

The Harry Simmons Collection at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame

Harry Simmons was a baseball historian, writer, and authority on the rules of the game. He served the International League and the Commissioner's Office in an administrative executive capacity for more than 40 years. While his lengthy career and his extensive collection of baseball materials could each be the subject of a presentation themselves, the focus of this paper will be on two pieces of historical significance from his collection.

Early Research

Having attended Sunday afternoon games in New York with his father, Simmons developed a deep interest in baseball's history, statistics and rules. In his 20s and 30s, he spent considerable time in the New York Public Library reading accounts of early matches in old newspapers. Simmons wanted to learn and understand the game's history and development so that he could fulfil his ambition of becoming a baseball writer. Upon discovering that the history books were vague and largely uninformed with regard to the early days of the sport, he delved into *The Sunday Mercury*, *Spirit of the Times*, and other sports publications of the 1850s and '60s. It was there that he was thrilled by the romance of the early games as described in the colourful prose of the era.

Simmons was the first to compile won-lost records for 19th-century National League pitchers, information not published in the pre-1900 annual guides. His results, compiled by checking box scores of each game as shown in *The Sporting News* and *Sporting Life*, were published over several issues of *Baseball Magazine*. While he was in the army between 1942 and 1945, he was able to continue his research at the Library of Congress in Washington. Here he compiled batting records for pitchers from the National League's inception in 1876, debuts of prominent players, rare fielding gems, and various items for ***The Sporting News Record Book***. He contributed original work to most of the top baseball writers of the day, including Taylor Spink, Leonard Gettleson, Hy Turkin, S.C. Thompson and Lee Allen.

Baseball Career

During the course of his research, Simmons developed a friendship with baseball historian Ernie Lanigan, who at the time was Information Director for the International League. When Lanigan became curator at the National Baseball Hall



of Fame, Simmons was offered Lanigan's position by League President Frank Shaughnessy, and joined the International League staff in 1946. One of his first tasks was to develop the League schedule, a job at which he became adept. In March of 1953, the Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee, and National League President Warren Giles called on

Simmons for some eleventh-hour changes to the NL schedule. Simmons continued to develop both the NL and AL schedules yearly from 1954 until 1982, as well as schedules for numerous minor leagues and leagues in various other sports. Of course, he accomplished all this without the aid of computers.

Another of Simmons' regular League duties was to hold conferences with the League's umpires to discuss rules and review controversial calls. Simmons soon realized from these conferences that the umpires were not as well-versed in the rules as might be believed. More specifically, he began to note the unusual situations that had arisen, and on which he had been consulted. In 1949, he submitted a collection of these situations to *The Saturday Evening Post* under the title "So You Think You Know Baseball". The series became very popular, running until 1961, and being published later in *Baseball Digest*. In 1962, the series was published under the same title in book form, and sold half a million copies.

In 1966, Simmons moved from the International League to the Commissioner's Office as its chief administrator, remaining in that post until his retirement in 1981. His official duties there included supervision of player control by teams, co-ordination of the two leagues, retirement plans, and player service time and pension records. A general resource to any Commissioner, owner or General Manager who might need advice, he served as the primary speech writer for the many functions attended by Commissioners Eckert and Kuhn.

Through his more than 40 years of service to baseball, Simmons earned the friendship and trust of virtually everyone associated with the management and ownership of the game. He is pictured at right with a few congenial associates: Frankie Frisch, Simmons, Bill Veeck Jr. and Warren



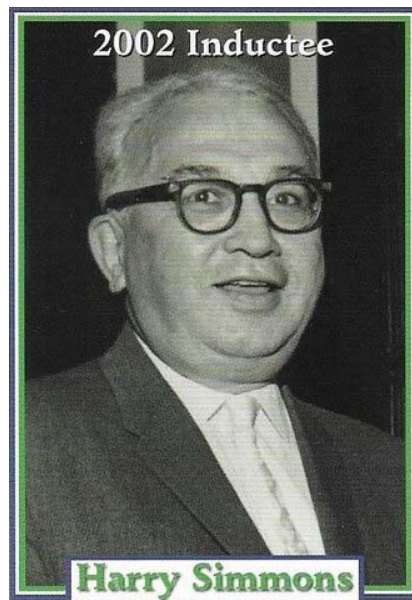
Giles. At the 1979 baseball winter meeting in Toronto, he was named “King of Baseball”, a prestigious title bestowed annually upon an individual who has made a significant contribution to Major League Baseball. In 1990, he was awarded The SABR Salute, given to a member of the Society for American Baseball Research whose research has contributed significantly to baseball knowledge. Among his many other accomplishments was a long essay on Baseball which was printed in the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1968 and for many years thereafter. And in 1951, he was called to testify before the Celler House Judiciary Committee probing monopoly influences on organized baseball; he was an expert witness on the history of the reserve clause.

Canadian Influence

Simmons moved to Montreal, where the International League had its head office, in 1953, when he became League Secretary. He was to remain a resident of the greater Montreal area for more than 40 years. When the Montreal Royals folded in 1960 the League office moved back to New York, but Simmons retained his residence in Montreal, splitting his time between the two cities until his retirement.

Simmons became a popular figure in Montreal baseball circles, giving frequent speeches to local community groups. He made many close friends among the writers and sports figures in both Montreal and Toronto. In the latter half of the '50s, League President Shaughnessy frequently became ill, so that Simmons was essentially running the League by himself. Long-time *Montreal Gazette* columnist Dink Carroll commented “Harry rolled the snowballs and Shag [Shaughnessy] threw them”.

Simmons' involvement in the Montreal baseball scene had influence far beyond the International League. He was in charge of public relations for the League for the 1946 season, and was therefore instrumental in managing the press appetite for Jackie Robinson's ground-breaking season with the Royals, and for laying much of the groundwork for Robinson's acceptance in the community. Later, he served as an advisor to Gerry Snyder and John McHale in their pursuit of a National League franchise for Montreal. In recognition of his far-reaching contributions to baseball in Canada, Simmons was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 2002.



The Collection

Over the course of his life in baseball, Simmons amassed a wealth of baseball-related materials. He collected thousands of items concerning the development of the early game. After Simmons' death in 1998, the extensive collection was donated to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame by his son David. It is an eclectic and diverse collection, including voluminous correspondence files, various baseball memorabilia, and a major collection of baseball publications and books. Some highlights:

- Press passes
- World Series pins
- New York Clipper weekly 1881 – 1883, 1897 – 1898
- Baseball Magazine monthly 1908 -1951

- Who's Who in Baseball 1912, 1916 – 1979

The press passes and World Series pins are on display in the Hall of Fame's Museum. The *Baseball Magazine* set includes the rare first issue from May 1908, and the *Who's Who in Baseball* set includes the first edition of 1912. Other publication highlights include:

- Reach Guides 1888 – 1939
- Spalding Guides 1885 – 1941
- Spalding Record Books 1908 - 1924
- American League Red Books 1937 – 1981
- National League Green Books 1936 – 1982
- Baseball Bluebooks 1918 – 1981
- Sporting News Baseball Registers 1940 – 1978
- Sporting News Baseball Record Books 1925 – 1941
- Sporting News Baseball Guides 1942 – 1981

These sets are not quite complete, and their conditions vary, but their scope is impressively comprehensive nonetheless.

The collection also includes hundreds of hardcover books, some of them first editions. Many of these are noteworthy for their personalized inscriptions to Simmons, from such figures as Ernie Lanigan, Harry "The Hat" Walker and John Heydler.

The remainder of this paper focuses on two specific pieces from the collection, pieces that are fruits of Simmons' research into early baseball.

The Scoresheet

I am a volunteer at the Hall of Fame's Museum. I'm also a baseball book collector. One of my duties in the Museum, therefore, is cataloguing donations of books and magazines. In the course of so doing for the Simmons collection, I came across a softcover reprint edition of Seymour Church's book *Base Ball*, originally published in 1902. Inside, between pages 24 and 25, was a single sheet

of paper, a photocopy of a handwritten page. Page 24 of the book is devoted to Henry Chadwick, baseball's keeper of the flame, prolific chronicler of the early game, proponent of baseball as a healthy pastime for America's youth, and inventor of the box score. Page 25 describes a set of three games played in 1858 called the Fashion Course Games.

Baseball in 1858 was still in its developmental stages. It had been, up to that time, largely a gentleman's pastime, played by young men in clubs as outdoor exercise. Through the late 1850s and into the 1860s, as teams and their backers became more competitive, the influence of professionalism increased, until some teams became completely and overtly professional in 1869. The Fashion Course Games were a key juncture in this development. They were held at the Fashion Race Course in New York, a horse racing venue with an enclosed, horseshoe-shaped grandstand, and they came to represent three important firsts.

The games were the first all-star games, pitting selected players from the various New York-based teams against their counterparts from Brooklyn. The fact that the organizers had to pay rent for use of the grounds posed a problem, however: how to cover the costs? The solution was a bold one: charge admission. The venue's enclosed shape, with controlled entrance and egress via gates, facilitated the collection of admission fees, so the bold experiment was tried for all three games. It was a smashing success, as thousands paid without complaint to witness the matches. The games provided the first evidence that baseball might prosper as an economic enterprise.

The third match of September 10th, 1858 represented another first, in addition to the all-star concept and the paid admission. The pitcher at that time was largely a facilitator; in fact, batters had been able to specify whether they wanted a pitch delivered high or low by the pitcher. If such a pitch were fairly delivered, and in the requested zone, but the batter did not offer at it, there was no penalty. In an effort to remedy this situation, the umpire was then authorized to call a strike on the batter. The third game of the Fashion Course series was the first in baseball in which the "called strike" rule was applied (three times).

On a related note, earlier this year (2016) an important document entitled "The Laws of Baseball" was unearthed. Published in 1857, one year before the Fashion Course games, it outlines the rules of the game, incorporating many features fundamental to today's game, including nine innings to a game, nine players to a side, and ninety feet between bases. The document was authored by Daniel L. "Doc" Adams, a player and executive with the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club and its predecessor, the New York Base Ball Club. It provides tangible evidence that Adams was the man responsible for defining the game as we know it today. Until now, such honour has been bestowed upon Alexander Cartwright, known accordingly as "The Father of Baseball". Cartwright is an inductee in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, where his plaque mistakenly credits him with the inventions now known to be due to Adams. And the umpire who invoked the called strike rule in the third Fashion Course game? Doc Adams. (Incidentally, "The Laws of Baseball" sold at auction for 3.26 million U.S. dollars.)

What does all this have to do with Harry Simmons' photocopy? Here it is:

Fashion Course Sep 10th 1858

All-Brooklyn Nine										All-New York Nine									
Innings										Innings									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	HL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	HL
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	HL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	HL
2	0	0	2	0	2	4	4	4	27	7	0	0	3	3	2	5	3	6	27

ENTR
This p
WM
ENTR

Note the inscription "Fashion Course Sep. 10th 1858" across the top, and the designation of the All-Brooklyn and All-New York Nines. Clearly, this is a

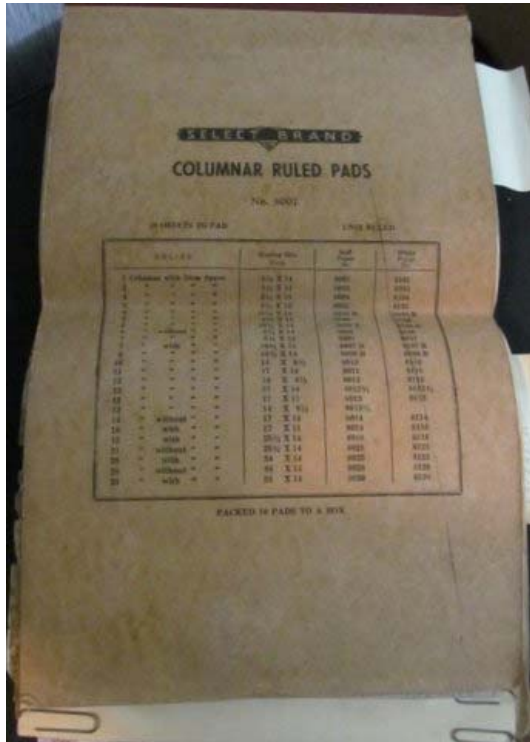
scoresheet from the last of the three Fashion Course games. A comparison of the player names and the final score (18 – 29) with the full box score given in Church's book confirms the identification. But this begs some obvious questions. Where had the copy come from? And is this Henry Chadwick's handwriting?

To determine the provenance of the scoresheet, I took it to the 2015 session of SABR's annual 19th Century Committee Conference in Cooperstown. I presented it to the assembled experts, and learned that the handwriting was indeed that of Chadwick, baseball's premier early historian. John Thorn, the Official Historian of Major League Baseball, declared that the page had been copied from a scrapbook in the Henry Chadwick Collection at the New York Public Library. The scrapbook, or at least certain pages of it, had been stolen some years ago, and has yet to resurface.

The presentation of the scoresheet caused considerable stir. One attendee was Marjorie Adams, who was thrilled to finally see a scoresheet of the game in which her great-grandfather had played such a key role. John Thorn's opinion, knowing Harry Simmons' reputation as a researcher, was that there were likely other items of historical significance in the collection. He was correct.

The Box Scores

The next discovery of note was a ruled notepad, thus:



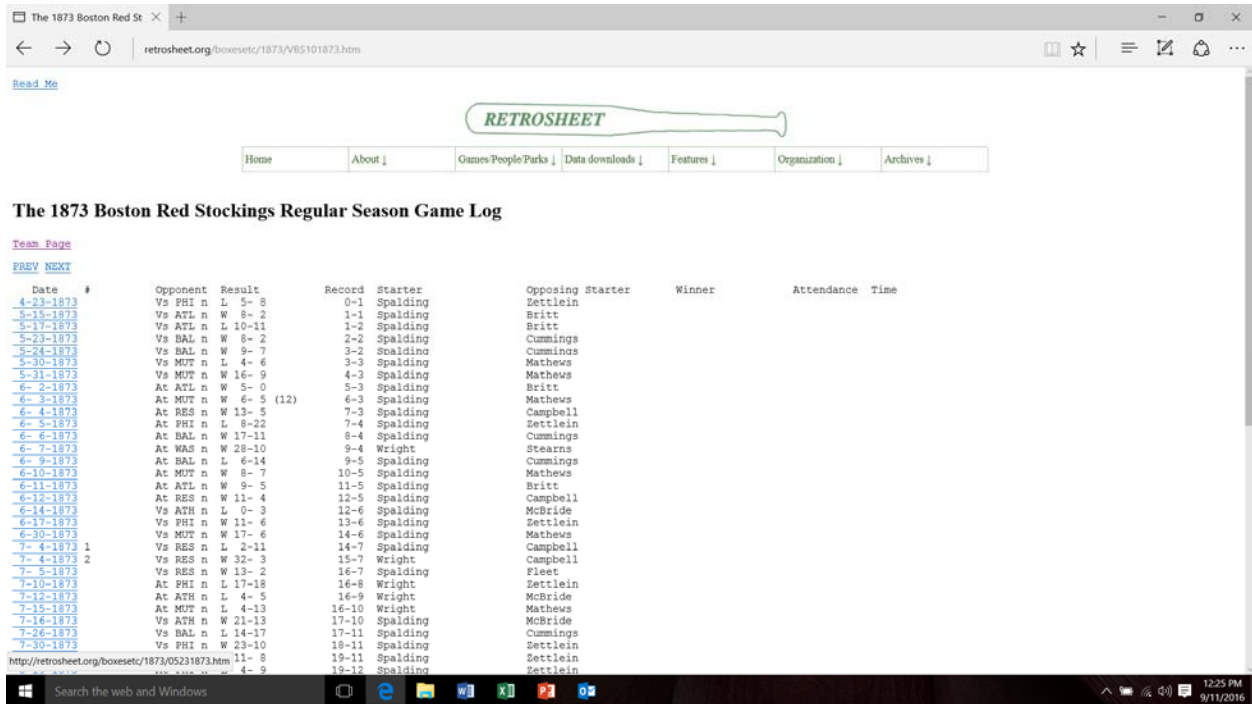
The notepad was filled with Simmons' handwriting, in pencil. Each page was blocked into a 2x7 array of rectangles; each of these rectangles appeared to be a game summary of some sort. A full sample page is shown on the next page. Closer examination reveals that each rectangle is in fact a rudimentary box score; amazingly, there is one such box score for virtually every game played in the last four years of the five-year history of the National Association.

The National Association was the first professional baseball league, operating between 1871 and 1875, the five-year period immediately preceding the formation of the

National League in 1876. Whether it should be classified as Major League is a subject of some debate among historians, although there is no disputing the quality of the players. The Association's dominant team, the Boston Red Stockings, used only 22 players in their 5-year run, but 5 of them are now enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Simmons' notepad was accompanied by two separate sheets of paper. On one he notes the various newspapers that served as his sources. On the other he summarizes, by year, those games for which he is missing box scores. For the 1873 season, he is missing a single game only.

which hosts thousands of boxes, most of them accompanied by play-by-play information. But Retrosheet lists nothing for 1873 (at least publicly). For comparison purposes, consider the first game played that season by the champion Boston Red Stockings: April 23rd, at home, against the White Stockings of Philadelphia. Here's what Retrosheet has for that game:



They list the score as 5-8, with starting pitchers Spalding for Boston and Zettlein for Philadelphia. Of note is the blank space to the right of the [4-23-1873](#) date; normally this space would contain a link to the associated box score (and possible play-by-play).

What Simmons has for this game can be seen in rectangle #6 in the top row of the previous page's image. For ease of legibility, that rectangle is reproduced in plain text on the next page.

GWright SS	0 0 2 4
Barnes 2B	0 1 4 4
Schafer 3B	0 0 1 1
Leonard LF	0 0 3 0
JWhite C	0 1 3 1
Spalding P	1 3 0 4
HWright CF	2 2 0 0
Manning 1B	1 1 4 0
Birdsall RF	1 1 0 0
	5 9 27 14
Cuthbert LF	3 2 3 1
Addy 2B	1 2 0 0
Malone C	1 1 4 2
Meyerle 3B	0 2 4 3
Devlin SS	0 1 1 1
Bechtel RF	0 1 1 0
Treacey CF	0 0 4 1
Mack 1B	2 2 9 0
Zettlein P	1 1 1 1
	8 12 27 9

Boston April 23
 BOS 000000401 5
 PHI 100030004 8
 Ump Ferguson
 TB B10P13
 BoE B5P2
 LoB B10P7
 BoB B3
 Time 2:00
 2000

All players and their positions are listed. The four columns to the right of each player show his runs, hits, putouts and assists in that order. Note that the totals give the 5-8 score, and each team's 27 putouts. We see that the game was played

in Boston, the Red Stockings apparently having chosen to bat first, with umpire Ferguson presiding. Each team's game totals for total bases, left on base, and bases on balls, follow. Time and attendance are given last. A most comprehensive and detailed summary.

Conclusion

The Fashion Course game scoresheet and the National Association box scores are two highlights of the Harry Simmons Collection that have historical significance. John Thorn was likely correct in his opinion that there may well be others. The correspondence portion of the collection, for example, has not yet been examined in detail. It may yield other noteworthy finds.

Sources

Information regarding Harry Simmons' early life and baseball career was taken primarily from correspondence between Simmons' son David and the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. The correspondence is part of the Simmons Collection in the Museum.

Andrew North
November 2016