger stroked 34 home runs while the Tribe could only muster 38 wins during the entire campaign. Had his home field possessed more favorable outfield dimensions for right-handed hitters, Berger would seem to have had the capacity to establish this somewhat embarrassing mark. The other ballplayer who came close apparently did so under the influence of performance enhancing drugs. Chicago's **Sammy Sosa** clubbed 63 dingers in 1999 while the Cubbies were only able to post 67 victories.

On May 20 at Fenway Park, Red Sox center fielder **Jacoby Ellsbury** got a real workout. He tied the major league record of making 12 putouts in a nine-inning game. Twice before an outfielder had made four innings-worth of outs. The first to do it was Boston Braves center fielder **Bailey "Earl" Clark** at Braves Field on May 10, 1929. He also was credited with an assist. Clark's efforts went for naught as the Reds bested the Tribe, 5-3, scoring three unearned runs on shortstop **Rabbit Maranville's** first error of the season. The next day, Clark recorded another 7 putouts in an 8-7 win over Cincinnati. Clark played for the Braves for seven seasons (1927-33), batted over .300 three times but never performed in more than 84 games in any one campaign. He landed briefly with the Browns in 1934 before closing out his major league career. The Twins' ill-fated **Lyman Bostock** reached the dozen mark during the second game of a May 25, 1977 doubleheader at Fenway. Bostock had 5 putouts in the first game, aiding Minnesota's sweep of the Bosox.

When the Blue Jays' **Aaron Hill** and the Rockies' **Brad Hawpe** were named to the 2009 All Star Team, they increased the number of former LSU players so honored to eight. The first was **Connie Ryan** in 1944. Ryan was performing for the Boston Braves at second base. Two others had ties to the Tribe. **Al Dark**, named multiple times at shortstop while with the Giants, started his long and illustrious career in Boston. **Joe Adcock**, who represented the Milwaukee Braves in the 1960 Mid Summer Classic at first base, was traded to Boston in February of 1953 and wore the "B" on his cap until the Tribes' abrupt departure to Milwaukee at the end of spring training.

A perfect game is one of baseball's rarest events. **Mark Buehrle's** July 23, 2009 perfecto was the first thrown by a Sox hurler in 87 years. On April 30, 1922, 26-year-old Pale Hose right-hander **Charley Robertson** achieved baseball immortality in only his fourth big league start. And he accomplished the feat against a potent Detroit Tigers line-up that included **Ty Cobb** and **Harry Heilmann**, at a filled Navin Field in Detroit. Robertson had a one game, two inning major league debut in 1919 with the infamous "Black Sox." His 2-0 perfect game victory was not without its controversial moments. Both Heilmann and Cobb accused the pitcher of throwing a ball doctored with grease and oil. Cobb even went so far as to personally inspect Robertson's uniform. At the time, Robertson was unaware that this one victory would represent the pinnacle of his career. Four seasons of losing records resulted in his departure from Chicago. Robertson spent most of the 1926 campaign in the minors except for an 8-game stint with the St. Louis Browns. The

perennial second division Boston Braves took him in the minor league draft in the fall of 1926 and he spent his final two big league seasons with Boston. The change of scenery didn't help as Robertson went 7-17 and 2-5 before being banished to the American Association Milwaukee Brewers where he concluded his professional career in 1930 with a 19-loss season. A highlight of his time in the Hub came on May 29, 1928 when he pitched the Braves to a victory over the Phillies in a game that marked future Hall of Famer **George Sisler's** debut in a Tribe uniform.

Robertson's perfect game was the last for the National Pastime until **Don Larsen's** World Series masterpiece in 1956. Reporters rushed to get his reaction to Larsen's gem and were surprised by Robertson's response. Robertson indicated that if he had it to do all over again that he wouldn't have pursued a career in the National Pastime. "Baseball didn't give me a particularly bad break but I went through it and found out too late that it is ridiculous for any young man with qualifications to make good in another profession to waste time in professional athletics. There's nothing wrong with them, but by the time you're through with athletics, you have to start over, and at an age when it's the wrong time to be starting."

One of major league baseball's rarest events occurred on August 23, 2009. Phillies' second baseman **Eric Bruntlett** accomplished an unassisted triple play in the ninth inning of a game against the Mets. Of the fifteen listed in baseball's record books, only one was performed by a member of the Boston Braves. On October 6, 1923 at Braves Field, Tribe shortstop **Ernie "Red" Padgett** made an unaided tri-killing in the fourth inning in a contest against the Phils. In almost an identical play to that of Bruntlett's, Padgett caught a liner, stepped on second for a force-out and tagged the baserunner who had advanced from first base. Padgett's heroics, in the first game of a doubleheader on the final day of the season, contributed to a victory that helped the Braves barely avoid the National League basement and give the Philadelphians sole possession last place. Rookie Padgett had been called up from the Memphis Chickasaws of the Southern Association ten days previously and his play of a lifetime came in only his fourth game in the majors. It was the first "modern era" unassisted triple play in the National League; earlier, **Paul Hines** of the Providence Rhode Islanders turned the trick in 1878. Fans of Boston had the unique privilege of seeing a player from each of their major league clubs perform this exceptional feat at home during the 1923 season. On September 14, Red Sox first baseman **George Burns** retired the Indians by himself during the second inning of a game at Fenway Park.

Padgett stuck with the Braves in 1924 as the team's regular third baseman but slid to a utility role the following season and was sold to the Cleveland Indians in 1926. He performed infrequently as a fill-in there and played the final game of his five year big league stint on July 30, 1927.

Warren Berg's Memories

Member **Warren Berg** is a retired bank executive with a long association with collegiate sports. He attracted the attention of the Braves and Red Sox while pitching for Harvard's varsity baseball team. Despite the best efforts of legendary Braves scout **Jeff Jones**, Warren chose to sign with the Red Sox. After graduating from

Harvard in 1943, he served as a captain in the Marine Corps from 1943-46. Upon mustering out, Warren spent time in the Class B New England League with the independent Providence Chiefs and the Lynn Red Sox. He compiled a 2-2 won-loss record with a 3.50 ERA over the course of twelve games (11 in Lynn and 1 in Providence) in 1946. A highlight of his sole professional season was a 4-0 shutout of the Nashua Dodgers in the second game of a twin bill. Scattering six hits, Warren faced 32 batters and didn't issue a walk. His efforts preserved a split for Lynn. In the Dodgers' line-up for that game were future Hall of Famers **Roy Campanella** and **Walt Alston**. Campy was the league's All Star catcher while Alston, at first base, was Nashua's playing manager. Nashua would later defeat Lynn in the New England League playoff finals series. One of Warren's teammates at Lynn, catcher **Matt Batts**, made it to Boston the following year and spent ten seasons in the majors.

Warren went on to coach at Harvard and manage the MIT Beavers baseball team from 1948-50 before entering the business world with Arthur D. Little, Inc. in Cambridge and later joining Shawmut Bank of Boston. Along the way, he authored the History of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Athletics (1950) and the History of Harvard Baseball (1964). Warren is a member of Harvard's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Warren's tale concerning the Boston Braves began when he was coaching at MIT. He was approached once again by Braves scout Jeff Jones. Jones had come on campus to look over a pitching prospect. After the game, while walking to the field house, Jones described a new way that manager **Billy Southworth** had devised to conduct batting practice. The Tribe skipper would have coach **Bob Keely** catch and call signals for the batting practice pitcher who would throw only to the day's line-up, including the starting pitcher. If the batter didn't get a hit, he was out. Southworth personally supervised the procedure.

Jones offered Warren \$300 a month to assume the special batting practice pitcher role, which he quickly accepted. He went to the Wigwam for the club's next home game in June. Warren was called the Braves "clinic" pitcher because of his exceptional control and an effective "change of pace" pitch that was something of a novelty back then. He was asked to illustrate his specialty to the Tribe's mound corps. Warren sent along a copy of a photo of himself in action on the Braves Field mound with the monster electric scoreboard looming in the background.

Warren's last appearance at the Wigwam in 1950 was on September 23rd. The Braves were scheduled to face the Giants who were in a battle for first place with the Dodgers. Rumors were swirling around about a possible "dive" in favor of the New Yorkers by the fourth place Braves since their share of the World Series pool would be increased if the Polo Grounds, rather than tiny Ebbets Field served as the National League host site for the Fall Classic.

"It was about 1:30 and I had just come out of the shower, having finished my job as batting practice pitcher. I sat in front of my locker, which was the last one and next to Braves outfielders **Sam Jethroe** and **Luis Marquez**. Sam was Afro-American and Luis the first Puerto Rican person of "color" to play in the major leagues. That's why "we" were at the far end of the locker room, and opposite Braves catcher, **Walker**

Cooper.

The door of the locker room opened and in came the baseball commissioner, '**Happy**' **Chandler**, the former Kentucky Governor and national politician. His two bodyguards lifted him on top of one of the big 'traveling trunks' in the center of the room. 'Happy' began by saying, 'Gentlemen, this is a very, very important game, and I know how you feel, but I will expect you to do your very best.' All of a sudden a big catcher's mitt came flying across the room from Walker Cooper's corner -- it just missed the Commissioner and crashed into the wall above Jethroe's locker, the second down from me. There was a silence; the bodyguards grabbed 'Happy' by the arms, lifted him down and hurried out the door. When the Commissioner left, there was some laughter. The Braves lost to the Giants 3-2. The Giants went on to beat Brooklyn in the playoffs on **Bobby Thomson's** famous last inning home run. They then lost to the Yankees in the World Series."

Warren obtained a memento from his locker room neighbor, Luis Marquez. "Luis Marquez had a very small, pinpointed head. I asked him if I could have one of his three hats to give to my son Peter. He said 'sure' in Spanish and then put three Cuban cigars in it." Warren later sold the hat to a collector in Malden for \$300. It had Marquez's name embroidered on the hatband.

As a departing gift for services rendered, Warren was approached by the Braves' public relations director, **Billy Sullivan** and given a choice, "Do you want nine hundred dollars or a new Buick?" Warren suspects that given the Braves' tough financial condition, the more attractive offer of the automobile resulted from a debt owed to the team from a neighboring dealership. His decision was an easy one and he received a "chit" for a new Buick convertible at Noyes Buick on Commonwealth Avenue in Allston. Warren selected a sparkling green model, which he drove home to Arlington the next week. The building that housed the Noyes dealership is now the Boston University Art Gallery located at 855 Commonwealth Avenue. See www.bu.edu/art/webPages/history2.html.

Thanks to Warren and other members who've taken the time to write down their special Boston Braves memories to share with the rest of us. Let's keep these coming in!

War Clouds On The Horizon

For our "Greatest Generation," even taking in a ballgame failed to provide an escape from the nightmare of the onset of another world war. On May 27, 1941, the Braves were involved in an incident that reflected this harsh reality.

The Tribe was at the Polo Grounds to play a night game against New York. 27,000 fans had gathered to witness the contest. The Giants' "**Prince Hal**" **Schumacher** opposed Boston's **Manny "Gyp" Salvo** on the mound. Salvo, a guest at our 1993 reunion, had come to the Hub in 1940 in a deal with the Giants that sent infielder **Tony Cuccinello** to Gotham.

The crowd witnessed what one writer called "the strangest nocturnal game ever staged in the Polo Grounds." It was a 1-1 pitchers' duel through seven

innings when home plate umpire **Jocko Conlan** called "time out" in an unprecedented move. The game was suspended for 45 minutes as President **Franklin D. Roosevelt**'s voice was piped through the stadium's public address system. Fans sat engrossed in silence and ballplayers leaned out from the clubhouse stairs to hear the president's radio "fireside chat" where he proclaimed "an unlimited national emergency" and announced steps that were only permitted when war was imminent.

In light of this dramatic announcement, the game between two also-rans took on a lesser importance but nonetheless had to be finished. When the contest resumed, both managers, Ott and Stengel, replaced their starting pitchers. The Giants inserted "**King Carl**" **Hubbell** while the Braves substituted **Richard Merriwell** "**Leif**" **Errickson**. Hubbell, in a rare relief appearance, was able to pitch his way out of trouble in the eighth and ninth and kept Boston scoreless. "King Carl" was allowed to bat in the last half of the final inning with runners on first and second. Although the future Hall of Famer batted only .183 in '41, he chose this instance to swat an Errickson offering safely into center field and drive in the winning run just as the clock struck midnight to end this historic day.

Sibby in '42

Sitting for an interview before the 1942 season, 20-year-old **Sibby Sisti** was peppered with a set of questions typically posed to athletes at that time. The greatest influence on his career? -- his parents. Mom and Dad Sisti were ardent baseball fans and always wanted their son to be a major leaguer. The perfect meal? -- "Shrimp cocktail, cream of tomato soup, steak, baked potato, corn on the cob, and a lettuce and tomato salad. Iced tea to wash it down, ice cream for dessert." His favorite radio program? -- **Bob Hope's** Pepsodent show. In addition, Sibby enjoyed radio broadcasts involving first class bands. On the top of the list was the music of **Glenn Miller**. A long-time movie fan, Sibby listed "Old Ironsides" with **Charlie Farrell**, **Wallace Beery** and **George Bancroft** as the most memorable flick that he'd seen. His preferred newspaper comic strips were Popeye and Superman. The most difficult plays for him to handle around the hot corner were slow grounders and bunts. And, his most uncomfortable experience on the diamond? -- "Finding myself arriving at third base when another runner was already there."

Home Sweet Home

The Hartford Courant of May 29, 2009 contained an article on 91-year-old **Jimmy Francoline**. Columnist **Dom Amore** profiled the local minor league ballplayer who spent the war years with the hometown Hartford Bees, the Braves' Eastern League affiliate. Francoline signed with the Cardinals in 1935 and remained in their system until 1937 when **Commissioner Landis** rebuked St. Louis and **Branch Rickey** for improperly stockpiling talent and granted free agency to a number of farmhands. Francoline quickly became Brooklyn chattel and also spent time in Cleveland's farm system before retiring after the 1939 season.

Lured back in action in 1941, Francoline joined the Braves Class D Bradford Bees, led by manager **Del Bissonette**. There he played with future Braves big leaguers **Ducky Detweiler**, **Ben Cardoni** and **Walt Linden**. With his dreams of the majors fading,

Francoline decided to settle down. Once again, he left the National Pastime and returned to Hartford. Francoline secured a job at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, contributing to the war effort. He and his family lived in the same house that his father built in 1912, just outside the left field fence of Bulkeley Stadium where Eastern League baseball was played. In fact, Francoline recalled that stray balls sometimes found their way into their backyard.

While other minor leagues shut down for the war's duration, the Eastern League remained in operation. Confronted with player shortages, Hartford Bees manager Bissonette sought out his former player. Francoline was available because he had failed his Army physical due to high blood pressure. He responded in the affirmative to "the best manager I ever played for." However, Francoline agreed only to play home games after his day shift at the plant.

Francoline performed as a part-timer through 1945, spending time at the hot corner and patrolling the outfield. He never played more than 71 games in a season for Hartford. His name alternatively appeared in box scores as "Francolini." It was his good fortune to be on one of the all-time great minor league baseball clubs. The 1944 Hartford team, known as the Bees, Senators or Laurels (local newspapers used different nicknames), set an Eastern League record with their 99-38 record and .723 winning percentage. The club has been designated to be among the all-time top 100 minor league teams (at #99). Francoline's teammates **Roland Gladu**, **Stan Shemo** and **Vince Shupe** reached the majors.

In 1945, Francoline was assigned the duty of pitching batting practice to **Babe Ruth**, who was in town for an exhibition game. Francoline stayed associated with baseball in variety of capacities (player, manager and general manager) until 1952. He wrapped up his time with a seven game appearance back in Hartford that year.

Francoline and his buddies occasionally plant flowers at the monument that designates the spot where Bulkeley Stadium once stood. The old ballpark was demolished in 1960 and Ellis Manor, a rehabilitation facility, has taken its place on George Street.

How to Play The Wigwam Outfield

Unlike neighboring Fenway Park, Braves Field had its outfield boundaries plastered with advertisements in the late '40s and early '50s. In addition to being a source of revenue, these billboards also served as markers by which some Tribe flychasers positioned themselves against opposing batters.

1948-49 Braves outfielder **Jim Russell** was once queried as to how he covered his territory when sluggers **Ralph Kiner** and **Hank Sauer** came to the plate.

"I shaded Kiner right between Gem and Botany and played Sauer at 5 O'Clock Shadow. **Mike McCormick** [Braves' left fielder] played Kiner close to Horace Partridge [a Boston sporting goods firm]. You shaded a lefthanded hitter like **Grady Hatton** over to Ofgant [an automobile dealer]."

Russell also appeared ahead of his time in the way he wore his uniform pants. He preferred to have the pant

legs reach his ankles, unlike his contemporaries who favored the higher knicker style with stirrup sox fully exposed. Russell's reasoning was that this method provided additional protection from spiking. A writer once chided him by comparing his fashion innovation to that of a "grandmother's pantalettes, peeking coyly from under a hoop skirt." Russell defended his style by citing **Ted Williams** as setting the precedent. "Ted Williams wears 'em that way and he does all right."

The Babe's Braves Field Blasts

Babe Ruth hit some memorable home runs at the Wigwam as a member of the Yankees and the Braves. During the Bambino's Yankees years, the Red Sox would "borrow" Braves Field to play Sunday home games while the principal tenant was out of town. Sabbath "Blue Laws" prevented the Bosox from using Fenway Park due to its proximity to a house of worship.

Even on a Sunday, with the home team Red Sox destined for a last place finish, a visit by the Yankees was guaranteed to draw a crowd. 25,000 fans filed into Braves Field on June 30, 1929 as **Miller Huggins'** reigning World Series Champions took to the unfamiliar National League turf. Boston battled the New Yorkers but could not overcome the heroics of Babe Ruth, who drove in four of the Yanks' six runs in a 6-4 triumph. In the top of the fifth inning, Ruth blasted a baseball approximately 470 feet into the top row of the center field bleachers. It was his 16th circuit clout of the campaign.

A near replay of that day's events took place as the '29 season was drawing to a close. The Yankees came to town for a one-day visit on Sunday, September 1. The Wigwam's turnstiles spun some 28,000 ticket holders into the friendly confines. Again the Red Sox went down to defeat, 6-4. In the first inning, the Sultan of Swat stepped up to the plate and drove southpaw **Billy Bayne's** second pitch like a rocket to center field where it bumped into a billboard that sat atop the bleacher stands. Ruth's 40th carried as far as his previous shot before it was stopped by the interfering sign.

The mightiest Bambino Braves Field blast took place the succeeding season. On May 18, 1930, New York routed the Red Sox, 11-0 as 25,000 folks looked on. In his first inning at bat, Ruth sent a **Big Ed Morris** pitch into the Jury Box, where it landed about two rows in front of the scoreboard. A contemporary newspaper account called the clout "one of Babe's heartiest hits in his whole career." The reporter further commented that the homer was "the longest drive ever hit to right field in Braves Field since they first fenced in the land on the banks of the Charles, fifteen years ago." Some speculated that Ruth had exerted such force on the spheroid that it would have reached the armory across Gaffney Street, 490 feet from home, had it not been impeded by the top portion of the Wigwam's tiny right field bleacher section.

Ruth's last majestic blow at Braves Field occurred during his National League debut on April 16, 1935. The 41-year-old slugger had been waived out of the American League by the Yankees and was lured back to Boston by Braves owner **Judge Emil Fuchs**. Opening Day was designated "Judge Fuchs Day," in part for his early attempt to "reverse the curse." Despite the frigid weather, 25,000 fans came to watch the historic event -- and they would not be disappointed. With all eyes upon him, the Bambino

responded in the fifth inning in a manner that he had done 723 times before. Facing "**King Carl**" **Hubbell**, Ruth bludgeoned an offering 430 feet into the narrow runway between the Right Field Pavilion and the Jury Box, driving in what proved to be the game-winning run. During the bottom half of that inning, Ruth provided the contest's fielding gem. Although he was originally penciled in to play first base, a pre-game strategic change placed him in left field. There, in the fifth, Ruth had to madly dash from his position to short left where he plunged headlong to spear a shot off of Hubbell's bat, to avoid a Giants' comeback. During the sixth inning, snowflakes began to drift down on the field, causing an attending band to strike up "In The Good Old Summer Time" followed by "Jingle Bells." Unfortunately, one game does not make a season. Ruth would soon unhappily retire, the Braves would win only 37 more times that season (losing 115) and Judge Fuchs would be forced to abandon his ownership position.

Bunky, The Braves' Good Luck Bird

The baseball fraternity is a superstitious lot, especially during a hot streak. Such was the case at Braves Field in the summer of 1950 as the home team sought to put the disastrous '49 season behind it any way they could. Sportswriter **Bob Broeg** wrote about such an example in *The Sporting News*.

On June 17, a banded female white and brown-speckled homing pigeon flew into the open window of Traveling Secretary **Duffy Lewis's** office in the Braves' Gaffney Street administration building. The bird's arrival coincided with a Braves' winning streak. Since the 17th is Bunker Hill Day in Boston, the pigeon was quickly dubbed "Bunky." In search of nourishment, Bunky flew from Lewis's office into P.R. Director **Billy Sullivan's** room, lured by the aroma of a fresh doughnut. Unaware of his uninvited visitor, Sullivan turned to answer the telephone, providing Bunky with the opportunity to peck at his pastry.

The Braves' illustrious outfielder-turned-traveling secretary took custody of the wayward pigeon and purchased five pounds of bird seed. Lewis also made sure the Bunky had an ample supply of fresh water. In turn, Bunky brought the Tribe good luck as the club won 19 of 24 home games since her arrival.

During day games, Bunky sunned herself atop the Right Field Pavilion wall and at night rested on the top ledge of a press box window. The Braves' good luck charm was less appreciated by the visiting press corps and Lewis once had to rescue his charge from a bourbon-soaked bread crust offered by a "well-oiled" knight of the keyboard. Office staff also maintained a lookout against opponents' threats to shoot or bird-nap Bunky.

With free reign of the administration building, Bunky once took it upon herself to explore General Manager **John Quinn's** office and sit in his chair. The bird's boldness wasn't questioned. "Why not?" stated the club's diminutive P.R. Department staffer **Don Davidson**. "She's got the best won-and-loss record in the league, hasn't she?"

Writer Broeg noted that this wasn't the first time that the Braves could be described as having gone to the birds. In 1905-07, the Hub's National League entry was

owned by the Dovey brothers and bore the nickname, "Doves."

In Memoriam

The number of living former Boston Braves players diminished to 35 on September 28 with the death of 1949 Tribe outfielder **Don Thompson**. The 85-year-old Asheville, NC resident passed away after a long illness. Thompson was originally signed in 1943 by the Boston Red Sox as pitcher. The port-sider continued hurling in the Bosox farm system through 1946. On July 26, 1945, he pitched a no-hit, no-run game against the Indianapolis Indians while performing for the Louisville Colonels. A sore arm caused him to convert to an outfielder. He became Cardinals chattel via the minor league draft and was acquired by the Braves in a similar manner. Thompson made his major league debut on April 24, 1949 as a pinch hitter for **Vern Bickford** but would only see action in six more games that season with the Tribe. On October 4, 1949, the Braves packaged him with **Damon Phillips**, **Al Epperly** and a large bundle of cash in a deal that sent **Sam Jethroe** and **Bob Addis** from Brooklyn to Boston. The former Braves ended up on the roster of the International League Montreal Royals. A strong season north of the border resulted in a 1951 call-up to Brooklyn where he performed in a utility role that year and in 1953-54. Thompson served as a defensive replacement in two games of the '53 World Series and had one brief, shining moment. With two outs in the ninth inning of Game 4 and the bases loaded with Yankees, **Mickey Mantle** singled to left to drive in a run. Billy Marting attempted to score from second and a perfect throw from Thompson to catcher **Roy Campanella** closed out the 7-3 Dodgers' victory. Thompson wrapped up his career in 1954 with a lifetime .214 batting average. In his retirement years, he worked as a real estate agent.

On June 24, the Braves Family lost right-handed pitcher **Carlton Willey**. The Cherryfield, ME native died at the age of 78. Willey attended a Boston Braves tryout camp in Bangor and was offered a contract by the Tribe. He broke into professional ball in dramatic fashion in 1951 with the Provincial League Quebec Braves. Willey posted a 15-5 record that resulted in a league-best winning percentage of .750. He captured the ERA crown with a stingy 1.96 percentage. Willey's performance justified a jump from Class C to AA in 1952. Continuing to make progress, he went 10-6 with the Atlanta Crackers before spending the next few years in the Army. That Georgia club also featured future big league manager and BBHA reunion guest **Chuck Tanner**. With the parent now housed in Milwaukee, Willey rejoined the Braves farm system in 1955. His breakout season came in 1957 when he went 21-6 for the AAA Wichita Braves and was named the American Association's Most Valuable Player. In his major league debut on June 24, 1958 he spun a six-hit shutout over the potent San Francisco Giants. Willey finished the season at 9-7, with a 2.70 ERA, good enough to capture *The Sporting News* NL Rookie Pitcher of the Year award. However, due to a series of tough luck injuries, he never lived up to his potential. He did make an effective one inning relief appearance in the 1958 World Series against the Yankees. The Mets purchased him from the Braves in 1963 where Willey got to perform for former Braves manager **Casey Stengel**. He pitched well for the last place, 111 game-losing New Yorkers, winning nine games with a 3.10 ERA. Two injury-plagued seasons followed and Willey

hung up his spikes in 1965. A lifetime .099 hitter, he clubbed a grand slam in '63 and achieved some notoriety in that same year by retiring all three Alou brothers (Jesus, Matty and Felipe) in the same inning. In retirement, Willey scouted for the Phillies, served as a probation officer, a blueberry plant manager and operated a painting business. He was a guest at the BBHA's 14th annual reunion in 2005. Carlton Willey Day was celebrated in Maine on the day of his funeral.

The death of another Braves Family reunion guest occurred on September 28. **Humberto Robinson** was 79 at the time of his demise. He holds the distinction of being the first Panamanian to make the big leagues. Robinson began his pro career in 1951 with a 17-13 record for the Farnham Pirates of the Class C Provincial League. **Carlton Willey**, also making his organized baseball debut in 1951 in that Canadian circuit, went 15-5 for the rival Quebec Braves. A number of former Negro Leaguers populated Farnham's roster. With the Pirates, Robinson played with Negro League All Star outfielder **Lester Lockett**, pitcher **Bob Trice** of the Homestead Grays, **Josh Gibson, Jr.**, son of the legendary Negro League slugger and was managed by another Negro League All Star, **Sam Bankhead** (Dan's brother), the first African American to skipper in the minors since Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. Robinson was originally Yankees property. The Boston Braves purchased his contract from the Provincial League's Trois Rivieres Yankees during the '52 season and sent him to the Quebec Braves where he played with **Ed Charles** (see **The Glider** later in this newsletter) and a fellow BBHA reunion attendee, **Ray Lague**. Robinson's 12-8 performance resulted in his advancement to the next level in the Tribe's farm system. The slender Panamanian was 110-58 as a starter in the minors, winning 23 games at Jacksonville in 1954, leading the American Association in winning percentage in 1955 (14-4, .778) and topping the International League in victories (18) in 1957. Among his Boston Braves Family teammates in the minors were **Bob Coleman**, **Wes Covington**, **Don McMahon**, **John Goryl**, **Joe Morgan**, **Mike Roarke**, **Bob Trowbridge**, **Pete Whisenant**, **Frank Torre**, **Bill Reed**, **Harry Hanebrink**, **Felix Mantilla**, **Jim Pendleton**, **Jack Daniels**, **Luis Marquez**, **Paul Burris**, **Carlton Willey**, **Bert Thiel**, **Bob Thorpe**, **Charlie Gorin**, **Bob Giggie** and **Georges Miranda**. Robinson reached the majors in 1955 with Milwaukee. Over the course of a five season stint in the big leagues with the Braves, Indians and Phillies, he was used almost exclusively in relief role (only 7 starts in 102 appearances). Robinson was a member of the 1958 NL pennant-winning Braves but did not appear in the Fall Classic. He achieved some notoriety with Philadelphia in 1959 when he refused a bribe to throw a ballgame. Wrapping up his time in the majors in 1960, Robinson departed with an overall 8-13, 3.25 ERA record. He left the game after pitching in the minors in 1961 and in the Mexican League in 1962. After baseball, Robinson worked for Chock Full O' Nuts in New York City for nineteen years. He was buried in Pinelawn Cemetery in Bethpage, NY.

Thanks once again to the efforts of member **Len Levin**, we're able to note the passing of some former Boston Braves farmhands.

Former major league pitcher **Ed Blake** was 83 years old at the time of his death on April 15, 2009. He was a high school teammate of Yankees great **Hank Bauer**.

A right-hander, Blake reached the majors in 1951 with the Reds and made brief appearances with Cincinnati in 1952 and 1953. His last season in the majors was with the Kansas City Athletics in 1957 where he had a two-game trial. All told, Blake only appeared in eight major league box scores during the parts of four seasons at the top. He toiled in the minors for 15 years, resulting in a 148-126 record. 124 of his wins were recorded at the AAA level. Blake was a member of the Braves' 1952 Milwaukee Brewers American Association affiliate that finished in first place with 101 victories. Blake contributed 10 wins to that total. His teammates on the club included **Bill Bruton, Don Liddle, Jack Dittmer, George Crowe, Luis Marquez, Gene Conley, Gene Mauch, Bus Clarkson, Dick Donovan, Johnny Logan, Billy Klaus, Roy Hartsfield, Chuck Tanner, Virgil Jester, George Estock** and **Murray Wall**.

90-year-old **Harold Cowan** died on March 8, 2009. He was one of the earliest builders of luxury homes in the Pinecrest area of Miami, FL. An excellent all around athlete, he signed with the Braves in 1946 and played in the infield for their Florida International League affiliate Miami Beach Flamingos at the Class C level. In 93 games, Cowan batted .212. His playing career ended when he joined the Navy. In addition to a successful career in the private sector, Cowan returned to organized baseball as an umpire in the Florida State League in 1962.

Edwin C. Gilman, who died at age 79 on April 12, 2009, was a standout left-handed hurler at Ashland (MA) High School. He signed a Boston Braves contract after graduation. Gilman made brief stops in the team's minor league chain, appearing on the roster of the Hartford Chiefs in 1950-51. After Korean War service with the Navy, he attempted to resume his ball playing career as Milwaukee chattel. Assigned to the Jacksonville Braves in 1954, he failed to record sufficient appearance to make the record books. He hooked on with the Cubs' Vicksburg Hill Billies of the Cotton States League in 1955 and in 34 games, won 8 while losing 10, achieving a 3.30 ERA. According to his son, Gilman's career was cut short by a torn ligament in his pitching arm. Medical procedures of the time weren't sufficiently advanced to restore his arm to a professional level. His son also noted that his father occasionally would double as his minor league team's bus driver. Gilman served as an Ashland selectman for six years.

On May 28, 2009, **Donald J. Gunnet** passed away. He was 87. He was signed by the Boston Braves in 1941 and assigned to the Bridgeport Bees of the Inter-State League. The shortstop was sent to the D-level PONY League in 1942 where he got into 19 games with the Bradford Bees before entering WWII with the Navy. Gunnett did not resume his baseball career after military service and spent 35 years as an insurance agent.

80-year-old **John Pearston** died on July 15, 2009. A three-letter athlete at William Hall High School in West Hartford, CT, he entered the Boston Braves farm system in 1948 for his only professional season. Sent to the Class D Richmond Braves of the Ohio-Indiana League, Pearston performed in the infield and outfield. In 116 games, he was only able to bat .202.

Boston Braves Relic "Down Under"

From time to time, we receive interesting and unusual queries at our internet website. Recently, an email arrived from the distant shores of Australia. Attached to the email were scans of an official **Ford Frick** National League baseball containing a number of faded signatures. The most distinct autograph, penned in a vibrant green ink, was not of a ballplayer but of **Harry Jenkins**, the director of the Boston Braves' farm system in the late '40s and early '50s. The writer, unfamiliar with our National Pastime, sought to decipher the signatures and date the baseball.

In an exchange of emails, the history of the ball and its journey overseas unfolded. Jenkins proved to be the key toward solving the mystery. He was a WWII vet who flew some 65 missions in Africa and Europe. Jenkins' love of flying continued as a civilian and he sometimes took to the air to visit cities housing Braves' farm teams. The Three Little Steam Shovels (Messrs. Perini, Rugo and Maney), as contractors and club owners, were also early advocates of air travel. This background, no doubt, planted the seeds that led to the legendary "Rookie Rocket" 10,200 mile press junket on a Pan American World Airways airplane during the winter of 1952.

Our writer was able to track the baseball's provenance through conversations with family members. It was believed that Harry Jenkins married an Australian woman sometime in the 1940s. Jenkins' father-in-law was a patient of our writer's grandfather, a urologist. An introduction was made through this connection. A friendship arose between the writer's grandfather and Jenkins based upon their mutual hobby of growing orchids and carnations. This led to the development of close ties between the two families. The writer's mother became godmother to Harry Jenkins' son Coleman. At some point, Jenkins presented the autographed baseball to her. She already had the semblance of an autograph collection through her father, who was not only a noted physician but also a silver medalist in swimming in the 1920 Olympics. Among such cherished possessions are the signatures of **Gene Tunney** and **Duke Kahanamoku**.

Many of the signatures on the baseball had badly faded. Fortunately, our writer is an art conservator and had access to an ultraviolet light. That source enhanced the signatures on the ball, revealing such signees as **Earl Torgeson, Warren Spahn, Bucky Walters, Dick Donovan, Vern Bickford, Willard Marshall, Dave Cole, Max Surkont, Johnny Sain, Gene Mauch, Billy Southworth, Bob Keely** and, of course, Harry Jenkins. That aggregation allows us to date the ball to 1951, prior to Southworth being replaced at the helm by **Tommy Holmes**.

Our writer is now trying to track down **Coleman Jenkins** to further tie up loose ends. This Boston Braves ball represents an early baseball link between our two countries. With Australia becoming another important international source of ballplayers, perhaps the day will come when autographed Australian baseballs will find their way to the United States.

The Glider

On August 22, the New York Mets celebrated the 40th anniversary of their "miracle" World Series championship team. Among those invited back for the ceremony was third baseman **Ed Charles**, who closed out his big league career with the New Yorkers that

season. The Daytona Beach, FL native can recall as a 12-year-old watching Jackie Robinson going through preseason drills at Kelly Field. Much later in life, he would meet the Hall of Famer when both were retired from the game and each was pursuing small business opportunities.

His parents divorced and Charles moved to St. Petersburg with his mother. As he matured, Charles developed his baseball skills and began to attract attention. Barred from accepting an offer from the Negro League Indianapolis Clowns by his mother, he was invited to a tryout by the owner of the Florida International League St. Petersburg Pelicans. The team was looking to integrate its squad but Charles' skills indicated that he was not yet ready for Class B level play. Nevertheless the St. Pete owner contacted the Boston Braves who were impressed enough to sign him to a professional contract in 1952. The team assigned the 19-year-old Charles to the Quebec Braves of the Class C Provincial League. Playing shortstop, he batted an impressive .317 and helped the club capture the league playoff crown. BBHA reunion attendees **Humberto Robinson** and **Ray Lague** were among his teammates. Charles rubbed shoulders with other members of the Boston Braves family while in the bushes. **Connie Ryan** was his manager in 1957 with the Corpus Christi Clippers. He and **Joe Morgan** were teammates at Jacksonville, Wichita and Louisville. Unfortunately for Charles, he remained buried in Braves farm system until being traded to the Kansas City Athletics in December of 1961. Charles held down the hot corner for the Athletics until being traded to the Mets in May of 1967. His graceful base running and performance on the field earned him the nickname, "The Glider."

Charles currently resides in Queens, a short hop from the Mets' new home at Citi Field. He is a published poet and some of his work reflects the racism that he faced while playing in the Braves organization in the then still-segregated South.

Sittin' In The Jury Box

Broadcaster **Jim Britt** was once so incensed about a piece penned by Boston sportswriter **Al Hirshberg** about the '49 Braves that appeared in *SPORT* magazine that he wrote a rebuttal to the editor that was reproduced in the March, 1950 issue. According to Hirshberg, "In the heat of an argument at a press party, Southworth accused a Boston radio announcer of being partial to the Red Sox. The announcer squawked so violently that the two nearly came to blows." Britt labeled the claim "an out-and-out fabrication." He further stated to the periodical's editors, "It makes for a good story, but it ain't so. One eye-witness to the conversation, **Steve O'Leary** of the *Boston American*, denied it in a story which carried his byline. As the radio announcer referred to, I wish this exaggerated version of a discussion between Billy Southworth and myself would be shelved."

Six-foot-eight-inch Boston Braves rookie pitcher **Gene Conley** made his professional basketball debut with the Celtics at Boston Garden on November 16, 1952. Boston defeated the Rochester Royals, 96-87. Conley played five minutes, scored two foul shots and, in general, handled the ball well. Coach **Red Auerbach** remarked, "He can be a very good player. I mean it -- very good." Conley responded, "I'm glad the first one is over. I fumbled around a bit out there, but I'll be all right

now. It felt good to be playing. I really love this game of basketball."

If you had a television set back in the spring of 1952, you could watch a program in glorious black and white put together by the Boston Braves. Every Thursday evening at 6:15 over WNAC-TV, the "Boston Braves' Television School For Little Leaguers, College, High School or Sand Lot Players" could be viewed on those small, circular cathode ray tubes housed in primitive, boxy TV sets. The show was designed to have Braves regulars demonstrate and provide instruction on batting, fielding and pitching and "every department of diamond play." Do any kinescopes of these programs exist?

Many years ago, *The Sporting News*, then baseball's "bible," would hand out questionnaires to players, especially rookies, during spring training. The February 16, 2009 issue of *Sporting News Magazine* reproduced several of these historic documents, including one handed in by **Hank Aaron**. Hammerin' Hank filled out the form on January 26, 1953 when he was still Boston Braves property. In his own handwriting, Aaron described how he played a half year with the Indianapolis Clowns before being sold to the Boston Braves.

Our 17th reunion was the subject of a feature piece in the June 5, 2009 issue of *Sports Collectors Digest*. Thanks go to member **Arnold Bailey** for continuing to annually submit his excellent summaries to this periodical. The article included a wonderful photo of our late business manager, **George Altison**, arm-in-arm with Braves players **Johnny Logan** and **Clint Conatser**. And many thanks to member **Hank Dever** for his ongoing efforts at finding and sending along Braves-related materials such as this.

Long-time BBHA member and frequent newsletter contributor **John Ahokas** seeks the assistance of fellow members. He'd like to acquire a copy of *How to Play and Enjoy Baseball by the Stars of the Milwaukee Braves*. The book was published in 1958. John can be contacted at 560 West Main Street, Hyannis, MA 02601.

Former Boston Braves catcher **Ebba St. Claire's** kid, Randy, was fired as the Washington Nationals pitching coach on June 2, 2009. He had survived a prior coaching purge but the Nats mound staff's then 5.49 ERA led to his demise. St. Claire has spent 31 years in baseball as a player and coach. His manager, **Manny Acta**, was shown the door just a little bit later.

All but two games of utility player **Jim Pankovits'** six seasons in the majors were spent with the Houston Astros. Those final two games were played in a Boston Red Sox uniform in 1990. His brief appearance in the Hub was somewhat of a homecoming as his father, Vince, was a Boston Braves farmhand in 1947-48. **Vince Pankovits**, a catcher by trade, also had had a tryout with the Yankees and was able to get Babe Ruth autographed his invitation. Son Jim managed in the Bosox chain for three years in New Britain (1992-94) before returning in that capacity to the Astros farm system.

Former Boston Braves outfielder **Luis Olmo** (1950-51) celebrated his 90th birthday on August 11. The San Juan, Puerto Rico chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research and the Sports Museum of Puerto

Rico helped Olmo mark the occasion. He was the second major leaguer from the island and the first Latino to hit a World Series home run (for the Dodgers in 1949). In 1946, Olmo led the Senior Circuit in triples. He played and managed in the Puerto Rican winter leagues with much acclaim. Olmo was one of the players suspended by major league baseball for jumping to the Mexican League in the late '40s. After his playing career ended, he scouted for the Milwaukee Braves and was responsible for the signings of **Juan Pizarro** and **Sandy Alomar, Sr.** Olmo was inducted into the Puerto Rico Sports Hall of Fame in 1962 and is a member of the Brooklyn Hall of Fame. His hometown of Arecibo named its baseball stadium after him.

The home of a former Boston Braves owner was offered for sale in June. The solidly-built, four-bedroom, Tudor-style manor home in Brooklyn, CT was once the residence of **J.W. Powdrell**. As the richest man in Brooklyn, he owned several area mills and was part of the **Robert Quinn** syndicate that bought out **Charles F. Adams'** 73% position in the club in 1941. A by-product of the deal was the restoration of the "Braves" team nickname. Included with Powdrell in this investor group were such notables as **Frank McCourt**, grandfather of the current Dodgers owner, and future principal owners, **Guido Rugo**, **Joseph Maney** and **Lou Perini**. The Powdrell estate sits on 1.53 acres of land at 89 Pomfret Road. Boston Bees manager **Casey Stengel** was said to have been a regular guest at the residence. The asking price was \$389,500.

100-year-old **A. Arthur Giddon** was honored at Fenway Park on May 2. Giddon grew up in Brookline, MA and lived within walking distance of Braves Field. After school and in the summer, he hung around the Wigwam. Giddon became the club's batboy for the 1921 and 1922 seasons. Among his duties was to polish shoes, oil gloves and pick up candy and cigarettes for the players. Instead of tips, Giddon received baseballs that he shared with friends for use in sandlot games. He recalls as Tribe standouts of the time, outfielder **Billy Southworth**, pitcher **Rube Marquard**, outfielder **Ray Powell**, infielder **Hod Ford** and third baseman **Tony Boeckel**. Giddon also met the stars of visiting National League teams but never thought to ask for autographs. When he was preparing for a game in 1921, the 13-year-old struck up a conversation with a distinguished gentleman in the stands. It turned out to be Commissioner **Kenesaw Mountain Landis**, who advised the lad to pursue a career in law. Giddon followed that advice and ended up heading the public defender's office in Hartford, CT. When the Braves left town, he shifted his allegiance to the Red Sox. Upon learning of the centenarian, the Bosox invited Giddon to Fenway Park and made him an honorary bat boy for a day. Giddon's story was picked up nationally and the BBHA supplied NBC news with photographs for a story that they ran during a weekend newscast.

Former Boston Braves farmhand **Don Jordan** was recently inducted into the Eau Claire Memorial High School Hall of Fame. The schoolboy right-hander drew the Tribe's attention by hurling two no-hitters and exhibiting a sharp-breaking curveball. Jordan was 18 when he signed a pro contract and was assigned to his hometown Northern League Eau Claire Braves. He anchored the mound corps there for two seasons, posting records of 16-6 in 1951 and 10-5 in 1952 before departing for military service. During the '52 campaign,

Jordan's shortstop was league All Star **Henry Aaron** and another future major leaguer, **Wes Covington**, patrolled the outfield. Jordan resumed his baseball career back in Eau Claire in 1955. Despite a respectable 11-7 mark on the mound, he decided to abandon the National Pastime and went on to a 35-year career in public education as a teacher, coach and administrator.

Congratulations are in order for a number of members of the Braves family that also have been inducted into a variety of Halls of Fame. We beat the New England Patriots to the punch when we inducted **Billy Sullivan** into the Boston Braves Hall of Fame in 1996 for his innovative public relations work for the Tribe and his devotion to keeping the memory of the team alive. As part of the Patriots' 50th anniversary celebration, Sullivan, the football franchise's original owner, was named to New England's Hall of Fame this spring. **Wes Ferrell**, who closed out his career with four games for the 1941 Braves, entered the Cleveland Indians' Hall of Fame at Heritage Park in Progressive Field in August. Included in the Pacific Coast League's Hall of Fame Class of 2009 were former Braves outfielders **Earl Averill** (1941) and **Frank Demaree** (1941-42). Pitcher **Jesse Barnes** (Boston Braves, 1915-17) was among this year's crop of Kansas Sports Hall of Fame honorees.

Norm Felske was a back-up catcher for the Braves' Hartford Chiefs club in 1949. In 28 games, he batted a very respectable .314 while playing alongside future big leaguers **Jack Daniels**, **Don Liddle**, **Bob Buhl** and **Bert Thiel**. Felske, now 84, achieved a degree of baseball immortality before embarking upon a professional career. After WWII military service, Felske entered Yale and was part of their national runner-up baseball clubs in 1947 and 1948. He holds the unique honor of catching the first ball ever thrown in the College World Series. The inaugural competition took place in Kalamazoo, MI at Hyames Field on the campus of Western Michigan College. In the Elis' lineup, Felske batted ahead future President **George H.W. Bush**. After graduation, he signed a contract with the Braves. The first pitcher Felske faced as a pro was veteran Negro League hurler **Dan Bankhead**. While in the minors, he once went 3 for 3 against **Whitey Ford**. Finger fractures while performing behind the plate curtailed his career and Felske used his Yale background as a civil engineer to become a successful real estate developer in Connecticut.

As a consequence of the Braves' shift to Milwaukee in the spring of 1953, the National League reassigned the Tribe's former Boston schedule for the upcoming season to the Pittsburgh Pirates. Learning of the change on March 18, the Bucs' general manager, **Branch Rickey**, remarked, "Judas Priest. No wonder **Lou Perini** wanted to get out of Boston." The cellar-dwelling Pirates' first 15 games of the upcoming campaign were now to be against the Dodgers, Giants and Phillies, who finished first, second and fourth, respectively, in 1952.

Author **Christopher Klein** has included the Ruggles T Station (former site of the South End Grounds) and Nickerson (Braves) Field among the recommended stops in his recent book, *The Die-Hard Sports Fan's Guide To Boston*.

93-year-old former Boston Braves infielder (1942, 1944) **Mike Sandlock** was honored at the 22nd annual

Jerry Sr. Memorial Celebrity Golf Tournament at the Innis Arden Golf Club in Old Greenwich, CT on August 11. Despite his advanced age, Sandlock can be found out on the links a couple of times a week.

Wrapping Up

Billy Sullivan once applied a quote by **Daniel Webster** to categorize the feelings of **George Altison** and the membership of the BBHA: "We are but few but there are those who love her." The "few" are the dedicated followers of a baseball team that left town over a half century ago. "Her" refers to our Boston Braves. With your continued support, we intend to carry on the responsibility of preserving and publicizing the rich history of Boston's Braves.

Thanks to the following members who have contributed thoughts, reminisces and materials: **John Brooks, John Ahokas, Hank Dever, Murray Brown, Dave Scrivines, Mort Bloomberg, Fr. Gerry Beirne, Joe McCann, Jack Ricco, Len Levin, Joe Maguire, Rich Rewkowski** ... and thank you **George Altison** for giving me the opportunity to edit this newsletter.

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