

BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

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Training 2008

Spring

It's Membership Renewal Time!

Spring marks our annual membership renewal campaign. Once again, we've closely managed the Association's expenses in order to be able to continue our dues at \$15. It would be nice if other things stayed at the same price – like postage and gasoline! Help us to control our expenses by writing a check to the BBHA now before you forget so that we won't have to incur the cost of having to print and send out reminders. Thanks for your continued support and for that of our Royal Rooters who are able to contribute a bit more to sustain the Association. Please mail your check to:

Boston Braves Historical Association
Post Office Box 5668
Marlborough, MA 01752

Once again, member **Bob Polio** has designed a great looking multicolored membership card that we'll be sending along to you. And mark your calendars now for the '08 Reunion/dinner that will be taking place on Sunday, October 5. More information will follow as the date grows closer.

#30 Billy Southworth, Manager

By Mort Bloomberg

Clint Conatser and Tommie Ferguson were unknowingly the chief catalysts for this article because both brought up Southworth's name repeatedly as we spoke about their years with the Braves during the late 40s and early 50s.

Said Tommie, "I loved Billy Southworth. He was great to us kids. Each season the batboys would go on a road trip of their choice and for each city at which the team stopped, Billy gave me 50 cents for a milk shake. That was in addition to the meal money Duffy Lewis [road secretary] would furnish -- \$6 per diem."

Said Clint, "I thought a lot of him and found him very personable. Spahn and a few other guys on the team said that Billy had confided that I reminded him of his late son. But I wasn't privy to that. All I know is that he was good to me. Thanks to him I had a chance to play in the major leagues plus reach the World Series, as a rookie no less. So I am grateful to him."

It was his sense of fairness and honesty that had the biggest impact on Roy Hartsfield, when I asked him at the 2007 BBHA dinner/reunion about Southworth. "He made it as easy for me as he possibly could. At my first spring training with the Braves in 1950 down in

Bradenton were four second basemen: Connie Ryan, Sibby Sisti, Gene Mauch, and I was #4. When we started playing exhibition games he gave each of us a shot at the position. Ryan was the #1 choice so he would get the first game and then down the line to me and we would rotate each game until we broke camp in late March. He couldn't be any fairer than that and I sure appreciated his not being partial to anyone. Management expected you to do your best at all times. If you didn't do it, why in those days just go catch a bus home. Although no words were ever spoken, these expectations were perfectly clear to everyone. But whatever Southworth did say, you could believe. Myself, I thought the world of the guy."

"He is without doubt the most conscientious and hardest-working pilot in the big leagues," wrote Frank Sargent in the *Lowell Sun*. He is a firm believer in the theory that 'if you want a thing done right, do it yourself.' He does everything from supervise workouts to help move the batting practice screen. He is a stickler for detail."

Nevertheless "Billy the Kid" had his detractors. Among them was Johnny Sain, the team's meal ticket who led the NL in 1948 with 24 wins, 39 starts, 28 complete games, and 314 innings. In Conatser's view, he "should have received the MVP award for his achievements that season," especially since they also led the way to the Braves first pennant in 34 years. Instead the award went to an equally deserving Stan Musial who had had a big year at the plate. To make matters worse, a few months earlier the Tribe had signed Johnny Antonelli, fresh out of high school and one of baseball's original bonus babies, for \$65,000. The rookie from Rochester, New York's contract "appalled" the usually soft-spoken curve balling Arkansan. Even though Perini was the final judge on the size of Antonelli's bonus, according to Conatser Sain thought that Southworth factored in the negotiations. As Clint added, "it probably wasn't so but Johnny was disgusted that an unproven kid's salary was approximately four times his own. Sain is dead now so I can tell the story. I would never tell anyone that before. He just didn't care for him at all."

To mend broken fences, the Hub National Leaguers tore up Sain's old contract and gave him a new one. "I said to Johnny, I hope you got your \$45,000. His answer was 'Clint, I wish I was making \$25,000.' I'll tell you something else I haven't told very many people. Sain said, 'I hope we don't win the World Series.' When I asked him why his answer was 'Well if we do, that little SOB will take all the credit for it.' And then he goes and slams the door on the

Indians in that famous 1-0 victory over Bob Feller in the Series opener. In other words, he was expressing his displeasure with Southworth but still doing all in his power to beat the AL champs."

Known in the media as "The Little General", Southworth was a stern taskmaster and paternalistic in a way that backfired on him at least once. Conatser was roommates with Earl Torgeson during spring training in 1949. "And one evening he told me that he and some of the fellas were going to a particular night club out-of-town. All of a sudden my phone rings. The voice on the other end says, 'Who is this?' It's Clint. 'Torgy there?' No. 'Do you know where he is?' I don't, Billy. BAM [the sound of Southworth slamming the phone down]. He was on a drinking binge and called all the other rooms in the hotel. I found the phone number for this place and told Torgy to get back here fast because Billy was on the warpath. Whatever went on in Billy's mind was more than the guys going out for a few beers. Maybe he began to lose it there."

In my opinion the "it" that Clint was alluding to was -- the respect of his players. Not advertised openly but well-known by insiders was that Billy had a serious drinking problem which was aggravated by his son's tragic death four years earlier. Perhaps Southworth did not want his boys (as he called them often!) to suffer alcohol induced setbacks on or off the field. Says Clint, "I think Billy in his own way had a family-like closeness to his players, although they took it wrong." But Billy was becoming an anachronism during the late 40s. Bill James, in his well researched book on the history of baseball managers, persuasively argues that the rapid postwar growth of cities, new methods of transportation, night baseball, Kinsey's sex reports, and most important the core questioning of whether employers had the right to exercise authority 24/7 conspired together to undermine the leadership skills of old style pilots such as Joe McCarthy, Frankie Frisch, and Southworth and to render them increasingly irrelevant.

One reason oddsmakers favored the Indians in the 1948 World Series was their balanced attack. With Lou Boudreau, Larry Doby, Joe Gordon, Ken Keltner, Eddie Robinson, and Dale Mitchell in the lineup every day, their team could beat you at small ball and at long ball. And Southworth's team had the misfortune to lose Jeff Heath shortly before the regular season ended due to a devastating injury sustained in a meaningless game. Jeff, purchased from the poverty stricken St. Louis Browns during the winter, was a dangerous left-handed pull-hitter who filled a major void in the Braves offense. "I can't wait to see [him] in action. He'll be a great help in run getting," was the appraisal Southworth offered of his new acquisition as the Braves got ready to better their third place finish in 1947. And as usual the veteran skipper was correct. Although platooned in left field, Heath was number two in RBIs for the Tribe in 1948.

On the other hand, before spring training members of Boston's Hot Stove League second guessed the benefits Heath could deliver to the Allston ballyard due to his alleged role in the "cry baby rebellion of 1940" staged by the Indians. "I don't know if you are familiar with the story," Clint explained, "but the reason he despised Cleveland was that he had been blamed for the revolt even though he had nothing to do with it. Roy Weatherly (nicknamed Stormy!), one of Cleveland's outfielders, came up to him with a bunch of gripes they had with their hated manager Oscar Vitt. So Roy went to Jeff, an established star on the ballclub with an easygoing temperament, and asked Heath to bring the team's list of complaints to the front office's attention. When management held a team meeting to get the full picture, all the players became comatose and left Jeff holding the bag. The press' spin on the incident pointed a finger at Heath as the ringleader of the revolt. He was actually the last guy in the world to cause an insurrection like that." Southworth's own comment on Heath's value to the Braves in 1948 supports Conatser. "They told me when I got him from the American League that Heath was a troublemaker. If he is, I'd sure like to have eight other troublemakers like him."

Clint and Jeff roomed together that year. Here is his account of the day at Ebbets Field in late September when Heath was injured. "We had already clinched the NL flag. So Jeff goes to Southworth and says, 'Billy, I don't want to play against the Dodgers today because I hate Cleveland and have been waiting all season for the chance to face them.'" [Moreover Heath had paid his dues, putting in 12 years of service with the Indians, Browns, and Washington Senators for the opportunity to get into the Series.] "During the year he repeatedly said, 'I hope we play the Indians; I will kill them.' And he could, he was that kind of a guy. Anyways, after you play so many years you just automatically slide but looking ahead at whom the Braves' post season opponent might be he said to himself I'm not going to slide. Well he hesitated and when he slid dislocated his ankle. We rushed from our dugout to home plate. Roy Campanella said, 'Hey fellas, I let him through; I didn't block him.' We knew it wasn't Campy's fault. It happened before he got that close to the plate. Jeff was in sheer agony. His tibia bone was just sticking out there and you could have taken a pair of scissors and cut off his foot like that. Jeff's loss really hurt us because he hit .319 that year. Since I batted .323 against left-handed pitchers it meant we had a big bat in the outfield regardless of who the other team put on the mound. He played for 2 or 3 more years with a huge shoe. But he could never mentally make himself slide again due to that horrible memory." [Note: Heath appeared in 36 games for the Braves in 1949 (.306, 9HR, 23RBI) and played Pacific Coast League ball in 1950. He later became a Seattle TV sportscaster.]

"Not many people know the reason why Southworth wanted Heath in the starting lineup for that game in Brooklyn. Back in 1943 the Cardinals clinched the pennant early

with 13 days to go. Billy's front line players wanted to take a few days off. The Redbirds won only six of their next eleven games, could not regain their cutting edge in the World Series, and were defeated four games to one in the World Series. 'I don't want you to lose your momentum,' Billy told us--and that was good thinking on his part." In an Associated Press story datelined September 28, 1948 he added, "I'm guarding against a letdown. Every regular will stay on the job for we're out to win everything in sight."

Conceivably some Red Sox players did not know the origin of Heath's unequivocal choice as an opponent in the fall classic. Frank Sargent wrote that "when the news about Heath's broken ankle reached the Red Sox clubhouse, not everyone was sympathetic. There were those who sneered at the mere mention of his name. 'He shot off his mouth on the radio didn't he?' asked one of the players. 'Well maybe they'll play Cleveland but he'll not be there. They'll get their brains beaten in anyhow.'" So much for the theory of peaceful coexistence between Beantown's two pro baseball clubs.

Many baseball observers identify Southworth as a manager who played the game "by the book." Local scribes said only in partial jest that "Billy is the king of percentages who must carry a logarithm table around with him." Without question his strategy did rely on bunting ("more than any manager of the 1940s and more than any manager since", according to Bill James' research) and platooning (in '48 with Heath, Conatser, Jim Russell, and Mike McCormick in the outfield; to a lesser degree, Earl Torgeson and Frank McCormick at first base and Phil Masi and Bill Salkeld behind the plate). Yet most impressive to Clint was how much he trusted his baseball instincts. "When I first joined the club, Tommy Holmes told me, 'Watch this guy. He will do things you won't believe and they will work for him.' For instance, he would take a guy off the bench hitting about .150 like Bob Sturgeon [whose '48 batting average was .218] and he would deliver a clutch base hit. He just had a gut feeling about the right thing to do in that situation. The moves he would make would work for him--all the time, not occasionally. Leo Durocher was the same way. I don't know what it is. It's like some guys can pick horses out of nowhere. Southworth was a genius like that on the diamond."

Conatser's vast admiration of Southworth led him to comment to me in January 2007, "Look at his record. He should be in the Hall of Fame, no matter what anyone says." And what a record he compiled. His career total of 1,044-704 works out to a .597 winning percentage and places him third best among managers with 1000 wins, trailing only Hall of Famers Joe McCarthy and Frank Selee. Thanks to James' work, here are some additional stats. Categories in which his teams led the league most often during his 13-year managerial career: hits(6), complete games(6), shutouts(5), batting average(5),

doubles(5), slugging percentage(4), pitcher's strikeouts(4), and ERA(4). On the flip side, Southworth's teams never led the league in saves, errors, or walks allowed. The longstanding oversight that Clint earlier noted was finally corrected when he was elected to Cooperstown by the Hall's Veterans Committee in December 2007.

Sixty games into the 1951 season with the Boston Braves in fifth place and going nowhere, Billy's popular rightfielder (who fittingly wore #1) took over the reins. After managing, Southworth remained with the organization as a scout. Tommie Ferguson ran into him in Waycross, Georgia where the Braves minor league camp was located because Fergie had to drop off there all the uniforms worn by the parent team during the previous year. "Billy had an awfully small room situated in a building near a prison where each convict escape was the signal to turn on the searchlights and sirens. I said to him - you were the manager of championship ballclubs with the Cardinals and the Braves. Is this the best they could do for you? He looked at me and said, 'Tommie, remember one thing. If you are a big leaguer, you are a big leaguer under any conditions'. And to this day I carry that message with me about adjusting to adversity rather than bitch and moan."

All's well that ends well. Although The Little General lost his share of battles, he won the war. And now the baseball world awaits his official induction into Cooperstown on Sunday, July 27, 2008, sixty years after his Braves captured their final pennant in Boston.

Billy, Billy, Jr. and Clint in Black & White

Our thanks to **Ronnie Joyner** for providing us with the excellent renderings of Billy Southworth, Billy Southworth, Jr. and Clint Conatser that are included in this issue. They bring you back to the days when such artwork would appear routinely in local newspapers and *The Sporting News*. We're glad that Ronnie's preserving this artistic part of the National Pastime and that he's graciously provided his services to honor members of the Braves Family.

Southworth and Stallings Compared

It took the Braves 34 years to return to the top of the National League. The skippers of both pennant winners were compared and contrasted by renowned baseball historian Fred Lieb in a full page article that appeared in the September 29, 1948 edition of *The Sporting News*.

Lieb pointed out that both George Stallings of the 1914 Miracle Braves and Billy Southworth of the 1948 edition had significant rebuilding jobs to accomplish and both did so quickly. They picked up key players from other clubs - Johnny Evers and Bob Elliott. The respective league-leaders each featured a young shortstop: Rabbit Maranville in 1914 and Al Dark in 1948. The two distinguished managers

structured right and left handed line-ups. During the stretch drive for the league flag, Stallings relied on his "big three": Dick Rudolph, Bill James and George Tyler while Southworth concentrated on Spahn and Sain, with some help from the weather.

The two departed in terms of their temperaments. Stallings was categorized as "hot-tempered, high-powered [and] superstitious." Southworth, Lieb believed, was "unobstrusive" and "gentlemanly." Billy the Kid's approach to his minions was never to reproach them immediately for a blunder nor before their teammates. The volatile Stallings acted directly and employed an extensive vocabulary of invectives.

Another glaring difference between Southworth and Stallings was with regard to superstitions. Quoting Lieb, "As baseball men go, Billy Southworth is as free of superstitions as any manager the writer has ever contacted." Stallings, on the other hand, was highly susceptible to irrational beliefs. He was a man who would avoid "unlucky" streets as he drove to the ballpark. Another example cited by Lieb: "There was a big crowd at the game the day the Braves emerged from the 1914 cellar and George had to park his car two blocks from the grounds. For the balance of the 1914 season, he parked his car at the exact spot and woe to any car owner who tried to squeeze in ahead of him." Stallings also acquired a "lucky coin" from a friend who had obtained it in Cuba from a "Cuban Father Divine" and held onto it tightly during the championship season.

Whereas Southworth was regarded as a gentleman and sportsman, Stallings' truculence was legendary. When the latter had a conflict with Connie Mack about the use of Shibe Park for pre-World Series practice, he railed in the press at the Athletics' manager calling Mack a "cheap skate" and a "bad sport." When Mack called Stallings to inquire as to the veracity of the newspaper quotes, the Braves leader answered "Yes, I said all of that, and some more. The first thing I'll do when I get out there will be to punch you in the nose."

The two Tribe helmsmen also differed in results. Stallings captured the Series title while Southworth fell short.

World Series Ticket Requests

As the 1948 season progressed and the Braves headed to the top of the pack, personal requests for World Series tickets started to flood the administration office on Gaffney Street. Roger Birtwell, in the October 6, 1948 issue of *The Sporting News*, relayed the story of how a Braves' secretary handled this task.

Miss **Raynhild Stenberg** served as the secretary to Braves presidents and general managers back to the Fuchs regime. She had been born in Sweden and came to America with her father as he pursued work as a woodcarver. After graduating from Somerville (MA) High School, she had intended to embark on a return

trip back to her hometown of Lidköping in Sweden but an offer from Judge Emil Fuchs intervened. The judge hired Stenberg to serve as the secretary to a committee that he led that was lobbying to bring Sunday baseball to Boston. When Judge Fuchs' regular secretary resigned, Stenberg accepted the permanent position.

During one of her first days with the club, Stenberg answered the telephone and the voice on the other end of the line demanded to be connected with Rogers Hornsby. Ms. Stenberg politely responded that the request couldn't be immediately fulfilled since "there is a ball game going on now and Mr. Hornsby is busy. He's playing second base." The caller sharply responded, "This is Judge Landis speaking and I don't care whether Hornsby is playing – or not playing. I want to talk to him immediately." While the commissioner held the phone, Stenberg quickly retrieved the Rajah. Fortunately, the Braves were at bat at the time. Later, she would draw up the trade papers sending Hornsby to the Cubs for \$200,000.

Stenberg was in Judge Fuchs' office when Babe Ruth announced his departure from the team. "Babe was sore at everybody. The only person he said goodbye to in the front office was me." Stenberg would remain at her position through the Tribe's various regime changes.

Braves fans were optimistic that 1948 would be the year that the Braves returned to the Fall Classic. Stenberg remarked, "Ever since the season started last April, applications for World's Series tickets have been coming in. I answered every one of them with a polite personal note. The Braves policy is that it is the fans who are responsible for their existence." Contact came in the form of telegrams, phone calls and bags of mail. They dramatically increased about a week before the Braves clinched the National League pennant. Despite the influx, Stenberg answered them all, informing all parties that it was too early to be accepting ticket requests. When correspondence was addressed to any of the Braves executives, she would add a personal note for that individual. Inquiries weren't restricted to New England. Letters were received from California, Washington and even Alberta, Canada. Telephone calls came in from distant locations as well. Stenberg recalled a twenty minute conversation with a man from the Canadian Northwest – a costly approach that did not produce the desired results. "It would have meant keeping some Greater Boston or New England fan from seeing the team he had supported throughout the year."

There were exceptions to the rule, however. She and Mrs. Perini read a letter from the wife of a terminally ill man. References were provided to establish the validity of the circumstances and tickets were sent along. Other similar situations also received such special treatment.

Various tactics were attempted to obtain the precious ducats. Stenberg received a telephone call from a man claiming to be the cousin of Honus Wagner. She informed the

caller that he'd have to get his tickets through his famous uncle. Stenberg's only regret about her baseball job was that it continued to keep her from making that trip back to Sweden.

The Formula and Price of Success

The Business Section of the *Boston Sunday Globe* of March 2 contained a feature story on recent successful models of building championship sports teams. Among writer Beth Healy's highlighted examples were the Boston Red Sox and the New England Patriots. The author posited that new ownership's impatience at delivering a championship is a large factor in actual results. Had the writer a better sense of Boston baseball history, she might have cited a much earlier example of this premise. The Braves' Three Little Steam Shovels delivered a National League pennant to Boston within four years of gaining control of a perennially losing team, following many of the same steps attributed to their successors.

The 1948 NL flag did not come cheaply for these investors. The tab was estimated at \$3.5 million 1940's dollars by sportswriter Roger Birtwell in the September 29, 1948 issue of *The Sporting News*. The investment began upon the acquisition of control in 1944 by Lou Perini, Guido Rugo and Joe Maney for a sum estimated at three quarters of a million dollars. As Birtwell pointed out, laying out those dollars "merely purchas[ed] the privilege of spending a lot more."

Like the Henry-Werner ownership group of the Bosox and Bob Kraft of the Patriots, the Tribe's new ownership acted quickly and dramatically. One of the Steam Shovels' first moves was to secure the services of an experienced and successful leader. Billy Southworth was lured from the Cardinals for a rich contract that was eventually made even richer, at an estimated \$50,000 per annum. Player acquisitions quickly followed. Infielders Dick Culler and Tom Nelson were picked up from the Milwaukee Brewers for \$50,000 and four players. However, by the time the 1948 season rolled around, Culler was operating a sporting goods store in North Carolina and Nelson was driving a cab in Los Angeles. The contractors enriched St. Louis and earned the nickname of the "Cape Cod Cardinals" through the procurement of Johnny Hopp (\$40,000), Ray Sanders (\$25,000), Johnny Beazley (\$25,000), Mort Cooper (\$60,000), Red Barrett (\$25,000) and Danny Litwhiler (\$20,000). Redbirds owner Sam Breadon purportedly turned down a Braves offer of a quarter million dollars for stars Marty Marion and Whitey Kurowski. The exodus of Missouri-based ballplayers to Northern climes would not be witnessed again in such a magnitude until the Kansas City Athletics – New York Yankees shuttle commenced a decade later.

The Steam Shovels opened their wallets to add talent via other routes as well. Earl Torgeson was picked up from Seattle for \$50,000 and four ballplayers. Bobby Hogue came from Dallas with a price tag of \$20,000, an amount also provided to Cincinnati for the services of Clyde Shoun. An estimated

\$100,000 in cash brought Eddie "The Brat" Stanky from the Dodgers. The Tribe's aggressive recruiting posture brought bonus babies Al Dark (\$40,000), Johnny Antonelli (\$65,000) and Johnny Fetzer (\$7,000) under contract. An important cog on the '48 club was imported from the American League. The perennially poor Browns received \$30,000 for slugger Jeff Heath. The Reds placed a \$20,000 price tag on Mike McCormick. Billy Herman and Don Padgett departed Brooklyn when checks were cut for \$10,000.

The ownership also recognized the need to develop its own talent and systematically built a farm system that unfortunately would flower too late to benefit Braves fans in Boston. The triumvirate led a quest that would result in the outright ownership of seven farm teams. In their most expensive purchase, they fatefully acquired the Milwaukee Brewers for \$270,000. To feed the farm system, management greatly expanded their scouting payroll and provided a private airplane for their director of minor league operations to travel to oversee the progress of prospects.

Similarly to the Sox and Patriots, Braves ownership also made major investments in their physical plant. Lack of funds had resulted in a deterioration of Braves Field that resulted in a somewhat shabby appearance. With their contracting backgrounds, Messrs. Perini, Rugo and Maney set out to restore the beauty of the Home of the Braves, laying out nearly a half million dollars on improvements. They installed lights (\$150,000; a Hub first), a state-of-the-art electric scoreboard (\$60,000), neon-lit foul poles (\$640), sky view box seats (\$60,000) and lowered the infield 18-inches in-season to provide spectators with a better view. Other expenses were incurred to paint the ballpark (\$25,000; not including patrons' cleaning bills resulting from sitting on wet painted seats), tighten and adjust pavilion seats (\$15,000), plant flowers and shrubs (\$1,500), purchase new field coverings (\$7,300), remodel offices and rest rooms (\$20,000) and rebuild the press box (\$11,000). More renovations were on the drawing boards had the success of the '48 season been sustained.

As you can see, what's old is new again in Boston. The Hub's current baseball and football franchises have pursued a model not as novel to this region as some might think. Perhaps the Braves formula might also prove successful to that once legendary basketball franchise, the Boston Celtics, now led by a new and aggressive ownership.

Safe At Home

If you've been among the fortunate to have attended the New England Sports Museum's 40th Anniversary celebration of the '48 NL Champs or of any of Ralph Evans' annual tours of Braves Field, you've heard the tale of what happened to Braves Field's last home plate.

In essence, a neighborhood group of teenage Tribe fans known as the Monford Street

Gang decided to take action upon hearing of the franchise's shift to Milwaukee during the spring of 1953. The heartbroken followers surreptitiously made their way into the Wigwam and dug up home plate. They kept the treasured possession hidden until the 1988 ceremony where a surviving member presented the artifact to the museum.

That accounts for one Braves Field home plate, but there's possibly another one out there, as yet unaccounted for.

On June 25, 1942, the Braves hosted the St. Louis Cardinals in a contest billed as the Army & Navy Relief Game. Proceeds from the gate were donated to military service relief funds. An elaborate pre-game ceremony was staged by the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, including an induction ceremony for 200 volunteers.

Some 25,093 witnessed the Redbirds' Mort Cooper blank the Tribe, 4-0. Cooper, who would join the Braves in 1946, pitched a perfect game until the sixth inning, running his string of scoreless innings to 32. His two-hit performance resulted in his tenth victory and sixth shut-out.

Braves President Bob Quinn reported that \$28,537 was raised by the event. Included in that total was \$200 that resulted from the auctioning off of home plate. The auction took place before the start of the game. Robert Provizier, described as a prominent realty man from Brookline, MA, was the successful bidder. He turned the plate over to his son, David. After the game, a large crowd gathered to witness the excavation of the trophy. Whatever happened to David or his treasured possession remains a mystery. Perhaps one of our members might be able to some shed light on this.

First and Last

George Edward "Duffy" Lewis was a member of the Boston Red Sox's "Million Dollar Outfield," along with Tris Speaker and Harry Hooper. The left fielder achieved further immortality by lending his name to a unique feature at Fenway Park from 1912-33. Lewis' deft playing of the ten foot incline in front of the left field fence led local scribes to dub the area as "Duffy's Cliff." During his eight seasons with the Red Sox, he was a member of three World Series champions. Like a number of Crimson Hose stars of that era, Lewis was eventually shipped to the Yankees and later concluded an eleven season big league career with the Senators.

In 1914, Lewis became the first player to pinch hit for Babe Ruth on the occasion of the latter's debut on July 11th as a Bosox rookie pitcher. The following season, he witnessed the Bambino's initial major league home run on May 6 against the Yankees' Jack Warhop at the Polo Grounds.

After departing the big leagues, Lewis played and managed in the Pacific Coast League (Salt Lake City Bees and Portland Beavers)

where he had performed before coming to Boston. He coached for Brooklyn in 1931 and joined the Braves in a similar capacity under skipper Bill McKechnie the next season through 1936. During the tight budgetary times of the Fuchs regime, Lewis doubled as the team's traveling secretary. When Bob Quinn took over the presidency of the club, he relieved Lewis of his burdensome double duty, shifting him permanently to the front office post. Lewis would retain the title, although his duties varied, through the move to Milwaukee until 1961.

His employment with the Braves positioned him to witness Ruth's 714th homer at Pittsburgh against Guy Bush on May 23, 1935. It has been posited that Lewis was the only person to have personally witnessed the Sultan of Swat's first and last circuit clouts.

As the Braves traveling secretary, Lewis had the reputation of being nattily attired. Author Tom Meany once remarked, "Lewis dresses like a page out of *Esquire*. Joseph of Biblical fame wouldn't be seen in some of the coats Duffy wears. His ties look as though lightning struck a paint factory."

Sadly, at the time of his death on June 17, 1979, Lewis died a pauper, without any known living relatives. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Holy Cross Cemetery in Londonderry, NH. Volunteer caretakers at the cemetery alerted a columnist for the Manchester *Union Leader* of this sad state of affairs and when a column appeared in the paper, funds began to flow in for a marker. A headstone was donated by a Vermont granite company and the Red Sox paid for its engraving. The memorial features the likeness of Lewis in baseball attire along with a portrait of Fenway Park. About 75 Red Sox fans turned out for the dedication ceremony in 2001. One of the attendees remarked, "This might be the closest I get to a World Series in my lifetime. It's spiritual."

In Memoriam

William Thrace "Bill" Ramsey, a right-hand hitting outfielder with the 1945 Boston Braves, passed away on January 4, 2008 in Memphis, TN. He was 87. Ramsey was born in Osceola, Arkansas and played varsity basketball at the University of Florida. In his only major league season, "Square Jaw" appeared in 78 games with the Tribe and batted .292. He broke into organized ball in 1939 with a brief appearance with the Dover Orioles of the Eastern Shore League. 1940 saw him join up with the Class D Northern League Superior Blues, a Brooklyn affiliate. The following season, Ramsey performed for no less than six different minor league clubs – the Columbus Red Birds, St. Augustine Saints, Grand Rapid Colts, Dayton Ducks, Fremont Green Sox and the Asheville Tourists. This odyssey took him to Ohio, Florida, Michigan, back to Ohio, and finished up in North Carolina. As a member of the Cardinals farm system, Ramsey divided the 1942 season in Class B between Asheville and Columbus. His next two seasons were spent on the West Coast with the Sacramento Solons. In

1944, centerfielder Ramsey was the Solons leadoff man and still led the club in RBI. A speedster, he won the PCL stolen base and triples crowns.

Drafted by the Braves, Ramsey occasionally held down the left field spot for the Tribe in 1945. From that vantage point, he was able to witness Tommy Holmes' 37-game hitting streak. Ramsey's only major league homer occurred on September 22 in a 3-2 losing cause against the Giants at the Polo Grounds. After his one year stay in Boston, Ramsey returned to the PCL for the next five seasons, performing for the Solons and the Seattle Rainiers. He led the league in hits in 1946 (216 in 182 games). In all, Ramsey appeared in 1,089 games on the coast, tallied 1,064 hits and swiped 205 bases. He wound down his playing career in 1951-52 drifting among the Rainiers, Kansas City Blues, Beaumont Roughnecks and the Toledo Mud Hens/Charleston Senators. His death reduces the list of Boston Braves believed to be still living to 38.

Richard L. "Dick" Fischer died at 78 on December 29, 2007. He pitched in the Braves farm system in the 1940s. With the Owensboro Oilers of the Kitty League (Class D) in 1946, Fischer recorded an 11-6 record and played with Chuck Tanner. He also performed for the Eau Claire Bears in the Northern League (12-9) and the Jackson Senators of the Southeastern League (6-9). Fischer was a retired Army colonel and a lobbyist for the Amoco oil company.

The wife of **Al Hirshberg**, the late *Boston Herald* sports columnist, recently died in a tragic accident. 89-year-old **Bert Cohen Hirshberg** was killed on February 2 while walking near Symphony Hall when struck by an automobile. She was well known for her advocacy and philanthropy in the Greater Boston area. Boston's sports fans recall her husband, not only for his newspaper work but also for such books as *The Braves: The Pick and The Shovel* and *The Red Sox: The Bean and The Cod*. He also wrote *Fear Strikes Out*, the tale of Jimmy Piersall's travails that was later made into a motion picture starring Anthony Perkins.

Book Report

Sponsored by the Boston Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and led by Editor **Bill Nowlin**, the book project on the 1948 baseball season in the Hub continues to make steady progress. *Spahn, Sain, and Teddy Ballgame: Boston's (Almost) Perfect Baseball Summer of 1948* is targeted for publication this summer by Rounder Books. The writing and reviewing processes are wrapping up and photographs have been assembled for illustrations. Having had a hand in assisting in editing the Boston Braves player biographies, your editor can attest to the fact that this book will be a "must have" for BBHA members. The book represents the significant efforts of a number of writers, including some that are both SABR and BBHA members. As publication draws nearer, we'll be providing you with further details.

Member Memories

In our last newsletter, we included a copy of the front page of the *Boston Daily Record* proclaiming that the "Braves Win Flag." That item prompted member **Frank Murphy** of Hyde Park, MA to write to us. The 79-year-old Boston Braves fan has the original front page framed on a wall in his home. Frank shared the following memories with us:

Any ball hit into the stands was put to use in the next neighborhood game. It would be taped and retaped. We would stay in the left field pavilion and do battle with other groups to try and retrieve the ball. Everybody would try to block out the opposition so the fastest guy on our side would go for the ball. The crowd was very light in the left field pavilion. The right field pavilion always had a good crowd. Mostly the gamblers. When we sat out in the Jury Box, we would ask the players in the visiting bullpen for a ball. They made us work for it. They would point out some girl up in the stands and have us run a note up to her. How innocent we were!

Getting to the ballpark was no problem. Boston El, Allston bus to Babcock Street in Brookline and run down the street, across Commonwealth Avenue and into the park. I lived close enough to both Fenway Park and Braves Field that I and my pal (a solid Red Sox fan) would get out of school and run to the afternoon games. They used to open the gates after four innings. Another bus to Kenmore and streetcar up Comm Ave into the alley behind the auto stores. It dropped you right in front of the gate at Gaffney Street.

I can't even remember my first game. It had to be around 1940. Went with the older guys from our corner. All great sports fans. You had to swear allegiance to either the Braves or Sox. Why I picked the Braves, I will never know. I was at the first night game (satin uniforms) and Jackie Robinson's first game here. I was at the first game of the '48 Series and the sixth (another foot on the drive to the left field wall by Masi and there would have been a seventh game). I got into both games by using a clean up crews' pass. The year Bob Elliott had in 1947 set the stage for '48. I could not believe we had made it. I went to the Sox playoff game with Cleveland with my Red Sox pal. I had mixed emotions. We won; they did not, but no City Series.

I went to Braves Field so many times that I could not count. I even played my high school football games there. It was the home field for the city schools. We dressed in the visitor's dressing room in left field, pot belly stove and all. I attended the games up to 1950. The Army called in January, 1951. I was looking forward to '53. Then that black day when they said from Florida that they were Milwaukee bound. I never could bring myself to root for them or any other team. Today they have an awful brand of baseball: DH,

middlemen, set up, closer, etc. No imagination. I can still see Casey Stengel stalling for time to take advantage of the Sunday curfew. What memories!

We also heard from **Vince Fandetti** of Vernon, CT. He missed our last reunion as it conflicted with his 76th birthday party. Vince described himself as a Providence kid who followed the Braves from his Rhode Island home. Vince was also a hurler of some notoriety. "In 1948, as a pitcher in the Providence Amateur League, I once struck out 19 guys in a nine-inning game. I thought I was hot stuff and I went to a Braves tryout in Cranston Stadium. I guess they didn't want a good curveballer who was 5'7" and 142 lbs!"

Do you have any memories that you'd like to share with the membership? Please jot them down and send them in!

Sittin' In The Jury Box

Popular reunion attendee **Gene Conley** was featured in *The Boston Sunday Globe* of January 13. Stan Grossfeld wrote an article entitled "Conley had twice as much fun." In describing his baseball and basketball accomplishments, Conley jokingly told the reporter, "I had to wear a jockstrap year-round." A recent pacemaker recipient, the 6'8" two-sports star resides in Clermont, FL with his wife of 56 years, Kathryn. She wrote her husband's biography, *One of a Kind*. We hope that our good friend is able to be back with us this fall.

Among a number of accolades garnered by the *Boston Phoenix* at this year's New England Press Association Awards Dinner was a first place citation for sports reporting. The highlighted piece was Mike Millard's "Home of the Braves," a May 11, 2007 nostalgic tribute to Boston's "other" baseball team. We previously alerted you to that article in our Summer 2007 newsletter.

In anticipation of the Braves clinching the 1948 National League pennant, Boston's acting mayor, Thomas J. Hannon waived all anti-noise ordinances in the city for the day. Fans were allowed to celebrate boisterously and were joined by city personnel as Hannon directed all fire sirens to be sounded for the event.

Ray Bradford, a former Boston Braves farmhand, achieved a milestone in barber history by clipping hair for six decades. The 77-year-old continues to work four five hour days a week at the Shores and Bradford shop in Salisbury, MD. Bradford estimates that he's delivered some 234,000 haircuts over his lengthy career. He pitched in the Tribe's minor league chain in the late '40s and early '50s. With the 1948 Bluefield Blue-Grays of the Appalachian League, Bradford rubbed shoulders with Johnny Cooney, Jr., the longtime coach's son, and ballplayer-later-turned-actor, Larry Pennell. He spent 1949 with the Federalsburg Feds of the Eastern Shore League. In 1950, hurling for the Hagerstown Braves in Class B ball, Bradford faced a young outfielder with the Trenton Giants by the name of Willie Mays. A woodworking

accident that resulted in the loss of a fingertip ended his playing days.

With Billy Southworth entering the Hall of Fame this year, a movement is developing to recognize another member of the Boston Braves family. In a January 4th *New York Sun* piece, "Four Industry Legends Who Belong in Cooperstown," Evan Weiner presented his arguments in favor of the inductions of **Lou Perini**, Marvin Miller, Judge Roy Hofheinz and Charlie Finley. Unfortunately, in supporting Perini's entry, Weiner places his emphasis on Perini's bold shift of the franchise to Milwaukee rather than his significant accomplishments in Boston.

After former Commissioner of Major League Baseball **Bowie Kuhn** passed away on March 15, 2007, his widow discovered a vast array of memorabilia stored in many areas of their home. Louisa Kuhn has decided to move to a smaller residence and dispose of her late husband's collection through an auction house. Proceeds will be directed toward Kuhn's favorite charities. Of interest to Braves fans is a historic baseball. The late commissioner possessed one of the three home run balls that the Sultan of Swat clubbed with the Tribe against the Pirates at Forbes Field on May 25, 1935 during his one last moment of on-field glory.

A nonprofit cemetery association in Lancaster, NY fell into hard times, forcing the Lancaster Rural Cemetery to become a ward of the town and its taxpayers. As reported in *The Buffalo News* of January 28, the 45-acre burial ground is the final resting place for a number of notables, including Revolutionary War veterans. Residing among its 11,000 graves is an impressive monument to a former state senator and town supervisor, "Handsome" George A. Davis. His son, George, Jr. is also buried there. **George Allen "Iron" Davis, Jr.** had a brief major league career as a pitcher – 36 games over the 1912-15 seasons. He debuted with the New York Highlanders in 1912. While with the Miracle Braves in 1914, Davis became one of only seven Boston Braves hurlers to pitch a no-hitter. The Williams College graduate accomplished this feat in the second game of a doubleheader against the Phillies on September 9. In the 7-0 victory, Davis walked five while two Phillies reached base on errors. Three of the walks occurred in the fifth inning but Davis fanned one batter and got the pre-Ruthian home run hitter, Gavvy "Cactus" Cravath, to ground into a double-play to end the threat. During off seasons, he attended Harvard Law School, quitting baseball at 27 when he earned his degree. Davis practiced real estate law in Buffalo until his retirement in 1958 and received national repute as an amateur astronomer. He ended his life at 71 by hanging himself at his Buffalo home on June 4, 1961.

As reported by Roger Mooney in *The Bradenton Herald* of January 22, 2006, Reunion attendee **Chuck Tanner** has returned to the Pittsburgh Pirates as a senior adviser. Tanner, who originally signed with the Boston Braves in 1947, is back with the club that he managed to a

World Series title in 1979. He had held a similar senior post with the Cleveland Indians last season. Tanner remains among a very small number of individuals with ties to the Boston Braves still active in major league baseball. At 78, Tanner donned a Bucs uniform to attend a Pirates fantasy camp at Pirates City in Bradenton, FL in January. Tanner remarked, "Baseball keeps you young."

Unless something extraordinary happens, the 83 year history of spring training in St. Petersburg ended upon the conclusion of the Tampa Rays Grapefruit League schedule. The Rays are leaving for the greener pastures of Port Charlotte in 2009 without a successor interested in playing at Progress Energy Park (a/k/a Al Lang Field). The Boston Braves/Bees called St. Pete their winter home from 1922-37, sharing the city with the Yankees from 1925 until the Bees' departure to Bradenton in 1938.

Prior to Nolan Ryan's ascendancy to the presidency of the Texas Rangers, the last Hall of Fame pitcher to hold that lofty title was **Christy Mathewson** of Judge Fuchs' Boston Braves, from 1923-25. Mathewson died four days after the 1925 season ended.

The Boston Globe of February 5th contained an editorial on the "Unsung pioneers of sport." The remarks were composed in reflection of the commemoration of Jackie Robinson's birthday at a Fenway Park ceremony. Organized at the behest of the Fenway Park Writers Series, the event was designed to honor those who pioneered in eliminating the Hub's uneven playing fields. The editorial singled out the contributions of our own **Sam Jethroe** for a special accolade. The tryout that the "Jet" and Jackie Robinson had at Fenway Park in 1945 was described as a "farce." "Jethro [sic] integrated Boston baseball and gave the lie to the notion that the city could not tolerate a black ballplayer. He proved it was only the bigoted Red Sox front office that would not." While such recognition is appreciated by fans of Boston's "other" team, misspelling Jethroe's name three times in the editorial was an unfortunate reminder of the lack of media respect that helped drive the Braves from Boston. We're grateful that we were able to honor Sam Jethroe in person at our reunions before he passed away.

According to past reunion guest **Rich Marazzi** in an article that he penned for the January 11, 2008 edition of *Sports Collectors Digest*, pitcher **Carl "Oisk" Erskine** might have been a mound-mate of Johnny Sain and Warren Spahn in Boston. Erskine was drafted into the Navy and served time at the Boston Navy Yard. He had the opportunity to work out at Braves Field under the watchful eye of Billy Southworth. The Tribe skipper thought that Erskine's style resembled that of Johnny Beazley and that the serviceman had the potential to make the club's roster within a couple of years. Even back then, Erskine's heart was with Brooklyn. GM Branch Rickey swooped into Boston, bringing in the underaged lad's parents to sign a \$3,500 bonus contract. When finished with his military obligations, Erskine proceeded

to show his potential in 1946 pitching for Danville in the Three-I League. However, upon the conclusion of the season, he found himself a free agent because Rickey had violated baseball's rules in signing an active duty serviceman. Some believed that the Braves had informed on the Mahatma. They were interested in signing the classy right-hander but faced competition from the Red Sox, Phillies, Pirates and Dodgers. Erskine ultimately turned down higher offers and rejoined with the Dodgers for another \$5,000, perhaps becoming the only player to receive two signing bonuses from the miserly Rickey.

It was nice to see a portrait of Braves Field in 1948 leading off Bill Goff's 2008 annual fine art 12-month ballpark calendar. This year's theme was "Fall Classic Hallowed Ground: Scenes from the Postseason." The Wigwam was featured in January and was a reproduction of artist Andy Jurinko's 1993 lithograph.

Once again, **Arnold Bailey** has written a fine summary of our reunion for *Sports Collectors Digest*. His article was featured in the February 8 edition. The reunion program cover portrait of **Johnny Sain** by **Mark Waitkus** and the **Roland Hemond** insert by **Ronnie Joyner** were reproduced to illustrate the story.

According to advertisements in the *Fitchburg (Mass.) Sentinel* of July 27, 1946, you could get a package deal from the Fitchburg and Leominster Street Railway Company to attend a game at Braves Field. For the princely sum of \$3 per person, one could obtain not only round trip passage to and from the Wigwam but also a reserved seat at the ballpark. The ad proclaimed: "No fuss – no parking worries – and a reserved seat waiting for you. Why not get up a party?" On July 30, the Braves were playing the Pirates "under those famous lights." To put this deal in perspective, a restaurant ad on the same page offered either "roast stuffed native turkey" or "roast prime ribs of beef" with all the fixings for \$1.25. Oh for the good old days!

Recipients have been named for two awards named after members of the Boston Braves family. The Boston Chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America gave the Judge Fuchs Award for Long and Meritorious Service to Baseball to **Dick Berardino**. Berardino has been with the Red Sox organization for forty years in various capacities, concentrating on player development. The Oklahoma Sports Museum bestowed the Warren Spahn Award for the outstanding left-handed pitcher in major league baseball on **Carsten Charles "C.C." Sabathia**, of the Cleveland Indians and the 2007 AL Cy Young Award winner, although some in Boston might disagree about the latter honor.

With Gene Conley, Boston had a Braves-Celtics connection. A Tribe link to the Bruins might also have happened but for an unfortunate incident. 17-year-old **Don Gallinger** was called up to the Boston Bruins in 1942 and became part of their youthful "Sprout Line," along with future coach "Bep" Guidolin. The Phillies and the Red Sox had pursued him

but their offers had been less attractive. His successful entry into the NHL was interrupted by wartime service in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Upon resuming his career, Gallinger led the Bruins in scoring in 1945-46. With his interest in baseball still burning, Gallinger was invited to join the Boston Braves in 1948 in Florida for a tryout with the Hartford Chiefs after the hockey season had concluded. The invitation was revoked when he was handed an indefinite suspension by NHL president Clarence Campbell. Gallinger had been linked to a Detroit bookmaker and, after a seven month investigation, was found to have bet on games involving the Bruins and to have given out information on the state of his teammates' injuries. The suspension was ultimately lifted in 1970 but it was too late to resume careers in either sport.

The first postwar professional football game in New England was held on September 5, 1946 under the lights at Braves Field. The exhibition contest featured the Boston Yanks versus the Chicago Bears. A large gathering of 34,496 fans witnessed the Sid Luckman-led Chicagoans defeat the home team, 24-17. The Yanks were coached by Herb Kopf, the brother of **Larry Kopf**, who performed for the Braves at the tail end (1922-23) of his ten year big league career. The club played another night-time pre-season game on September 17 at the Manning Bowl in Lynn (MA) against the Long Island Indians. Other than their September 30th home opener against the Giants under the Wigwam's illumination, the Yanks played their local NFL pigskin contests in daylight at Fenway Park. The league cancelled Boston's franchise after the 1948 season due to continued financial losses.

The cover photo of the *Orlando Sentinel's* 2008 spring training preview section featured Atlanta Braves pitcher **John Smoltz** donning a 1919 Boston Braves jersey.

With Fidel Castro's departure as head of the Cuban government, some have speculated that an influx of baseball talent would be reaching U.S. shores soon. One of the first Cubans to achieve success in the big leagues was **Dolph Luque**, "The Pride of Havana." The right-hander broke in with the Braves for a couple of brief trials in 1914-15 before moving on to the Reds, Dodgers and Giants over the course of a twenty-year career. He appeared the 1919 and 1933 World Series. Luque's best season was with Cincinnati in 1923 when he went 27-8 with a 1.93 ERA.

**Happy 91st Birthday (3/29)
Tommy Holmés!!**

Thanks!

In addition to the submissions noted previously, we'd like to provide a tip of the cap to the following contributors: **Mort Bloomberg, Jack Wholley, Al Rocci, Midge Landry, Jim Maranville, Rev. Gerald Beirne, John Materazzo, John Ahokas, Hank Dever, Gary Mastas, John Lombardini and Jerry Wright.** Please keep your reminiscences, recollections and clippings coming. **Bob Brady, Newsletter Editor, 25 McAndrew Road, Braintree, MA 02184-8245.**