

BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

Summer 2006

Sebastian Daniel "Sibby" Sisti July 26, 1920 – April 24, 2006

The 2006 baseball season began on a sad note for the Boston Braves Family with the loss of our beloved **Sibby Sisti**. Over the past few years, Sibby fought a valiant battle against declining health. Despite his illnesses, he would annually journey from his Amherst, NY home to be with his former teammates and his many fans at our fall reunion. Sibby would be among the first to appear and last to leave. He graciously reminisced, signed autographs and posed for pictures. Those of us who had the privilege of making his personal acquaintance will always treasure those moments. While Sibby was very humble about his baseball accomplishments, we fans knew better and honored his contributions by placing him in the Boston Braves Hall of Fame. He was our "Mr. Boston Braves." When word of his final illness became known, many of you sent along cards and letters to cheer him up. Sibby appreciated the efforts and remained in contact with BBHA business manager George Altison despite the seriousness of his condition.

Sibby is survived by his wife of 64 years, Norine, two sons, three daughters, 11 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. In a touching tribute entered into the funeral home's on-line register book, Kevin Dobson of West Seneca, NY said:

"We can all find peace of mind knowing that right now his spirit is free... His body, of pain and sorrow and...that he is in a good place...He is wearing his home whites, with that big tomahawk on the front...He is in a place where it's always springtime, the grass is always green, the sky is always blue, and the two greatest words ever, are ringing in his ears, in his mind and in his heart..."Play Ball"... God Speed Sibby!"

At the family's request, contributions may be made in Sibby's memory to the National Kidney Foundation of Western New York or the American Diabetes Association.

"Goodnight Sibby Sisti, wherever you are."

By Saul Wisnia

The first four men inducted into the Boston Braves Hall of Fame after its formation by fans of the defunct National League club were Warren Spahn, John Sain, Tommy Holmes, and Sebastian "Sibby" Sisti. In order, that's one Hall of Famer, two All-Stars, and one .244 hitter who toiled for 14-plus years in the big leagues by playing wherever and whenever he was asked. Nobody questioned the selection.

Sisti didn't belong in the class of Spahn, Sain, and Holmes as a ballplayer, yet for the thousands of old Braves denizens who attended reunions of the team during the last two decades, he WAS the Boston Braves. He symbolized the team's working-class, friendly demeanor better than any other individual, and delighted in returning to town and greeting the old diehards who remembered the days of Walker Cooper, Sam Jethroe, and fried clams at Braves Field.

A Buffalo native, Sisti actually had his initial big-league tryout for the Red Sox at the tender age of 15, when he was driven down to Cleveland by scout Bill Meyers and donned a Boston uniform for hitting and fielding practice under the eye of manager Joe Cronin. The Sox didn't sign him, but the Braves committed to him before his senior year of high school and in July of 1939 brought him up from Hartford. At 18, he was the youngest player in the major leagues; after getting into 63 games that summer, he was a starter at third base the next three years.

The Braves were a seventh-place club each of his first four seasons, but Sisti was a favorite of manager Casey Stengel because of his work ethic. He and young second baseman Connie Ryan were often spotted by Casey taking extra batting and fielding practice, and would talk baseball for hours with their skipper on the long train rides from one National League outpost to the other. Sibby's batting average fell to .211 in '42, but as long as Stengel was in town his job was safe.

World War II cost Sisti three seasons, however, and when he returned from the Coast Guard in 1946 new manager Billy Southworth sent him back to the minors just after Opening Day to learn a new position - shortstop. If Sibby was mad by the demotion, he took it out on American Association pitching. He hit .343 for the Indianapolis Indians, leading the league in batting, hits, and triples and earning selection by *The Sporting News* as its Minor League Player of the Year. He was back up to the majors to stay in 1947, and earned a role as starting shortstop on a quickly rising team. But a shoulder separation sidelined him in mid-season, and effectively ended his career as a starter. He was batting .281 at the time, but when the next season rolled around the club had hotshot rookie Alvin Dark to play short.

At this point Sisti assumed his role as "Super Sub," capable of filling in at any infield or outfield spot save for catcher (although as the team's "unofficial" third receiver, he often caught batting practice). At no point was his nickname more appropriate than 1948, when a broken ankle suffered on July 8 sidelined second baseman Eddie Stanky in the heat of the NL

pennant race. Sisti stepped in and manned the spot the rest of the regular season, fielding well and hitting his usual steady .250. When Stanky returned in late September, however, Sibby was sent to the bench for the World Series against Cleveland. His only at-bat came in the ninth inning of the sixth and final game, when he was called upon to pinch-hit and bunt the potential tying run to second base. He popped into a double-play instead, and one out later the Indians were champions.

The sad-eyed Sisti - who switched his No. 13 uniform for No. 7 the following year - never shirked questions about this dubious event, nor was he ever forced by Braves fans to wear goat horns like Johnny Pesky or Bill Buckner did after similar miscues for the Red Sox. The public forgave Sibby, perhaps because unlike Pesky or Buckner, he wasn't a star player expected to win - nor was his team. And if he was bitter about his lack of playing time (he appeared in 100 games just twice in his final seven seasons), he never showed it. He actually had quite a sense of humor about his situation. When Boston sportswriter John Gillooly wrote that Sisti had been "sitting on the bench so long he had enough splinters in his rear end to start a match factory," Sisti approached Gillooly in the Braves dugout the next day and said, "I have a gift for you in my pocket. This is my manufacturing company." And he gave him a box of matches. Sisti was equally self-effacing when it came to his .244 lifetime batting average. With the exception of the 1939 season, the sacrifice fly rule was not used between 1931-54, a span which covered nearly all of Sisti's career. He often joked that he would have had a much higher lifetime average if he had the sac fly on his side. When someone would ask "How high?" he'd shout back, "Hell, at least .245!"

Along with teammate and fellow Buffalo native Warren Spahn, Sisti was the first on the team to hear that the Braves were moving to Milwaukee in the spring of 1953. As he described it: "We were in spring training when the announcement was made, and Warren and I were up in St. Petersburg making a commercial for Gillette. After I got through with my segment, I went into the other room and was looking at the tickertape coming out of one of those old globes. I saw that the National League meeting had just concluded, and the Boston Braves were now going to be moved to Milwaukee. "So I went back into the director where he was shooting Spahn's scene, and I told him that the 'B' on the cap was no good. He says, 'What do you mean by that?,' and I said 'We just moved to Milwaukee.' He just said, 'When we make the announcement and show this commercial on TV, we'll just say 'Warren Spahn and Sibby Sisti, FORMERLY of the Boston Braves, now of the Milwaukee Braves.' That's how they did it, and the commercials ran that year."

It was just two weeks before Opening Day, but until then Sibby and his teammates had been in the dark about the move. Sisti said the concept of going to Milwaukee was "as green as apple pie to me." In other words, he didn't care

for it. He had been in Boston nearly 13 years, and he may as well have stayed there. He had just 23 at-bats during the team's maiden season in Wisconsin, and appeared in nine games as a defensive replacement (with no at-bats) in '54 before being released and then re-signed as a coach. He was 33 years old.

Sisti was asked to manage in the minors for the Braves the next season, and spent a decade at the helm of clubs in Quebec, Corpus Christi, Austin, and Sacramento. He was an infield-outfield instructor with Phillies minor leaguers for a couple seasons, then around 1970 finally went back home to Buffalo and a "real job" as a truck driver. He raised his kids, cared for his wife when she became ill in recent years, and returned to all but one annual reunion of the Boston Braves Historical Association held between 1991-2004 - staying away only after major surgery. His last appearance came at the age of 84, and as usual he brought the day's loudest cheers and laughs. When the 2002 reunion coincided with an Atlanta Braves-Red Sox series at Fenway, he threw out the first ball at the opener.

Sibby had two unique claims to fame later in life. In 1973, authors Brendan Boyd and Fred Harris ended their popular *Great American Baseball Card Flipping, Trading and Bubble Gum Book* with a page featuring one of Sisti's cards accompanied by a one-line epitaph beneath it: "Goodnight Sibby Sisti, wherever you are." Most readers probably had no idea.

If they were paying close attention a decade later, however, they found him. In 1983, Sisti was asked to be a technical advisor for director Barry Levinson's popular 1940-era baseball movie "The Natural." Filmed in Buffalo, the film told the fictitious story of the "New York Knights," a National League team whose struggles on the field and in the stands would be quite familiar to old Braves fans. Sisti helped star Robert Redford and other actors with their baseball sequences, and also had a bit part as manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates. An annual highlight of Braves reunions came when Sisti would reveal the sum of his latest royalty check for his appearance; the checks usually ranged from 65 cents to about \$4.00.

In the film's climatic scene, Sisti comes to the mound and calls in a young fireballing reliever to face Redford's Roy Hobbs. A pennant-winning Hobbs home run into the light towers results, and Sisti delighted in telling reunion attendees that after reliving his managerial error again and again on videotape, he had devised a solution. "If they ever make a 'Natural II,'" he stated emphatically, "I'm going out there again. But this time, on the first pitch, Redford's going right down on his ass!"

Saul Wisnia is on the executive board of the Boston Braves Historical Association and the author (with Richard Johnson) of From Yawkey to Milwaukee - Boston's Bloom and Demise as a Two-Team Baseball Town, to be published in 2007 by Rounder Books.

Sibby

***On The Death of Sebastian (Sibby) Sisti
Boston-Milwaukee Braves, 1939-1954***

by Zvi A. Sesling

Baseball heroes die.
My first baseball hero was Sibby Sisti.
Perhaps it was the name, a poetic sound,
an alliteration.
He was my first hero.
Sibby wasn't a superstar.
No one called him Mr. Baseball or Splendid
anything.
He was the blue collar player on the blue collar
team.
He played where needed,
the reliable player the average fan could
associate with.
It made him a fan favorite.
He was a natural.
There will always be a place in my lineup for
Sibby.

Media Reflections

Sibby Sisti's passing did not go unnoticed in the local media. BBHA member and newspaper correspondent **Marvin Pave** penned a tribute entitled "Sisti A Model Teammate" in the April 29th edition of *The Boston Globe*. The piece contained a few anecdotes from former teammate, Johnny Logan. "There are two things I'll never forget about my old roommate," said Logan. "First, he was like another dad to the younger players on the team. He was a student of the game and always a gentleman. Second, he smoked those smelly stogies every night while reading a western novel in our room. I used to get up at 2:30 in the morning after he fell asleep and flush the cigar butt down the john." Johnny went on to say, "Sibby told me back in 1951 that my making the team would probably mean he'd still be on the bench, but it never affected our relationship negatively. He was the established guy who played in a World Series and I was a rookie who had just signed a \$5,000 contract but he never criticized me and he always gave me tips on how to improve. You always felt you had a friend in Sibby. I will miss him very much."

Writer **Alan Lupo** produced an article, "When Boston had the Braves and the Braves had Sibby," which appeared in the *Lawrence Eagle Tribune* on June 11th and *The Salem News* on June 12th. As a youth, Lupo joked to his buddies that "Sibby Sisti can do everything. He plays infield, outfield, and in between he's up in the stands selling programs and hot dogs." In reflecting on Sibby's career, Lupo commented, "No, the man was not a fearsome hitter, just a pretty good one. He was a fine fielder, bunter and all around hustler. He was one heck of a working stiff on what was a workingman's team." Lupo closed his story with the reflection, "OK, so he didn't sell hot dogs in between innings. But he was a class act. He was and remains one of my heroes, and maybe heroes never really die."

Welcome Ronnie Joyner

Ronnie Joyner, 42, is an artist and illustrator specializing in historical baseball. He has co-authored recent autobiographies by former players Don Gutteridge, Virgil Trucks, and the Pirates' Frank Thomas. Joyner is currently working with Bob Dillinger on an upcoming biography. Joyner's illustrations can be seen regularly in the pages of *Sports Collector's Digest*, as well as in publications of the Philadelphia Athletics, St. Louis Browns and Washington Senators historical societies. In addition, the Pittsburgh Pirates alumni magazine, *The Black & Gold*, recently asked Joyner to contribute an illustration to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dale Long's eight consecutive games home run streak. "Whether it's through my writing or illustration, I consider it an honor to help preserve the legacy of the ballplayers of the past," Joyner said recently from his home in Charlotte Hall, Maryland. "The story of Dale Long's home run streak is a perfect example of the type of history that needs to be passed on to the next generation of baseball fans, and I really enjoy facilitating that. I'm also very excited to finally get together with the Boston Braves Historical Association," Joyner continued. "I was very honored to be asked to contribute a drawing of Sibby Sisti, and I hope I can do more in the future." Joyner can be reached by phone at 301-290-0445, by email at ronnie@ndun.com, or by U.S. Mail at 7780 Traeleigh Lane, Charlotte Hall, MD 20622. If you are interested in purchasing any of Ronnie Joyner's products, which also include full-color illustrated baseball card sets of the 1944 Browns, 1953 Browns, Philadelphia A's Fan Favorites and 1969 Washington Senators, please go to www.philadelphiaathletics.org or call the A's Society at 1-800-318-0483.

1948

I'm pleased to announce that the Boston Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research has elected to take on a book project featuring the 1948 baseball season in Boston. The publication will track that campaign from the perspectives of the Hub's National and American League ballclubs. Biographical sketches will be prepared on all players that appeared on the Braves and Red Sox rosters during the teams' pennant drives, and season highlights and events will be captured. Saul Wisnia and your editor will assist the Chapter in its representations of the Tribe. While only a few BBHA members responded to the SABR Chapter's invitation to participate that was included in our last issue of the newsletter, we hope with the confirmation of the project that others will now come forward with any contributions regarding the players or events associated with our team's Last Hurrah. Our thanks go out to Bill Nowlin for his dogged pursuit of this initiative. The current target date for publication is late 2007 or early 2008.

The Season So Far

Despite having been gone for over half a century, the Boston Braves continue to find their way into current baseball season happenings.

Twins' catching phenom, Joe Mauer is threatening to become the first backstop to capture a league batting title since **Ernie Lombardi** did it with the 1942 Braves. Mauer's robust hitting has even placed him within shooting distance of the stratospheric .400 mark. The legendarily slow afoot catcher for the Braves claimed a second National League hitting championship during his one-year stint with the Tribe. Lombardi was purchased from Cincinnati during the winter as the Reds tired of their aging catcher's constant haggling over his contract. Although his 1938 batting crown and MVP status was without dispute, Lombardi's 1942 achievement was the subject of controversy and debate. Although his .330 average was the best among Senior Circuit regulars, he only made it to the plate some 309 times. While the league maintained an unofficial 400-at-bat standard, NL president Ford Frick declared the minimum inapplicable to backstops given the wear and tear of the position. Lombardi had lost several weeks of activity to a common catching injury – a split finger. Had the rule been enforced, the Cardinals' Enos Slaughter would have been awarded the title by virtue of his .318 batting average. After the 1942 campaign, Lombardi held out once again and once again packed his bags, this time moving to New York and the Giants, in exchange for Connie Ryan and Hugh Poland.

When Edgar Renteria of the Atlanta Braves started at shortstop in this year's All Star game, he became the franchise's first starter at that position since **Eddie Miller's** 1942 appearance. The slick-fielding Miller was a six-time All Star. However, Al Hirshberg in *The Braves, The Pick And The Shovel*, reported that the Tribe infielder had such a dislike for the mid-season classic that he always tried to find excuses for not going. Miller's aversion was attributed to the 1940 contest where the Giants' Billy Jurges, considered his inferior, played the lion's share of the game. As was the case with Lombardi, Miller's constant salary squabbles led to his departure to Cincinnati after his All Star season. The economically-challenged Braves received \$25,000 along with infielder Eddie Joost and pitcher Nate Andrews. Renteria has a shot at besting **Al Dark's** franchise-leading season shortstop batting average of .322, achieved during Blackie's Rookie of the Year 1948 season. Similarly, Renteria's RBI performance may challenge the shortstop franchise mark of 100 set by the Beaneaters' **Herman Long** in 1899.

Tommy Holmes' 1945 37-game hit streak continues to draw attention in the press as National League batters attempt to reach that level and ultimately challenge Pete Rose's 44-game Senior Circuit record. Jimmy Rollins of the Phillies surpassed Holmes' mark by a game at the beginning of the season and teammate Chase Utley fell two games short in August. The

Braves once employed another outfielder who would later hit safely in 69 games in the minors and claim the organized baseball record. **Joe Wilhoit** debuted with the 1916 Braves and batted a meager .230. The following season, he spent time with the Braves, Pirates and Giants. Sent to the minors in 1919, Wilhoit eventually landed with the Wichita Jobbers of the Western League where he went on his record hitting tear from June 14-August 19. Over the course of 128 games, he stroked 222 hits and batted .422. Wilhoit received a late season, six-game trial with the Red Sox and hit at a .333 clip. He found himself back in the minors in 1920 and he finished his playing career in 1923 in the PCL with the Salt Lake City Bees. In his farewell campaign over 172 games, Wilhoit garnered 238 base hits, good for a .360 average.

When Atlanta's Chipper Jones stroked at least one extra-base hit in twelve consecutive games, he accomplished a feat that hadn't occurred in 78 years. During his one year stay with the Braves in 1928, Hall of Famer **Rogers Hornsby** met that mark on his way toward capturing the batting title with a .387 mark. However, neither Chipper nor the Rajah holds the NL record. The Pirates Paul Waner put together a 14-game consecutive streak in 1927.

Chipper's Atlanta teammate, lefty Chuck James became the first Braves hurler since **Jesse Barnes** to win his first four major league starts. Unlike James, Barnes accomplished his feat over two seasons, winning his last three starts at the tail end of the 1915 campaign and picking up his next victory upon his first start in 1916. In 1917, he accomplished the rare feat for a pitcher of walking twice in the same inning. Despite the auspicious beginning, Barnes proceeded to record 6-15 and 13-21 marks before being traded to the Giants in 1918. He blossomed in Gotham, twice winning twenty or more games and emerging victorious twice in the 1921 World Series for the eventual World Champs. His younger brother, Virgil, joined him as a moundsman in New York during the early '20s. A midseason swap in 1923 returned Barnes to the Hub but he lost 14, 20 and 16 games before departing for Brooklyn in 1926. Virgil finished up a nine year big league career on a 2-7 losing note with the 1928 Tribe. Over their careers, the brothers faced each other ten times with the elder besting the younger five times against three setbacks.

As of the writing of this newsletter, the majors haven't witnessed a no-hitter since the Diamondbacks' Randy Johnson's perfect game against the Braves at Turner Field on May 24, 2004. This is the greatest drought since the days of World War II. That gap began on August 30, 1941 when Lon Warneke held the Cardinals hitless in Cincinnati and was closed on April 27, 1944 upon the completion of the Braves' **Jim Tobin's** hitless masterpiece against the Dodgers at the Wigwam.

On May 14, Phillies' slugger Ryan Howard achieved a rare feat in major league baseball history that was first performed in 1949 by the Braves' **Jeff Heath**. Howard clubbed

pinch hit and extra-inning home runs in the same game. Two others – Jeff Bagwell and Del Rice – also lay claim to this accomplishment.

This season, a number of ballclubs have deployed an extreme defensive shift against clutch-hitting "Big Papi" David Ortiz of the Red Sox. While the maneuver is often compared to the "Williams Shift," devised by Lou Boudreau against the Splendid Splinter, the pioneering use of this technique has been attributed to the 1926 Braves who attempted to outfox Phillies' slugger Cy Williams.

The Boston Braves continue to serve as a reference whenever current teams perform poorly. This year's edition of the Kansas City Royals appears well on the way toward a third consecutive 100-loss season. That dubious achievement was first recorded by the 1909-12 Boston Braves and repeated by the Tribe in 1922-24. Accomplished ten times in major league history, not even the Browns, Phillies, A's or Senators at their nadir made this list more than once. Unfortunately, this year's edition of the Atlanta Braves looks to break its string of 14 consecutive division championships. The team's 6-21 record for June was the worst in franchise history since September of 1935, when the Boston edition was 5-25.

Honors

On March 23rd, **Larry Kopf** (a/k/a Bill Kopf) was inducted into the New Britain, CT Sports Hall of Fame. The Connecticut native had a ten-year big league career that included playing shortstop for the Reds in the 1919 World Series tainted by the Black Sox scandal. Kopf finished at a player with the 1922-23 Braves. He later coached baseball at Georgetown University and went into the homebuilding industry in Ohio until his death in 1986. Younger brother, Wally, had a two-game major league career with the 1921 New York Giants. Another sibling, Herb, was also an inductee at this ceremony. An outstanding athlete at Lake Forest Academy in the Chicago area, Herb later achieved college football fame at Washington and Jefferson, appearing in the Rose Bowl. He was the head coach of the NFL Boston Yanks from 1944-46. The award's dinner was attended by Herb's son and grandson. Thanks to BBHA member **Don Clerkin** for passing on this information. Don is also a member of New Britain's sports shrine, inducted in 1996 as a reflection of his memorable career as a sportswriter for the *Hartford Times* and authorship of several books on sports.

In Perth Amboy, NJ on April 9th, William Urbanski Field was rededicated and a new sign was unveiled to honor the city's first major league ballplayer. A citation was presented by the mayor to Urbanski's son and family. **Billy Urbanski** spent his entire time in the majors with the Tribe. Over seven seasons (1931-37), he appeared in 763 games and batted .260. Urbanski was a sure-handed shortstop, holding down that position as a regular for over five seasons. He was driven in twice by Babe Ruth circuit clouts in the Bambino's three-homer

game at Pittsburgh on May 25, 1935. Urbanski batted above .300 four times while playing in the International League. He ran the Short Stop Café in Perth Amboy for twenty-five years and coached youth baseball. Urbanski died at age 70 in 1973.

Between games of an Atlantic Collegiate Baseball League June 18th doubleheader at Krausche Field in North Plainfield, NJ, Cleveland Indians' scout **Bobby Malkmus** was honored. The New Jersey native has been involved in professional baseball since signing a contract with the Boston Braves in 1950. Now 74, Malkmus was a utility infielder for the Milwaukee Braves, Washington Senators and Philadelphia Phillies from 1957-62. He was in Philadelphia's line-up on September 16, 1960 when 39-year-old Warren Spahn threw his first no-hitter. Malkmus was the only starter that Spahn failed to strike out that day. After retiring as an active player, he managed in the minors for the Phillies, Expos and Orioles. Malkmus has also scouted for the San Diego Padres.

Each year since 1960, a male and female high school athlete from Montgomery County, AL is selected to receive the **Jimmy Hitchcock** Memorial Award. The honor reflects the recipient's character, dependability, effort and leadership. Hitchcock was the Auburn University Tigers first football All American. With skills as a passer, runner and punter, this "triple threat" led the University to a Southern Conference championship in 1932. Also possessing considerable baseball talent, Hitchcock made it to the big leagues briefly, appearing in 28 games as an infielder with the 1938 Boston Bees. His older brother, Billy, also a stellar athlete at Auburn, went on to spend more than forty years in professional baseball as a player, manager, scout, coach and minor league executive. Included in his career were stops with the Red Sox in 1948-49 as a utility infielder and with the Braves in Atlanta as its manager in 1966-67. In 1997, Auburn renamed Plainsman Park, its baseball stadium, "Hitchcock Field" in honor of the illustrious brothers. Jimmy died in 1959 while Billy passed away on April 9, 2006. Billy Hitchcock is more familiar to Boston Braves fans for his role in an infamous dust-up with Earl Torgeson in an April 16, 1948 "City Series" pre-season game at Braves Field. The two swapped punches after a play at first base in the fourth inning. Torgie fell upon Hitchcock who was attempting to advance on Al Dark's overthrow. Apparently, Torgeson was retaliating for an earlier incident in Florida where Hitchcock had held his leg to prevent him from retrieving a wild throw.

In Memoriam

Erling "Swede" Larsen died on October 8, 2005. He was 91. Larsen broke into the majors on June 17th with the 1936 Boston Bees. He joined the club upon graduating from Colgate University where he was a member of the varsity basketball and baseball teams. The 22-year-old second baseman relieved Tony Cuccinello during the second game of a double

header at the Beehive against the Cardinals that the home team went on to lose 10-2. He would only appear in three games that season, garner one at bat and go hitless before forever disappearing from the big leagues.

Outfielder/third baseman **Jimmy Outlaw** passed away on April 9, 2006 at 93 years of age. He broke in with the Reds in 1937, spending parts of two seasons there. Sent to the Syracuse Chiefs of the International League in 1938, Outlaw batted .339 and was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals in October. In December, before even donning a Redbird uniform, he was swapped to the Dodgers who immediately sent him to the Bees along with first baseman Buddy Hassett for outfielder Gene Moore and pitcher Ira Hutchinson. After a one-year stint in Boston where he played in 65 games and batted .263, Outlaw was shipped to the International League Buffalo Bisons. He remained there from 1940-43 when he was picked up by the Detroit Tigers to fill a place in a war-depleted roster. He stayed in the Motor City until ending his big league career in 1949. Outlaw's only duty as a regular occurred during the 1944-45 seasons. Despite only playing 21 of his 132 games at the hot corner, he started all seven games of the 1945 World Series at third base. The shift enabled Hank Greenberg, fresh from the war, to patrol in left field as the Tigers defeated the Cubs in the Fall Classic. Outlaw's ten years in the majors covered 650 games and resulted in an overall batting average of .268.

Harold F. Luddy, Jr., a former Boston Braves farmhand, died at age 77 on April 22nd. As a lefty pitcher/first baseman, he spent several years in the low minors. In 1947-48, Luddy recorded 2-1 and 12-9 totals for the Class D Richmond Roses of the Ohio State League. Moving up to Class C and the Braves' Eau Claire Bears Northern League affiliate, he stayed for two seasons and had pitching records of 9-8 and 5-7 in 1949-50, respectively. His Wisconsin teammates included future big leaguers Bill Bruton and Bob Trowbridge. A Korean War veteran, Luddy worked for 44 years as a produce clerk in Rockland, MA.

Another Braves minor leaguer, **Arthur Thursby**, passed away on August 4th at 82. Born in Lowell, MA, Thursby settled in Wilmington, DE and was 20-year member of its police department. He spent 1945 as Braves property with the Mooresville Moors of the North Carolina State League. Thursby compiled a 1-5 record over 13 games with a 7.02 ERA..

The *Greensboro News & Record* carried an obituary for **James L. Malone, Jr.** He died on June 26 at age 84. Although Malone had lived in Greensboro, NC for 19 years, he originally hailed from Arlington, MA. As a teenager, he was a clubhouse boy for the Boston Braves and he continued to follow the progress of the team despite moves to Milwaukee and Atlanta. As a Marine in WWII, Malone was part of "The Thin Red Line" during the battle for Guadalcanal from August through December of 1942.

We extend our sympathies to the family of **Daniel "Ed" McInnis** of Quincy, MA. The Marine Corps veteran and retired postal worker died at 80 on April 25. His obituary in *The Patriot Ledger* noted his membership in the BBHA. He was raised in Allston and was also a member of the Allston/Brighton Historical Society.

Summer of 1935: When Major League Baseball Came to Maine

by Norm Furrow

Twice in 1935, the Boston Braves interrupted their regular season schedule to travel to Portland, on June 24, and Lewiston, on August 19, for exhibition games against the Pittsburg Pirates and St. Louis Cardinals.

Although barnstormers and single teams had played there in the past, the Portland game marked the first time that two major league teams ever played each other in Maine. The game was sponsored by the Knights Templar, a Masonic Order, and chaired by Harry Lord, former Boston Red Sox third-baseman and Maine native. The afternoon game, a 2:30 P.M. start, was played at Portland High School Stadium, adjacent to the present site of Hadlock Field, home of the current minor league Portland Sea Dogs. A large crowd of over 5,000 fans were in attendance, not surprising since Maine had been without professional baseball since 1930, when the Portland and Lewiston minor league teams folded, along with the rest of the New England League.

Starting pitchers for the contest were the Braves' Bobby Brown, a former Portland New England League hurler, and the Pirates' Mace Brown, later a reliever for the 1946 pennant-winning Red Sox.

The Braves opened the scoring in the first inning when Ed Moriarty doubled, took third on an outfield fly and scored on a ground out. The game settled into a pitching duel until the eighth inning when the Pirates broke it open, scoring four runs on Gus Suhr's double, Tommy Thevenow's single, a walk to Earl Grace and a home run by Bud Hafey, a relative of Hall of Famer Chick Hafey. In the ninth, Larry Benton relieved Brown to no avail, as the Pirates scored three more runs on Pep Young's single, another Gus Suhr double and Cookie Lavagetto's home run. In the bottom of the ninth, the Braves tried to make it close when Tommy Thompson and Wally Berger reached on errors, Randy Moore doubled and Ray Mueller smashed a towering home run, but they would end up on the short end of a seven to five score.

The Pirates were a solid team and would finish the season fourth in the National League with eighty-six wins against sixty-seven losses, thirteen and one half games out of first place. They were led by brothers Paul "Big Poison" and Lloyd "Little Poison" Waner in the outfield, shortstop Arky Vaughan and Manager and third-baseman Pie Traynor, all future Hall of Famers.

The hapless Braves would have the worst season in their history, winning only thirty-eight games, finishing dead-last, sixty-one and a half games behind the pennant-winning Chicago Cubs and twenty-six games behind the next-to-last Philadelphia Phillies. Rabbit Maranville, the Braves' shortstop and future Hall of Famer, was forty-three years old, had broken a leg the previous season and was reduced to a utility role, in this his last season. The Braves' only real star was hard-hitting outfielder Wally Berger, who would lead the league in both home runs and runs batted in that year, making his appearance a special treat to fans.

New England was well represented with players from both rosters. The Pirates' Pie Traynor was a Massachusetts native and catcher Tom Padden came from New Hampshire. The Braves' Rabbit Maranville, Ed Moriarty, Bobby Brown and Al Blanche all hailed from Massachusetts, as did Danny MacFayden and Shanty Hogan, who had been teammates at Somerville High School. MacFayden had pitched at Hebron Academy, a Maine prep school and would retire to Brunswick, Maine to coach baseball at Bowdoin College. Sanford, Maine's own Freddy Parent, the original Red Sox shortstop, would be the game's base umpire. Braves' coach Duffy Lewis, although a California native, played in the great Red Sox outfield with Hall of Famers Tris Speaker and Harry Hooper. Lewis also had managed the Portland New England League team and would later become the Braves' traveling secretary. Elbie Fletcher, first-baseman and Milton, Massachusetts native, was in the minor leagues but would later be recalled and play in the Lewiston exhibition game.

If the game had been played earlier in the season, the fans would have been blessed with seeing Babe Ruth, albeit in his ill-fated swan song with the Braves. The fans were treated, however, to the presence of Honus Wagner, Pirates' coach and Hall of Fame shortstop, certainly one of the game's all-time great players.

Eight weeks later and not to be outdone by Portland, Lewiston hosted its own exhibition game between the Braves and St. Louis Cardinals, the 1934 World Champions.

The late afternoon game, a 5:00 P.M. start, was played at Lewiston Athletic Park and promoted by locals Charlie Miller and Bucky Gaudette, a former minor leaguer and local legend. The game was well attended, with three thousand paying customers and another two thousand, mostly children, admitted for free. The youngsters were allowed to keep the baseballs (donated by the Draper-Maynard Sporting Goods Company, Plymouth, New Hampshire) that strayed from the playing field, quite a treat for depression era youths. Additional bleachers were brought in, but some fans chose to stand along the foul lines in the outfield, while others watched from windows at the old high school.

The Cardinals (called the "Gas House Gang" for their rough, aggressive style of play and dirty uniforms) scored early and often, tallying eight runs in the first four innings off Braves' starter Larry Benton. Ducky Medwick homered twice, Rip Collins also homered and Charlie Gelbert (playing for injured third-baseman Pepper Martin) had three hits including a double. The Braves failed to score until the ninth inning, when catcher Al Spohrer smashed a three run homer off Joe Eckert, who went the distance in the Cardinals eight to three win. The surprise of the day perhaps was Braves' pitcher Al Blanche, who pitched four shutout innings in relief, striking out five. Blanche had a fleeting glimpse of glory in an otherwise undistinguished two year career in which he never won a game.

The game's main attraction was the Cardinals' great pitcher, Dizzy Dean, the temperamental and cocky hillbilly, whom the fans dearly loved. His team was embroiled in a pennant race and not about to use their ace in an exhibition game. Dizzy sat on the bench in street clothes, but took time to sign autographs for his adoring fans.

The game was completed in well under two hours (1:35), which was the norm for that era, allowing both teams to catch the 7:45 P.M. train, the "Flying Yankee," back to Boston.

The "Gas House Gang" would finish the season in second place, only four games out, and were led by pitchers Dizzy Dean, his younger brother Paul ("Daffy") and Jesse Haines, Manger/second-baseman Frankie Frisch, third-baseman Pepper Martin and outfielder Ducky Medwick. All would gain election to the Hall of Fame except the younger Dean and Martin. Leo "The Lip" Durocher, their good-field/no-hit shortstop from Springfield, Massachusetts, would enter the Hall of Fame as a manager, as would the Braves' skipper, Bill McKechnie.

In 1935, the country was in the midst of the "Great Depression" and all the major league clubs played these side-trip exhibitions to make extra money. The Braves never drew well, taking a back seat in Boston to the Red Sox. They would only average 3,000 fans per home game, half the league average. The Braves were in a financial crisis and would soon have new ownership and a name change to the Bees.

The Braves are no longer a New England team, having moved to Milwaukee in 1953, then on to Atlanta in 1966. Would the present day Red Sox venture to Maine for a similar game? Forget it! The current state of major league baseball would prohibit it. The owners and players can't seem to agree on anything. Greed runs amok! We can only look back to a bygone era, when baseball truly was the "National Pastime," was played "For the Love of the Game," a time when major league baseball did indeed come to Maine.

After discovering an old scorecard, Norm proceeded to undertake the research that resulted in the above story. He has presented an oral report on this subject to the Southern New England Chapter of SABR.

Say Hey and the Braves

If you ever find yourself traveling through Salisbury, MD and are in need of a haircut, you might want to stop at the Shores and Bradford Barbershop. Not only will you receive a no-frills clipping but you might also be fortunate enough to land in the chair of the 76-year-old proprietor, **Ray Bradford**. Bradford, who has been cutting hair for 56 years, wisely originally entered the profession as a back-up in case his first choice of a line of work faltered. In his youth, he was a promising pitcher who signed a contract with the Boston Braves. With the bonus that he received for signing, Bradford enrolled in a barber course. For three years, in the spring through the fall, he played professional baseball and in the winter, cut hair. Bradford's days as a ballplayer ended prematurely in 1951 when he accidentally "trimmed his fingers" running boards through a joiner. However, despite the brevity of his baseball career, Bradford had a date with immortality. In 1950 while with the Hagerstown Braves of the Inter-State League, he traveled to Trenton to pitch against the Giants. Bradford claims the honor of being the first pitcher that the then 19-year-old Willie Mays faced in organized ball. Mays' contract had been purchased from the Negro National League Birmingham Barons by Trenton's parent, the New York Giants. Bradford's recollection that Mays "was good" that year was an understatement given that the Say Hey Kid batted .353 in his 81 games for the New York Giants farm club. Bradford pitched in 36 games that season and had a 5-6 won/loss record with a 4.42 ERA.

The Boston Braves would be involved in another pivotal moment in Willie Mays' career. Called up to the Giants in May of 1951, Mays had a discouraging start, struggling at the plate. Mays broke his slump when he recorded his first hit, a home run, against **Warren Spahn**. He then went on to play a key role in the Giants' pursuit of the pennant that culminated in Bobby Thomson's "Shot Heard 'Round The World."

We all can recall that famous World Series photograph taken on September 29, 1954 of Willie Mays in centerfield with his back to the plate hauling in Vic Wertz's eighth inning blast. The left handed Giants hurler who served up the pitch to the Indians' first baseman that turned out to possibly be, at 460 feet, the longest out in Series history was originally signed by the Boston Braves in 1946. **Don Liddle** reached the majors with Milwaukee in 1953 and was part of the 1954 trade that also sent Johnny Antonelli to New York in return for Bobby Thomson. Mays later gave the glove that he used to make the historic catch to Liddle's son, Craig, who would later donate it to the Hall of Fame.

Sittin' In The Jury Box

Despite our longing for days past, the BBHA is attempting to adapt to modern day technology. We have established an official web site with the help of Executive Committee member **Jonathan Fine** and our web master **Byron Magrane**. It is at its developmental

stages and, obviously, is a work in progress. We invite your comments and suggestions. Please visit us at www.boston-braves.com.

Check your favorite bookstore in October for a new offering by Temple University Press. **Danny Litwhiler**, with the assistance of Jim Sargent, will be publishing his memoirs this fall. Entitled *Danny Litwhiler: Living the Baseball Dream*, the publication will cover his experiences in the National Pastime from the 1930s through the 1980s. Litwhiler performed as an outfielder for the Braves for parts of three seasons (1946-48). The book will deal with his playing career as well as his experiences as a minor league manager, college baseball coach and baseball innovator. Litwhiler was an honored guest at our 1998 BBHA reunion commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1948 NL champions. Our thanks to Jeffrey Morey at *The Autograph Review* (305 Carlton Road, Syracuse, NY 13207) for bring this publication to our attention.

Another book currently available and highly recommended is *Now Batting, Number...* by Jack Looney. Looney provides an exhaustive and fun study on the history behind baseball uniform numbers. The heart of the book contains a listing of the complete rosters of thirty major league teams with each player's number from 1929. If you've ever been curious about who wore what number when for the Boston Braves, this is the book for you. For example, the late **Sibby Sisti** claimed numbers 5, 25 (1939), 1 (1940-41), 2 (1942, 1946), 7 (1947-51) and 13 (1951-52) over the course of his Boston career. He retained #13 in Milwaukee from 1953-54. As a coach with the Seattle Pilots in 1969, Sibby donned uniform number 31. In his acting stint as the fictional manager of the Pittsburgh team in the movie *The Natural*, Sibby bore number 30 on his back. The real life claimant of that Pirates jersey during the period of the motion picture would have been right handed pitcher Rip Sewell of "eephus" pitch fame.

The famed Eire Pub on Adams Street in Dorchester, MA is the proud sponsor of the Boston Braves, an entry in the Massachusetts Independent Baseball League. The men's "over-18" baseball league was established in 2000 and draws its players from the Boston Park League, Cranberry League, local colleges and other devotees of the game. It's an aluminum bat league and it plays its games on Sunday mornings from April through August. "Braves Field" for this edition of the Tribe is Ronan Park on Neponset Avenue in Dorchester.

The direct descendants of the Boston Braves will return to the Hub in 2007 for interleague play against the Red Sox. The Atlanta Braves will visit Fenway Park on May 18-20 and the Bosox will reciprocate with a trip to Turner Field on June 18-20.

It's been seventy-one years since Babe Ruth stroked his final home run in a May game at Forbes Field while with the Boston Braves. On that Saturday afternoon, the Bambino stroked

numbers 712, 713 and 714. A few witnesses to that historic game are still around. One of them is 83-year-old Paul Warhola. Warhola used to drag his uninterested younger brother Andy to Pirates games. Andy would later drop the last letter of their family name and become an artist of some repute. Not only did Paul Warhola witness the day's dramatic events, he also got the Babe to autograph his program, which has been long lost.

Fifty-five of the Bambino's 714 circuit clouts occurred while performing in a Boston uniform. Six flew out of the park while with the Tribe. One other member of the 500 Home Run Club accumulated a portion of his grand total while with the Boston Braves. **Eddie Mathews** poked 25 of his 512 home runs during his 1952 rookie season in the Hub. Eleven were hit at the Wigwam and he clouted at least one homer in each National League park. Ironically, like Babe Ruth, Mathews' last three home runs as a Boston Brave came in one game. On September 27th, the next to last day of the season, in successive at bats, he stroked three baseballs out of the playing confines of Ebbets Field in an 11-3 vanquishing of the Dodgers. Future Red Sox manager Dick Williams retrieved Mathews' first shot in the parking lot beyond Bedford Avenue. On the injured list and arriving after the start of the game, the Dodgers reserve outfielder had just parked his car when the ball bounced off of a garage wall. Reflecting on Mathews' glorious debut, the pre-move 1953 Boston Braves media guide commented that "the future holds other great accomplishments for him as well as for the Boston Braves." Unfortunately for us, that statement proved to be only partially true.

Former 1938 Bees outfielder **Ralph McLeod** continues to draw press clippings due to his volleyball exploits. *The Patriot Ledger* of Quincy, MA carried a story on March 30th on the athletic prowess of the 89-years-young McLeod and his compatriots at the gym on Beechwood on the Bay, a nonprofit community center in the Squantum section of Quincy. The group was preparing for the 24th annual Senior Olympics, a week-long competition featuring an infamous volleyball game between the seniors and the mayor's office. One of McLeod's mates noted that while the mayor's squad of younger players may be more agile, "they don't stand a chance. We still beat them every year." McLeod was a teammate of **Jimmy Hitchcock**, who was mentioned in the "Honors" section of this newsletter.

Our best wishes for a happy retirement go out to **Bill Monbouquette**, the 70-year-old former Red Sox star pitcher, Braves Field knothole gang member and frequent BBHA reunion attendee. He wrapped up a half century as a player, scout, coach and manager this past spring. In recognition of his many contributions to the hometown team during its pre-Impossible Dream years of decline, the Bosox awarded him one of their cherished 2004 World Series rings. We hope to renew acquaintances with Bill at our October reunion.

Another longstanding BBHA member is looking forward to retirement after the

completion of one final season with the NFL. We extend our fondest regards to New York Giants senior vice president and general manager, **Ernie Accorsi** and wish him a "super" finale. Of course, our loyalties would be challenged should his Giants confront Boston Braves fan Bob Kraft's Patriots!

It didn't work for the Braves but might it help the Tampa Bay Devil Rays? The Devil Rays have been thinking about adopting a new nickname after eight losing seasons and a change in ownership. Sound familiar? The Braves tried it in 1936, transforming themselves into the Bees and referring to their park as the Beehive. The experiment failed and the "Braves" returned for good in the '40s.

Baseball has a language of its own. It even has its own dictionary – *The New Dickson Baseball Dictionary*. A term found within that compendium of baseball phrases has its origins with a Boston Bees hurler of the late 30s. To "hang" a pitch is to throw a ball that fails to break properly, often with dire results. The first use of that terminology has been attributed to Bees left-handed pitcher **William "Roy" Weir**, during a 1937 interview. Weir's big league service consisted of parts of four seasons through 1939 with the Bees where he appeared in 29 games, winning six while losing four and compiling a 3.55 ERA. With the International League Toronto Maple Leafs in 1939, he pitched a no-hit game against the old Baltimore Orioles.

Another honor has been bestowed upon a former member of the Boston Braves administration. **Roland Hemond** was inducted into the Professional Baseball Scouts Hall of Fame on August 20th. The scouting shrine is housed at Richmond County Bank Ballpark, home of the New York-Penn League Staten Island Yankees, a/k/a the "Baby Bombers." Hemond has been a very popular guest at past fall reunions.

BBHA member **Herb Crehan** informed us that he had an article on infielder Don Gutteridge in the June issue of *Red Sox Magazine*. Gutteridge is a surviving member of the 1946 America League Champion Red Sox team and was honored during Opening Day ceremonies at Fenway Park this spring. Herb noted that he included a paragraph on Bees/Braves catcher, **Ray Mueller** who was Gutteridge's cousin. Mueller debuted with the Bees in 1935, staying in Boston until shipped to the Pirates in 1938. He returned in 1951 at the tail end of his 14-year career to play in 28 games for the Tribe. Mueller was dubbed "Iron Man" in recognition of catching 233 consecutive games. After his playing career, he managed in the minors, coached for the Cubs and Indians and scouted for the Phillies. Mueller died in 1994.

Andy Pafko was briefly a member of the Boston Braves but never had a chance to garner an official at bat or roam the outfield at the Wigwam as such. Pafko was picked up by the Braves in January of 1953 in a trade with the Dodgers for infielder Roy Hartsfield and cash. He played as a Boston Brave during spring training of that year and left with the club for

Milwaukee in March. Pafko visited with us during our reunion in 2001. On April 24th, the 85-year-old former outfielder was made the third annual inductee to the Milwaukee Braves Honor Roll. The event took place at Miller Park and Pafko also delivered the ceremonial first pitch to another Boston Brave, **Johnny Logan**, playing out of position behind the plate. Boston Braves signee, **Felix Mantilla** was also on hand to witness the honor. The June, 2006 issue of *The Tepee*, the newsletter of the Milwaukee Braves Historical Association (2614 E. Bottsford, St. Francis, WI 53235) contains a front cover story on Pafko's tribute as well an article on Boston farmhand **Bob Buhl** and a remembrance on **Sibby Sisti**.

Johnny Logan was presented with two honorary plaques this past April by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Warhawk baseball team in between a doubleheader against the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Logan remarked "That's the closest way that I could get my diploma or some recognition at Whitewater. It was a great honor."

Is **Javy Lopez** the latest "Boston" Brave to join the Hub's American League franchise? Crippled by backstop injuries, the Red Sox picked up the former Braves catcher from the Baltimore Orioles on August 4th. Over fifty ballplayers spent parts of their careers with both of Boston's major league teams. Included in those ranks are Babe Ruth, Babe Dahlgren, Eddie Joost, Roy Johnson, Billy Klaus, Gene Mauch, Al Simmons, Bucky Walters, Rabbit

Warstler, Wes Ferrell, Gene Conley, Chet Nichols, Nelson Potter, Danny MacFayden, Cy Young and Joe Wilhoit (of aforementioned "hit streak" fame). A little known fact revealed in the New York Giants 1946 Spring Training Guide was that Bill "Ninety-Six" Voiselle of the 1947-49 Braves started his pitching career as Red Sox chattel in 1938 with the Moultrie Packers of the Georgia-Florida League. To add Javier Lopez, we would need to invoke a bit of a technicality. While with Atlanta, Lopez appeared dressed as a Boston Brave on a 1994 Donruss Studio-series Heritage Collection baseball card. He was portrayed against a backdrop comprised of the circa-1948 Braves Field electric scoreboard.

In Appreciation

Your submissions of materials and kind words keeps this newsletter going. Many thanks to all those who have taken the time to drop something into the mail to us. In addition to those named elsewhere in the newsletter, we'd like to extend our thanks to **Rev. Gerald Beirne, Joe Gusky, Bob Downes, Gail Morrill, Ray Benoit, Jeff Gaughan, Hector Cote, Jerry Orlen, Carl Johnson, Ben Emanuele, Steve Coe, Helen Meltzer, Rita Varone and John Ahern.**

Bob Brady
Newsletter Editor
25 McAndrew Road
Braintree, MA 02184