

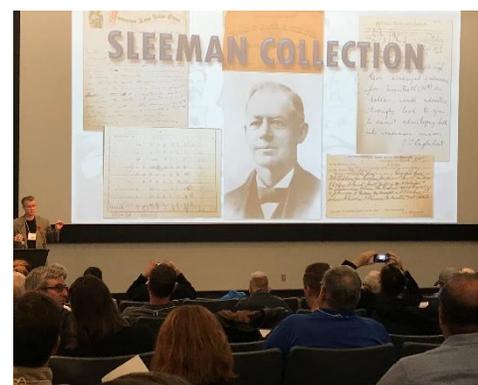
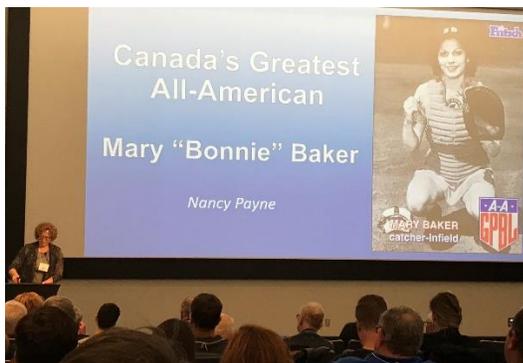
Some 70 cranks attended the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Canadian Baseball History Conference in London, Ontario on the weekend of November 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The Conference venue, Museum London, offered a spectacular view of the Forks of the Thames River, and overlooked Labatt Park, the world's oldest ballpark.

Local historical flavour was provided by a London jeweller who loaned a large ball of lightweight metal proclaiming "Baseball Today!". The ball had been hung outside the store, at a prominent downtown intersection, whenever a game was scheduled at nearby Tecumseh Park (now Labatt Park). The store has been operated as a jewellery outlet, under various ownerships, for decades, and was at one time owned by the family of Thomas Gillean, an outfielder with the champion London Tecumsehs of the 1877 International Association. The ball therefore represents a possible link to London baseball's (and Labatt Park's) earliest days.



Leading off for the presenters was **Nancy Payne**, who told the story of Regina, Saskatchewan's Mary "Bonnie" Baker, the best known of the 64 Canadians who played in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The first female manager in professional sports, and the first female broadcaster in Canada, Baker was a pioneer who was featured in *LIFE* magazine and the television show *What's My Line?*, and was the inspiration for Geena Davis's character in the film *A League of Their Own*.

**Martin Lacoste** then presented a summary of the extensive baseball-related holdings of the Sleeman Collection at the University of Guelph. President and manager of the Guelph Maple Leafs, George Sleeman formed the first professional Canadian baseball league, the Canadian Association, in 1876. The collection's letters, telegrams, photographs and miscellanea



provide a rare glimpse behind the scenes of the operation of an independent (then minor league) team in the early days of organized baseball.



**Anne Chamberlain** next provided a historical overview of the InterCounty Baseball League, a semi-pro organization that has operated throughout southwestern Ontario for the past 100 years. The league has been home at times to Ferguson Jenkins, Jesse Orosco, Wilmer “The Great” Fields, and future Prime Minister of Canada Lester B. Pearson.

Former SABR President **Larry Gerlach**, billing himself as Free Agent History Professor, then delivered the feature presentation of the Conference, a special session on the lengthy career of Guelph’s Bob Emslie. During his 45 years in baseball (1880 – 1924), first as a player, then as an umpire, Emslie experienced first-hand the development of both the modern game and the umpiring profession. The presentation featured innumerable anecdotes, some humorous, some decidedly not so.

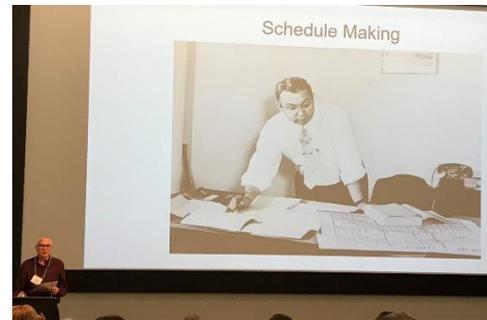


**Gary Gillette**, Chair of SABR’s Detroit Chapter, provided a detailed assessment of the ManDak League, a haven during the 1950s for numerous former Negro League stars and lesser players. Analyzing its overall calibre of play and comparing the rosters of some of its better-known teams, Gary concluded that the League might be considered the equivalent of a High A classification today.

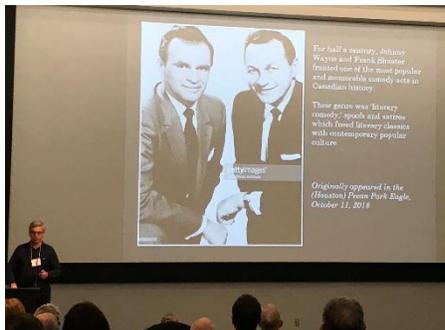


**David Simmons** then provided background on his father Harry’s contributions to Canadian baseball, and in particular Harry’s involvement in the establishment of the Montreal Expos in 1969. Harry Simmons was an administrator, historian and

rules expert who worked for the International League and the Commissioner's Office for decades. His vast collection of papers and historical research is one of the most important holdings of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.



**Maxwell Kates** entertained with an overview of the baseball-related humour of the Canadian comedy duo Wayne and Shuster, whose parodies and sketches alluded to such diverse themes as Yogi Berra, Astroturf and Prohibition Stadium. A highlight was the video broadcast of their famous skit *Shakespearean Baseball*.

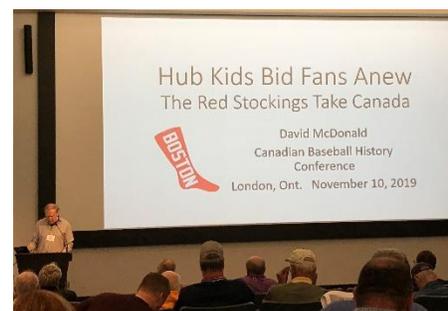


SABR's Hanlan's Point Chapter President **Allen Tait** next summarized the ownership history of the Toronto Blue Jays. The paper is part of an ongoing SABR initiative to develop and archive an ownership history of every major league baseball team.



**Warren Campbell** provided a fast-paced journey across Canada, describing innovative approaches to promotion and the building of teams and leagues at various levels. Featured innovators included four Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame inductees; individual episodes were in turn humorous, inspiring and perplexing.

**David McDonald** described the exhibition tours into Canada embarked upon by the champion Boston Red Stockings during the summers of 1872 through 1874. Results of the games laid bare the immense talent gap between the champions and the local amateurs, with only the Canadian champion Guelph Maple Leafs providing a modicum of opposition.

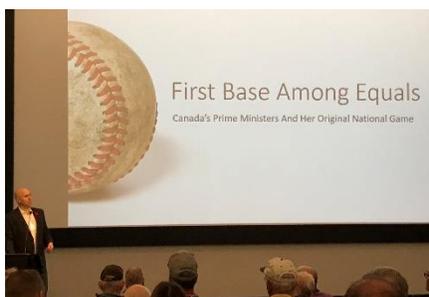
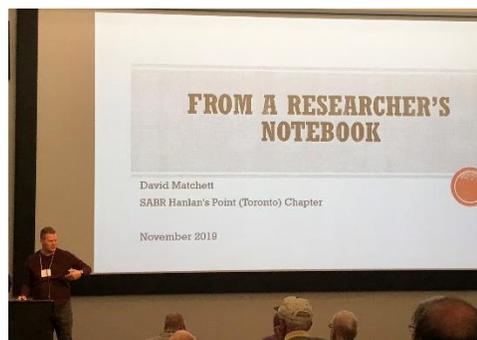




Kitchener, Ontario resident **Benno Rosinke** took us back to 1911 in his home town, then named Berlin, for the story of the 1911 Berlin Green Sox of the newly formed Canadian Baseball League. Smartly bedecked in the Green Sox stirrup hosiery, Benno summarized the team's dominant season and ignominious end. The Green Sox star center fielder was future

superscout Joe Cambria.

**David Matchett** took a page *From a Researcher's Notebook*, merging the concepts of long-time SABR member Al Kermisch's annual contribution to the *Baseball Research Journal* and ESPN's *Pardon the Interruption*. David was on the clock to deliver 6 Canadian-themed research tidbits, each jarringly concluded by the jangling of Anne Chamberlain's cowbell.



From the earliest years after Confederation until at least the First World War, baseball was referred to as Canada's national game. Baseball fan and politico **Stephen Dame** uncovered the links between baseball and Canada's heads of government, from John A. MacDonald to Lester B. Pearson, from Pierre to Justin and many in between.

**Matt Rothenberg**, discussing Royals and Montreal hockey royalty, looked at those involved in the ownership or administration of the Montreal Royals, and at the same time involved in a similar capacity with (or playing for) any of Montreal's three major league hockey clubs. Focus was directed specifically at Sam Lichtenhein, J. Ernest Savard, Louis-Athanase David, and Emile Bouchard.



Finally, **Bob Barney** and **Riley Nowokowski** investigated the effects of London's great floods of 1883 and 1937 on the usability and configuration of Labatt Park.



Particular emphasis was placed on the positioning of home plate, and on the duration of the forced inactivity in each case, these being the two issues cited by critics of the ballpark's claim to being the world's oldest. The study puts to rest the argument that the park moved its location, and demonstrates that it suspended activity but

briefly.

A special feature of the Conference was a bus trip to the newly renovated and expanded Museum facility at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in nearby St. Marys. The Hall's Director of Operations, Scott Crawford, directed a tour of the Museum, while long-time SABR member Andrew North presented the new reference library that serves as the physical home of the Centre for Canadian Baseball Research.



Andrew North  
St. Marys, Ontario