

Boston Braves Historical Association Newsletter

Summer 2008

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Tommy Holmes & Art Johnson

It is with the deepest regret that we begin this current newsletter with an announcement of the deaths of two beloved member of the Braves Family and longtime generous supporters of the BBHA.

Thomas Francis Holmes

Tommy Holmes, the hero of Braves Field's right field bleacher "Jury Box," passed away of natural causes on Monday, April 14, 2008 at an assisted living facility in Boca Raton, FL. "Kelly" was 91 at the time of his death.

Tommy spent ten of his eleven big league seasons as an outfielder for the Boston Braves and appeared in 1,289 games for the Tribe. Originally signed by the Yankees, he came to Boston in a trade in 1942. Tommy concluded his playing career in 1952 with a 31-game stint with his hometown Brooklyn Dodgers after having managed the Braves for parts of the 1951 and 1952 seasons. Tommy finished up with a lifetime .302 batting average with 88 home runs and 581 RBIs.

Perhaps the most well known of Tommy's exploits was his 37 consecutive game hitting streak that set a modern National League record in 1945. The record stood until it was broken by Pete Rose, when the latter hit in 44 straight games in 1978. Holmes' mark is the ninth longest in big league history. As revealed in a memorial piece on Tommy by Richard Goldstein in the April 15 *New York Times*, then Braves third base coach, Del Bissonette played a part in this achievement. "I cracked my bat when the streak reached about 20 games," Tommy would recall. "I had some others but none I liked particularly. We had an off day, and Bissonette said: 'I'll get you a bat. I'm going up to my home in Maine. I'll bring you back a piece of concrete from my attic.' "It was like a rock," Tommy opined. "It had been aging. But I tried it in batting practice and I liked it."

The '45 season was the pinnacle of his playing career. In addition to the hit streak, Tommy led the league in safeties with 224, doubles with 47, home runs with 28 and slugging average at .577. He was the runner-up

for the Senior Circuit's batting average (.352 vs. Phil Cavarretta's .355) and RBI crowns (117 vs. Dixie Walker's 124). Even more notably, Tommy only struck out nine times all season. For his stellar performance, he was accorded the runner-up position in National League MVP voting and received *The Sporting News* Player of the Year Award.

During the championship season of 1948, Tommy took the time to participate in the historic *Truth or Consequences* radio broadcast that launched The Jimmy Fund. He would go on to knock in the only run in the World Series opener, benefiting from the controversial "safe" call of Phil Masi on a Bob Feller-Lou Boudreau pick-off attempt.

Over the course of his career, Tommy would break up three no-hitters. He ended up striking out only 122 times in 4,992 at bats.

Tommy became engaged in the preservation of Boston Braves history back in 1988 when he attended the 40th anniversary reunion of the Hub's National League champs. He was called upon to unveil the large Braves Field commemorative plaque in the courtyard in back of the old administration building. From that point forward, Tommy was a frequent participant in BBHA reunions, often providing us with memorable and touching recollections. At our 1993 event, he was inducted into the Boston Braves Hall of Fame in an emotional ceremony. Tommy made his last appearance at our fall gathering in 2003.

Tommy was a baseball "lifer." In retirement, he served for 30 years as the Mets' director of amateur baseball relations. Mets COO Jeff Wilpon commented that "Tommy Holmes was one of our sport's truest gentlemen. His passion for the game and up-and-coming players, along with his 30-year association with our franchise, was unsurpassed." **George Altison**, the BBHA's business manager, told *The Boston Globe* that "Tommy is beloved to Braves fans as Johnny Pesky is to Red Sox fans." BBHA Executive Committee member **Saul Wisnia** added that Tommy was "a non-flashy, working class player who conversed with the fans during games and signed autographs in his street clothes afterward." In addition, Saul has penned a

wonderful biography of Tommy in the upcoming publication, *Spahn, Sain and Teddy Ballgame: Boston's (almost) Perfect Summer of 1948*.

We will cherish the many memories of Tommy. Some of us were fortunate enough to have seen him play while others have wonderful recollections from his reunion appearances. It's unfortunate that the Atlanta edition of the Tribe has not chosen to honor Tommy's passing with a memorial patch on this season's uniforms. Our deepest sympathies to the Holmes family who also recently suffered the loss of Tommy's wife Lillian, who always accompanied her husband back to Boston for our celebrations.

Arthur Henry Johnson

We lost a good friend, gracious gentleman and ardent supporter when **Art "Lefty" Johnson** passed away on April 27, 2008. He was 88 at the time of his death.

Art was born and raised in Winchester, MA and excelled as a baseball, basketball and football varsity athlete at Winchester High School. His pitching prowess attracted the local Boston Bees and the day after graduation in 1938, Art began his professional baseball career with the Class C Erie Sailors of the Middle Atlantic League. There, Art rubbed shoulders with such future major leaguers as Tex Hughson, Whitey Kurowski, Phil Masi, Bama Rowell, Jim Hegan and Walt Alston. A 17-11 performance with the Hartford Bees in 1940 led to a promotion to Boston for a two-game trial. The following season, Art performed in 43 games with the seventh place Braves (the Bees moniker had been dropped), going 7-15, third best on Casey Stengel's staff. His promising career took a downturn when he suffered a rotator cuff injury during spring training in 1942.

After appearing in four games in 1942, Art enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served in the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre and became part of America's "Greatest Generation." In 1992, Art joined his fellow WWII ballplayer veterans for ceremonies in their honor at Cooperstown.

After baseball, Art pursued a career in the insurance industry. He retired as the owner and president of H. Lincoln Harrison Insurance Agency in Worcester, MA. Art stayed active in the national pastime, coaching the baseball team at Holy Name Central Catholic High School and actively participating in the Holden, MA Little League and Babe Ruth programs. He also served as a strong advocate for enhanced pension benefits for his generation of ballplayers.

Art was one of the founding fathers of the BBHA. He was a familiar face at our events and often represented us and the Braves Family at local commemorations.

Art was most generous in sharing his memories with reunion attendees and lending his well-crafted autograph to programs, photographs and various mementos. Your editor will always remember Art's many kind words of support for our newsletter offerings. Art was a reunion fixture who attended all of our events through 2007. At our eighth reunion in 1999, Art was honored for his support in a tribute presented by executive committee member **Jonathan Fine**. Our Summer 2007 newsletter contained a great **Ronnie Joyner** sketch of Lefty.

We always looked forward to seeing Art each fall and will now greatly miss him. We're thankful that Art graced us with his presence and we will always cherish the memories that he left behind for us. We offer our heartfelt condolences to his family.

Reunion Alert

This year's reunion will be held on **Sunday, October 12**. More information will be forthcoming as plans are firmed up. Please note this date for our grand ballpark tour, reception and dinner.

Changes

You may detect a bit of a change in the newsletter's format. Your editor has retired and had previously relied on his company's automation support to assist in dealing with the foibles of computers and word processing software. Now I'm alone and at the mercy of these infernal tools. To compound my difficulties, I'm also trying to learn how to use an Apple Mac and its word processing as opposed to the PC and Microsoft Word environment that I had previously been exposed to. Please bear with me. As a senior citizen, nothing in this electronic world is intuitive to me. Any Apple experts out there that would like to offer their services as a virtual "help desk," please let me know.

Along these lines, I now have a personal email address and would like to offer a new service to the membership. From time to time, I receive information relating to the Boston Braves that I'd like to share quickly with you. We'll still be using our quarterly newsletter as our primary communications device. Some examples of what would be shared through email alerts will be given immediately following this section. If you would like to avail yourself of this service, please provide me with your email address. Mine's easy to remember: bbraves@beld.net.

Boston Braves Information on the Web

Executive Committee member **Mort Bloomberg** has provided two interesting sites that our members may wish to explore. The first contains an amateur home

movie film clip of Braves Field, shot in 1953. While it's somewhat dark and murky, this brief period glimpse of the Wigwam is priceless. To find it, you will need to go to YouTube (www.youtube.com) and, using its search feature, type in "1953 Braves Field." Then be prepared to turn back the clock! The clip is a bit slow at the start but eventually runs for 1.41 minutes

Mort also uncovered a site maintained by Billy Southworth's daughter, **Carole Southworth Watson**, and her family. Mort's piece "#30 Billy Southworth, Manager," is included at the site. It originally appeared in our Spring 2008 newsletter. Go to www.billysouthworth.com to learn more about this Hall of Fame manager. If you are a member without a computer, you should be able to access either site at a local public library nowadays. Both websites are relatively easy to locate. Enjoy!

2008 HOF Induction Notes

Billy Southworth was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame on July 27 at Cooperstown, NY. Bill DeWitt, Jr., chairman of the St. Louis Cardinals delivered the late Braves manager's acceptance speech. Since it was relatively brief, it has been reproduced in its entirety below:

"It's an honor and a privilege to represent Billy Southworth's family, friends, teammates, and baseball fans in both cities. We are all proud of Billy Southworth and his well-deserved election to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Born in Nebraska and raised in Columbus, Ohio as one of seven children, Billy Southworth had a strong upbringing and knew the value of dedication and hard work.

Baseball was Billy's life from a young age. By 18, he was playing professional baseball, and at 22 he was playing the outfield of the American League in Cleveland.

As a ballplayer, Southworth was popular and convivial, but fiercely competitive. He played 13 major league seasons between 1913 and 1929 and had a lifetime average of .297. He showed his leadership skills early, serving as captain of the Braves from 1921 to 1923. A highlight of his career was hitting .345 in the 1926 World Series against the Yankees, helping the Cardinals win the first of ten World Championships

Though a successful player, it was as manager he made his mark. He honed his skills managing under Cardinals legendary general manager Branch Rickey. Starting in Class D ball, he worked his class up to AA Rochester where he won three straight pennants and

rejoined St. Louis as manager in 1940. He had great players with the Cardinals who responded to his style, Terry Moore, who he made captain, Marty Marion, Mort Cooper, Enos Slaughter, Stan the Man Musial and Red Schoendienst. From 1941 to '45, his teams won at least a hundred games and a hundred plus from 1942 to 1944, winning three National League pennants and two National League Championships [*sic*].

In 1946, Billy moved to Boston to manage the Braves, taking over a losing franchise that had not finished as high as third place in 30 years. Within a year, Southworth had the Braves in third place and in the following season, 1948, they won the National League pennant, behind the pitching of Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain.

Known as the Little General, Southworth was a strict disciplinarian who demanded maximum effort and hard play while stressing sound fundamentals. He was also creative for his era, and his use of relief pitchers often in the middle of innings and platooning of position players which was not done too much at that time. He won more than a thousand games and still has the fifth highest winning percentage in baseball history.

Billy Southworth was a humble and private man who taught his children 'humbleness is greatness.' If he were with us today, he would have been too modest to speak of his accomplishments. Today Billy would have talked about his family, including his daughter Carole, his grandchildren Cheryl, Shelly, Eric and Evan, and they should all be very proud because Billy Southworth was a winner in every sense."

Nick Cafardo, in *The Boston Globe* of July 28 noted "Because the Braves left Boston after the 1952 season, and because there aren't many left who remembered Southworth, his contributions to Boston sports sometimes gets overlooked. But those who chronicled Southworth's performance in '48 rank it among the greatest feats in Boston sports."

Another inductee as a manager, Dick Williams, grew up in St. Louis and followed Southworth's exploits. Cafardo reported that Williams once used one of Southworth's tactics in a game: faking an intentional walk to strike out a batter.

In his remarks, new HOF member Goose Gossage cited the help that he received during his illustrious career from Braves Family members **Johnny Sain**, **Chuck Tanner** and **Roland Hemond**. The latter was in attendance at the ceremony to receive the accolade in person.

Owen Carle Remembers

Another of our members has generously chosen to share his many memories of the Boston Braves. 87-year-old **Owen Carle** took the time to send us a five-page handwritten letter of reminiscences that follow:

A good acquaintance of Owen's was **Abe "Eddie" Aronson** who served as a trainer for the Braves for many years. It was Aronson's opinion that no one hit the ball any harder than Ernie Lombardi and Wally Berger. Owen speculates that if Braves Field's fences had been less distant, Berger would have been able to produce stats comparable to those of Ted Williams and would have solidified the Braves fan base in Boston to the extent that the club might not have moved.

When Owen was nine years old, he attended a Braves game with his mother. In those days, information was communicated to the fans in the stands via an announcer with a hand-held megaphone. During this game, the announcer, **Eddie O'Brien**, interrupted to tell the fans that local legendary golfer, **Francis Ouimet**, had just won the 1931 U.S. Amateur Championship. Ouimet first achieved greatness by capturing the U.S. Open in 1913 as 20-year-old. As was the custom, O'Brien initially delivered the news to the first base side of the field, then to the crowd behind home plate and finished his report with a broadcast to the third base area attendees. His news was greeted with resounding applause. Ouimet would later become an official with the ballclub when Bob Quinn put together an ownership syndicate to buy out Charles Francis Adams.

Owen recalls that when the not-infrequent April snowstorms occurred during this era, the Braves would practice in the armory across Gaffney Street. However, postponements due to wet grounds were rare because of the rapid melting of the white stuff in the spring.

As a member of the Knot Hole Gang, Owen found himself under the supervision of volunteer Boston school teachers who were obviously Braves fans. Little supervision was necessary.

Braves infielder **Whitey Wietelmann** would often visit the Edward Devotion School playground where he would play ball with the grammar school kids. The school was within an easy walking distance of the Wigwam.

Upon leaving Braves Field on Babcock Street after the first game of the 1948 World Series, Owen saw Joe Louis in his car with a lady friend. There were guards at each corner of the car.

When fans stood up in the upper regions of the third base pavilion, they could easily see Magazine Beach

and swimmers on the Cambridge side of the Charles River. Owen jokingly speculates that the Braves might return to Boston if those areas are ever pollution-free enough to permit swimming again.

Foul balls hit into the grandstands at Braves Field could be returned to an usher for a ticket to a later game.

Gerry O'Leary used to do a pre-game radio show on Gaffney Street, sponsored by Peter Paul Mounds. He would select someone (usually a kid) from the crowd. O'Leary would ask the contestant a series of questions. If the first question was answered correctly, the latter would "reach first base" and receive a silver dollar; two questions answered correctly, "second base" and two silver dollars, three questions, "third base" and three silver dollars. If all four questions were answered correctly, a "home run" would bring five silver dollars. Owen was a contestant sometime in the Thirties. He answered the first three questions correctly. Before Owen could get the fourth question, O'Leary announced that the show was running late and that they had run out of time. He did give Owen the five silver dollars, which he still has to this day.

In later years, Owen found reference to a George Sisler playing baseball for the John D. Runkle School, a grammar school in Brookline, MA. He speculates that this was the son of George Sisler, attending local schools when his father was finishing a Hall of Fame career in 1929-30 with the Braves. Sisler, Jr. would become a minor league executive and president of the International League.

Thanks to **Jonathan Fine** for his assistance with this story. What memories might you have to share?

When The Boston Braves Came To Town *by John Galluzzo*

Member John Galluzzo has kindly granted us permission to reprint his story that originally appeared in the June, 2008 issue of South Shore Living.

With great achievement comes great expectation. Rockland once boasted some of the most important, busiest and most recognizable shoe factories in America; Emerson Shoe, Hurley Brothers, and E.T. Wright & Company, makers of the "Just Wright Shoe." Skilled laborers who specialized in leather cutting and other tricks of the shoe trade flocked to the region. But big shoe contracts drove the business. When there were no major orders to fill, entire factories reverted to skeleton crews.

Out of work, Rockland's skilled laborers struggled to provide their families with even the most basic necessities of life. Charitable, civic-minded souls found

ways to help, by creating repositories for donations to be spent in support of those in need. Such were the state of affairs in Rockland that led to the birth of the Milk Fund for the town's down-on-their-luck schoolchildren.

But Rockland thought big. Knocking on doors and holding public rallies were one thing, but where was the real star power? During the summer of 1929, Frank Jones and "Stubby" Mahon, Rockland do-gooders, spearheaded an effort to utilize one of the town's newest public facilities, the baseball field built in commemoration of the veterans of the recently ended World War, to raise some serious funds for the youngsters. They reached out to the city of Boston and dared to ask one question: "Would a major league baseball team consent to playing a game in Rockland and donating the proceeds from the gate to the Milk Fund?"

And so the Boston Braves came to Rockland. The scene was set for Monday night, August 26 at 5:45 p.m. Without lighting at Memorial Park, the organizers wanted to be sure to get in a full nine innings. Pulling out all the stops, Jones and Mahon lined up the Cape Cod League's Falmouth team (later to be known as the Commodores) as opponents.

The town responded with spirit, draping all the buildings of the Union Street business district with bunting and flags in anticipation of the arrival of the teams. Local citizens volunteered to drive to Boston to pick the players up and bring them down to town.

Judge Emil Fuchs, owner-manager of the Braves that year, and his team were paraded up Union Street to cheering crowds, headed to the high school gym to prepare for the game. Thousands packed the stadium and overflowed down the foul lines as their baseball heroes appeared one by one: third baseman **Lester Bell**, first baseman **George Sisler**, and hero of the 1914 World Series, catcher **Hank Gowdy**. As the game played out, fans joined the Braves on their bench, forcing many of the players to sit on the ground when their team was at bat.

Gowdy stole the show. With the Braves down early, as pitcher Red Peery gave up four runs in the first two innings, the "old war horse," as the *Rockland Standard* later described him, led off the inning to exaltations from the crowd. "When he came to bat in the third inning he put his hand to the visor of his cap and looked away into the distance as though he was looking for a good place to send the ball. And then he went and did it," said the *Standard*. With a mighty swing he slammed a ball to deep left, up and over the wall, to put the Braves on the board. He rounded third, "puffing like a porpoise," saying, "My, that's a long way round those

bases," with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face.

The Braves added three runs in the fourth, and four more in the fifth, including a mammoth "Babe Ruth" to center field by Bell, estimated at that time to be the longest ball ever hit at Memorial Park.

In between innings, C.O. Davis stood at a microphone behind home plate and carried on a game-long auction for a single bottle of milk, reminding everyone of why the game was being played. When the sun finally went down and the game was called (the Braves pulled it out, 8-7), Elwin T. Wright, owner of the E.T. Wright Shoe Company had earned the right to take the bottle home, shelling out an even \$100 for the privilege. To sweeten the pot, Judge Fuchs produced a bag of baseballs to be signed by his players and auctioned off. In total, the day's gate and auction items brought in \$1,500 for milk for undernourished schoolchildren.

In just two months time, the Milk Fund would become a subject of even greater importance for the youngsters of Rockland. The onset of the Great Depression after the stock market crash of October 1929 would hit the community hard, as it did the rest of the country. Rockland, though, had found an ally in the Boston Braves, and forged a partnership that continued for the next five years, until such a time when the Braves themselves could no longer financially afford to make the trip to town. But no one in Rockland would ever forget the excitement generated the first time a major league baseball team played in their hometown.

Looong Games

This year's All Star Game and the April 17 22-inning marathon between the Rockies and the Padres bring back memories of the granddaddy of them all -- the 26-inning tie played between the Dodgers and Braves on May 1, 1920 at Braves Field. The latter game took place over three hours and fifty minutes, in contrast to the shorter 2008 game, which ran six hours and sixteen minutes. Yes, baseball needs to do something about the length of its contests -- especially those Sunday night showcases. Much has been said and written about the 1920 **Joe Oeschger - Leon Cadore** duel. Both pitchers hurled to the end. The Braves' Oeschger threw 21 consecutive scoreless innings. His durability is also reflected by the fact that upon his death on July 29, 1986, Oeschger was the last survivor among the twenty-two players that had appeared in the historic game.

Including the record-setter, the Boston Braves played in four over-20 inning contests. Some nineteen years later, on June 27, 1939, the Bees again tied the Dodgers at the Wigwam in a game that ceased after 23

innings because of darkness. This game lasted five hours and fifteen minutes before a "crowd" of 2,457, most of whom stayed the duration. Bees reliever, **Milt Shoffner** hurled 16 consecutive scoreless innings for naught. Victory was almost at hand for Boston in the thirteenth but pinch runner **Otto Huber**, a 25-year-old rookie infielder, stumbled and fell rounding third on what would have been a sure score. An apoplectic **Casey Stengel**, who as manager was also coaching at third, asked the perplexed greenhorn, "What the hell were you wearing, bedroom slippers?" Huber replied, "Geez, Case, you had me on the bench so long my spikes got dulled on the concrete in the dugout." From that day forward, Stengel would always check a potential pinch runner's shoes before installing him in a game. Huber's entire big league career would consist of eleven 1939 games with the Bees.

On May 17, 1927, the Tribe dropped a 22-inning contest at Braves Field to the Chicago Cubs, 4-3. Braves starter **Bob Smith** held the Cubs runless from the fifth to the twenty-second inning when he weakened and permitted a run to cross the plate.

Way back on August 1, 1918, spectators at Braves Field witnessed a record-setting twenty-inning scoreless duel between the Pirates and the Braves. Braves starter **Art Nehf** yielded two runs at the top of the twenty-first inning that the Tribe was unable to address during its turn at bat. Future Boston manager **Billy Southworth** drove in the second run for the Bucs. Pittsburgh also featured a future Braves skipper at the hot corner -- **Deacon Bill McKechnie**.

Babe Ruth and the Spring of '35

Much has been written about Babe Ruth's unhappy 28-game swan song with Judge Fuchs' 1935 Braves. While Ruth carried eventual managerial expectations to the Hub, the Judge saw the Bambino as a financial savior for a franchise swimming in red ink. Neither would happen.

When the Braves broke spring training camp in Florida, they proceeded to barnstorm northward, hopeful of picking up some extra cash from fans filling local venues for a sighting of the Babe and, perhaps, even to witness an exhibition game homer.

The Babe's first home run as a Brave occurred on April 4 in Savannah, GA. The Tribe played the Southern Georgia Teachers' College team and demolished the undergrads by a score of 15-1. A crowd of 2,000 saw Ruth played for five innings before being replaced by Randy Moore. In two of his three at bats, Babe failed to get the ball out of the infield. But the crowd got to see what they had turned out for. Ruth drove a collegian's pitch into the ballpark's right field bleachers.

The following day, the Braves ventured to the campus of North Carolina State College in Fayetteville. April 5, 1935 was proclaimed "Babe Ruth Day" and the mayor declared a business holiday for the occasion. Ruth had previously made a professional appearance there in 1914 in a Red Sox intrasquad game conducted at Fair Grounds Park. This day's contest was held in a 3,000 seat venue, Highland Park, and the crowd was estimated anywhere from five to ten thousand spectators and was said to represent at least a third of Fayetteville's population. The game lasted only six innings and the Babe failed to produce any batting fireworks. He walked twice, hit into a double play and struck out. In that last at bat, Ruth swung so hard at the third strike that he fell to the ground.

The Braves prevailed 6-2 in what turned out to be a carnival-like atmosphere. The game was started with forty new baseballs at the ready. However, fans grabbed and kept any ball that they could retrieve. The overflow crowd packed the foul lines and spread into the outfield. One bold female fan actually delayed the contest as she walked onto the field and asked first baseman Ruth to autograph her souvenir baseball. Even the Fayetteville players joined the madness. A reserve went into the stands and picked up a couple of errant balls. When the supply of spheroids became critically low, a local store owner was summoned for replenishments. An announcement went out to spectators that every new baseball in the town had been brought to the park. Despite these efforts, the game had to be stopped at the top of the seventh when the last baseball disappeared into the crowd. The college reserve who had earlier retrieved two souvenirs in the stands offered up his trophies to no avail. The game was declared over by the home plate ump.

By April 7, the Tribe had made its way to Newark, NJ from Norfolk, VA to play the Newark Bears in Ruppert Stadium. The International League Bears were a top affiliate of the Babe's former team, the New York Yankees. Many of the Bambino's Gotham fans crossed the Hudson to see their hero in action. A contemporary newspaper account described the occasion thusly: "Attired in the attractive uniform of the Boston Braves, Babe Ruth made his debut in the metropolitan area as a National Leaguer today and thrilled some 10,000 spectators with a real-old-fashioned Ruthian field day."

Despite earlier spring training indications to the contrary, the reporter stated that "Ruth is in fine shape. There's no question about it. The manner in which he cavorted around first base was ample proof. In the fifth inning, he made a circus catch of [the pitcher's] bad throw. He scooped the ball off the ground while on both knees and rolled over on his back, but still held on to it."

The Babe's fielding prowess, however, was overshadowed by his batting display. In the very first inning, Ruth smashed a knuckle-ball offering 350 feet into the right field bleachers. The fireworks would continue. In the sixth, the Sultan of Swat lived up to his moniker and sent a fastball out into the street behind the park. The drive was estimated to have traveled over 500 feet and was believed to be the longest homer in the history of the minor league ballpark. The Braves went on to defeat the Bears by a score of 10-8.

The Babe's return to the Hub as a member of a local nine was delayed by rain as City Series exhibition games scheduled for April 12 and 13 were rained out. On a chilly April 14, Ruth came home to Fenway Park to play in his new Braves togs before a gathering of 11,000. He played first base and failed to get a hit in three at bats over five innings. Ruth also made an error in the field. This contest marked the debut of Joe Cronin as the Red Sox player-manager. Cronin was equally unsuccessful in four at bats and made two miscues in the field. The Braves prevailed, 3-2.

Prior to the kick-off of the season, the Braves trekked to Worcester, MA for a practice contest on April 15 against Holy Cross College. 8,500 turned out and the mayor presented the key to the city to the Babe as he approached the plate for his first at bat. Ruth went hitless in one official appearance. It took a three-run ninth inning rally for the Braves to defeat the collegians, 5-2.

The Braves' season opener took place at the Wigwam on April 16 against New York's Giants. It would provide another moment in the spotlight for the 41-year-old slugger at the obvious end of a legendary career. The citizenry of Boston had thought that they had bid adieu to the Babe the previous fall when a huge crowd assembled at Fenway Park to cheer the Bambino in what was thought to be his final Hub season appearance. Now, predictions were for a crowd of from forty to fifty thousand at the Wigwam to welcome back the Hub's prodigal son. Ruth planned to play five innings and hoped to hit at least one home run.

Due to wintry weather, the turnstiles at Braves Field only admitted some 25,000 through its gates for this historic occurrence. The day had been designated "Judge Fuchs Day" and a bronze plaque was presented to the club's owner in recognition of his thirteen years of stewardship. The opener was steeped in ceremony. Airplanes circled over the field and dignitaries populated the stands. Five of the six New England governors were in attendance along with five mayors and an assortment of other federal, local and state officials, but the day was clearly Ruth's. The Bambino rose to the occasion. His sizzling first inning single nearly cut the legs out from under Giants player-

manager Bill Terry and drove in the first Braves run of the 1935 season. The Babe batted in what became the winning runs in the fifth. Off of Carl Hubbell, Ruth clubbed his 724th homer about 430 feet into the runway between the Jury Box and the right field pavilion, driving in the two critical runs needed to eventually defeat New York, 4-2. The crowd roared in response to the Babe's heroics. And the Babe was no slouch in the field. In the Giants portion of the fifth inning, Ruth dashed from deep left field to spear a drive off the bat of Hubbell that would have put the visitors back into the ballgame. When snowflakes started to fall in the sixth inning, a band in attendance struck up "In the Good Old Summer Time," followed by "Jingle Bells." Ruth would retire to the dugout in the seventh inning.

In a post-game interview, Giants manager Terry reflected on Ruth's performance. "He's far from through, take my word for it. The single in the first inning I never saw. The ball came at me so fast I just couldn't see it. And that home run was just the last word."

The following evening, Ruth and his wife celebrated their sixth wedding anniversary at their quarters at the Ritz Carlton. His opening day heroics had resulted in a flurry of congratulatory telegrams. Among the missives were messages from former teammates Lefty Gomez and Lyn Lary as well as world heavyweight wrestling champion Ed "Strangler" Lewis.

However, on April 18, the great Walter Johnson, then managing the Indians, delivered a reality check in a newspaper interview. "Yes, I'm afraid my old friend Babe Ruth is through as a player and doesn't know it. That he can be of value to the Braves on the playing field is almost too hard to believe." The Big Train's remarks proved to be prophetic. The Babe's days as a player were numbered as was Judge Fuchs' time as Braves owner.

Boston Braves Curse???

Were the Braves under a hex during their stay at Braves Field or has one been manufactured akin to the so-called "Curse of the Bambino" of the neighboring Red Sox? On his MSNBC cable program, "Countdown," of May 7, 2008, host **Keith Olbermann** devoted a portion of the usually politically-oriented show to a peek at the construction status of the new Yankee Stadium. The National Pastime isn't an alien subject to Olbermann as he's a member of the Society for American Baseball Research and a frequent contributor to *Sports Collectors Digest*.

Olbermann's tour of the "House That Steinbrenner Is Building" took him to the spot where the replica David Ortiz jersey had been embedded in concrete by a

construction worker hoping to curse the new digs. As Olbermann put it, the creative Sox fan “ran his big bazoo about it” and the jersey was retrieved and later auctioned off for charity. The Countdown host speculated that this attempt wouldn’t have worked anyway “because a team has to curse itself.” He cited the Boston Braves as an example. Quoting Olberman, “During the construction of Braves Field, a dozen mules and horses were buried alive in a cave-in. The Boston Braves won the World Series in 1914 and 12 of baseball’s first 28 championships. They moved to their new ballpark in 1915. They didn’t win the World Series for 43 years and until they moved out of Boston. That’s a curse.”

You can see and hear Olbermann’s piece on YouTube by searching under “New Yankee Stadium - Keith Olbermann.”

The story of the construction accident, *sans* any reference to a “curse,” has appeared in print before. In his 1989 book, *Ballparks of North America*, author Michael Benson put it this way, “According to some, there was a cave-in during construction. Twelve horses and mules were buried alive underneath third base -- and were there the whole time ball was played on the site!”

Two faded panoramic photographs of Braves Field under construction, showing the use of draft animals, presently reside in the lobby of the Case Center, adjacent to Nickerson Field on the Boston University campus. Stop in and take a look at them during next reunion tour.

Evidence of the accident never turned up when Boston University dismantled that portion of the Wigwam and rearranged the area to meet its needs.

The old ball field received another face lift this year as its playing surface was renovated by the installation of state-of-the-art FieldTurf in time for the kick-off of the collegiate soccer season. A university spokesperson estimated that the surface of the former “Home of the Braves” was used approximately 2,600 hours last year, “which makes it one of the most used fields in the country.” Not bad for “cursed” territory!

In Memoriam

Former one-season Braves farmhand **Glen Schaeffer** passed away at age 88 on April 3. The ex-infielder had a minor league career that ran from 1940-52, excluding four years of WWII Army service. He was at one time, property of the Browns, Braves and Cubs and spent the 1941 season as the player-manager of the Beaver Falls Bees of the Class D Pennsylvania State Association. Upon release from military service, Schaeffer joined the

1946 Hartford Chiefs and played in 104 games, batting .213. He performed at second, short and third for the Braves’ Eastern League affiliate. A good fielder and a hustler, Schaeffer was considered not too impressive at the plate, perhaps reflecting his beginnings as a pitcher before changing positions early in his career. Nonetheless, Schaeffer is a Hall of Famer. From 1946-51, he played goalie for St. Louis soccer teams that twice captured the national amateur championship. He was inducted into a local soccer hall of fame in 1980.

BBHA member **Dick Schattinger** died on April 4 at age 83. As a recent high school graduate in 1942, this Californian lad was invited by Braves manager Casey Stengel to come east and spend a once-in-a-lifetime summer with the ballclub. Dick’s adventure was chronicled by your editor in the End of Summer 2004 newsletter under the heading “Dick Schattinger and the Summer of ’42” and the story currently also resides on the Society for American Baseball Research’s web site (www.sabr.org) in an illustrated version in its SABR-zine section under the same title. After WWII military service, Dick would spend three seasons as an infielder in the low minors before calling it quits. His dream of becoming a big leaguer was deferred a generation to his son, Jeff, who made a brief one game pitching appearance in 1981 for the Kansas City Royals. Dick returned to the Hub in 1996 to retrace the steps of his youth and later learned of the BBHA and contacted us about his ties to the Braves. It was a privilege to have been allowed to tell and preserve his story.

Member **Ed Niemeyer** of Marblehead, MA passed away at age 73 on January 3. Ed grew up in Brighton and attended many games at Braves Field as a boy during the war through to his freshman year at Boston College when the team left for Milwaukee. Ed generously shared his many memories about what it was like to be a Braves fan during their last years in Boston. Thanks to member **Steve Cooper** for providing his thoughts on his friend and mentor.

Laurance J. Maney died on February 11 after a brief illness. He was the grandson of C.J. Maney, one of the Three Little Steam Shovels. Reflecting his heritage, Laurance worked in the construction industry. In his 50s, he received a doctorate from Harvard University in Celtic Languages and Literature. His wife, Linda, informed us that Laurance was a Braves fan all of his life no matter where they played. He never ceased to tell her about the feats of Warren Spahn in particular.

Sittin’ In The Jury Box

Member **Midge Landry** informs us that her late uncle, infielder **Skippy Roberge** of the 1941-42 and 1946 Boston Braves has been unanimously selected for

induction into the Lowell Catholic High School Hall of Fame. The ceremony will take place at Lenzi's at 810 Merrimack Avenue in Dracut, MA on November 1. BBHA members are cordially invited to celebrate this well deserved honoring of a member of the Braves Family. The cost is \$40 per ticket, with cocktails at 6 p.m. followed by a dinner at 7 p.m. Please make checks payable to Midge and send them to her home address at 48 Dana Street, Lowell, MA 01850.

This past March, spring training bid farewell to the City of St. Petersburg, FL. The Tampa Rays played their final exhibition game at historic Al Lang Field (Progress Energy Park) on March 28. With no prospect in sight of another big league team moving in, an era that commenced in 1922 with the Boston Braves came to an end. The Braves spent their early spring at this site until 1937. Proposals to build a major league stadium for the improving Rays on this footprint are being discussed.

The Red Sox 2008 pre-season odyssey resulted in a stop at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum at the end of March. The affair was designed to commemorate the Dodgers' 50th season on the West Coast. Proceeds went to the home team's cancer charity, ThinkCure. Owner **Frank McCourt** explained his rationale: "When my grandfather was one of the owners of the Boston Braves, the Braves started the Jimmy Fund, a cancer charity. When the Braves left Boston for Milwaukee in 1953, they played an exhibition game against the Red Sox. The proceeds of that game went to the Jimmy Fund."

We experienced a blast from the past on June 12 when the Braves played the Cubs at Wrigley Field. Both teams donned replica 1948 uniforms in the first-ever throwback game played in the Windy City's friendly confines. The event was held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Cubs baseball on WGN-TV. The game commenced being broadcast in glorious black and white before shifting to full color. Fans were encouraged to dress in late '40s attire and the post-war atmosphere was captured by period music and replica scorecards. It was nice to see the classic Boston Braves caps, jerseys and socks on players on a diamond that was a contemporary of Braves Field.

Braves fans can recall that brothers Mort and Walker Cooper each played for the Boston Braves at different times. Mort, a hurler, performed for the Tribe during the 1945-47 seasons while his younger sibling caught for the Braves in 1950-52. Lesser known is the fact that a third brother was Braves chattel. Pitcher **Sammy Cooper** toiled in the Braves minor league system from 1946-50. He rose as high as the Class B Evansville Braves in 1950.

For a brief moment in time there was a second member of the Holmes family with the Braves. For two weeks in the early spring of 1946 **Jackie Holmes**, Tommy's kid brother, tried out at the club's minor league training camp in Greenwood, MS. The *Hartford Courant* of March 21 of that year sadly reported "when he grows bigger and stronger he may be able to make the grade, but right now he doesn't have the ability to even be considered for a Class D club. He is still in his teens and has plenty of years ahead to realize his ambition of following in the footsteps of his famous brother." Unfortunately, that day was never to be.

Joe Casey was inducted into the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Hall of Fame on March 15. The honor reflected his many years of service as a high school coach and official. He was a Nashville schoolboy pitching phenom at North High, hurling several no-hitters and possessor of a 31-1 record. Casey spent his entire professional baseball career in the Boston Braves farm chain. From 1947 to 1950, he pitched for such affiliates as the Owensboro Oilers, Hartford Chiefs, Pawtucket Slaters and Denver Bears. After baseball, Casey pursued a career in law enforcement and served as Nashville's police chief from 1973-89.

In an interview with Bryan Painter of *The Oklahoman* on March 16, **Greg Spahn** recalled his incredible childhood as the son of Boston Braves Hall of Famer **Warren Spahn**. Greg revealed a unique connection to Ted Williams. The doctor who delivered him in Boston just prior to the 1948 World Series against the Indians was a referral by the Splendid Splinter to his dad!

The Braves clinching of the '48 National League pennant set off a frenzy among the team's New England fans to acquire World Series ducats. Member **Bob O'Neil** remembers that the club established a rule that applications had to be sent in beginning on a specific date. Despite submitting a request via Western Union when the office opened at 12 a.m., Bob's family did not hear back from the Tribe. They undertook an alternative strategy. During its birth year, the Jimmy Fund asked city and town police chiefs to act as local chairmen for the charity. Bob's dad sought out their top law enforcement official who was able to get the O'Neil family two tickets to each game, enabling family members to each attend a Fall Classic contest.

According to a report in the April 15th edition of *The State Journal-Register* of Springfield, IL, Boston Braves Hall of Famer **Roland Hemond** is about to embark upon a new baseball venture. Currently in his 57th year in professional baseball as an official with the Arizona Diamondbacks, Roland will be working with his son, Bob, and others to field a team from Hannibal, MO in the Central Illinois Collegiate League in 2009. The

CICL is a college wooden bat summer league founded in 1963 and is supported by Major League Baseball. Roland was named chairman of the Hannibal team and joining him and Bob on the board of directors are Walt Jocketty, Red Schoendienst, Frank White and Lee Thomas. Hannibal has been without baseball since 1953. We also happily note that Roland and his wife, Margo, will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this November.

Our get well wishes go out to our good friend and frequent reunion attendee, **Bill Monbouquette**. In a May 16 story in *The Boston Globe*, the former Red Sox ace revealed that he is bravely battling leukemia. Monbo grew up a Boston Braves fan and was a former Knot Hole Gang member. We hope to see him in good health once again and as our honored guest at our reunions.

Member **Wally Carew** wrote an excellent piece on his vivid memories surrounding the departure of his beloved Boston Braves. His tribute appeared in the April 3 issue of *The Boston Globe* in its Northwest edition. The former Knot Hole Ganger was nine when the Tribe departed. His last trip to a game at Braves Field occurred in August of 1952.

The Pilot is the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston and America's oldest Catholic newspaper. In addition to communicating religious news, the paper has carried stories on Boston's Braves. In the April 25 issue, **Clark Booth** penned a heartfelt piece, "Remembering the Braves," describing the events leading to the Braves' departure on March 18, 1953. On July 27, columnist **Gordon White** headlined his section, "Miracle Moments: Overused Phrase Rarely Applies in Sports." White contrasted the "Miracle Braves of 1914" and the "Miracle at Coogan's Bluff" with the 2008 performance of the Tampa Rays. Both articles may be access through the paper's website: www.thebostonpilot.com using the search feature.

Thanks

A number of members have contributed materials to the BBHA and helped in production of this newsletter. We extend our gratitude to **Hank Dever, John Ahokas, Vincent Fandetti, John Delmore, Phil Cahill, John Materazzo, John Voiselle, Mike Hanlon, Jack Powers, John McKenna, Jack Porter** and **Daniel Papillon**. 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)**.