

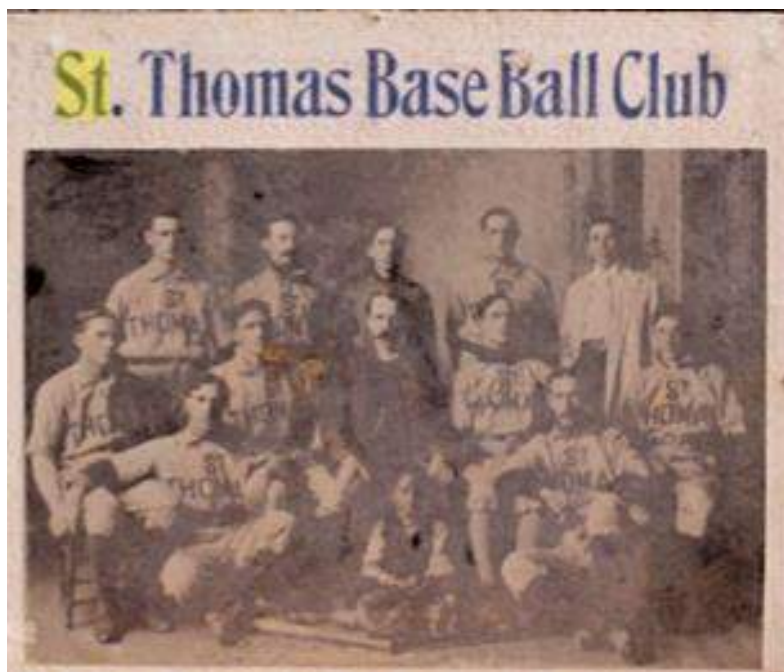


Bob Emslie: Umpire Unmasked

The illustrious history of baseball in Canada is evident in the 124 individuals, three teams, one league and an historic 1838 game enshrined in the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. Today, I want to talk about a member of the class of 1986, Robert Daniel Emslie. Although no Canadian achieved longer--and greater--distinction in baseball than Emslie, little is known about his life or career. That is not surprising. There is only one full biography of a major league umpire, Bill McGowan, American League 1925-1954. I learned why during the past eleven months researching a biography of Emslie; extensive perusal of dozens of newspapers for more than fifty years continues, but today I can offer few scenelets, statistics, and assessments of his baseball odyssey--- principally his major league umpiring career.

Robert Daniel Emslie made his planetary debut on January 27, 1859, in Guelph, the fourth son and seventh of eight children born to Alexander and Mary, Presbyterian immigrants from Aberdeenshire, Scotland. (Emslie is a Scottish habitational surname meaning “woodland clearing.”) In Guelph, and in London after the family moved there in 1868, young Bob caught baseball fever. It is not surprising as he grew up in Ontario, the game’s historic Canadian seedbed.

Bob started out as an outfielder, but, captivated by the curve balling artistry of Fred Goldsmith of the London Tecumseh he became a pitcher. He started playing for pay in 1880 with the Harriston Browns, receiving room and board as a hotel clerk and \$1.50 to \$1.75 per game, leading the Browns to the Canadian League Championship. In 1882 he joined the St. Thomas Atlantics. The



team photo is interesting in several respects. That it appears on a cigar box lid indicates the fame of the team and popularity of baseball in Ontario. And the presence of a black batboy not only illustrates that superstition and social insensitivity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led many teams to use physically challenged people (dwarfs and hunchbacks) or racial minorities (blacks and

Indians) as batboys or mascots --human “good luck” charms—but also calls to mind the history of blacks in Ontario, many being fugitive slaves. In 1858 American abolitionist John Brown met with blacks in Chatham—Ferguson Jenkins’ hometown-- and drew up the constitution for the free republic he tried to create in the U.S. by force of arms in 1859.

Back to baseball. On May 24 the Atlantics went to New York to play exhibition games. Expecting the trip to last a week, Bob packed only one shirt and one pair of socks, but the excursion proved so profitable that they played 28 games through the eastern United States. When the tour ended in August, he

turned professional with the Camden, New Jersey, Merritt, earning \$150 a month. The next year the team disbanded on July 20, whereupon Bob became a major leaguer with the Baltimore Orioles of the American Association.

In 1884, with a devastating curve ball, he went 32-17 with a 2.75 ERA, striking out 264 while walking only 88. The famous cricket player, English-born Spencer Oldham, attending his first baseball game commented: "That fellow Emslie was a terror. I saw the balls break in the air--start straight, shoot down. They just curved around and fooled the batters." (Because of that outstanding season, he has become a member of *Out of the Park Baseball*, a fantasy/historical league).

In 1885 Emslie regressed—badly-- winning 3, losing 10 with a 4.29 ERA. Released by the Orioles on July 24, he then pitched 4 losing games with Philadelphia before heading home. He later explained what had happened. "When I was pitching in the American Association I suddenly felt a stinging sensation in my shoulder. This thing went on for some time, until no matter what kind of a ball I threw, it gave me great pain, and then I knew my arm was dead." (It might have been a torn rotator cuff or a labral tear of the cartilage where the humerus bone joins the scapula--shoulder blade.)

After comeback attempts with Toronto in 1886 and Savannah in 1887 failed, Bob inadvertently launched a second baseball career. On July 1, 1887 Dominion Day, he went to Toronto to watch an International League game. When the umpire failed to show because of illness, the rival managers asked him to substitute. He did so well that the owners of both teams urged him to umpire for rest of the season; he did, and the next year became a regular member of the four-umpire staff at a salary of \$1,250, noting: "It was purely a matter of accident how I came to follow umpiring as a means of livelihood."

In 1890 he joined the American Association thereby becoming the first full-time Canadian-born major league umpire. (Tom Gilleen umpired 29 games in 1879 and 2 in 1880.) He started 1891 in the Western Association, but in August returned to the majors with the National League, where he remained until 1924.

Whatever he thought about umpires and umpiring during his playing days, his views certainly changed after donning the blue serge suit. Umpiring in the

tumultuous 1890s was exhausting and inherently difficult. A single umpire calling balls and strikes from behind home plate, then moving behind the pitcher with men on base invariably led to controversial decisions. Umpires were routinely criticized, cussed, bullied, badgered, spiked and spit upon by players, while fans, then called "cranks", hurled bottles and all manner of debris at the arbiters. Physical assaults by players and mobbings by fans and were commonplace; police escorts were familiar and welcome sights to the men in blue. Club owners and league officials actually promoted rowdiness to boost attendance. Umpires were cast as cultural villains.

Emslie inevitably had his share of difficult encounters with players and managers. Most confrontations were verbal, but not all. He tossed Pittsburgh's Honus Wagner twice --once for throwing his glove across the field at him and again for registering disapproval by "scornfully grasping his nose with his thumb and index finger."

Some were violent. In 1897 Chicago's Bad Bill Dahlen dragged him for some distance by the collar --"the most vicious attack on an umpire that year." On July 4, 1900 in Cincinnati, the Giants' Jack Doyle slugged him, resulting in a fistfight. Emslie, after inflicting considerable damage on the peppery first baseman's countenance, dusted off his clothes, then swept off the plate with his whiskbroom, and umpirically ordered play resume.

Hall of Fame pitcher Christy Mathewson said Emslie would "listen to a reasonable argument, the sort of umpire who rules by the bond of good fellowship rather than by the voice of authority." As a result, players respected his ability and integrity so came to his aid in time of need. In 1899 irate Brooklyn fans jumped upon the field and mobbed him after he called out Tom Daly at home plate in a 2-1 loss to Boston. Emslie laid one of his tormentors out cold with a blow to the jaw before Dahlen and Daly shielded him from the crowd. The next day the Brooklyn fans gave him a resounding cheer when he appeared on the field. And in 1907 when fans at the Polo Ground poured onto the field bent on assault, Giants pitcher Joe McGinnity ran from the dugout, threw an arm around Bob, "occasionally warding off a stray wallop that some angry fan aimed at the umpire's head" until police arrived, firing shots in the air to restore order.

Emslie understood kicking was part of the game and admitted: "Umpires make mistakes the same as other people and it is only natural that there should

be a protest if the player gets the small end of a decision, but I will put him out of the game just as soon as I feel that he is talking back too much or uses language which he should not use." His first ejection was July 21 1892, Jack Crooks of the St. Louis Browns; his second came two years later when he tossed New York Giant Jack Doyle and fined him \$5 for "a series of foul names unfit for publication." He was initially reluctant to eject players, but the abuse wore thin; from 1895 to 1901 he tossed several every year—eight in 1897.

Then there were the unusual games that tried an umpire's patience. In 1896 the Cleveland Spiders came to bat in the bottom of the ninth trailing the Chicago Colts by two runs. After two outs, the potentially tying runs got on base, whereupon Chicago's player-manager Adrian "Cap" Anson complained it was too dark to continue. (Games began at 3:00 and there were no lights until the mid-1930s.) When Emslie ordered play to continue, the Chicago team laid down on the field while Anson argued. After play resumed, Cleveland scored a run and had the tying run in scoring position, whereupon Anson "again signaled the Colts to lay down on the diamond." Emslie again ordered the players back to their positions, but they did not do so "for fully five minutes." When play finally resumed, a Cleveland triple plated the tying run and put the winning run on third base. Anson's men then "took another nap on the diamond." Whereupon Emslie, citing darkness, called it a tie game.

The next year, the Colts came to bat in the top of the ninth trailing the New York Giants 7-5. Bob again ejected Anson when he persisted on arguing it was too dark to continue. When play resumed, Chicago scored five runs to lead 10-7, but had only eight players for the bottom of the ninth. Whereupon, Chicago pitcher Dan Friend, who had gone in to shower, took the field wearing his baseball cap and a bathrobe. The Giants protested that Friend was not in uniform. Exasperated, Emslie, again citing darkness, called the game, the score reverting to a 7-5 New York victory.

Emslie's umpiring career was unique in one respect: he became bald to the point where he began to wear a wig or toupee. It has been said that the hair loss was due to nervous stress of umpiring, but it actually began in 1885 in Baltimore and surely was caused by genetics. Umpiring was hard enough, but Emslie, extremely sensitive about wearing a wig, endured additional grief over the hairpiece. In 1897, he let Jack Doyle argue until the player earned ejection by

suggesting Bob get a hair restorer. The next year, an irate Doyle grabbed Bob's hairpiece and took off with it. Ejected and fined \$20, he said: "It was worth the laughs." During an argument John McGraw patronizingly suggested "in a voice loud enough for fans in the front row to hear," that Emslie fasten his toupee with a hairpin. Bob, crimson with anger, ejected and fined his tormentor, calling it "one of the most brutal cases of 'show up' he had ever experienced."

Words, however nasty, didn't hurt long, but baseballs often did. Chicago sportswriter Hugh Fullerton recalled when on August 13, 1894 a foul ball struck Emslie "over the heart. The pain was excruciating. His face grew white and he set his teeth together and resumed work. Three balls were pitched after he was hit. He called them all clearly. Then he collapsed, falling as if dead, and was carried off the field unconscious." Emslie later recalled: "I received so many blows on my anatomy that it would take a mathematician to count them up. Suffice it to say that I have walked or hobbled on the field to umpire a game when my body was covered with bruises."

Enduring the rough-and-tumble, no-holds-barred mentality that dominated the game in the last part of the 19th century required a love of the game and a stoic demeanor. Compensation was meager, usually less than \$5 a game; the league paid train fare, but the umpires had to pay their own travel expenses and buy their uniforms and equipment (did so until 1970). Consequently, umpire staffs were notoriously unstable because of incompetence, abuse and paltry pay. In 1895, 59 umpires called games.

Bob Emslie was one of the very few who not only endured, but also prospered in the umpiring profession as indicated by three newspaper accolades in 1896. To the *Sporting Life* he was "the best umpire on the staff, without peer as the 'caller of balls and strikes.'" The *New York Clipper* said "few men are better known in baseball circles than Robert D. Emslie, who is generally perfectly cool and calm in the performance of his duties, and is pretty nearly always correct in his decisions." *The Sporting News* called him "the best arbiter in the National League, discharging duties in an honest and fearless manner."

Given his reputation, from 1892 to 1897 he umpired the post-season Temple Cup series between the league's first and second-place teams. (The famous painting of an 1894 Temple Cup game at the Polo Grounds, "A Base Ball



Match,” may be the finest work of Henry “Hy” Sandham, painter and illustrator born in Montreal in 1842.)

Working conditions aside, the duties of an umpire were physically and emotionally taxing. They began work in March and, without vacation breaks, continued until the season ended in early October. The heat and humidity of July and August was debilitating, as were extra inning games. During his last 14 seasons Emslie had at 52 double digit games—8 went 15 innings, three 16, two 17 and one 22.

He displayed remarkable endurance, routinely working about 90% of the scheduled games; in 1908 and 1916 he alone umpired the entire 156 game schedule. Amazingly, he failed only eight times to complete a game. He was replaced four times after being struck by the ball, three times because of illness, and once when he left after the eighth inning to catch a train home due to a family illness.

The umpiring profession advanced noticeably after the National and American Leagues found peace in 1903. Compensation increased. In 1910 the top salary in the National League was \$3,000, with only four umpires, Emslie surely

one, earning more than \$2,000. Umpires also received greater on-field authority and support, and benefited from the adoption of the two-umpire system, official in both leagues in 1912.

While two umpires made life easier, Emslie had to learn how to switch from standing to crouching behind home plate, call pitches from the “slot” between catcher and batter, and use hand signals. National League umpires, because of Bill Klem’s personal preference, began using a chest protector under their coats, but Bob continued to use the outside protector. He was an innovator, the first to wear shin guards when he showed up in 1900 wearing cricket pads.

One thing remained the same: there seemingly was no end to the complaining and arguing, bickering and berating. Physical assaults dramatically declined, but the verbal abuse increased as John McGraw, arriving in 1903 as player-manager of the New York Giants, passed on his abrasive, pugnacious, vitriolic behavior to his team. (I have examples I cannot share.) On May 9, 1903 Emslie had the distinction of giving McGraw his first ejection. All told, Emslie tossed McGraw 14 times and Giants players 43 times. Rowdiness was much greater in the National League than the American, so the number of Emslie’s ejections spiked— 8 in 1902, 14 in 1903,



20 in 1904, 15 in 1905, 10 in 1908.

The joy of watching exceptional players and participating in notable games countered the contentiousness. For a home plate umpire, a no-hit game is a thrill despite mounting pressure to call pitches correctly. Emslie had four of them. His first one, August 16, 1893, was historic -- the first no-hitter after the pitching distance had been moved to sixty feet, six inches. As the field umpire in four other no-hit games, Emslie actually worked eight no-hitters, the National League record until broken by Frank Secory in 1969.

He was also involved in two record-setting games, both at the Polo Grounds in New York. In the second game of doubleheader on August 14, 1901, the Giants' George Davis hit a fly ball down the left field line that struck one of the two policemen standing in the corner by the fence on the shoulder and bounced into the bleachers. Emslie correctly ruled it a home run since before 1931 a ball that bounced out of play in fair territory was a home run. It is the only time in baseball history that a home run was hit off of a spectator.

On September 28, 1919, Bob was on the bases when the Giants beat the Phillies 6-1 in the first game of a doubleheader. The game took 51 minutes, to date still the fastest game in major league history.

There was another, unofficial record. In 1914, tired of bench jockeying, he tossed Vic Willis. When Boston players began laughing, he went to the dugout to enforce his mandate only to find Willis sound asleep—the only time a sleeping player was ejected.

Alas, Emslie is forever remembered most famously (or infamously) for his role (or non-role) in the game between the New York Giants and Chicago Cubs at the Polo Grounds on September 23, 1908, the so-called “Merkle Boner” game. With two outs in the bottom of the ninth, score tied 1-1, rookie first baseman Fred Merkle--at nineteen the youngest player in the league making his first start of the season--after what appeared to be the game-winning hit to center field, headed for the Giants' clubhouse instead of first advancing to second base. Cubs second baseman Johnny Evers obtained a ball—which ball and from whom is unclear—and, touching second base, told Emslie that Merkle had been forced for

the third out. Emslie had not been watching Merkle so asked home plate umpire Hank O'Day if he had reached second base.

O'Day said no, so Emslie called Merkle out, thereby ending the inning and negating the winning run. As the Giants raged in protest and thousands of fans milled around the field, the league's two most experienced umpires called the game a tie because it had become too dark to continue. The league president subsequently ordered it to be replayed if the two teams ended tied at the end of the season. (They did -- for the first time in major league history; on October 8 the Cubs won the replacement game 4-2 and went on to defeat the Detroit Tigers four games to one in the World Series.)

Emslie has unfairly been criticized for failing to notice Merkle didn't reach second base. In his report to the league president, Emslie said that he couldn't make the call because he "had to fall to the ground to keep [the batted] ball from hitting me." O'Day's account said Emslie had been watching the play at first base. Both are true: Emslie did fall or duck to avoid the batted ball, but was properly looking toward first base since that concluded the play. Watching to see if Merkle touched second was the home plate umpire's duty.

Because of the Merkle incident, John McGraw dubbed Emslie "Blind Bob." Emslie, an accomplished trap shooter, took offense. Several stories circulated as to how he demonstrated his visual acuity to the Giants manager. One version is that he showed up one afternoon during a Giants' practice with a rifle—not to shoot the Giants manager but to demonstrate his eyesight. After placing a dime on the pitcher's rubber, he retreated behind home plate, took aim, and sent the coin "spinning into the outfield." Another version says he put the dime on a matchbox on second base. (I have first-hand verification of neither.) On another occasion, he challenged McGraw to a contest—shooting at apples set on second base. McGraw declined, sarcastically quipping: "Maybe you can see apples, but you can't see baseballs."

Players and fans have ever questioned the umpire's eyesight, usually in jest but really in Emslie's case. Once regarded as the best in the league at calling balls and strikes, he found himself increasingly criticized for his work behind the plate, many of his ejections from 1902-1908 coming after ball-strike calls. Sports writers joined players in alleging that his eyesight had diminished, although one of them

conceded that the belief he was “suffering from a loss of vision” seemed not to make sense given his performance in trapshooting contests each fall. But the two sports are markedly different in terms of visual perception. Calling pitches requires split-second, precise linear judgment, while trapshooting involves gauging horizontal distance over which to spray a field of pellets. Emslie was aware of the problem, so beginning in 1903 he increasingly worked more often on the bases than behind home plate; in 1909 he split time almost evenly between home plate and first base, but in 1910 worked only 2 of 145 games behind the bat.

After the annual meeting of National League club owners in December 1910, it was erroneously announced that Bob Emslie “has outlived his usefulness on the playing field” and so would be “retired on a pension owing to failing eyesight.” But, given increasing criticism, it was decided to have all League umpires undergo an eye examination before the opening of the next season. Emslie, like his compatriots, received a positive vision report, but thereafter essentially stopped calling balls and strikes, working only the bases. During the next fourteen years he never umpired home plate in 6 seasons, and did so only once in 5 others.

Was not umpiring the plate Emslie’s proposal or a league directive? I have so far found nothing from league owners and administrators, fellow umpires, or newspaper reporters that discussed the reason. If Emslie’s vision was substandard, it could have been corrected by wearing glasses. But umpires then did not wear glasses, mistakenly taken as a sign of unacceptably poor eyesight. (On April 24, 1956, the American League’s Frank Umont became the first major league umpire to wear glasses on duty. Although there was no adverse reaction from players, Yankee manager Casey Stengel quipped: *“They rob you for 20 years then they put on glasses.”*)

Concerns about his work behind the plate may have accounted for the lone conspicuous omission in his long and distinguished career: he never umpired a World Series. He understandably would not have been assigned once he stopped umpiring home plate in 1910, but there were six previous Series. He must have regretted not receiving the recognition—and extra pay—that came with umpiring baseball’s premier event.

At the end of the 1912 season, in which he worked only 48 games as a replacement, Emslie considered retiring. No doubt still hurting from the attempt to retire him and being restricted to umpiring only the bases, he was also probably tired of being away from family for seven months, the grueling work schedule, and the persistent arguments. Moreover, his good friend and umpiring comrade, Hank O'Day, left in 1912 to become manager of the Cincinnati Reds. He intended to purchase his hometown St. Thomas Saints of the Class C Canadian League, but backed off when warned that ownership of a minor league club would cost him reappointment as an umpire. As late as February 1913 the directors of the St. Thomas Club still hoped to hire Emslie as the team manager. But he chose to continue umpiring, perhaps because O'Day decided to return to umpiring in 1913.

Despite his dedication to umpiring and love for the game, it must have been difficult for Bob Emslie to accept his inability to umpire home plate. It took supreme confidence in ability and sense of self-esteem to become a one-dimensional base umpire. Since baseball had been his adult life--umpiring since 1887-- he understandably wanted to carry on as long as possible.

But why did the league retain an umpire who was unable or unwilling to call balls and strikes and thus make only base running decisions? His unprecedented retention was testimony to his reputation for unquestioned integrity, unparalleled knowledge of the rules, ability to handle personnel and run games effectively, and his exemplary performance as a base umpire. O'Day said: "I honestly think his work on the bases is the best of the league. There was less kicking made on his decisions than on any other man who worked with me. In fact, there was hardly any." Pittsburgh's Honus Wagner agreed, calling him "the greatest of all the umpires on base decisions. Some kind of instinct seemed to guide him on close plays. His strong point, though, was his fine judgment on plays not covered by the rule book. He saved many a bad situation by making a quick decision on some point not covered by the rules. Nine times out of 10 the players would feel satisfied that he had done right." In 1914 *Sporting Life* commented: "Bob Emslie is along in years, but he has a clear eye and the pep to get around and sees the plays." That explains why he worked a nearly full schedule from 1913 to 1920.

Despite his limited role, Emslie was widely heralded –revered, actually -- as The Dean of National League umpires. On August 12, 1916, a celebration marking his twenty-fifth season as a National League umpire was held between games of a doubleheader in Brooklyn. Surrounded at home plate by players from both teams, he received from league President John Tener a bag containing \$500–twenty-five double Eagle gold coins worth \$20 each, one for each year of service—and from Bill Klem, a diamond stickpin on behalf of his fellow umpires.

Bob Emslie effectively retired as an active umpire after the 1921 season,



becoming the first former umpire to hold the official position of supervisor of league umpires -- a fitting tribute to his long and distinguished service, but also recognition of the respect he enjoyed from fellow arbiters. In addition to supervising the league’s staff, helping train first-year umpires, and evaluating new recruits, he served occasionally as a substitute or third base umpire for special games. He took the field for the last time on September 28, 1924, umpiring both ends of a double header between the Cincinnati Reds and St. Louis Cardinals at Sportsman’s Park in St. Louis, at 65 years and 8 months the oldest man ever to umpire a major league game.

Emslie was gratified that the league recognized his legacy and that he still had something to contribute to umpiring, but he missed the game action. Accordingly, for the three years 1925-1927 he umpired spring training games in Florida, sometimes behind the plate, and called the games for the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Robins as they traveled through the south en route to opening day. An incident, recalling embarrassments of yesteryear, occurred in Nashville. Zack Taylor, Dodger catcher, recalled: “Emslie was umpiring when Bob Meusel tore in from third and I blocked him off the plate. When Meusel hit, all three of us went pin wheeling. The collision shook Emslie loose from his toupee. Emslie was so embarrassed that he forgot to put on his mask. All he put on was his wig. Dazzy Vance shouted from the bench: “Forget about the wig, ‘Baldy’; if you really want to stay pretty, you’d better put on your mask.”

Eventually Bob Emslie called it quits and headed to his home at 51 Elgin Street in St. Thomas. Ever the accomplished athlete, he remained physically active in retirement, in summers playing golf and during winters bowling and curling. He was also an active member of the Trinity Anglican Church and two Masonic lodges: Talbot Lodge No. 44 and St. David's Lodge No. 302. He enthusiastically cultivated a new hobby—refinishing old furniture—and almost daily headed downtown, a mere block from home where he chatted with merchants, ever puffing on his beloved cigar.

Of course his life continued to revolve largely around baseball, as he frequently attended local games, coached youth teams, and provided instructions to area umpires. Ever the scout, he recommended Jack Graney to the Chicago Cubs. With his lifetime engraved silver pass, he made frequent trips to watch regular season and World Series games.

And he surely reflected with pleasure and satisfaction upon his forty-eight years in baseball, flipping through his mental album of memories of ten years as a professional player and thirty-eight years as an umpire. He had witnessed fundamental changes in the game as major league baseball evolved from a single league in 1882 to multiple circuits, finally solidifying with the present two in 1903, amid rapidly changing rules (ball-strike counts, pitching underhand to overhand and from 50 feet to 60 feet 6 inches). The only constant was the ninety-foot diamond, prompting Hall of Fame sportswriter Red Smith to comment: "Ninety feet between home plate and first base may be the closest man has ever come to perfection." On a personal level, he worked with some of the finest arbiters in history. Four of the ten umpires in the National Baseball Hall of Fame were his contemporaries: Bill Klem, Hank O'Day, Tom Connolly and Billy Evans. He watched great players and performances, considering Christy Mathewson of the Giants the greatest pitcher and Honus "Hans" Wagner of Pittsburg the best all-around player.

A flood of memories came when his old umpiring pal, Hank O'Day, visited St. Thomas, when in 1932 he went to Cincinnati for an "old-timers" game, and in 1936 when he umpired a benefit game at London's Tecumseh Park. (His old pitching idol, Fred Goldsmith, came from Berkley, Michigan.) When O'Day died in 1935, Emslie traveled to Chicago, serving as an honorary pallbearer. Thereafter he hung out with Bill Byron who lived in Ypsilanti, MI. Known as "The Singing

Umpire," Byron occasionally announced decisions in rhymes, as when a batter squawked on a called third strike:

“Let me tell you something, son,
Before you get much older.
You cannot hit the ball,
With the bat on your shoulder.”

Life became increasingly difficult following the death of his wife in 1937, and the onset of poor health. In his eighty-fourth season, Bob Emslie was called out on April 26, 1943, due to infirmities of old age. He is interred next to his wife in the West Avenue Cemetery.

Bob Emslie was of the best arbiters in baseball history. Christy Mathewson considered him “one of the finest umpires that ever broke into the league.” Honus Wagner agreed, ranking Emslie and Bill Klem as the best umpires he had seen. In 1941, Isaac Falk, preeminent authority on the National League, said the circuit’s “greatest umpires are Bill Klem, Bob Emslie and Al Barlick.” (Klem and Barlick are in Cooperstown.) Statistically, Emslie is firmly entrenched in the major league record book. He is tied for 4th in years of service (35), and ranks 4th in home plate games worked (2,358), 7th in ejections (141) and 14th in the number of games umpired (4,230).

Since his reputation, service and statistical records approach or surpass umpires in Cooperstown’s Hall of Fame, he also may have been so enshrined had he worked World Series games and not stopped umpiring home plate. He was, however, among the 39 non-players named in 1946 to the Hall’s “Honor Rolls of Baseball”—de facto enshrinement for outstanding figures then not eligible for official induction.

Bob Emslie, proudly represented in his umpiring equipment in the Elgin County Museum in St. Thomas, eventually found a place in baseball Valhallas. In 1986 he was immortalized as a member of the fourth class inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and in 2004 was enshrined in the Guelph Sports Hall of Fame. (He unquestionably should be in the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame in Toronto and the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in Calgary.) And he is one of only three umpires for whom a baseball facility has been named. (John Ducey, minor league umpire, Edmonton, Alberta, and Ernie Quigley, National League umpire,

Lawrence, Kansas, are the others.) The lone survivor, Emslie Field in St. Thomas, is a fitting, living memorial. Would that the players who take the field, the umpires who supervise the action, and the spectators who watch the games recall the distinguished career of Canada's pioneering Man in Blue. Robert D. Emslie: honor to his name.

Larry Gerlach
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