

# Boston Braves Historical Association Newsletter

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## **Remembering A Magical Season -- And Much More!**

by Saul Wisnia

Sixty years and one day after the last World Series game ever played at Braves Field, members of the BBHA gathered a mile from the Wigwam's remnants to reflect on that near-miss afternoon and the great days that preceded it. But while the BBHA's 17th reunion on October 12 at the Brookline Holiday Inn served as a celebration of the 1948 National League champs, it was also a chance to honor the memories of old friends and turn the clock back yet again with tales of times spent in and out of the spotlight.

Speedy outfielder **Clint Conatser**, who looks nearly two decades younger than the 1921 birth date on his baseball card, came in from California with his daughter **Pamela** to represent the '48 club. Clint found himself mobbed with well wishers seeking him out for handshakes and autographs during the cocktail hour, many of them getting his signature on copies of a new book, *Spahn, Sain and Teddy Ballgame*, on that historic season (*please see the newsletter insert for more information!*). Those who had attended **Ralph Evans'** annual tour of Braves Field before going on to the hotel may have noticed broadcaster **Greg Wayland** of New England Cable News (NECN) and his camera crew at Ralph's side; after deftly adding in some interviews from the luncheon along with archival footage, Wayland produced an exceptional six-minute tribute to the Braves and the Association that ran on NECN the next week and is still featured on its web site at [www.necn.com/Boston/Sports/Boston-Braves-fans-reminisce-glory-days-/1224726910.html](http://www.necn.com/Boston/Sports/Boston-Braves-fans-reminisce-glory-days-/1224726910.html). Reporter Wayland's interest in the Braves was not only professional. As his piece revealed, as a young boy, he had attended a game there with his father.

The day's formal festivities got underway with the traditional benediction from **Father Gerald Beirne** of Rhode Island, who surely pulled at the heartstrings of many in the crowd when he mentioned two former Braves who had passed away during the previous year: **Tommy Holmes** and **Art Johnson**. This pair were at opposite ends of the spectrum as ballplayers -- Holmes starred for a decade in Boston's outfield, while Johnson enjoyed just one decent full season as a left-handed pitcher before a rotator cuff injury and then World War II interceded -- but in the pantheon of BBHA heroes both shone brightly. Holmes was the first man honored by the Association with induction into its Hall of Fame, and while healthy, was an annual reunion attendee with his wife **Lillian**. Winchester native Johnson was a BBHA founding father and "Iron Man" who never missed a gathering from the group's 1991 formation until his death and delighted in sharing reflections of his time with Casey Stengel's "Bees." Happily, the Johnson family attendance record remains perfect, as Art's son **Dave** and his brother **Carl** (a minor league hurler for

the Bees and later a New Hampshire state senator) were on hand to acknowledge cheers in "Lefty's" honor.

Holmes' 1948 outfield colleague was the star of the day, as Conatser shared memories of his teammates, manager Billy Southworth, and some of the key moments of the '48 season during an engaging give-and-take with co-MC **Joe Morgan** -- the former Braves farmhand who was back in the spotlight himself this year on the 20th anniversary of his spectacular "Morgan Magic" debut as Red Sox manager. Walpole Joe got a fine bit of ribbing in on Clint when he introduced him with this story: "One day Dorothy and I were in a restaurant down in Florida, and this lady comes up to us and says, 'I'm from Massachusetts, and when I was young I was a babysitter for one of the Boston Braves players.' I asked who it was, and she says, 'Oh, you wouldn't know him. He wasn't any good.' I asked, 'What position did he play?' She said, 'Outfield,' and I said, 'Clint Conatser.' That was it!"

In reality, Morgan then related, Conatser was a fine right-handed hitter who batted .277 platooning primarily for slugger (and roommate) Jeff Heath against lefties during the summer of '48. Clint had several key hits during the year, including an eighth-inning homer at Ebbets Field in late August that beat the Dodgers 4-3 and kept Brooklyn from tying Boston atop the National League. Before Morgan and Conatser started their exchange, a recording of the California fly-catcher's most significant at-bat of the season was played for the crowd -- which was instantly transported back to October 11, 1948 by the excellent play-by-play of Braves "voice" **Jim Britt** broadcasting Game Six of the World Series against the Cleveland Indians.

*"Clint Conatser, a Braves outfielder, has a bat in his hands in the Braves dugout. Billy Southworth has moved in, and he just nodded his head to him. Clint Conatser is going to come out, in place of left-handed Marv Ricker. The bases are loaded with one out in the eighth inning, and Cleveland leads 4-1. ...Here's the wind-up, Bearden gets set.... THERE GOES A DRIVE TO CENTER FIELD! Going back for it is Tucker! He takes it, and here comes Holmes sprinting in with a run and Torgeson on his way to third base. That was a wicked smash that went straight-away to center field, and Holmes came in after the catch."*

Although Conatser's near-game-breaking sacrifice fly was followed by a clutch pinch double to left from Phil Masi to make it 4-3, the Braves rally ended there. Indians pitcher Gene Bearden was able to get through the ninth to preserve the game and the World Series for Cleveland, but Conatser believes that if Boston had pulled out the contest, things were looking good for a winner-take-all finale. "We win that ballgame and they've got nobody left to pitch. We've got Johnny Sain [who had allowed two runs in 17 Series innings] coming

back the next day for Game Seven. There's no way they beat Johnny Sain. But that's the way it goes."

Conatser admitted being frustrated at not playing more in the Series, getting just four plate appearances including a Game Three start in which he went 0-for-3 against the left-hander Bearden. Still, he has nothing but praise for his platoon-loving manager Billy Southworth, who this past summer was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame by virtue of his winning a combined four pennants and two World Series with the Cardinals and Braves.

"I was fortunate enough to room with Tommy Holmes that [1948] spring, and he told me, 'Clint, you're going to see something this year that you've never seen before. This man is absolutely unbelievable. The plays that he makes, the way he makes decisions, and how they work for him. I just don't know how he does it.' I watched all year, and Tommy was right. He [Southworth] would do things...there was a method to his madness. He would perch himself up behind the batting cage while the hitters were taking batting practice. He would watch for [who had the best] timing, and those are the guys he would use as pinch-hitters that day. He made all of his own decisions. He was the third-base coach, and didn't rely on anybody else. He was very confident of his ability, as he should have been."

Clint's favorite ballplayer on the club was his roommate **Jeff Heath**, who hit .319 with 20 homers and 76 RBI in just 364 at-bats under the manager's lefty-righty platoon. Conatser said Heath had requested not to play in the last few contests of the regular season after the Braves clinched, but Southworth had watched his Cardinals team go stale in 1943 after clinching early, resulting in a World Series loss to the Yankees. He didn't want a repeat performance, so Heath was in the lineup against the Dodgers on September 29 and suffered a horrific home plate injury at Ebbets Field.

"He dislocated his ankle and broke his tibia, and it ruined his baseball career," Conatser recalled. "I remember Campanella [Dodgers catcher] was yelling, 'I let him through, fellows, I let him through!' Heath might have been thinking of sliding, but then at the last moment he decided not to slide. You can't do that as a player. If you've been sliding all along and now you tell yourself *not to slide*, when the play comes up, you'll falter -- which he did in catching his spikes. It was horrible; you could have cut his foot off with a pair of scissors, it was that terrible. He played for a couple of years after that with some kind of a boot, but he was never able to make himself slide again."

Heath was immediately declared ineligible for the upcoming World Series, but his roommate was able to bring him a little joy after attending the Braves' NL pennant-clinching party at Al Schacht's restaurant that night. "I called him at the hospital and asked how he was doing, and he said, 'Clint, I'm in terrible pain. They're giving me morphine, but it won't work.' I said 'Well, I'm going to stop by for dinner, I'll grab a couple of bottles of champagne, and then I'll come over and see you.' So we had dinner, I grabbed a few bottles, and I got a cab and went over to the hospital. He was really miserable. So I gave him the first bottle, and he drank it all down at once. He started on the second one, stops, and then says to me, 'Clint, there's a good-looking nurse down the hall. Can you go ask her if she could come down here?' He had forgot all about his pain!"

A few days later, Boston's NL champs went to Fenway Park as spectators to watch the Red Sox and Indians do battle in the first-ever American League playoff. The winner would face the Braves in the World Series, and Clint and his teammates had mixed emotions. "The basic salary for ballplayers then was \$6,500 a year, and most guys didn't make much more than that," he said. "Cleveland seated 86,000 people, and Fenway Park sat something like 33,000, so we were adding up the dollars. We wouldn't have been disappointed if it was a Subway Series -- we would have liked that for Boston. But we weren't really disappointed when Cleveland won, as far as the money goes." [As losers in the World Series, each Brave player earned about \$4,600 in bonus money, more than twice the \$2,100 each runner-up Red Sox earned two years earlier facing the Cardinals in Fenway and equally smallish Sportsman's Park.]

Although Conatser was still with the team in spring training of 1949, when dissension rocked the Braves club, he says he didn't have any personal explanation for what happened. He did, however, relate the story of how he found out something was up:

"In spring training I was rooming with [Earl] Torgeson, and I got a call in my room one night. 'Is Torgy there?' 'No, he isn't.' 'Well this is Billy. Do you know where he is?' 'No I don't Billy.' Then I heard all sorts of commotion and yelling at the hotel, and I didn't know where Torgy was. So I called one of the guys and he told me he was at some nightclub out of town. I get hold of him there and say, 'You better get back here. Billy is on a rampage.' He was checking all the rooms, wondering where the players were. There was quite an uproar, and to this day I don't know what triggered it."

### ***Roy the (near) Red Sox***

The next man joining Morgan at the podium debuted with the Braves after the excitement of 1948 and '49, when the club was still competitive but about to begin its quick descent to the near-bottom of the National League. Like any true Southern gentleman, former second baseman **Roy Hartsfield** knows how to spin a tale, and he delighted the audience with his folksy description of how he was almost property of Boston's "other" major league team:

"I was still in high school at the tender age of 16. We had a post office box in Chattahoochee, Georgia, the town I was born in, and my father had a business right across the street from it. So I'd go over and pick up the mail every day, and one day I go over and pull out a contract from the Boston Red Sox. This is back when clubs did just about anything they wanted, with no regard for the rules. They want me to join their team the next year in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and I didn't even know where Scranton was."

"Well, there was a policeman named Marshall who handled the crossing right off the streetcar about four miles from my house, out by the high school. He played center field for the Atlanta Crackers in the Southern Association during the summer, and in the winter was a Fulton County policeman. He didn't know me from this microphone, but I said, 'I'll go ask Marshall in the morning. Maybe he can give me some advice on this.' I take out the contract and show it to him and he says, 'You shouldn't sign it.' I said, 'I can't sign it anyway -- I'm only 16. My father has to sign it to make it legal.' So he says, 'Well, on the strength of this contract, I'll take you out and introduce you to Earl

Mann.' He was the president of the old Atlanta Crackers, an independent club in the Southern Association."

"Now Marshall had never seen me play, and didn't know if I thought a baseball was blown up or stuffed. But he took me out there to meet Earl, and Earl says, 'Roy, I tell you what I'll do. I'll increase the monthly salary and give you a \$500 bonus.' I thought that was all the money in the world, and he didn't know if I could play or not! So at the age of 17, I was playing Double A ball in Atlanta right out of high school."

Rather than describe highlights from his days with the Braves, which included steady defense and a fine .273 average from 1950-52, Hartsfield said only that he loved Boston and wished his tenure here had been longer. Then he shared several amusing stories involving his favorite men in blue, the umpires. In one tale from his debut season with Atlanta, he recalled taking two high inside fastballs that an old Southern Association ump named Steamboat Johnson called strikes. Having been told previously by a teammate that Johnson was a reasonable man, he stated, "Listen, Steamboat. You're taking that bat right out of my hands. That pitcher is doing a good enough job on his own -- you don't have to help him. I just can't handle that pitch." Johnson replied by saying, "Son, you learn to handle that pitch and you can get up to the big leagues," to which Hartsfield quickly retorted: "You learn to call it, and you can go along with me!"

Roy's next umpiring account involved celebrated base-stealer Maury Wills of the Dodgers. According to Roy, Wills actually had 105 steals in 1962 rather than 104 noted in the record books. "The Dodgers were playing the Giants in Candlestick Park in San Francisco," Hartsfield said in setting the scene. "Jose Pagan was playing shortstop for the Giants, and Dusty Boggess is umpiring at second base. He's an old slow-talking southerner from Dallas, Texas, but he thought rather quickly. Maury sets sail for second base, and Pagan covers the bag. He takes the throw, puts the tag on Maury, and Maury hears Dusty say, 'Safe!' But the sign he makes is the out sign. Maury gets up and gets in contact with the bag. He says, 'Dusty, I *heard* you call me safe, but I *saw* you call me out. Which is it?' Dusty says, 'Well, Maury, only you, Pagan, and myself heard me say safe. Fifty thousand other people saw me call you out. What do you think it is?'"

#### **Another Take on Southworth**

Last called to the dais by Morgan was **Johnny Logan**, who has been taken to batting cleanup at these affairs and has certainly not mellowed with age. After first paying a tribute to his late roommate Sibby Sisti -- "Hey George, Sibby just called, and he wants his meatballs and spaghetti!" -- the former All-Star shortstop who bridged the club's Boston and Milwaukee years expressed his disappointment that longtime Braves batboy **Tommy Ferguson** could not be there. Fergie had planned as always to join his old friends at the gathering, but a terrible toothache had left him shacked up at his Falmouth summer home. His wife **Petey** came in his place, and Logan made sure she and everyone knew that he was holding Fergie responsible for the loss suffered by Johnny's beloved Milwaukee Brewers in the National League Divisional playoffs. "Tommy was a scout for the Phillies for 25 years, and he was the guy who advised them how to play the Brewers." [The Phils topped the Brewers 3-to-1 in the NLDS on their road to the World Series title.]

Logan was a four-time All Star and a member of two pennant-winning clubs with the Braves, but back in April of 1951 he was just another rookie out to prove himself in the big leagues. Boston was in New York to start the season against the Giants, and Johnny was thrilled to find himself in the starting lineup when he arrived at the Polo Grounds on Opening Day. "Larry Jansen is the pitcher [for New York], and I go 1-for-3 and handled eight or nine chances without an error. Boy, for a rookie, that's great! I went back to the hotel and was really feeling good about what a great game I had."

"Then the second day comes, and I see the lineup -- Logan is hitting eighth. I think, 'OK, at least I'm in the game.' The first inning we go out one-two-three. The second inning, I'm about to come up with the bases loaded and two outs. I'm in the on-deck circle, ready to hit, and time is called. Here comes Billy Southworth out to speak with me. I thought he was going to say something like, 'Be careful, get a base hit, and let's score some runs.' But he puts his arm around me and says, 'Kid, I'm taking you out.' This is the second inning!"

"So there I am, kind of disappointed, and I went back to the bench and sat all alone meditating and thinking. Little Willard Marshall was going to hit for me, and I'm thinking: Should I root for Willard Marshall to get a hit? Should I root for him to fly out? Should I root for him to ground out? You know what he did -- he grounded out! I said, 'Shivers, I could have done that!' That was my introduction to baseball and how Billy Southworth was thinking. It made me alert, and looking back at the situation, I accept it. He was a successful manager who had been in the playoffs, but when you're a kid you want to get a chance in there. But believe me, I have nothing against him ... *much*. He was the man, and I learned one thing: to be a major leaguer, you have to have your manager like you. Once he likes you, he'll give you a chance. And if he gives you a chance, you need to produce for him."

#### **A Walpole Joe Anecdote**

A second baseman small of stature but big on ability was the subject of the day's funniest true story, as recounted by Joe Morgan. Former Braves second sacker **Eddie Stanky** had once told Joe that he'd have a job for him whenever he wanted it, and in 1977 that opportunity seemed to arise. "I'm still in Triple A [with Pawtucket], and one day I pick up the paper and it says, 'Stanky Comes Back to Manage the Texas Rangers.' I say, 'Dotty, I'm on the phone tomorrow. We're getting back to the big leagues next year.' Then I pick up the paper the next day, and it says, 'After One Day, Stanky Quits.'"

#### **Faces in the Crowd**

In addition to the aforementioned gentlemen, several other BBHA stalwarts were on hand for the festivities. Starting with the ladies, these included **Adacie Allen**, a Braves season ticket holder in the 1940s who cheered alongside super-fan Lolly Hopkins as a member of "Lolly's Girls"; **Midge Landry**, the niece of former Braves infielder "Skippy" Roberge and **Carolyn Fuchs**, the granddaughter of former Braves owner (form 1923-35) Judge Emil Fuchs and daughter of longtime BBHA regular Bob Fuchs.

Also in attendance were **Norm Roy**, a Waltham High grad who pitched well for the Braves as a 1950 rookie while carpooling in from Newton to Babcock Street with

Roy Hartsfield; **Mike Roarke**, a teammate of Joe Morgan's at Boston College and a 1952 Braves signee who eventually made it to the majors as a catcher with the Tigers and a pitching coach with the Red Sox; Johnny Logan's son **Jimmy**, a minor leaguer in the Yankees chain; and the BBHA executive committee -- **Bob Brady, Mort Bloomberg, Jonathan Fine** and **Gary Mastas**. Association business manager **George Altison** was, as always, the day's MVP, as he, his wife **Christine**, and their children and grandchildren all pitched in to once again make the day a success. George grew up with the lights of Braves Field shining into his room, and he continues to keep the light of his beloved team shining bright through his efforts.

As attendees entered the dining room on October 12, a series of wonderful photos memorializing the life of Braves great Tommy Holmes were being projected at the front of the room. A BBHA member gave these pictures, which featured Tommy in poses from early childhood through his years as a bag-punching champ and a ballplayer, to the Association after Holmes' death. New BBHA friends **Jan and Darryl Houston Smith** loaned the projection equipment and know-how to get the images up onto the screen in time for the event, and the "Pride of the Jury Box" received yet another tribute in artist **Mark Waitkus'** lovely painting of Holmes adorning the official reunion program.

Thanks to all who participated in our raffle. Congratulations to winners **Gerald Eskin** of West Roxbury, MA (Take Me Out To The Ball Game Music Box), **Warren Silvers** of Marlborough, MA (Braves Logo Blanket) and **Bernie Rubin** of Sharon, MA (Tommy Holmes Autographed Photo).

### **Sing-a-long**

The '48 Braves season resulted not only in the immortal rhyme "Spahn and Sain and Pray for Rain" but also a lesser known ditty composed in the team's honor. "Colonel" Dave Egan, in his September 26, 1948 *Boston Daily Record* column, printed the lyrics prepared by Parke Grindell of Bath, Maine to the tune of "McNamara's Band."

*There's Mr. Sain, and Mr. Spahn, and Eddie Stanky too,  
along with the McCormick boys, they make a gallant  
crew.*

*There's Ryan, and there's Bickford, who quite inspire  
raves,  
oh, you'll never find a better team than the good old  
Boston Braves.*

*There's Mr. Dark, and Mr. White, and Torgeson as well,  
they said they couldn't field or hit, but how they gave  
them hell.*

*And good old Billy Southworth, like Lincoln freed the  
slaves,  
oh, you'll never find a better team than the good old  
Boston Braves.*

*There's Mr. Heath, and Mr. Shoun, and Mr. Masi, yea,  
it surely is a pleasure to watch those buckoes play.*

*There's Elliott, the master, for whom New England  
raves,  
oh, you'll never find a better team than the good old  
Boston Braves.*

### **Owen Carle Remembers, Part 2**

87-year-old **Owen Carle** has sent along another batch of his baseball reminiscences to share with the membership. We're grateful to be able to preserve such recollections and invite others to join Owen in passing along their experiences:

**Tommy Ferguson** was my second baseman on the Brookline Municipal Twilight League team. Tommy went from being a batboy for the Boston Braves to "executive" status with the Braves and then to similar positions with Philadelphia and Los Angeles in the major leagues. [Editor's Note: Tommy, a frequent and gracious reunion guest, was inducted into the BBHA Hall of Fame in 2002]. He was and is a dedicated, loyal and enthusiastic player and executive.

Advertising signs at the Wigwam -- Gem Blades, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, J.A. Cigars, Ballantine Ale, Boston Garter and many more.

**Fred Hoey** -- With all due respect to Jim Britt, Frankie Frisch and others, Fred was the voice of Braves baseball. He also broadcasted some of the Red Sox games. His opening for every game was as follows: "Hello, everybody, this is Fred Hoey broadcasting from Braves Field, Boston. I am about to broadcast the Braves-Giants game. Batteries for the Braves are Fred Frankhouse and Al Spohrer; for the Giants, Carl Hubbell and Gus Mancuso." When Fred was not going to be returned one year [1937], the public uprising was such that the radio station was forced to bring him back for the next season.

My encounter with **Babe Ruth** was at Fenway Park, prior to his momentary stay with the Braves. When the Tribe was on the road and on Ladies Day, my mother would take my sister Martha and me to the game. It was early in September and the Yankees, as usual, had clinched the pennant. The crowd was small as the Red Sox in those days were a deep second division team and we had grandstand seats. An announcement was made that the Yankees as a team would autograph scorecards for boys under twelve years of age in their dugout. I was about ten years old. It was in the 1920s or early 1930s. My mother encouraged me to go to the Yankees dugout. I was a very bashful kid. I went down and handed my scorecard to a face that I immediately knew by sight from the newspapers. It was the Bambino -- Babe Ruth. He scared me, saying literally "Get out of here kid! You ought to know that I only sign baseballs." Seventy-five years later, his face and words are still fresh in my visage. Years later, I feel that he had a bad day, as besides being a prolific hitter, he led the American League in strikeouts. Then, suddenly, the adjoining player, **Earle Combs**, also an outstanding player in his right, spoke out, "Come here, sonny; I'll sign your scorecard." I rushed back to my mother. She saw that I had only obtained one signature. I was afraid to tell her why. Years later, Earle Combs (later succeeded by his son) became the varsity baseball coach at Duke University, a college baseball power. I have never forgotten Earle Combs and his courtesy to a young boy. It has been the theme of my talks as a camp director and a coach on how to handle and treat young boys and girls.

## The Boston Braves and Baseball's Top 100 Minor League Teams

by Arnold C. Bailey

Minor league baseball dates back to 1877 in Milwaukee, but the city's best team was certainly the last one which, in 1952, had such an outstanding season that it truly opened the door for the Braves' move from Boston early in the next year.

Since 1947, Milwaukee had been the Boston Braves' top minor league affiliate. In 1952, the Brewers rolled to a 101-53 record, easily finishing first, a dozen games ahead of second place Kansas City in the eight-team American Association. Despite losing to K.C. in the playoffs, they were later rated the 54th best minor league team ever in a ranking commissioned by organized baseball.

If Braves owner **Lou Perini** was looking for a place to move his ballclub -- and he was, as history shows -- Milwaukee clearly had proved itself in 1952 as 195,839 fans turned out to cheer a successful AAA team. And a year earlier, in 1951, the Brewers had drawn even more fans (245,066) as the team finished first and won the playoffs.

Boston had stumbled badly to a 64-89 record in '52, while its Milwaukee farm thrived, although the parent Braves took their manager, **Charlie Grimm**, early in the season, then recalled two of the team's stars -- infielder **Jack Dittmer** and pitcher **Virgil Jester** -- in late June.

Grimm was replaced by coach Red Smith for a few games, then by **Bucky Walters**, Boston's pitching coach, for the rest of the season. **Billy Bruton** led a dominant offense that led the league in team average (.292), hits (1,512), runs (872), doubles (280) and stolen bases (94). Bruton batted .325 and was the individual leader in hits (211) and runs (130). Other big hitters for the Brewers were **Luis Marquez**, who batted .345; **Dittmer** (.356), **George Crowe** (.351 in 27 games), **Gene Mauch** (.324), **Johnny Logan** (.301 in 42 games), and **Billy Klaus** (.296). Also in and out of the lineup were familiar names like second baseman **Roy Hartsfield**; outfielders **Wally Post**, **Pete Whisenant**, **Chuck Tanner** and **Bob Montag**; shortstop **Buddy Kerr**; and catcher **Al Unser**, plus some names less familiar like first baseman **Hank Ertman**, catcher **Dewey Williams**, second baseman **Bill Reed**, and outfielder **Jim Basso**.

The pitching staff was led by lefty **Don Liddle** with a 17-4 record whose 2.70 earned run average and 159 strikeouts won two-thirds of the mound triple crown. As the team's rating reminds fans, Liddle is probably best remembered for the pitch he threw two years later in the World Series. Then with the Giants, Liddle relieved Sal Maglie in the eighth inning of the first Series game and the Indians' Vic Wertz smashed one of Liddle's pitches to centerfield, so far out that Willie Mays had to make the miraculous over-the-shoulder catch that later would be voted the top sports thrill of the year by *The Sporting News*. Also on the staff was **Gene Conley**, who would end up as one of Boston's rare two-sport stars through his service with the world champion Boston Celtics and also pitch for the Red Sox late in his career. The 6'8" righty had an 11-4 record for the Brewers, as a prelude to his 11 big league seasons highlighted by 14 wins for the '54 Braves in Milwaukee, 15 for the 1962 Red Sox and selection in three All-Star games. Then, there was **Murray Wall**, with a 16-10 record; **Jester**, 10-5 before his call-up; **Dick Hoover**,

10-5; and **Ed Blake**, 10-3; plus **Dick Donovan**, **Bill Allen**, **Bert Thiel** and **George Estock**.

The year 1952 would become a benchmark season of dramatic change for professional baseball, especially in the minors. World War II had marked an unusual transition with the contraction of the minors to just 10 leagues in 1943-44. By 1952 the minors had rebuilt to include 43 leagues, but four years later there would be only 27 and by 1959 just 21. New forms of competition were partly responsible, especially the emergence of television. What would you rather do on a Tuesday night -- watch the hapless St. Louis Browns or the popular Milton Berle on TV? Then, there were the effects of big league expansion.

Before the 1953 season, Perini would move his Braves to Milwaukee and the minor league Brewers would relocate to Toledo. Milwaukee, with a 92-62 record, gained second place in the National League, 13 games behind the Dodgers. Toledo would finish first in the American Association under managers **Tommy Holmes** and **George Selkirk** with the big right-hander Conley winning pitching's triple crown (23 wins, 211 strikeouts and a 2.90 ERA) and **Sam Jethroe** leading the league in runs (137). The next season, the Braves drew over two million (2,131,388) and finished third, and by 1957 the relocated team would win a pennant and beat the Yankees in the World Series behind Lew Burdette's pitching (three complete-game victories) and Hank Aaron's hitting (.391 with three home runs), as baseball's championship flag would fly west of the Hudson River for the first time since 1948 when the Braves lost the Series to Cleveland.

Players or managers with Boston Braves connections show up on at least 38 more of the teams ranked among the top 100 in the history of minor league baseball. The research and ranking were done for Minor League Baseball by two baseball historians, Bill Weiss and Marshall Wright. The top ranked team was the 1934 Los Angeles Angels and two members of that remarkable ballclub would later see limited service with the Braves. LA's team leader was outfielder **Frank Demaree**, who won both the batting triple crown (.383, 45 and 173) and MVP award in the Pacific Coast League. Later, he saw limited service in Boston in 1941 and '42 among his dozen big league seasons. Backup outfielder **Bobby Loane** got into 13 games with the 1940 Braves. How strong was that Angels team? Every starter, except infielder Carl Dittmar, would also make it to the majors. LA dominated the powerful PCL with a 137-50 record as a Cubs affiliate since the club was bought in 1921 by Chicago Cubs owner William K. Wrigley.

One of the most interesting Braves connections was to the 11th rated team, the 1981 Albuquerque Dukes. A Dodgers farm team, the Dukes were managed by former Braves catcher **Del Crandall**, in his fourth season at the helm. Signed by Boston in 1948, Crandall had been an All-Star catcher through 1966 and then turned to coaching and managing. His PCL powerhouse had a 94-38 record and a .325 team batting average, and several stars like outfielder Mike Marshall, who would make it to the majors. At least one member of the squad -- reliever Alejandro Pena -- would spend time with the Braves, by then moved to Atlanta.

For New England sports fans, the most intriguing player on that Dukes team was a 6'7" pitcher from Southbridge, MA, who had an 11-5 record. His name

was **Bill Swiacki** and many of the region's sports fans will recall his father, Bill, had been a hero in one of college football's most dramatic upsets, Columbia's 21-20 win over powerful Army in 1947. A pass-catching end, he made two key receptions, one for a touchdown, and photos of him stretched out and diving through the air to catch a Lions' pass are among the indelible images of New England sports. The younger Swiacki also had been a football star, among the three sports he played at Amherst, but chose baseball as a career after turning down an offer from the NY football Giants where his dad had played as a pro in the late 1940s.

Here are other Top 100 minor league teams and their Boston Braves connections:

**Number 4** -- 1924 Fort Worth Panthers (109-41): **Clarence "Big Boy" Kraft** was the star, batting .341 with 55 homers and 196 RBI. He also was with the #46 ranked team, the 1921 Fort Worth club. Despite his prodigious minor league stats, Kraft's only big league experience was three games with the 1914 Braves in which the big first baseman had a single hit and a strikeout in three at-bats.

**Number 7** -- 1903 Jersey City Skeeters (92-33): Catcher **Fred Brown** played nine games with the Braves in 1901 and '02 and batted a modest .200. But Brown's true calling turned out to be politics, rather than sports. He served as a small town mayor, then governor of New Hampshire and also a U.S. Senator from the Granite State. In 1932, he was nominated as a candidate for president at the Democratic Convention, although he received little support beyond some from the New England delegations. He later served as comptroller general for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

**Number 10** -- 1925 San Francisco Seals (128-71): Both **Paul** and **Lloyd Waner** of that PCL powerhouse played briefly for the Braves. Paul was the star of that Seals team, his .401 batting average making him the first in the league to top the .400 mark. Paul played 209 games for Boston in 1941 and '42, and Lloyd played in but 19 games for the '41 team.

**Number 12** -- 1939 Kansas City Blues (107-47): Third baseman **Billy Hitchcock** managed the Braves in 1967 in Atlanta, and his younger brother, **Jimmy**, had been a Braves infielder for 28 games in 1941, his only big league experience. KC's top hitter (46 homers and 136 RBI), **Vince DiMaggio**, was with the Bees in 1937 and '38, then shipped to KC for Eddie Miller. Catcher **Johnny Riddle** coached for the Braves in Milwaukee in '56 and '57. Pitcher **Johnny Babich** (17-6) was with the Braves in 1936 but injured. Pitcher **Tom Reis** (17-4) was purchased by the Bees after the '39 season and had a 2-5 record for the 1940 Braves, then got into just one game the following season.

**Number 13** -- 1943 Los Angeles Angels (110-45): Colorful, sometimes flaky shortstop **Billy Schuster** played briefly with the Braves in 1939. The Angels' best player was outfielder **Andy Pafko**, who led the PCL in batting (.356) and hits (215). The final five years of his 17-season big league career were with Milwaukee's Braves.

**Number 18** -- 1923 Kansas City Blues (112-54): Right-fielder **Beals Becker**, who hit .301, spent eight years in the National League, including time with the Braves.

**Number 21** -- 1920 Toronto Maple Leafs (108-46): Manager **Hugh Duffy**, a Cranston, RI native, had played for the Red Sox but was then awarded to Boston's National League team. He hit a record .440 in 1894. He later scouted for the Braves (as well as the Sox for whom he also managed), and coached Harvard's varsity baseball teams. Shortstop **Frank O'Rourke** played in 61 games for the Braves in 1912 at age 17, but hit only .122. Third baseman **Lena Blackburne** played in 31 games for the 1919 Braves (he's best known, however, as the supplier of the special mud from the Delaware River that umpires use to rub on new baseballs). Right-handed pitcher **King Bader** (19-9) was a coach with the 1926 Braves, and also managed in Lynn, Providence and Hartford.

**Number 22** -- 1911 Denver Grizzlies (111-54): Shortstop **Jack Coffey** went from the Fordham University campus to the Braves in 1909 but batted only .187. Almost a decade later, he resurfaced in 15 games with the Red Sox.

**Number 24** -- 1927 Buffalo Bisons (112-56): First baseman **Del Bissonette**, the team's top player (led the International League in hits, homers, runs batted in and other categories), also the manager of a Top 100 team (1944 Hartford, #99), was a coach for the Braves, then manager in 1945 after **Bob Coleman** departed. Pitcher **Blackie Magnum** (21-7) played parts of seven seasons in the bigs, including time with the Braves. Shortstop **Andy Cohen** never played for the Braves but still had some impact on the team; in 1928, Giants manager McGraw traded Rogers Hornsby to the Braves to turn over the shortstop job to Cohen. With Boston, Hornsby would win the batting title with a .387 average; Cohen would hit .274 but be back in the minors by 1930.

**Number 26** -- 1931 Hartford Senators (97-40): Almost two decades later, in 1950, general manager **Earl Mann** would sign a working agreement with the Braves to add the Connecticut city to its minor league network. (According to the team description, in the 1940s, Mann and Branch Rickey pulled off one of baseball's strangest trades -- Atlanta Crackers' broadcaster Ernie Harwell was sent to Brooklyn for catcher Cliff Draper).

**Number 28** -- 1929 Kansas City Blues (111-56): Outfielder **Fred Nixon** (.344) was with the Braves in 1922 and '23. Infielder **Harry Riconda** (.320) played for five big league teams including the Braves.

**Number 31** -- 1906 Portland Beavers (114-58): Shortstop **Bill Sweeney** spent six seasons with the Boston Braves.

**Number 32** -- 1921 Memphis Chicks (104-49): Third baseman **Andy High** (.321) had 13 big league seasons, including time with the Braves in part of 1925, and full years in '26 and '27, and a .284 career batting average in 1,314 games. He hit .302 in his final season in Boston.

**Number 33** -- 1925 Fort Worth Panthers (103-48): First baseman **Ed Konetchy**, who replaced "Big Boy" Kraft, would play for 15 seasons in the big leagues including time with the Braves. With Ft. Worth, he led the league in homers (41) and RBIs (166).

**Number 38** -- 1970 Hawaii Islanders (98-48): Manager **Chuck Tanner** signed with Boston and was an outfielder with the mid-1950s Braves in Milwaukee and

only the second player to hit a home run on the first pitch of his first big league at bat.

**Number 40** -- 1952 Miami Sun Sox (104-48): Manager **Max Macon** was a first baseman/outfielder for the Braves and occasionally pitched for the Tribe at the end of his playing career in 1944 and '47.

**Number 41** -- 1907 Wichita Jobbers (98-35): Outfielder **Beals Becker**, mentioned previously, (.310 as a hitter and 5-5 as a pitcher) spent two seasons with the Braves. Right-handed pitcher **Harley Young** (29-4) spent the 1908 season with the Braves and Pirates (0-3).

**Number 42** -- 1931 Houston Buffaloes (108-51): Manager **Joe Schultz** played for seven National League teams including the Braves. Hall of Fame outfielder **Joe Medwick** (.305-19-126) played in 66 games for the 1945 Braves (.284). The Buffaloes' top pitcher was Dizzy Dean (26 wins).

**Number 43** -- 1933 Columbus Red Birds (101-51): Right-handed pitcher "**Big Bill**" **Lee** (21-9) pitched for the Braves in 1945-46 and was 16-12 over those two seasons.

**Number 47** -- 1940 Nashville Vols (101-47): Manager **Larry Gilbert** had been drafted as an outfielder by the Braves after the 1913 season and hit .268 in 72 games for the 1914 champion "Miracle" team (he also had two sons -- Tookie and Charlie -- who played in the major leagues, neither one for the Braves). **Dick Culler**, who set a league mark for double plays by a shortstop with the Vols, was the Braves regular at that position in 1945-46. Right-handed reliever **Johnny Sain**, then aged 22, was purchased by the Braves after the 1941 season and went on to become a great starting pitcher and an even greater pitching coach. Right-handed pitcher **George Jeffcoat** (14-6) played for the Braves in 1943 (his younger brother Hal pitched and played outfield for three big league teams from 1948-59).

**Number 48** -- 1924 Memphis Chicks (104-49): Infielder **Walter Barbare** was the Braves regular shortstop in 1921 and batted .302 and he also played for the Red Sox during his big league career (1915-22).

**Number 50** -- 1928 San Francisco Seals (120-71): This powerhouse led the PCL in every major hitting category. Outfielder **Earl Averill** (.354-38-173) played for the Braves in 1941 during a 13-season big league career. Outfielder **Roy Johnson** (.360) spent a decade in the bigs including part of 1937 and '38, his last season, with the Braves. Outfielder **Smead Jolley** (triple crown winner with .404-45-188) played in Boston in 1932 and '33 but with the Red Sox, not the Braves.

**Number 57** -- 1916 New London Planters (86-34): Pitcher **Doc Crandall** was with the Braves in 1918 and pitcher **Bunn Hearn** (who won 22 for the Planters) had five big league seasons including the Braves. He became the long-time coach at North Carolina.

**Number 58** -- 1933 Davenport Blue Sox (82-32): Pitcher **Al Piechota** (19-4) was 2-5 with the 1940 Braves.

**Number 59** -- 1905 Columbus Senators (100-52): Owner **Bob Quinn**, who also owned the Red Sox for 10 years, returned to Boston in 1936 as president of the Braves. In 1946, he turned the team over to his son, John. Shortstop **Rudy Hulswitt** scouted for the Braves

after his playing career.

**Number 64** -- 1949 Stroudsburg Poconos (101-36): First baseman **Harry Warner** (.347) was purchased by the Braves after the '49 season and remained in organized baseball's minor leagues through 1959.

**Number 67** -- 1949 Pensacola Fliers (98-42): Outfielder **Benjamin (Bob) Thorpe** played in 110 games for the Braves from 1951 to '56 and hit .251.

**Number 81** -- 1951 Hazard Bombers (93-33): Manager and first baseman **Max Macon**, mentioned previously, who batted .409 with a league-best 148 RBIs, played for the Braves in 1944. Macon lost the batting crown to Orville Kitts, who batted .424. Hazard's lefty, Johnny Podres (21-7), led the league in strikeouts, ERA and winning percentage.

**Number 83** -- 1932 Tulsa Oilers (98-48): Pitcher **Bill Posedel** (16-10) won 41 games for the Braves and Dodgers from 1938 to '46 as "Barnacle Bill's" career spanned the war years.

**Number 85** -- 1948 Indianapolis Indians (100-54): In 1946 and just for that season, Indianapolis had been the Braves' top farm team. The team's manager in 1948, **Al Lopez**, had caught for four big league teams including the Braves (1936 to '40) during a 17-year career as an active player. He also managed for 17 seasons, including pennant winners with both the Indians and White Sox. Indians catcher **Clyde Kluttz** had played for the Braves from 1942 to '45.

**Number 86** -- 1941 Newark Bears (100-54): The manager of this 100-54 team was **Johnny Neun**, who played first base for the Braves in 1930 and '31, hitting .325 in his first season in Boston. One of the Bears' stars was all-time Braves' favorite **Tommy Holmes** who batted .302 and led the league in hits (190) as a prelude to his NL record 37-game hit streak for Boston in 1945. Newark and Kansas City shared what then was the Yankee's long list of minor league talent and the '41 Bears were loaded with future big leaguers including Johnny Lindell, Snuffy Stirrweiss, Hank Majeski, Tommy Byrne and Hank Borowy.

**Number 88** -- 1922 St. Paul Saints (107-60): Catcher **Mike Gonzalez** played one game for the 1912 Braves at the start of a 17-season big league career. His path crossed that of an all-time Braves favorite, **Billy Southworth**, in the mid-1940s. Gonzalez managed the St. Louis Cardinals for about a week until the team hired Southworth, later the manager of a pennant-winner in Boston and now a Hall of Famer. Left fielder **Joe Riggert** played in 63 games for the Braves in 1919, the last of his three big league seasons.

**Number 91** -- 1923 St. Paul Saints (111-57): The team's pitching ace, **Thomas Clancy Sheehan**, with a 31-9 record, was a Braves coach in 1944.

**Number 96** -- 1950 Quebec Braves (97-40): Infielder **Waldon Williams**, a Braves farmhand, led the league in walks (168).

**Number 99** -- 1944 Hartford Laurels/Senators (99-38): First baseman **Vince Shupe** led the league in hits (187) while batting .339 and had 109 RBIs. In 1945, he spent part of the season with the Braves and batted .269. Shupe may be better known for dating actress Jean Peters, who later married billionaire

Howard Hughes, in whose honor the good people at Webster's coined the word "eccentric." Infielder **Steve Shemo** played 25 games with the Braves in 1944-45. Third baseman/outfielder **Roland Gladu** led the league in batting (.372) but only hit .242 in 22 games for the Braves in 1944.

**Number 100** -- 1944 Milwaukee Brewers (102-51): The innovative and colorful **Bill Veeck** had purchased this team in 1941 and by 1944 his manager was **Charlie Grimm**. Midway through the season, Grimm also took on duties as team vice president when Veeck joined the Marines. When the Cubs wanted Grimm to return as their manager, they found a replacement as Milwaukee's field boss in **Casey Stengel**, fired by the Braves as their pilot after the 1943 season. So, Casey took over in Milwaukee and, with a stop in Oakland, he was on the way back to the majors and great success leading the Yankees. The Brewers shortstop **Dick Culler** started at that position for the 1945-46 Braves, as previously mentioned. Second baseman **Tom Nelson** (.303) appeared in 40 games for the '45 Braves, his only time in the majors.

*Member Arnold C. Bailey's "Collectors Corner" is now in its 18th year in The Providence Journal. He has generously publicized activities of the BBHA and has provided reunion recounts for Sports Collectors Digest. In addition, Arnold played a key role in the formation of the Rhode Island Reds Historical Society (www.rireds.org), honoring the Ocean State's legendary minor league hockey franchise.*

### Pugilism at the Park

When the World Boxing Council initially announced plans for a **Rocky Marciano** statue, its first preference was to erect it in Boston. A storm of controversy arose and the larger-than-life representation of the undefeated former heavyweight champion will be placed in the Brockton Blockbuster's hometown. Had this most appropriate site not been chosen, we'd have offered another place -- outside of Braves Field! Marciano made his professional Boston boxing debut at the Wigwam and his sculpture would have made a fitting sports bookend with the Harry Agganis memorial that now graces the area.

As a youth, Rocky was torn between baseball and boxing. Through the auspices of a *Boston Herald* sportswriter, he was invited to the Chicago Cubs annual tryout camp in 1947, conducted at their Fayetteville, NC Tri-State League facility. While Rocky showed promise as a hitter, he was unable to throw accurately from home to second base because of an arm injury received during his time in the Army. According to Ed Fitzgerald in the January, 1953 issue of *Sport* magazine, Rocky reported that "My arm was dead. I couldn't throw." Given the local publicity that had surrounded his trip south, Rocky was reluctant to return home upon failing the tryout. An acquaintance referred him to the Goldsboro (NC) Goldbugs of the Class D Coastal Plain League. The unaffiliated club was short of catchers and he sought a job with them. As Rocky related to Fitzgerald, "I played for a couple of weeks, maybe three altogether, and I got my hits, but I couldn't throw. The manager finally told me I'd better go home." Rocky would ultimately make it to a big league ballpark in Boston, but he would perform in a "squared circle" constructed on the baseball diamond.

Rocky's 28th bout on his way to the heavyweight crown was staged at the Wigwam on the evening of

July 10, 1950. His opponent was former Italian amateur heavyweight champ Gino Buonvino of Bari, Italy. The rainy evening resulted in a disappointing gate as only 4,900 filed through the turnstiles. Another noted negative to the bout was the antique ring used for the contest. It was in a dilapidated condition and several feet smaller than regulations required. Fight patrons also suffered from poor lighting of the ring, causing a chant of "LIGHTS" to often arise from grandstand spectators during the bout.

The future champ started strong, knocking Buonvino to the canvas in the first round but failed to put his opponent away. Buonvino fought back but began to tire noticeably by the seventh round. Knocked down in the ninth, Buonvino was saved by the bell. The exhausted Italian faced a relentless barrage of Rocky's blows in the next round until the referee stepped in and stopped the fight. Rocky would later comment about his Braves Field experience, "[W]hat a ring. It was really small and tilted. I felt like I was fighting uphill all night."

Both of Boston's Green Cathedrals served as outdoor boxing venues over the years. Fenway Park staged its first fight on August 11, 1919 and would continue to lend its confines to pugilistic pursuits through 1956. According to BoxRec.com, the home of the Red Sox hosted 27 boxing cards over the years. The bulk of the action (19 programs) took place before Tom Yawkey's acquisition of the home team and environs in 1933. Its last two matches, in 1954 and 1956, involved local favorite and one-time world welterweight champion, Tony DeMarco, the "Boston Bomber."

Braves Field got a later but more auspicious start. On October 12, 1920 in excess of 15,000 male and female fans gathered at the Wigwam to witness a battle for the welterweight championship of New England. The *Boston Globe* of the following day declared that the attendees comprised "the largest crowd that ever saw a fight in New England." But for rain in the forenoon and threatening weather later in the day, at least an additional 10,000 individuals would have come to the contest according to the newspaper. The right field pavilion was over half-filled as was the Jury Box. Many others were sitting and standing in the outfield by ringside.

Tommy (Corcoran) Kloby, from Lawrence, MA and the reigning champ, met challenger Nate Siegel of Revere, MA, a perceived underdog, in a ten round affair. Both fighters battled ferociously. Siegel was said to have given Kloby "one of the worst whalings since he won the title," stunning the titleholder on several occasions and scoring a knockdown in the ninth round. For his efforts, Siegel was declared the victor on points. The new champion fought until 1924 and then became a successful restaurateur. Siegel would meet an untimely end in 1934, killed by a shotgun blast through a window in his Revere home.

In all, Braves Field played host to 70 boxing programs, most featuring multiple matches, through July of 1951. The majority of these events occurred during the Depression years as Braves ownership leased the ballpark to generate revenues to stay afloat financially. According to **Bob Fuchs** in *Judge Fuchs and the Boston Braves*, Boston Garden boxing promoters attempted to stage evening boxing cards at the Wigwam directly following afternoon Braves games, in hopes of retaining the baseball crowd. The promoters paid \$25,000 for such rights but soon found that the

Tribe's fans were not interested in sticking around and quickly negotiated a buyback.

In addition to Rocky Marciano, such International Boxing Hall of Famers as Jack Britton (The Boxing Marvel), Jack Sharkey (The Boston Gob), Paul Berlenbach (The Astoria Assassin), James J. Braddock (The Cinderella Man), Willie Pep (Will o' the Wisp), Manuel Ortiz and Tiger Flowers (The Georgia Deacon) made appearances at Braves Field.

On June 8, 1943, Hartford, CT-based Willie Pep made the first defense of his world featherweight title at the Wigwam against Sal Bartolo of East Boston. Pep received a unanimous decision in the 15 round bout that saw a crowd of 15,000 pay \$47,000 to witness the fight. Bartolo would capture the NBA version of the featherweight crown in 1944 and meet Pep again in 1946 at Madison Square Garden to unify the title. Pep defeated the East Bostonian, this time stopping him in the 12th round.

Pep returned to the Gaffney Street venue on July 17, 1944 to battle bantamweight champ Manuel Ortiz in a non-title affair. The ten-rounder took place before 10,000 boxing fans. Pep was awarded the victory, claiming seven of the ten rounds.

Tiger Flowers, the first African American to become a world middleweight champion, first fought in Braves Field in 1925, well before Jackie Robinson's debut on the same field in 1947. On June 25, 1929, a match for the "colored middleweight title" was staged at the Tribe's ballpark. "Gentleman" Jack McVey was pitted against William "Gorilla" Jones in the featured bout. The evening's boxing program had been delayed because of the unexpected length of an earlier doubleheader between the Braves and Phillies. Unfortunately, a heavy rainstorm swept in and disrupted the boxing card. The fight promoter, hoping to salvage the evening, dispensed with the preliminaries and sent McVey and Williams out into the uncovered ring. The 15,000 attendees sought refuge in the distant covered portion of the park. The fighters gamely fought in the rain for ten rounds and an unpopular decision was awarded to Jones.

Similarly, Fenway Park opened its doors to black pugilists such as Cuba's Kid Chocolate (in 1932), many years in advance of its primary tenant's welcoming of Pumpsie Green to the home turf.

#### **Boston Braves Items of Interest on the Web**

Want to know what Braves Field looked like when it was a golf course? The Brighton Allston Historical Society web site is the place to visit. Go to [www.bahistory.org/AllstonGolfClub.html](http://www.bahistory.org/AllstonGolfClub.html). At the site, you can also visit their photo collection section and click on "Braves Field" and "Street Car Commonwealth Avenue."

Another Allston-Brighton, MA Braves-related web find is located at [www.wickedlocal.com/allston/news/lifestyle/columnists/x332630161/Remembering-Old-Allston-Brighton-Sept-12](http://www.wickedlocal.com/allston/news/lifestyle/columnists/x332630161/Remembering-Old-Allston-Brighton-Sept-12). The September 12, 2008 *Allston-Brighton Tab* contained an interview conducted on December 23, 1998 with **Stan Babcock**, then 80 years old. The long-time area resident shared many memories including some involving the Braves. His father was a carpenter who worked on the construction of Braves Field. Stan's baseball experiences went back to the days of the "Blue Laws" when baseball in Boston was banned on Sundays and there were no

night games. He remembered once-a-week "Ladies Days" at Braves Field when the team returned home from road trips. Stan was a member of the Tribe's "Knothole Gang." As he explained, "Just as soon as school was over, you went to the local playground -- in my case the Ringer Playground -- and you signed up for the 'knothole' ticket. You paid a nickel. My second-grade school teacher was the administrator. So, you would sign up and get the ticket, and she would give you a white slip to go with it. Then when you got to Braves Field, they would take the white slip and you could go in and watch the Braves play for the whole season. We never had that with the Sox. They never gave that to us."

You may recall in the last newsletter that I mentioned Babe Ruth clouting a homer for the Braves in Newark, NJ as the ballclub headed north to conclude its 1935 spring exhibition season. Member **Mort Bloomberg** has found a film clip of that historic event and you can see it at [www.thoughtequity.com](http://www.thoughtequity.com) when you search under "Boston Braves." You'll also find newsreel clips of the Bambino's signing with the Tribe, the '48 Series and a 1950's snippet.

A one-hour documentary film entitled "Signs of the Time," includes a recreated 1921 game at Braves Field against the St. Louis Cardinals. Actors appear in period uniforms at Ainsworth Field in Erie, PA. A feeble attempt was made to transform that diamond into the Wigwam. The intent of this film, made by Crystal Pix, is to explore myths, mystery and legends surrounding the evolution of umpire hand signals. A movie trailer for the documentary and still photos taken of the Braves-Cardinals game at "Braves Field" can be seen at [www.signsofthetimemovie.com](http://www.signsofthetimemovie.com).

Some interesting, high quality Boston Braves photographs may be accessed at [www.Corbis.com](http://www.Corbis.com) by searching under "Boston Braves."

Freelance writer and author **Chris Klein** specializes in travel and history. As part of his research on his next book, *The Die-Hard Sports Fan's Guide to Boston*, he took Ralph Evans' reunion tour of Braves Field. Chris intends to include the Wigwam as an attraction in the upcoming publication. He was also kind enough to plug the reunion and *Spahn, Sain and Teddy Ballgame* in his blog, <http://hubtrotter.blogspot.com/2008/10/braves-field.html>.

Artifacts from the estate of Braves and Red Sox broadcaster **Jim Britt** recently went on the auction block. To read a description and view photos of the items, visit [www.memorylaneinc.com/site/bid/bidplace.asp?itemid=11959&getauctionid=69](http://www.memorylaneinc.com/site/bid/bidplace.asp?itemid=11959&getauctionid=69). In addition to Red Sox-related memorabilia, the lot contained such personal effects as his social security card, passport and assorted organizations membership cards. It drew a winning bid of \$531. An excellent biography of Jim, penned by member **Mort Bloomberg**, appears in *Spahn, Sain and Teddy Ballgame*.

If you caught the movie, *My Best Friend's Girl*, you saw local comedian/actor **Dane Cook** wearing a faded Boston Braves t-shirt. A number of BBHA members possess that style of jersey in a similar condition, your editor included. It's tan with "Boston Braves" in team lettering, the logo of the Indian with a full headdress and the dates of the team's existence, 1876-1952, emblazoned on the front. In an interview, Cook stated that he found the t-shirt in an area thrift shop. See

Cook wearing it in a still from the movie at [www.imdb.com/media/rm313889792/tt1046163](http://www.imdb.com/media/rm313889792/tt1046163). We commend him for providing the Boston Braves with some screen time!

The offer still stands for any interested BBHA member to sign up for the BBHA eNewsletter to receive items such as the above in-between our published editions. Simply send your email address to me at [bbraves@beld.net](mailto:bbraves@beld.net). The electronic newsletters are sent out on an *ad hoc* basis whenever interesting information crops up.

### In Memoriam

We are saddened to note the recent deaths of four minor league members of the Braves Family.

**Paul Kearney** passed away on August 29 at age 88. As a youth, he was an accomplished baseball player sought after by colleges and the pros. Although recruited by Holy Cross College, Kearney elected to sign with the Braves. He very briefly played for the 1940 Bradford Bees of the D-level PONY League. The first baseman committed three errors on opening day and was released on May 23 after seven games. Warren Spahn was also making his professional debut with the Bees in 1940. Kearney went on to wartime military service and participated in the Normandy landing. He pursued a successful business career and was an active participant in youth baseball programs.

On September 6, **Ralph Albers** died in Pitman, NJ. He was 79 years old. Albers excelled in sports at Pitman High School in baseball, basketball and football. He signed a Boston Braves contract upon graduation in 1948. Albers was described as a "fire-balling" southpaw who drew contemporary comparisons to Sandy Koufax and Steve Carlton. His high school record was 35-2 and he once struck out 20 in a one-hit 2-0 masterpiece. Over the course of 1947 and 1948, Albers threw one no-hitter, eight one-hitters and seven two-hitters. As a senior, he went 11-0 and eight of his victories were via shutouts. Albers attracted the parent club's attention with stellar performances with the Pawtucket Slaters in 1949 (14-6, 2.78) and the Evansville Braves in 1950 (13-12, 2.94). At Pawtucket, he rubbed shoulders with future big leaguers George Crowe and Don Liddle. Evansville's pitching squad also included Ray Crone, who would perform in the majors for five seasons. Albers received parent club spring training invitations both years. However, tragedy struck, and an automobile accident while playing in Texas, effectively ended his big league quest. Albers retired from professional baseball in 1953. He then embarked upon a successful career in banking and agriculture. As a golfer, he scored four holes-in-one. In 2001, Albers was inducted into his alma mater's hall of fame.

80-year-old **Peter Perini** died in Fountain Hills, AZ on September 11. A baseball and football star at Ohio State, he was the captain of the baseball team and co-captain of the football squad in 1950. The latter won the Rose Bowl that year. Perini signed with the Braves and joined the Hagerstown Braves of the Class B Interstate League in 1950. The outfielder batted .339 in 68 games. His second and last season of professional baseball in 1952 was also spent in Hagerstown, where Perini played in 134 games and batted a respectable .294. He was then drafted into the Army and served in during the Korean War. His love of football led him to the NFL after military service where he played for the

Chicago Bears and Cleveland Browns. He ended his football career in 1955 with the NFL champion Browns, performing on the gridiron with the likes of Otto Graham, Lou Groza, Dante Lavelli, Ray Renfro and Chuck Noll. Perini went on to a lengthy career in Ohio's Department of Corrections, rising to the level of prison superintendent. He was inducted into his high school and university halls of fame. No indication of any relationship to the family of the former Braves owner was revealed in his obituary.

**Robert Hunt**, 79, passed away on October 24. In 1952, his last year in organized baseball, he was the regular third baseman on the Braves' Mountain States League (D) affiliate Harlan Smokies. The Smokies captured playoff championship that season. Hunt went on to work for a dairy for many years but his love of the National Pastime led him to coach and umpire locally throughout his life.

*Many thanks to member **Len Levin** for providing the information on these Braves Family passings.*

### Braves New World

Filmmaker and Milwaukee Braves Historical Association member **William Povletich** has teamed up with Milwaukee Public Television to produce *Milwaukee Braves: The Team That Made Milwaukee Famous*. The hour long documentary focuses on how the franchise's relocation from Boston to Milwaukee in 1953 served as the catalyst for baseball to reexamine itself as a big business -- resulting in a flurry of franchises relocating west, multi-league expansion and teams cooperating with cities to build civically funded stadiums and tax subsidies.

The documentary, which is currently in production, includes on-camera interviews with former Braves players **Del Crandall**, **Ernie Johnson**, **Phil Niekro**, **Felix Mantilla** and **Joe Torre**, team executives **Bill Bartholomay** and **Dick Cecil**; sportswriters **Furman Bisher**, **Don Walker** and **Howard Bryant**; Boston Braves Historical Association members **Bob Brady**, **Ralph Evans**, **Dick Johnson**, **David Perini** and **Saul Wisnia**. The documentary is scheduled to premiere in the spring of 2009 to coincide with the release of Povletich's book *Milwaukee Braves: Heroes and Heartbreak* from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

### Can You Solve This Mystery?

Member **Bob Bencks** is seeking an answer to a mystery that has he has been unable to solve. First, a little background information: In 1942, Mort and Walker Cooper served as a "brother" battery for the Cardinals. When Mort got stuck at 13 wins, his sibling suggested that the hurler change his uniform number from 13 to 14 to advance his victory total. It worked and Mort continued the tactic all the way to 22 wins.

Advancing to 1951 and the Boston Braves, **Walker Cooper** has joined the club and when **Warren Spahn** became stuck at 21 victories, the catcher informed Spahn of his brother's fruitful number-switching technique. Spahn changed his uniform number from 21 to 22 and success followed. Continuing on to his next start, on September 29 at Braves Field, Spahn donned #23 but failed to get the win. Number 23 was **Johnny Logan**'s regular numeral and he entered the contest in the ninth inning as a replacement for Buddy Kerr. The question that remains unanswered to date is what

number was Johnny Logan wearing in that game? Logan does not recall and the search of contemporary newspaper accounts has failed to yield a solution. Bob is soliciting the help of fellow members. If anyone attended this game and/or has a scorecard, clipping or other documentation noting the shortstop's number, please let us know!!

### **Sittin' In The Jury Box**

Infielder **Skippy Roberge** of the 1941-42 and 1946 Boston Braves was posthumously inducted into the Lowell Catholic High School Athletic Hall of Fame on November 1. **Midge Landry**, his niece, and **Gary Mastas** of the BBHA executive committee, spoke on his behalf before a crowd in excess of 300 at the induction dinner.

Our frequent honored reunion guest, **Johnny Logan**, was the recent subject of a piece in Binghamton University's publication, *Pipe Dream*. Entitled "BU's first major leaguer," the article tracks Johnny's time at the school through to his playing career and thereafter. Among Johnny's reminiscences is his Boston Braves tryout before scout **Dewey Briggs**. He took a bus from Binghamton to Homer, NY and quickly dressed for a workout. Johnny had hastily packed his equipment and, as a result, had to perform for half an hour wearing two right-footed shoes. Briggs noticed the mismatch and question Johnny about his odd footwear. Johnny responded, "God, damnit I didn't even know that." I was so embarrassed I didn't even wanna tell him I knew it. Nevertheless I still made the team." More of this interesting interview of the always candid Logan can be read at [www.bupipedream.com/pipeline\\_web/display\\_article.php?id=9176](http://www.bupipedream.com/pipeline_web/display_article.php?id=9176).

The Veterans Committee of the National Baseball Hall of Fame is considering ten pre-1943 candidates for induction into the National Pastime's shrine on July 26, 2009. The results of their deliberations will be revealed on December 8 at baseball's Winter Meeting. Four of the ten spent some time with the Boston Braves. Shortstop **Bill Dahlen** performed with the Tribe in 1908-09. Pitcher **Wes Ferrell** ended his playing career in 1941 with a four game swan song with the Braves. Outfielder **Sherry Magee** was with club from 1915 until August of 1917 when he was sold to the Reds. "**Bucky**" **Walters** broke in with the Tribe as an infielder in 1931-32 and returned to pitch for a one game major league finale in 1950. Walters was a member of the Braves' coaching staff from 1950-52.

Once again **Ken Coleman** is under consideration for the Ford C. Frick Award for excellence in baseball broadcasting. Ken spent 35 years broadcasting for the Cleveland Indians, Cincinnati Reds and Boston Red Sox. A Boston Braves fan, he also served as the BBHA reunion MC until his death in 2003 and was a tireless supporter of the Jimmy Fund. The award winner will be announced on February 15, 2009 and the presentation will occur during the 2009 Hall of Fame weekend.

**Babe Ruth's** 712th home run ball, hit as a member of the Boston Braves, was recently auctioned off for the princely sum of \$172,500. Hit at Forbes Field against the Pirates on May 25, 1935, the ball was retrieved by Pittsburgh resident Emmet Cavanagh who was sitting in the right field stands. After making his catch, Cavanagh sat down and witnessed the Bambino clout two more. After the game, Cavanagh tracked Ruth down at the Schenley Hotel and got him to sign his

souvenir on a side panel. According to reports of the day, Braves teammate **Randy Moore** took the Babe aside after the game and pleaded for him to retire on the spot and go out on top. Ruth responded, "Aw kid, I'll hit twenty more before the end of the year." However, by June 2, the Babe realized the futility of his situation and retired.

The 2008 World Series marked the 60th time that the Fall Classic has been broadcast nationally. According to **James R. Walker**, in his book *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television*, a World War II B-29 bomber was loaded with television equipment and flown over western Pennsylvania to help link Eastern and Midwestern television networks to broadcast the 1948 World Series between the Boston Braves and Cleveland Indians. Had the Red Sox been successful in their one game playoff encounter with the Wahoos, this effort most likely would not have been undertaken. Outdoor viewing stations were set up on the Boston Common and near the Tribune Tower in Chicago to allow folks not yet in possession of a television set to witness the games. It would not be until 1951, when coaxial cables were connected coast-to-coast, that a truly national broadcast would take place.

The current version of the Braves-Red Sox "City Series" will resume in 2009 with the Tribe coming back to Boston on June 19-21 and the Bosox journeying to Atlanta on June 26-28.

The 2008 baseball season marked the 80th anniversary of a record-breaking streak by the Boston Braves. Starting on September 4, 1928, the Tribe played nine straight doubleheaders. The string concluded on September 15. After two single contests on September 17 and 18, the Braves kicked off another chain of consecutive twin bills, participating in four such dual contests from the 20th through the 24th of the month. Led by managers **Jack Slattery** and **Rogers Hornsby**, the team finished with a 50-103 record, 44 1/2 games in back of the NL champion Cardinals. Surprisingly, the Braves avoided the Senior Circuit basement as the Phillies performed even worse, claiming only 43 victories against 109 losses.

On the heels of the past season's last place finish, the Washington Nationals fired five of its coaches, retaining only pitching coach **Randy St. Claire**. St. Claire, the son of former Boston Braves catcher **Ebba St. Claire**, was appointed to his current position back in 2003 when the team still resided in Montreal.

Despite not having pitched off of a major league mound in 43 years, the late **Warren Spahn** continues to appear on baseball cards. Baseball's greatest portsider, in his Boston Braves togs, is portrayed on card #103 of Upper Deck's 2008 "Goudey" set.

90-year-old BBHA member **Bill Hayes** wrote to inform us that of his association with the late **Glenn Schaeffer**, a minor league farmhand of the Braves in 1946, whose passing we reported in our last newsletter. Bill was the Road Secretary for the Hartford Bees when Schaeffer played in 104 games for the Eastern League club. He recalled that the infielder "lacked a lot as a batter, but was a fine shortstop and a real asset in the clubhouse." Their paths crossed again in 1950-51 when Bill was the General Manager of the Big State League Temple Eagles and Schaeffer was the team's regular shortstop. Bill also asked to be remembered to **Gene Conley**. He and Gene appeared on the cover of the January 2, 1952 *Sporting News*. Conley was being

honored as the Minor League Player of the Year for his 20-9 professional baseball debut in 1951 at Hartford while Bill received the Minor League Executive of the Year Award (Lower Classification) for his work at Temple. Conley was recently the subject of a feature story in the *Los Angeles Times* on September 1.

This past summer, an item appeared at auction on eBay that seemed to support the tale that some Braves Field seats eventually found their way to the old Boston Garden after the Wigwam's demise. According to the seller, the chair was installed in the yellow loge level of the Garden in 1955 after its removal from the ballpark. A photograph accompanied the offering. The Garden's yellow paint motif had been removed from the seat, revealing its original "Braves Field" green coloring along with a white #11 on the seat back.

History has repeated itself as the Braves have abandoned yet another city. This time, it's the folks of Richmond, VA that have suffered the loss. The Atlanta Braves AAA Richmond Braves affiliate left Virginia's capital city after 43 seasons upon the close of the International League's 2008 campaign for a new home in the Atlanta suburb of Gwinnett County. In an all-too-familiar scenario, the parent club demanded a new municipally-financed facility to replace the minor league club's dilapidated home field but city officials were not able to satisfy the ultimatum.

Atlanta's rookie pitcher **Jair Jurrjens** achieved a 9-4 record by the All-Star break. In doing so, he tied a 71-year club midseason freshman performance mark also held by Boston Bees hurler **Lou Fette**. Fette went on to complete the 1937 season with a 20-10 record while Jurrjens finished 13-10 in 2008.

The *Greenwich Times* of September 1 reported that 93-year-old Boston Braves 1942 and 1944 infielder **Mike Sandlock** is still going strong, playing golf twice a week. Sandlock plays his nine hole games at the Innis Arden Golf Club in Old Greenwich, CT. Shortly before his 92 birthday, he shot an 86 after playing 18 holes on his home course. Sandlock came up to Boston with Warren Spahn and later converted to catcher during stints with the Dodgers and Pirates. He became acquainted with Jackie Robinson while with Brooklyn and the two later met occasionally on the golf links.

**Johnny Antonelli** was unable to attend this year's reunion due to a conflict with an honor that was bestowed upon him in Rochester, NY. Antonelli was given a lifetime achievement award during the city's annual Columbus Day luncheon. More than 500 people attended the 68th annual ceremony.

### **Thanks and Happy Holidays!**

We extend our thanks to the following BBHA members not previously mentioned in the newsletter for their contributions of materials for our archives and this newsletter: **John Delmore, Jerry J. Wright, Herb Crehan** and **John Ahokas**. Please consider taking advantage of our book offer for holiday giving. The Executive Committee extends its best holiday wishes to the membership and our Boston Braves Family. As always, your thoughts, suggestions, reminisces and materials are always most welcome. **Bob Brady, BBHA Newsletter Editor, 25 McAndrew Road, Braintree, MA 02184-8245 ([bbraves@beld.net](mailto:bbraves@beld.net))**.