

# Boston Braves Historical Association Newsletter

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### Association Notes

Despite a valiant attempt by the BBHA Executive Committee, a 2010 fall reunion failed to materialize. Finding an adequate site in Boston within an acceptable timeframe proved to be our downfall. Locations that were identified and available were too small and/or logistically inadequate to serve all of our estimated needs. We will now turn our efforts towards a 2011 gathering.

### Worst and Best

In 1984, baseball historian **Joseph L. Reichler** authored *The Baseball Trade Register: Every trade, sale, and free agent signing from 1900 on*. Reichler was a journalist and prolific author of baseball books. He also served for a spell as the director of public relations in the Office of the Baseball Commissioner. In addition, Reichler edited several editions of *The Baseball Encyclopedia*.

*The Baseball Trade Register* ran some 567 pages and listed transactions ball club by ball club, including separate sections for “defunct” teams such as our very own Boston Braves. Each team review commenced with Reichler’s personal ranking of the club’s five best and worst trades. Let’s review this expert’s choices and see whether his selections meet the approval of our membership!

#### *The Worst*

##### **#5**

Reichler’s fifth worst swap took place on June 12, 1927. The Tribe and the Giants hooked up for a six player deal that sent right-hander **Larry Benton**, shortstop **Herb Thomas** and catcher **Zack Taylor** to New York for pitchers **Hugh McQuillan** and **Kent Greenfield** and infielder **Doc Farrell**. 83 years later, the impact of this transaction hardly seems to resonate unless one is a serious Braves historian.

*The Boston Globe* of the following day categorized the swap as a “good trade for the Giants,” by obtaining Benton on the “cheap” for a couple of suspect pitchers and an unproven infielder. Their sportswriter considered Benton as “one of the best pitchers in the National League” who seemed to have recovered from an early season sore arm. Benton was popular in Boston with his reputation as “a hard and conscientious worker.” The Braves’ trading partner was in need of such a performer since the club found itself in a closely fought contest for Senior Circuit’s top spot with the Cardinals and Pirates, while Boston was destined for a seventh place finish.

Benton, who left Boston with a 4-2 record, pitched effectively for the Giants over the remainder of the season. He finished with a 17-7 record and the league’s best winning percentage. In 1928, Benton went on to win 25 while only losing 9 games, again capturing the winning percentage crown and leading the circuit with 28 complete games. The Braves eventually reacquired him in 1935 after his skills had greatly diminished in what would be his “swan song” season.

Taylor, a perennial second-stringer, continued in that capacity, batting .233 for the Giants. He was sold back to the Braves during the winter of 1928. Taylor’s active playing career wrapped up in 1935 after stops with the Cubs, Yankees and Dodgers. He would later manage the woeful 1946 and 1948-51 St. Louis Browns.

The third Boston castoff, Herb Thomas, appeared in only thirteen games with the Giants and batted .176. He never played in the majors after 1927.

“Handsome Hugh” McQuillan began his career with the Braves in 1918 and was an effective starter for the club in the early ‘20s. Dealt to the Giants in 1922 for the sizable sum of \$100,000 and a pitching prospect by the name of Larry Benton (where have we heard that name before?), he served as New York’s third starter and contributed to successful pennant drives in 1922-24. McQuillan appeared in each of those year’s Fall Classics, including a victory against **Carl Mays** in the 1922 sweep of the Yankees. *The Globe* sensed that “the fact that McGraw is turning him loose at this time is somewhat suspicious.” The Giants had correctly surmised that McQuillan’s talent was on the decline as he lasted only one more season in the majors.

Kent Greenfield did provide the Tribe with a bit of a return. The curveballer went 11-14 for them in 1927 but followed with a 3-11 record the following year and split his time between Boston and Brooklyn in 1929, his last big league season. Like McQuillan, Greenfield’s departure from New York seemed to reflect that club’s estimation that his days as an effective pitcher were numbered.

The last member of the triumvirate, Doc Farrell, an off-season dentist, made a solid contribution by batting .316 for the season. The ex-University of Pennsylvania baseball captain was thought to possess the potential to become a solid ballplayer. However, the following year, his average dropped 101 points. Farrell was shuttled back to the Giants in 1929 and bounced around the majors for a few more years before finishing up with four games for the 1935 Red Sox.

On a parallel note, Reichler ranked this deal as the New York Giants' fifth best. Some contend that the trading history between the two ball clubs reflected a questionable relationship between the respective front offices, somewhat similar to that of the New York Yankees and Kansas City Athletics of the 1950s and '60s.

#### #4

Near the middle of the 1930 season, the Braves and Cardinals swapped hurlers. On June 16, St. Louis shipped **Fred Frankhouse** and **Bill Sherdel** to Boston for future Hall of Famer **Burleigh Grimes**. Grimes also had another claim to fame, being major league baseball's last "legal" spitballer. He received the nickname, "Ol' Stubblebeard," because of his habit of not shaving on days that he took the mound.

Reichler's rating is a bit puzzling. Grimes' tenure with the Tribe was brief -- he had been picked up on April 9th from the Pirates for portsider **Percy Jones** and cash. In eleven games in the Hub, Grimes recorded a 3-5 won/loss record. He did go on to win 13 more games for the pennant-winning Cards and was victorious in 17 games the following season. After losing two World Series contests in 1930, Grimes reversed course in 1931 and won a couple in that Fall Classic, including the seventh game clincher against the Philadelphia Athletics. However, he descended into mediocrity after that, bounced among four clubs and was finished in the majors by 1934.

"Wee Willie" Sherdel was a left-hander who had won in the double digits for St. Louis eight times, including a 21-victory season in 1928. His best years were clearly behind him when dealt to the Braves. Still, Sherdel was able to contribute six wins to **Bill McKechnie's** sixth place ball club. He added another six victories to the team's seventh place tally of 64-90 in 1931 and finished with a four-game performance with the Braves and Cardinals in 1932.

However, it would appear that the Braves received more than adequate compensation in this deal with the arrival of righty Fred Frankhouse. Although performing unexceptionally in 1930-32, he blossomed thereafter, winning 16, 17 and 11 games over the next three seasons. His eleven victories in 1935 led the staff on a club that was one of baseball's worst (38-115). He was rewarded with a trade to Brooklyn the following winter but returned to the Hub for his final season in 1939. Frankhouse was named to the 1934 National League All Star squad while with the Tribe. In 1988, he came back to Boston to attend the 40th reunion celebration of the '48 champs.

#### #3

Reichler's next bad trade still reverberates among contemporary Boston Braves fans as it marked the disassembly of the core of the '48 champions and provided the rival Giants with missing pieces needed to secure an eventual World Championship. Faced with dissension and the need to revitalize a team in apparent decline, the Braves struck a pre-Christmas 1949 swap that sent the keystone duo of **Eddie Stanky** and **Al Dark** to New York for shortstop **Buddy Kerr**, third baseman/outfielder **Sid Gordon**, outfielder **Willard Marshall** and right-hander **Red Webb**. How important was this transaction for the Giants? According to Reichler, it stands as the second most

valuable trade in the entire history of the New York- version of the Giants, just below the acquisition of the immortal **Christy Mathewson** from the Cincinnati Reds in 1900!

Initial reaction to the trade in both Boston and New York was that both clubs would be benefitted but that the Giants had given up a bit too much in a four-for-two swap. The Braves were said to have insisted on the inclusion of Gordon, delaying the deal until the Giants eventually capitulated. Kerr and Marshall had been in **Leo Durocher's** doghouse in 1949 while Stanky and Dark were alleged to be leaders of the anti-Southworth faction in the Tribe's clubhouse. The point-of-no-return seemed to have been reached when the latter group attempted to vote **Billy Southworth** only a half share of fourth place finish money because of the manager's leave of absence during the season.

Boston gambled that Gordon and Marshall would add needed power to their 1950 lineup and that Kerr would return to form as the National League's premier fielding shortstop. Despite impressive minor league credentials, Webb was a throw-in as he had battled a lame arm throughout the past season and would only pitch in one game for the Milwaukee Brewers in 1950 before calling it quits. At a press conference announcing the transaction, Southworth proclaimed, "I feel I have the nucleus of a club that's a definite pennant threat."

While Gordon performed as advertised, Marshall and Kerr failed to live up to expectations. Contrary to Southworth's belief, the trade did not stem the downward spiral and, as such, would be a contributing factor to the Braves' departure from Boston.

#### #2

How could a Depression era trade that brought five players and \$200,000 to Boston for a single individual be regarded so poorly? On November 7, 1928, the Braves dealt their playing manager **Rogers Hornsby** to the Chicago Cubs for pitchers **Percy Jones**, **Socks Seibold** and **Bruce Cunningham** along with catcher **Lou "Doc" Leggett**, second baseman **Freddie Maguire** and a wad of much needed cash. The future Hall of Famer had led the majors in batting in 1926 with a lofty .387 average to become only one of two Boston Braves (Ernie Lombardi in 1942 was the other) to achieve that feat in the twentieth century.

Again, we seem to have a case of Reichler questionably being enamored with the past credentials of the departee rather than the practicalities of the situation. The Braves' decision was not without its logic. The outspoken and irascible Hornsby was picked up in January from the Giants because he had worn out his welcome in New York. The Polo Grounders believed that Rajah's conduct warranted exile to a team not considered a threat to them. With an estimated salary in excess of \$40,000, Hornsby was the highest paid National Leaguer heading to a team bathed in red ink. The relationship clearly could not endure.

Hornsby's arrival in Boston commenced in controversy. He bad-mouthed skipper **Jack Slattery** and succeeded him 31 games into the season. Despite such conduct, Hornsby maintained an amicable relationship with owner **Judge Emil Fuchs**. By the end

of the season, he felt that his "punishment duty" in the Hub was fulfilled and that it was time to move on to a more rewarding position. Hornsby approached Fuchs with the request to allow him to approach **Bill Veeck, Sr.** and **William Wrigley** of the Cubs to negotiate a deal favorable to all parties. "If you give me permission, I think I can talk to Mr. Wrigley, Senior, and trade myself to Chicago for a number of good, young players that will mean more to you than my individual services, which might only have another year to run." With the Judge's blessing, Hornsby initiated the process that ultimately led to the November deal.

The transaction immediately benefitted Chicago. In 1929, Hornsby, with his .380 batting average, was a key component in the Cubs' capture of the National League pennant. Thereafter, however, Rajah's playing time diminished as he devoted more of his efforts towards managing.

And what of the Braves? None of the players garnered in the trade ever came close to Hornsby's level. However, for the most part, they were a serviceable bunch. Maguire was the club's regular second baseman for three seasons. Seibold won 12, 15 and 10 games over that same period for second division teams, leading the staff in victories in 1929 and 1930. Cunningham was a part of the Tribe's bullpen for four seasons. Jones and Leggett lasted but one season. The former turned in a 7-15 performance, while the latter batted .160 in 39 games.

Not to be overlooked was the fact that part of the contributed cash was used for a side deal with the Cubs. Boston purchased **Wally Berger**, then Cubs chattel assigned to Los Angeles in the Pacific Coast League. The powerful slugger went on to be a four-time All Star and the team's dominant run producer for over seven seasons. Overall, not necessarily as bad a deal for the Braves as categorized by Mr. Reichler.

#### #1

To identify the Braves' worst trade, Reichler had to go back all the way to 1905 and the days of the Beaneaters. On December 15, Boston sent future Hall of Fame pitcher **Vic Willis** to the Pirates in return for righty **Vive Lindaman**, third baseman **Dave Brain** and infielder/outfielder **Del Howard**.

Yes, this was hands-down a legitimate stinker. Right-hander Willis, a/k/a "The Delaware Peach," had won twenty or more games four times during his 1898-1905 stay in Boston, including 27 victory seasons twice. The great curveball hurler would win at least 22 games with Pittsburgh from 1906-09 and help the Bucs to the '09 World Championship.

Willis' trade was prompted by two off-seasons where he had lost 25 (winning 18) and 29 games (winning 11), respectively. His performance was a reflection of the awful Beaneaters teams during those years, rather than being "washed up" as some had speculated. In 1904, Boston lost 95 games and the following season exceeded that total with 103 defeats. Willis welcomed his trade to the perennial first division Pirates of that era.

Pittsburgh gave up very little to obtain a top-ranked starter. Lindaman hardly filled Willis' shoes. He lost 23 games in 1906 and never won more than 12 games with the Beaneaters, although that mark was a

club pitching corps top mark in 1908. After 1909, he was out of the majors. Brain was mediocre in the field but did capture the Senior Circuit home run crown with 10 round trippers in 1907. He left the Hub in 1908 and finished his time in the big leagues that same year with the Reds and Giants. Howard spent a season and a half with Boston before departing to Chicago for a couple of campaigns with the Cubs.

Despite his glowing credentials, it wasn't until 1995 that Willis was duly rewarded with a posthumous induction into the Hall of Fame.

#### The Best

#### #5

Reichler selected another Beaneaters' deal with the Pirates that produced more positive results. Again, Pittsburgh sent multiple individuals to Boston in exchange for a single player. On December 11, 1906, outfielder **Clarence "Ginger" Beaumont**, second sacker **Claude "Little All Right" Ritchey** and lefty **Patsy Flaherty** headed to the Hub while shortstop/second baseman **Ed "Batty" Abbatichio** switched his residence to the Steel City. The trade was launched by a new ownership team headed by the Dovey brothers, George and John. The Pennsylvania natives had had a prior relationship with **Barney Dreyfuss** of the Pirates thus facilitating the exchange. The team's new leadership also prompted fans to re-nickname the franchise, "The Doves."

Pittsburgh was apparently applying the philosophy of dealing players just prior to a predicted diminishment of skills. Boston, on the other hand, looked to unload an individual who had abandoned the team in 1906 to attend to personal business interests in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Abbatichio, thought to be the first ballplayer of Italian extraction, came from a wealthy family that disapproved of his career choice. In an attempt to lure him away from the diamond, his father gave him a hotel. "Batty" took a year's sabbatical to run it and only returned to the National Pastime when he was assured that his status as a baseball player would not jeopardize his hotel's liquor license. Ballplayers at that time were not viewed as possessing the highest of character by local citizenry. Abbatichio also had another claim to fame. In 1895, he played football for pay for his hometown Latrobe team, the latter considered one of the first professional pigskin clubs.

Beaumont was a speedster who was reputed to be the finest lead-off man of baseball's Deadball Era. The redhead was the first to bat in a modern World Series game, accomplishing that feat on October 1, 1903 against the Red Sox at the Huntington Avenue Grounds. He batted over .300 in six of his eight seasons in Pittsburgh. However, knee problems plagued him in 1905 and 1906. Ritchey earned his nickname for his prowess of hitting in the clutch. He was equally capable in the field and has been ranked as one of the Pirates' all-time top second basemen. Ritchey and the immortal **Honus Wagner** were an outstanding keystone combo during Pittsburgh's first golden era. Pirate owner Dreyfuss was willing to move him to Boston because of his belief that Ritchey had become disinterested in baseball due to an investment in oil wells that were producing a handsome return. After winning 19 games for Pittsburgh in 1904, Flaherty had slumped to a 9-10 record the next season and was marked for departure.

The exchange falls on the plus side of the Boston ledger as all three former Bucs had more productive years left than expected by their former employer. Beaumont hit .322 in his first Boston season and was effective for two more campaigns. Ritchey anchored the infield for a couple of years while Flaherty gave the Doves two 12-win efforts, tied for the club lead in victories in 1907-08. Abbaticchio claimed second base for a couple of seasons but was sent back to Boston on July 1, 1910 where he wrapped up his major league career.

#### #4

August 30, 1951 was a bittersweet day for Boston Braves fans as they bid adieu to **Johnny Sain**. Big John had contributed so much to the team during his tenure and had been immortalized by the *Boston Post's* **Gerry Hern** with the "Spahn and Sain" refrain. But now it was time to part ways. Seeking to bolster their bullpen for their annual World Series drive, the Yankees picked up Sain and sent \$50,000 and a pitching prospect by the name of **Lou Burdette** to Boston. [Editor's Note: "Lou" is Burdette's personal preference for the spelling of his first name]. **Arthur Daley** of *The New York Times* categorized the deal as "taking out an insurance policy on the 1951 pennant." He also threw in a flippant remark that would come back to haunt him in the fall of 1957: "the Yankees yielded \$50,000 (which they'll never miss) and Lou Burdette, a rookie pitcher (whom they probably won't miss either)."

As the highest paid player on the roster of a club suffering severe losses at the gate and with a career heading toward its twilight, Sain's departure was inevitable. According to a report in *The Sporting News*, Sain "choked up" as he left the Braves' locker room for the last time. A small boy, autograph book in hand approached him in the alley by the locker room exit. Seeing the tears in the big man's eyes, the lad put down the book and uttered the sentiment that most Boston Braves felt, "Bye, Johnny. Good luck."

Sain paid immediate dividends to the Yankees, spot starting and relieving. He performed in three World Series and contributed 11 and 14-win seasons to the '52 and '53 pennant winners. In 1954, Sain led the American League in saves. When his usefulness to the Bronx Bombers diminished, they sent him off to their "major league farm club" in Kansas City where he ended his playing days in 1956.

While the Boston Braves never reaped the full benefit of the Burdette acquisition (he won only six games here), their successor in Milwaukee certainly did. He teamed up with **Warren Spahn** to produce one of the National League's best one-two pitching punches for nearly a decade. In fact, one wag once paraphrased the Hern doggerel thusly: Spahn and Burdette, followed by two days of wet! He brought joy to Boston National and American League fans when he won three games over the Yankees and secured the 1957 World Championship for the Braves. Burdette returned to Boston in 2002 to attend that year's BBHA reunion.

**Gary Caruso**, in authoring *The Braves Encyclopedia* in 1995, compiled a top 10 franchise-best list of trades. The top four transactions occurred while

the Tribe was still in Boston. At the pinnacle was the Burdette-Sain transaction.

#### #3

Let the controversy begin! Reichler rates the transaction where the Braves virtually stole an MVP player and the cornerstone of their Boston pennant-winning season as only their third best trade.

On September 30, 1946, "Mr. Team" **Bob Elliott** joined the Braves Field contingent in a 6-player deal with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Also heading to the Hub was catcher **Hank Camelli**. The trade was driven by the Pirates desire to secure Tribe second baseman **Billy Herman** as their next-year playing manager. The future Hall of Famer had been a mid-season pick-up from the Dodgers. Along with Herman, the Braves threw in pitcher **Elmer Singleton**, infielder **Whitey Wietelmann** and outfielder **Stan Wentzel**. None of this aggregation would make a significant contribution to their new club. Singleton won six games over two seasons, Wietelmann played in only 48 games in 1947 and Wentzel never appeared in a Pirates line-up. Similarly, Camelli performed in 52 games in 1947 and left the majors for good.

When Herman learned of the transaction, his first comment on its effect on the talent-challenged Pittsburghers was "Why, they've gone and traded the whole team on me." Cardinals manager **Eddie Dyer** called it "the greatest trade ever made." Herman's time at the helm lasted for all but the final game of the '47 season. He appeared in just 15 games and had a batting average of .213. His big league managerial debut was similarly lackluster -- a 61-92, seventh place finish. Herman would return to Boston to manage the Red Sox in 1964-66 with equally bad results.

Elliott's move to Boston was precipitated by a conflict that he had with Buc's skipper **Frankie Frisch** who frequently shifted him between the outfield and third base. Coming to the Braves, he was anchored to the hot corner and thrived. Elliott captured National League MVP honors in his first year with the Tribe. His all around contributions lead the club to the pennant the next season and he batted .333 with two homers, both off of **Bob Feller**, in the Fall Classic. Elliott continued to post solid stats in Boston through 1951. A movement toward youth by the Braves and the emergence of **Eddie Mathews** led to his trade to the Giants in April of 1952.

Caruso ranked this swap as the second best in franchise history. Reichler called it the Pirates' third worst.

#### #2

For a minor league outfielder in the Yankees chain in the late '30s and early '40s, the prospect of breaking into the parent's lineup was bleak. **Joltin' Joe DiMaggio**, **George "Twinkletoes" Selkirk**, **Charlie "King Kong" Keller** and **Tommy "Old Reliable" Henrich** had a lock on patrolling American League pastures for the Bronx Bombers. Despite a batting average of over .300 during his five farm system seasons, Brooklyn native **Thomas "Kelly" Holmes** stagnated in the bushes.

Holmes' break came on February 5, 1942. The Yankees front office, in assessing Holmes' skills, determined that his seeming lack of fence-clearing

power didn't fit into the Bombers' *modus operandi* and elected to deal him to the Braves for first baseman **Buddy Hassett**, outfielder **Gene Moore** and some cash. The Yankees sought to fill a hole at first base created when last season's regular, **Johnny Sturm**, departed for military service. Although a regular in Boston, Moore was seen as merely a throw in and was quickly flipped to the Dodgers later that month. Expressing the type of braggadocio not infrequently observed coming from New York City-based media (see, e.g., Arthur Daley's remarks on the Sain-Burdette deal) **Louis Effrat** of the *New York Times* summarized the transaction as one where "the Yankees gave up nothing and received plenty--well, more than they relinquished."

However, the Yankees' loss proved to be Boston's gain. For Hassett, it was a two-fold homecoming. Not only was he a city resident, Hassett had begun his career with the Yankees but faced an even more formidable barrier to a big league promotion than Holmes -- the Iron Horse, **Lou Gehrig**. Considered surplus, he was shipped to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1936. Hassett had a solid season and post-season for the Bronx Bombers in 1942 but his active baseball career came to a close that year upon entering military service.

In essence, for one season of Buddy Hassett's services, the Braves received not only a player who would "own" right field at the Wiggam for nearly a decade, but also one of the club's most beloved members. The "Hero of the Jury Box" does not need any introduction to Boston Braves fans. Needless to say, Holmes repaid the Braves' investment many times over. A career .302 hitter, his premier season was 1945. Holmes batted .352, with 117 RBI, 125 runs scored, 15 stolen bases plus led the league in doubles (47), hits (224), slugging average (.577) and home runs (28) while setting a modern Senior Circuit hit streak of 37 consecutive games. Over 636 at bats, Holmes struck out only 9 times. In recognition of those efforts, he received *The Sporting News* National League Most Valuable Player award. In comparison, the fourth place Yankees' outfield in '45 featured Charlie Keller along with such luminaries (?) as **Tuck Stainback**, **Hersh Martin** and **Russ Derry**. And no one on the New York roster came close to Holmes' 28 circuit clouts (first baseman **Nick Etten** led the Yanks with 18 homers).

In all, Holmes had five .300+ seasons in Boston, including a .325 effort that contributed to the '48 pennant. Later, inexperience and a weak roster would doom his managerial efforts in the Hub with the Braves. Despite the latter, Holmes' record with the Tribe is undiminished in the eyes of his many fans. He would return to Boston for BBHA reunions for as long as his health permitted. Holmes would patiently sign meticulously legible autographs for all who asked. We were most fortunate that a man of his skills and character performed in Boston with the Braves.

Reichler called the Holmes trade the Yankees' fifth lousiest. Caruso positioned the deal as the Boston-Milwaukee-Atlanta Braves' fourth best.

Take that Louis Effrat!

#1

Reichler's selection of the Boston Braves' premier trade shouldn't come as any surprise, given his proclivities evidenced above. It's the January 10, 1928 acquisition of **Rogers Hornsby** from the Giants in exchange for catcher **James "Shanty" Hogan** and outfielder **Jimmy Welsh**. Reichler also listed it as the Giants' third worst.

In Hornsby, the Tribe acquired a player who had batted over .400 on three occasions. In 1927, despite the burdens of being appointed acting manager in place of an ailing **John McGraw**, his average was a hearty .361 and Rajah had some pop in his bat. Hornsby homered 26 times and drove in 125 runs. He only became available to the lowly Braves because of run-ins with owner **Charles Stoneham** and the latter's desire to punish his superstar. **Judge Fuchs** of the Braves was willing to take on Hornsby's large contract, despite severe budgetary constraints, in hopes that Hornsby would cause Braves Field's turnstiles to hum at a much higher clip than the 288,685 that had spun through them in 1927. He would make a similar (and fatal) bet signing **Babe Ruth** for the 1935 season.

It was readily apparent that the duration of Hornsby's stay in Boston would be dictated by a hoped for improvement in the club's financial posture. Rajah held up his end of the bargain, serving in multiple capacities -- manager, captain and regular second baseman. He also led the league in batting (.387) while clubbing 21 home runs and accruing 94 RBI. But the Tribe's finances continued in the red (attendance dropped to 227,001) and his stay in the Hub proved to be just a one-year "rental." Judge Fuchs was forced to deal Hornsby to the Cubs in what Reichler determined to be the second worst swap in Boston Braves history.

While the Giants didn't necessarily receive a comparable exchange for the future Hall of Famer, the club did pick up players that would make positive contributions. Hogan batted .300 or better for the next four seasons as Gotham's regular backstop. Welsh also was a .300 hitter (.307) in New York before being traded back to the Braves in June of 1929 for **Doc Farrell**. Farrell had come from the Giants in 1927 (see Reichler's fifth worst swap). Hogan too returned to Boston in 1932 as part of the continuing curious shuttling of players between the two ball clubs. (See the next article).

Should this acquisition reside atop the list or should the deals for Holmes or Elliott, where the return lasted for several years, be accorded that honor? You be the judge!

### ***Overlooked Deals?***

#### ***Reichler Trades Ranked Elsewhere***

In the eyes of this writer, Reichler misplaced in his book one trade that he attributes to the Milwaukee Braves and ranks it as the Wisconsin version of the Braves' #1 pick-up. On February 16, 1953, a complicated four-team deal took place among the Phillies, Dodgers, Reds and Boston Braves. When the dust settled on the transaction, Cincinnati's **Joe Adcock** and Brooklyn's **Jim Pendleton** ended up with the Braves and the Tribe's **Earl Torgeson** departed for Philadelphia. **Russ Meyer** of the Dodgers and **Rocky Bridges** of the Reds were also involved. Adcock donned the block "B" ball cap in Florida and posed for pictures in a Boston uniform until "Black Friday" rolled

around and Milwaukee was designated as the new franchise home.

Torgy would never recapture the batting prowess that he exhibited during his time with the Tribe. Adcock proved to be a highly productive first baseman for the Wisconsin edition of the Braves but given the genesis of his acquisition, perhaps it would have been better to share the trade's value between Boston and Milwaukee.

Unranked in his Boston Braves "best" section was Reichler's second most defective deal in Brooklyn Dodgers history. On December 12, 1935, the Bums sent catcher **Al Lopez**, infielder **Tony Cuccinello** and hurlers **Ray Benge** and **Bobby Reis** to the Tribe for pitcher **Ed Brandt** and outfielder **Randy Moore**. Brandt only lasted one season with the Dodgers and Moore only slightly longer. Neither made any significant contributions to Casey Stengel's seventh place Dodgers. On the Braves' side of the equation, Benge was dealt to the Phillies midway through the '36 season and Reis provided some bullpen help for a year before fading. However, Lopez and Cuccinello tipped the scale in favor of Boston. Lopez provided creditable service as a durable defensive backstop for over four campaigns while "Chick" Cuccinello played a solid second base during the same period. The latter twice batted above .300 while with the Tribe and was an All Star in 1938. Adding insult to injury, the Braves finished one spot above Brooklyn in 1936.

#### Caruso's Picks

Only one swap by the Boston version of the Braves made Caruso's "10 Worst Trades" in franchise history list. At his #3 position was the June 15, 1939 dealing of first baseman **Elbie Fletcher** to Pittsburgh for another first sacker, **Bill Schuster**. In Schuster, Boston got a grand total of two games, three at bats and no hits. Fletcher, the pride of Milton, MA, played for the Pirates for over six seasons. A fine defensive player, Fletcher also was adept with the bat, leading the Senior Circuit in on-base percentage for three consecutive seasons and landing on the All Star squad in 1943.

Caruso also adds to the positive side of the ledger a couple of Boston Braves transactions that Reichler missed. He went all the way back to November 13, 1895 for his #7 franchise best selection. On that day, the Beaneaters picked up outfielder "**Sliding Billy**" **Hamilton** from the Phillies for third baseman **Billy Nash**. While the future Hall of Famer's best years were in the past, Hamilton still exhibited his base-stealing talents and batting prowess for Boston. He led the National League in stolen bases twice more and compiled batting averages well over .300 during five of his six seasons in the Hub. Hamilton was an integral component of the 1897 and 1898 pennant winners. Nash assumed the role of playing manager in Philadelphia in 1896 and delivered an eighth place finish. Replaced at the helm by **George Stallings** in 1897, Nash's batting skills continued to erode and he wrapped up his major league career with a 20 game stint the following season. Perhaps his most important contribution to the Phillies was his recruitment of **Nap Lajoie** for the club.

Ninth on Caruso's all-time best list is the transaction that brought second baseman **Johnny Evers** to the Braves on February 11, 1914. Boston

gave up infielder **Bill Sweeney** to acquire the Cubs' player-manager. While in the sunset of his career, Evers was named team captain and his inspirational play helped deliver a "miracle." For his efforts, he received the Chalmers Award, representative of being the league's most valuable player. Sweeney played the last of his eight years in the majors with the '14 Cubs. In 134 games, he batted .218.

#### The Braves, The Giants and Tammany Hall *by Fr. Gerald E. Beirne*

*Fr. Beirne is a longtime member of the BBHA and is fondly remembered by reunion attendees for his gracious opening benedictions at the event. The following is the written version of a well received presentation made in Atlanta, GA at the 2010 annual convention of the Society for American Baseball Research.*

"Shocking! I am shocked to think that there is gambling going on in this place!" -- one of the most quoted and parodied lines about hypocrisy in arguably one of Hollywood's greatest movies, *Casablanca*. However, the staid Baseball World was truly shocked to its backbone two years running when the National League's premier and most prominent player, **Rogers Hornsby**, was traded to the New York Giants, only three months after leading the St. Louis Cardinals to their first ever pennant. And then, to be dispatched again the very next year to the going-nowhere Boston Braves. Did no one want the greatest player in the Senior Circuit? Was this a trade or a gift, or collusion? Had Christmas come late to Beantown? Or -- as we shall investigate in this presentation--

#### *WERE THE BOSTON BRAVES OF THE TEENS AND TWENTIES MERELY PAWNS OF THE NEW YORK GIANTS AND TAMMANY HALL AS HAS BEEN ALLEGED?*

The press, the fans, even some of the players of that time strongly believed the collusion charge to be true. Shocking, I know, but for sure there were: (a) a convenient 200 mile tie between these two great northeastern cities; (b) many connections on the business and corporate level; and (c) very frequent trades between the two teams, as many as two or three a year, sometime swapping the same players back and forth.

#### *The Un-holy Trinity*

Let's look at the principals in this triangle in which one side, the one with plenty of money and better baseball management, positively fared much better for a long, long time. That is, until another side finally wised up under **Lou Perini**.

First -- the erstwhile and formidable **John Joseph McGraw**, hands down the undisputed symbol of the powerful Giants, already winners of five 20th century pennants. Manager McGraw was part owner of the team and a powerful force in New York City. McGraw was so unrelentingly combative that other teams formed a "let's not help McGraw clique by trading with him." He was friendly to the Hibernians of Tammany but not an official member.

Second -- Tammany Hall, benignly named for a Native American Delaware chief, was an old-time New York political organization from the time of the

Revolutionary War. Its first leader was **Aaron Burr**, its purpose was to circumvent laws so as to enrich its members and not get caught. The amazing successful robber barons of the 19th century -- Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Harriman, Fisk *et al.* were seemingly free to do as they wished, no law would touch them. **Teddy Roosevelt** called these *nouveau riches* "malefactors of great wealth. They made the rules and changed them at will. They may not steal second base but they would steal the whole stadium." The process was nicknamed "Plunderbund." Tammany was actually, according to **Mark Twain**, "in sync" with the moguls, that is "how to get rich without getting caught." Under the utterly corrupt leadership of **Boss Tweed**, Tammany became the political machine that nearly ran the nation's largest city into the ground by imitating these robber barons, especially by cultivating the loyalty of the hundreds of thousands of immigrants pouring into New York.

**Andrew Freedman, Frank Farrell, Bill Devery** and **Jake Ruppert** were other baseball men who belonged to Tammany. These sons of immigrants were typical of strong-minded men who used a bold and crafty ruthlessness to gain what they wanted -- political power, prestige and profit.

Eventually, one of their members purchased the Boston National League team.

Third -- The Boston Braves were an up and down story. After a spectacular last quarter of the 19th century in which the Beaneaters had eight first place finishes, the turn of the century signaled a "Y2K" downturn in fortune as the franchise went from being Champs to Chumps. Several factors figured in: (a) the indifferent ownership of New Yorkers **William Hepburn Russell** and the Dovey brothers; (b) an inability to replace fading veterans like **Hugh Duffy** and **Kid Nichols** with capable younger men; and (c) the introduction of an American League team in 1901 which immediately proved more successful, more popular and more profitable. The Americans stole **Jimmy Collins**, **Bill Dineen**, **Buck Freeman** and **Chick Stahl** from the Beaneaters, who then averaged 100 losses a season from 1905 to 1912. Symbolic of this misfortune was pitcher **Cliff Curtis**, who experienced a two-year 23-game losing streak.

Then out of nowhere came New York millionaire **James E. Gaffney** in December 1911. The Tammany "Man of Mystery" was lured on by partner **John Montgomery Ward** and a rivalry with **Frank Farrell**. Gaffney had risen from New York City policeman to brother-in-law of Tammany leader **Charles Murphy** to Tammany sachem himself to millionaire construction magnate.

Boston fears that Tammany-trained Gaffney might line his pockets with local money were wrong. He brought cash, zeal, energy and purposefulness to the downtrodden Hub team. He rescued them from the decrepit South End Grounds, bought land for a new stadium and then, with his own construction company, built the largest ballpark in America, seating 42,000. He hired **George Stallings** as manager and brought new blood onto the playing field in **Johnny Evers**, **Charley Deal** and **Boss Schmidt**.

Press box wags speculated over what the new name Gaffney might give to his lackluster team. One was The Hopes, "because that's all they have." Other juvenilia witticisms were The Misfits, or the Gaffs, but

Gaffney insisted that the new name be -- the BRAVES. Not so coincidentally, BRAVES happened to be the nickname of -- Tammany Hall.

The same American Indian headdress logo, and the accompanying terms such as chief, wigwam, wampum, tribe, tomahawk, tepee, tom tom, war party, war path, sachem, even medicine man, were regularly trotted out by the press. So said **Harold Kaese** in his history of the team, the name Braves was not only original, it was -- aboriginal.

And then under Gaffney's ownership came the "Miracle Team" of 1914, miles out of first place on July 4th, and with prospects looking about as dead as a deer on a fender, the Tribe miraculously swept the pennant, and then like a New England October hurricane, swept the heralded Philadelphia Athletics in the World Series.

### **The Trades**

If anything did smell rotten, it was the numerous and annual swaps between these two Northeastern clubs. The Braves appeared to be merely a "farm team" of the Giants, but the players sent by New York were not all bad, and the money helped Boston a lot. But it was the frequency of these deals which always seemed to favor New York, and whose cheesy aroma smacked strongly of a more than questionable, clandestine relationship. They traded two or three times a year, sometimes returning a previously traded player back to his original team, kind of a Lend Lease. These were called "Double Arounds."

**Hank Gowdy** and **Buck Herzog** are prime examples. Gowdy's 18 year playing career reads: NY-BOS-NY-BOS, with the U.S. Army in between. Herzog made three of these trips. This Lend Lease package did not feel, look or even smell right, but no clear evidence was ever found that all was not above board, even after a **Judge Landis** investigation. However, we all know that you can turn off the light but the bulb stays hot, and common feeling among the baseball cognoscenti in the press box and the bleachers remained that the little brother Braves were conveniently in the pocket of the big brother Giants.

### **Art Nehf**

In 1919, the New York Giants, thirsty for another pennant, were in the market for a quality pitcher. On August 1, McGraw sent hurler **Joe Oeschger** (of 26 innings fame), plus 3 others and cash (reported as different amounts as high as \$55,000 and as low as \$25,000), to the Braves for **Art Nehf**, ace of the Braves Wigwam. The 5'9" Nehf was sort of the **Bobby Shantz** of his day, a first class but undersized workhorse and innings eater. Even though Herr Nehf went 9-2, 1.50 in August and September, it was not enough to catch the Reds.

It was the impunity of this type of midseason deal that raised and hue and cry of unfairness and unsportsmanlike conduct by both the press and fandom. *The Boston Post* piously insisted that [*clear the throat*] *Ahem*, "drastic action must be taken in order to curb the rapacity of those who are willing for the spirit of real rivalry to be killed....The fact remains that these two bad deals (**Carl Mays** to the Yankees being the other) has served to throw cold water on baseball....It is an act that serves to encourage commercialism at the expense of true sport. Imaging (!), if all the players

were to do this," *The Post* wondered. The **Joe Dugan** deal in 1922 was likely the last straw for a trading deadline to be enacted.

*Rogers Hornsby*

"Beware of Greeks even when bearing gifts" was the warning Laocoon gave his fellow citizens of Troy. Let's substitute "Giants" for "Greeks." If even the hard-boiled scribes and fans were totally surprised at Rajah's trade TO the Giants in 1927, they were even more startled at his trade FROM the Giants to the Braves just one year later, only two days after signing a two year New York contract. It was hard to fathom that the premier player in the National League, he who had batted over .400 three times, led the league in walks, hits, doubles, triples, home runs, runs scored, RBIs and slugging percentage multiple times, would be dispatched to these perennial underachievers.

Hornsby had been called Mr. Blunt, a Bridge Burner and Mister Barbed Wire, but John McGraw took pride in being able to handle and get the best out of anybody. But Rogers Hornsby was not anybody. I find a comparison of the Rajah to today's **Alex Rodriguez**. Both are:

- an infielder who hits with great power and high average;
- the highest salaried and for some time the best player in his league;
- a puzzling relationship with managers and teammates;
- often traded or moved;
- subject of undesirable off-field headlines.

Was this unfathomable transaction yet another convenient Braves-Giants deal of one hand washing the other with collusion written all over it?

Here are six varying theories on what this headline hogging swap was all about: I quote "Six in the Know":

- (1) **Freddie Lindstrom** -- "That trade is a great thing for New York, I am quite sure there are a number of Giants who feel the way I do...He tried to boss the players, he wrecked all sense of harmony on the club and tried to have players like me and Roush traded."
- (2) **John McGraw** -- and Hornsby seemed to get along well, mutually respectful and admiring of the other's talents and abilities. McGraw's vague statement that Hornsby was traded for the mysterious "good of the Giants," causes me to remember the adage, "The given reason is seldom the real reason." McGraw emphasized, "Talk of syndicated baseball is a joke and I can prove it. Last Friday we offered Hornsby to the Reds for catcher Hargrove and Hughie Critz and were turned down. Last December, I tried to trade Hornsby to Brooklyn for Dazzy Vance, Wilbert Robinson turned me down without a second thought. And to the Cubs for Kiki Cuyler." (Actually there was an anti-McGraw clique by this time when it came to trades among NL owners and managers who were tired of his "pit"-bullying tactics.) Significantly, and here is where a huge contradiction pops up, the Associated Press added from McGraw, "when these efforts to dispose of Hornsby failed, **we** opened up negotiations with the Boston club and the deal was completed." The other players were catcher "Shanty" Hogan and

journeyman Jimmy Welsh. John Kieran of the *N. Y. Times* called the trade "a shifting of assets from one ledger to another -- in the same corporation!" Note well that McGraw said that "we approached Boston about dealing Hornsby." I smell smoke.

- (3) **Judge Emil Fuchs** had become owner of the Braves in a most unusual way. John McGraw, of all people, intending to coerce his friend, Broadway impresario and Providence-born **George M. Cohan** into buying the Boston team, brought together a group of people for lunch. Cohan deferred the offer to enter baseball instead suggesting "Why doesn't your man Judge Fuchs buy the Braves?" Surprisingly, Fuchs replied immediately that he would, "If - old friend Christy Mathewson would come along as team president." Note the chumminess of these men and then wonder what business was it of John McGraw "to manipulate the sale and ownership of the Boston Braves?" About the Hornsby trade, Fuchs said that "the two young men transferred to the New York club were not for sale, because the citizens of Boston resented their ... ball cubs [note the plural] being used for a farm system for the larger and more prosperous cities who had the advantage of Sunday baseball and ... population; and could afford to purchase whatever they deemed necessary to build ... a championship baseball club. Therefore, [here the confusing contradiction with McGraw] when the New York club inquired as to the possibility of obtaining ... such excellent prospects and players of ability [Hogan and Welsh!] **we** insisted that no player ... would be acceptable to us except Rogers Hornsby." The Braves also received \$40,000 to pay Hornsby's salary. Doesn't this contradict McGraw who said the Giants approached the Braves about getting rid of Hornsby?! Fuchs said the Braves were approached by New York about acquiring Hogan and Welsh! Fuchs was esteemed as a man of extremely honest reputation, but he was an attorney representing not only the Giants, but McGraw personally. The judge invited "anyone to look at our books," and added on January 11, "No man who is interested in any way with the New York Giants owns a nickel's worth of stock in the Braves .... Furthermore, I do not owe one penny to any one connected with the ownership of the Giants. And furthermore, Commissioner Landis knows of this deal."
- (4) **The Man in the Street** -- *The New York Evening World* sent reporters out to interview random John Q. Public's on their way home from work. Here are three sample quotations": -**Max Glassman**, "I think baseball is fake, and that McGraw and Stoneham own Boston. I used to go to 25 games a year but will never go again. All they want to do is make money." -**A.F. Gruenberger**, "The Giants must have an interest in the Braves, otherwise how could they let a man like Hornsby go?" -**Charles Gessner**, "The Giants plan to bolster the weak Braves. They are practically the sole owners of the Boston club." So (Ergo) the conclusion among the fandom is -- a sour and deeply rooted cynicism with a strong feeling that the two teams were really one.
- (5) **Rogers Hornsby** -- "Flabbergasted! Cannot believe it. It's a big surprise, but it's all right with me. It doesn't make any difference to me where I play. I go where I am told to go. John McGraw and I got along great together." Then Hornsby asked reporters, "I've heard reports that the Giants own

the Braves. Do you know if that's true?" The Rajah hit okay .387-21-94, in Boston to win his final batting crown, but he managed the Tribe to a miserable 39-83 mark, saved from the cellar only by the stubborn Phillies. This while the Hornsby-less but "Frisch-ful" Cardinals were winning another World Series.

(6) **Charles Stoneham** -- A press statement issued at 9:45 PM by Giants secretary **James Tierney** uttered a Clintonesque "Rogers Hornsby was traded to Boston in the best interests of the Giants." **Bozeman Bulger** of the *Times* wrote knowingly, "That Charles Stoneham wanted to settle definitively that **he** was the president of the club and would brook no criticism or back talk, will probably have to be accepted as the explanation of the Rogers Hornsby whirlwind. On several occasions, Stoneham heard or read that Hornsby expected to be manager of the Giants in 1928, but he would not do so unless there were a change in ownership! [The Rajah clearly had more nerve than a bad tooth.] Understandably, Stoneham made up his mind to get rid of Hornsby -- immediately. And this is why the club did not get a bigger return in exchange." "We got all we could," declared Tierney. "You know very well that McGraw would have taken more players if he could." Ergo, Stoneham made a sacrifice of many thousands of dollars just to clear his decks" Bulger concluded. In addition, a most strongly worded editorial in a Boston newspaper claimed that it was Hornsby's sour deal with gambler Frank Moore of Cincinnati that caused the trade. Moore claimed that he was owed almost \$90,000 by Hornsby and went to court to collect. Hornsby's rebuttal was that "since gambling is illegal, Moore has no legal leg to stand on." The jury agreed with the defendant. But even **Andrew Zimmern**, host of the Food Channel's *Bizarre Foods* show, might have had trouble digesting the rancid aftertaste of welching from that verdict. It was then opined that powerful members of the national gambling family put such great pressure on Stoneham, that he determined to get rid of his All-Star prima donna. Soon Hornsby found himself as *persona non grata* with his third team in three years -- soon to be a fourth.

**SO, WERE THE BOSTON BRAVES OWNED AND/OR CONTROLLED BY THE NEW YORK GIANTS AND TAMMANY HALL?**

### **Conclusion**

The Giants did not own the Braves, but their longterm cozy relationship indicates a hard to explain influence with Boston and looks very much like control. Examples are:

- the frequent trades;
- the Giants getting Nehf, and then getting rid of Hornsby;
- But more tellingly - John McGraw's personal involvement with Judge Fuchs, his personal lawyer and the lawyer of the Giants, to buy the Braves;
- the unanswered questions of, and possible untruth - Did the Giants approach the Braves about getting rid of Hornsby, as well as paying his astronomical salary; or did the Giants approach the Braves about acquiring Hogan and Welsh?

The Braves were not owned or controlled by Tammany Hall but they were *owned* by a member of Tammany, James Gaffney, who comes out with perhaps the cleanest hands of anyone. He improved the team and built a new ballpark. He was held in high esteem by the other NL owners for his fairness and ability to get things done and he was the key instrument in resolving the Federal League conflict. *TSN* wrote that "the National League suffered a loss when Gaffney sold out."

Boston seemed satisfied with what they got and what they gave up in both the Nehf and Hornsby deals -- Wampum for the Wigwam - \$25,000 for Nehf, \$40,000 to pay Hornsby's salary, and then \$100,000 more from the Cubs in the next Hornsby deal with which they purchased **Wally Berger**.

The almost desperate dumping of Hornsby on the Braves is traceable to: his sandpaper personality; the fact that no one else wanted him; and the obvious accommodation that existed between the New York and Boston clubs.

The commonly held opinion that such a syndicate existed was more a matter of feeling and opinion, based on rumor and scuttlebutt by the press and fans, and fueled by the frequent trades between the two clubs.

Judge Landis inspected the books of both teams and was satisfied that "they were two separate teams and corporations."

### **In Memoriam**

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

On September 11, **Olav "Ole" Kollevoll** died at the age of 87. As a child, he had emigrated with his parents from Norway. At Colgate University, Kollevoll lettered and captained in three sports -- football, baseball and hockey. He served in the Navy during WWII as a lieutenant commanding a PT boat in the Philippines. His catching skills attracted the interest of the Boston Braves, who signed him and placed him with their Leavenworth Braves Class C Western Association affiliate in 1946. Kollevoll made it as far as Class A with the Tribe, spending part of the 1949 season with the Hartford Chiefs. With Evansville in 1947, he was managed by former Braves' skipper, **Bob Coleman** and played with future Wigwam inhabitants **Johnny Logan, Billy Reed, Walt Linden, Bob Whitcher, Gene Patton** and **Dick Manville**. Battery mate **Don Liddle** would break in with Milwaukee in 1953. With the Chiefs, Kollevoll performed alongside Reed and Liddle again as well as with other prospective big leaguers **Jack Daniels, Paul LaPalme, Bob Buhl** and **Bert Thiel**. A shoulder injury brought Kollevoll's minor league career to an end in 1951 and he departed with a respectable career batting average of .293. While a Braves farmhand, he continued to pursue his interest in hockey, playing at the semi-pro level during the off season and representing the U.S. in the World Hockey Championships in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1947. After leaving baseball, Kollevoll commenced a long and successful career in college athletics as a coach and administrator. He directed his college hockey teams to several trips to the ECAC Frozen Four Championships and was named president of the Athletic Conference in 1978. His collegiate work

earned him lifetime achievement honors from Lafayette College, Colgate University and the ECAC.

Former minor league first baseman **James "Dutch" Paules** passed away at 91 years of age on September 13. He began his professional career in 1940 with the York Bees of the Class B Interstate League and would roam through the Tribe's farm system with stops at Bradford, Hartford, Jackson, Milwaukee and Pawtucket. In his first full season, Paules played for the 1941 Bradford Bees along with a couple of teammates with future major league Boston Braves credentials, third baseman **Bob "Ducky" Detweiler** and right-hander **Armand "Big Ben" Cardoni**. Paules was a WWII Navy veteran with service in the Guadalcanal campaign. As Braves chattel, Paules also shared dugout space with **Ray Martin, Ernie Johnson, Johnny Logan, Chuck Tanner, Pete Whisenant, Don Liddle and Dave Cole**. While playing for the Bridgeport (CT) Bees of the Colonial League in 1949, Paules met his future wife who was the official scorer of Bridgeport's games. He also managed the club for part of the season and led the league in RBI. Paules wrapped up his time in organized ball in 1954 at age 35. He and his wife raised nine children while he worked as a warehouse manager in Bridgeport.

A fixture at our annual reunions along with his brother **Art "Lefty" Johnson, Carl Johnson** died unexpectedly on September 18 in his 88th year. Five days later, his wife of 67 years passed away. Both Carl and Art Johnson were left-handed pitching prospects signed by the Boston Braves. While older brother Art reached the big leagues and performed there during 1940-42, Carl was not so fortunate. His very brief minor league career ended when he enlisted in the military service and served in the Pacific Theater during WWII. Carl's brush with baseball fame occurred in 1940 when he was assigned to room with another 19-year-old rookie southpaw for the Class D Bradford Bees of the PONY League -- **Warren Spahn**. Carl would make his mark in politics. He served two terms in the New Hampshire House of Representatives and five terms in the Senate. Both brothers were longstanding loyal members of the BBHA. In fact, Carl was among the first responders to our last newsletter's dues announcement. We were most privileged to enjoy his company each fall. We offer our deepest sympathies to the Johnson family.

You might not have known that the Boston Braves had a **Johnny Bench** before the Cincinnati Reds. **John "Jack" Bench** performed as a pitcher rather than a catcher. He died on September 23. Bench was 81 years old at the time. He spent two of his three minor league seasons in the Braves system. The 19-year-old broke in with the Eau Claire Bears of the Class C Northern League in 1949 with a 12-9 mark. His record fell to 4-7 with the California League Ventura Braves the next season. One of his catchers on that club was the late **Bob Roselli** who played parts of five seasons with the Milwaukee Braves and Chicago White Sox. Bench left baseball to serve in the Navy during the Korean War. He attempted a comeback in 1955 but was through after 18 appearances with the Texas City Texans of the Big State League.

86-year-old **Thomas J. Zikmund, Sr.** passed away on September 27. He was a Braves farmhand from 1946 to 1948, performing in the outfield and first base. Zikmund had a spectacular debut in Class D with

the Appalachian League Bluefield Blue-Grays. He batted .380 and was named the circuit's All Star first baseman. Promoted to Class B, Zikmund batted .304 for **Bob Coleman's** Evansville Braves. At Evansville, he played with **Ole Kollevoll** and several future Boston Braves (see above). Despite that performance, Zikmund started 1948 back in D ball with the Richmond Roses of the Ohio-Indiana League where he hit .304 in 87 games and was promoted to the B-level Jackson Senators. He was cut loose by the Braves after the 1948 season and spent one more year in the bushes before calling it quits. He left organized ball with an overall .321 batting average.

### Can Anyone Ride Big Syd?

We often receive requests for research assistance from members and try to do the best we can to help. One recent query, however, has us stumped and we're seeking your assistance. Member **Robert E. "Bob" Quinn** posed the header question above. If the last name of this member strikes you as familiar, it's because he's a part of one of baseball's "first families." Bob is the grandson and namesake of the legendary **J.A. "Bob" Quinn** who at varying times was part of ownership syndicates that controlled the Red Sox and the Braves and who served in an executive capacity with the Browns and Dodgers. His son and our Bob's dad, **John Quinn**, held the general manager's post with the Boston and Milwaukee Braves for 23 years and with the Phillies for another 13 seasons. In his own right, our current BBHA member served as the general manager of the Yankees, Reds (including the 1990 World Champs) and Giants. And his son, also named Bob, has been in the front office of the Milwaukee Brewers. Let's not forget to include another BBHA member and frequent reunion honoree, **Roland Hemond**, in this mix. Roland married John Quinn's daughter, Margo, and went on to a long and illustrious major league executive career.

After the passing of his beloved wife, Kathryn, last year after nearly 50 years of wedlock, Bob has embarked upon an effort to write a book about his experiences. His first chapter is entitled "Early Memories," which would include the time he spent hanging around Braves Field. Bob has a vague recollection of a Tribe post-game promotion designed to keep the fans from leaving early and continuing to patronize the park's concession stands. As Bob remembers, "A metal fencing/barrier would be put in place, covering a circle from the back of the home-plate area to about half way to the mound. Then, a Brahma bull, named 'Big Syd' would be led into the enclosure. After signing a 'hold harmless' disclaimer, 5 contestants were given the opportunity to ride 'Big Syd' for 10 seconds (maybe 15 seconds). At \$50 per failed contestant, the pot grew to \$5,000 when ultimately a sailor from Okla., on leave from his Boston docked ship, successfully rode "Big Syd and claimed the cash!!"

Bob hopes that at age 73, he hasn't outlived most old-time Boston Braves fans and that someone in our membership can confirm and/or add to his reminiscence. If you can help out in any way, please contact us and we'll pass along your information to Bob. Feel free to drop a line to me at my address listed at the end of the newsletter.

### Was Home Stolen Twice in 1953?

The story has often been told how a band of youths took it upon themselves to “steal” home shortly after the Braves’ move to Milwaukee was announced in the spring of 1953. Sneaking into Braves Field, members of the “Mountfort Street Gang” in Allston dug up home plate with their hands and hid it for 35 years. During ceremonies in Boston commemorating the 40th anniversary of the last Boston Braves National League pennant, one of the old gang presented the historic souvenir to the Sports Museum of New England where it currently resides.

But, what are we to make of a photograph that appeared in the April 1, 1953 edition of *The Sporting News* that bears a caption under it, “The home plate at Braves Field, carrying spike marks of many historic games played in the Boston park, being carried to a truck by John Coyne, a member of the ground crew”? Two vans were loaded with a variety of equipment and even the Wigwam’s tarpaulin. The trucks departed Gaffney Street for Milwaukee on March 21. Other than newspaper photographers, the event appeared to be witnessed by only a young and disconsolate Braves fan, perhaps from Mountfort Street!

We believe that the last home plate in use at the Wigwam during the 1952 season still resides in Boston, thanks to the quick action of the Mountfort Street residents. What Milwaukee received was a back-up that had been kept in storage and used for the photo opportunity. The *TSN* plate picture looks remarkably similar to the relic housed at the Boston Garden sports repository. The substitute plate permitted the relocating franchise to avoid having to make an embarrassing revelation to Milwaukee citizenry that Boston Braves fans had pulled off baseball’s version of the “Brink’s Job” as a final symbolic gesture marking the heartbreaking loss of their team. We will continue to believe this in the absence of convincing evidence otherwise -- and probably in the face of such evidence should it ever materialize!

### Sittin’ In The Jury Box

The same issue of *The Sporting News* containing the home plate photograph also revealed some other interesting tidbits. According to *TSN*, Braves President **Lou Perini** only had to refund payment for 420 1953 Boston Braves season tickets. Perini sent each subscriber a letter along with a refund check. The message conveyed to the loyal fans from the owner read, “I have slowly come to the realization that, in spite of all our efforts, the large majority of Boston and New England fans do not feel as you and I do.”

Also included within the pages of the April Fools Day 1953 edition of *TSN* was a story on Spahn’s Diner along with an accompanying photo. Upon the announcement of the shift to Milwaukee, Spahn proclaimed that the diner would open as scheduled on what would have been the opening of the annual pre-season City Series between the Braves and Red Sox commencing on April 12. During the off season, he had been more concerned about trade rumors than a franchise shift. He and his next door neighbor, **Joel Greenberg**, each contributed in excess of \$25,000 toward the Commonwealth Avenue eatery. Before the move, they had hoped to recoup their investment over the course of one season.

According to an August article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, Hockey Hall of Famer **Doug Harvey** (not to be confused with the former National League umpire bearing the same name) almost became a Boston Braves (not to be confused with the Boston Bruins AHL affiliate from 1971-74) farmhand in 1950. He had split his time between hockey and baseball in the late ‘40s. An outfielder for several seasons with the Ottawa Senators/Nationals of the Class C Border League, Harvey came to the attention of the Braves in 1949 when he led the league in batting (.351) and runs (121) and was named to the All Star team. His previous season with Ottawa wasn’t too shabby either, as reflected by a .340 batting average. The Braves drafted Harvey with the intention of sending him to their Class B Pawtucket Slaters farm club for further seasoning. However, instead of viewing the move as an advancement toward a potential big league career, Harvey regarded the Tribe’s plan as an insult. Per Harvey: “I hit .342 [*sic*] and .351 but the Braves didn’t show any interest in letting me try Triple-A competition, so I said to hell with baseball.” His strong opinions and attitude carried over into his hockey career and also got him in trouble from time to time, particularly regarding his efforts at organizing a players’ association in the face of ownership opposition. Harvey spent most of his career with the Montreal Canadiens. The outstanding defenseman was enshrined in hockey’s hall of the immortals in 1973. He passed away in 1989.

Boston Braves artifacts have turned up in some pretty strange places outside of the U.S. In our Summer 2009 newsletter, we informed you that a 1951 autographed team ball found its way to Australia, courtesy of Tribe farm system director **Harry Jenkins**. Now, member **Peter J. Tirinnanzi, Sr.** reports that a copy of the famous photograph of Spahn and Sain, posed on the top step of the Braves Field home dugout, is hanging on the wall of the Officers’ Club at Kadena AFB in Okinawa. Peter’s daughter, who is employed as a teacher there by the Department of Defense, noticed the framed picture and set a photograph of it back home. Their interest in such an artifact comes naturally to them. Peter’s uncle was “Steam Shovel” **Guido Rugo**. An avid Braves fan, Peter was able to attend many games at the Wigwam using a season pass provided by Uncle Guido.

Attending the Red Sox-Angels game at Angel Stadium in Anaheim on July 27, member **William Scanlon** was pleasantly surprised to see the following on the park’s jumbo message board: “Welcome to **Clint Conatser** 1948 World Series; 1948 Braves Alumni.” It’s nice to know that our popular reunion guest still gets out to the ballpark to enjoy the National Pastime in person.

Executive committee member **Mort Bloomberg** discovered a newly published book with a chapter dedicated to Braves Field. *Closing ‘Em Down: Final Games at Thirteen Classic Ballparks* by **David Jordan** includes the Wigwam’s Last Hurrah in a section headed “The Other Place in Boston.” Mort also picked up a Detroit Tigers’ bit of trivia that involves a member of the Braves Family. Detroit’s **Max St. Pierre**, a catcher, made his big league debut on September 4. At 30 years, 141 days old, he became the second oldest Tigers position player making a major league inaugural. The oldest is **Mike Roarke**, also a backstop, who made it to the majors with Detroit on April 19, 1961 at 30 years and 162 days old. Roarke had originally signed with the Boston Braves in 1952. In 1970, he replaced

**Johnny Sain** as the Bengal's pitching coach. Roarke served in similar capacities with the Cubs, Cardinals, Padres and Red Sox. His time as a hurling mentor with the Pawtucket Red Sox (1981-83) overlapped with his Boston College classmate, **Joe Morgan's** stewardship of the Bosox affiliate (1981-82). Roarke has been an honored guest at our Brookline Holiday Inn functions.

It was nice to see **Sibby Sisti** honored with a baseball card in 2010. He appeared in the Tri-Star Obak card set. The card design utilizes as its model, pasteboards issued by the American Tobacco Company in 1910 inside packages of its Obak cigarettes. The originals bear the hobby designation of T-212. Being unlicensed by Major League baseball, the cards are devoid of logos or other team designators. Sisti is portrayed as playing for Indianapolis A.A. in 1946, although the picture looks suspiciously like one taken while with the Braves. Sisti is #50 in the 117 base card set and #19 in the "mini size" supplement. His card is part of a commemoration of minor league players of the year. In 1946, Sisti paced the American Association in batting (.343), triples (14) and total hits (203). That earned him *The Sporting News* designation as minor league baseballs #1 player.

Longtime member **John Delmore** still has a copy of a letter that he sent to his mother on March 20, 1953 from the U.S. Navy's boot camp at Bainbridge, MD. He kindly shared it with us given that it reflected his reaction to news from home that the Braves had left Boston. John said that he "nearly went over the hill" at the loss of his favorite team. As John related to his mother, "It was quite a shock for me when I heard about the Braves transfer to Milwaukee. It seems funny that Perini would pull something like that, he sure let down a lot of real baseball fans." The Bainbridge Naval Training Center had a number of WWII baseball alumni including **Stan Musial, Eddie Miksis, Elbie Fletcher, Dick Sisler, Dick Bartell** and **Buddy Blattner**. In 1944, the Bainbridge Commodores baseball team had a record of 56-15, including wins over four big league clubs, and won the Fifth Naval District Championship. In addition to being a loyal member, John also carries the title of the BBHA's "poet laureate." In 1994, he wrote "The Park With Nobody In It: Braves Field 1957" and in 2002 penned "An Elegy To A Braves Fan."

In 2002, thanks to the tireless efforts of late BBHA member **Jim Smith** of Dorchester, MA, the City of Boston designated the alley running between Gaffney Street/Agganis Way and Babcock Street as "Braves Field Way." A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held during the 2002 reunion. A street sign was hung on poles at each end of the alley. Unfortunately, neither lasted very long. Vandals and/or souvenir hunters removed them and the city ceased to replace these historic markers. BBHA secretary/treasurer **Jonathan Fine** persisted in requesting that the city restore the signage, and his pleas recently were answered. In late October, a new "Braves Field Way" sign was attached high on a light pole on the Agganis Way side of the alley. We sincerely hope that this commemorative tribute not follow the path of its predecessors and remain in place to remind to all that pass by the remains of the Wigwam that there once was a historic ballpark here.

### **Last of the Ninth**

With another year drawing to a close, the Executive Committee wishes to thank the membership

for its loyalty and generosity during the challenging times that faced us after George Altison's unexpected passing. We hope to perpetuate George's legacy and assure that current and future generations of baseball fans possess an awareness of, and appreciation for, the contributions of the Boston Braves to the heritage of our National Pastime.

Help us in this endeavor by sharing your reminiscences and by alerting us to news, events and happenings related to the Braves. Contact me at: **Bob Brady, Newsletter Editor, 25 McAndrew Road, Braintree, MA 02184-8245** or via email at [bbraves@beld.net](mailto:bbraves@beld.net). Don't forget that you can register for BBHA eNewsletter alerts at my email address. It's a free service for members.

With the end-of-year holidays fast approaching, your Executive Committee extends its best wishes to all during this festive season.