



Searching for Spud

Tracking down the missing Canadians in the
record book

By Justin Mckinney



What is a Missing Player?

As of October 2025 - 23,615 players have appeared in the Major Leagues (about 3400 Negro Leaguers)

A missing player is any player for whom we lack a death date (and who can be reasonably assumed to have passed away)

From 1871-1915 - there are 131 such players

Majority are quite obscure (1 game careers / fill-ins / injury replacements)

Handful of cases where player had substantial pro career and has not been found - four Canadian players are among the missing men

The Four Missing Canadians

1. **Ralph “Spud” Johnson** - 1889-90 AA, 1891 NL - Led 1890 AA in RBI
2. **Jonathan Morrison** - 1884 AA, 1887 NL - long minor league career
3. **George A. Walker** - 1888 AA - only major league win was a shutout
4. **Bill Magee** - 1897-1902 NL - won 16 games in 1898 for Louisville

Ralph “Spud” Johnson



Born 1856 in Upper Canada to William and Mary Johnson

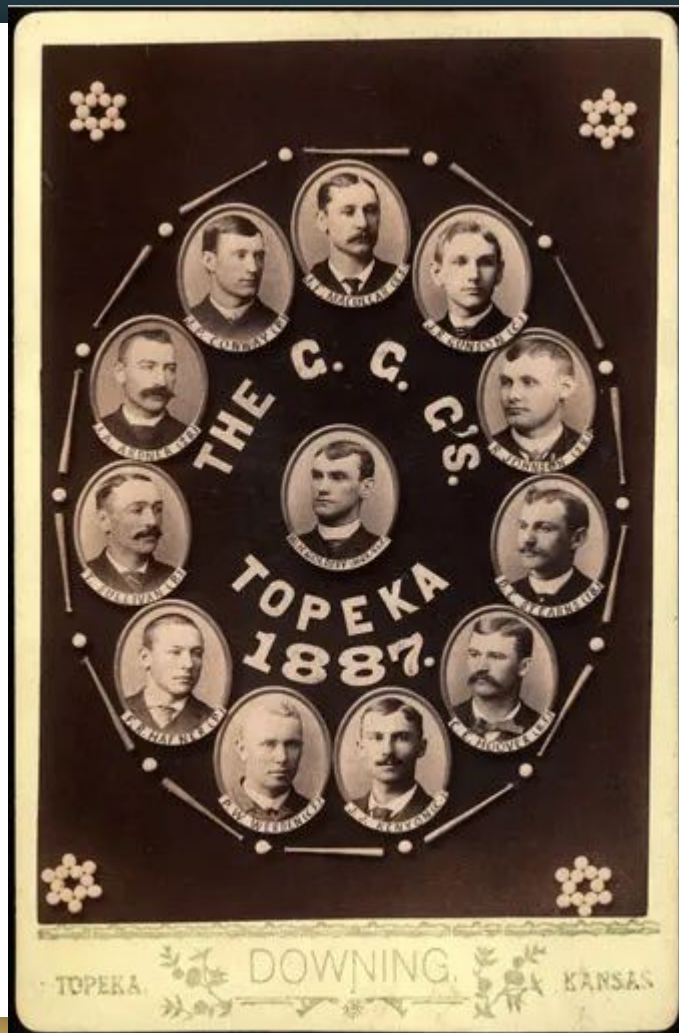
Living in Seneca Township on 1861 Census

Family relocated to Chicago by end of the Civil War

Baseball career began in Chicago City League around 1878

Shotgun wedding in 1882

Worked in insurance industry and played for trades league teams in Chicago throughout 1880s



Late Bloomer

1887 - 30 year old Johnson began his pro career with Topeka of Western League - hit .434

Split time between 3B and outfield - defensively limited

1888 - Kansas City - led Western Association in batting - hit .342

1889 - Given a shot in AA with Columbus - 32 year old rookie

Manning's "Select" Ball Team, 1888.

KANSAS CITY, MO.



ARDNER, 2nd b.

CAMPO, c. f.

CONWAY, p.

WELLS, c. & l. f.

MANNING, s. s. & Capt.

REYNOLDS, c. & l. f.

CARTRIGHT, 1st b.

GUNSON, c.

JOHNSON, 3rd b.

SWARTZEL, p.

HASSAMAER, r. f.

Sold by F. C. RINGO.

Major League Career

1889 - hit .283/.355/.370 and scored 91 runs for Columbus of AA

1890 - in AA weakened by Players League defections, Johnson hit .346/.409/.461 and led league with 113 RBI (was not a stat at that point)

1891 - joined Cleveland in NL (much stronger league) and hit .257/.319/.309 with just 46 RBI and was released in August

1892 - played a couple of months with Rochester in Eastern League, but returned to Chicago to care for his ailing mother

Post Baseball

1892-1905 - Johnson never played pro baseball again - his wife died sometime in 1890s

Took on many different roles:

- **1895** - running a saloon - described “as fat as a whale”
- **1896** - he founded a sporting newspaper called Stage and Field
- **1897** - Ran for alderman of 12th ward in Chicago
- **1898** - Opened an opera house and hotel in Portsmouth, Ohio
- **Ca. 1900** - Worked as solicitor and real estate agent
- **1905** - Relocated to New York and ran hotel and involved in theatrical business

1910 Census - living in NYC hotel - daughter Hazel died in 1916

1920 Census - good match living in Chicago - working as “theatrical actor” - every immediate family member passed away

A likely resting place

February 26, 1928 - a man named James R. Johnson died in Chicago

No known relatives, informant on death certificate was John McInerney - man listed as 65 years old actor and born Chicago

McInerney was close friends with Charlie Comiskey and was leader of White Sox rooting club

Spud Johnson had been member of old-time ballplayer association in Chicago that had ties to Comiskey

Based on available information - this is very likely the ballplayer

Jonathan Morrison



1859 - born in London, Ontario to Ronald and Margaret Morrison

1879 - began his baseball career playing shortstop for Harriston, ON club

1882 - went to Port Huron, MI to play

1883 - Port Huron club featured Canadian big leaguers - James Pirie, Bill Mountjoy, Morrison and Bill Watkins

1884 - played for Bay City of Northwestern League - club disbanded and best players bought by Indianapolis of the American Association

*Here's "Watty's" Famous Port
Huron Baseball Nine of 1883*



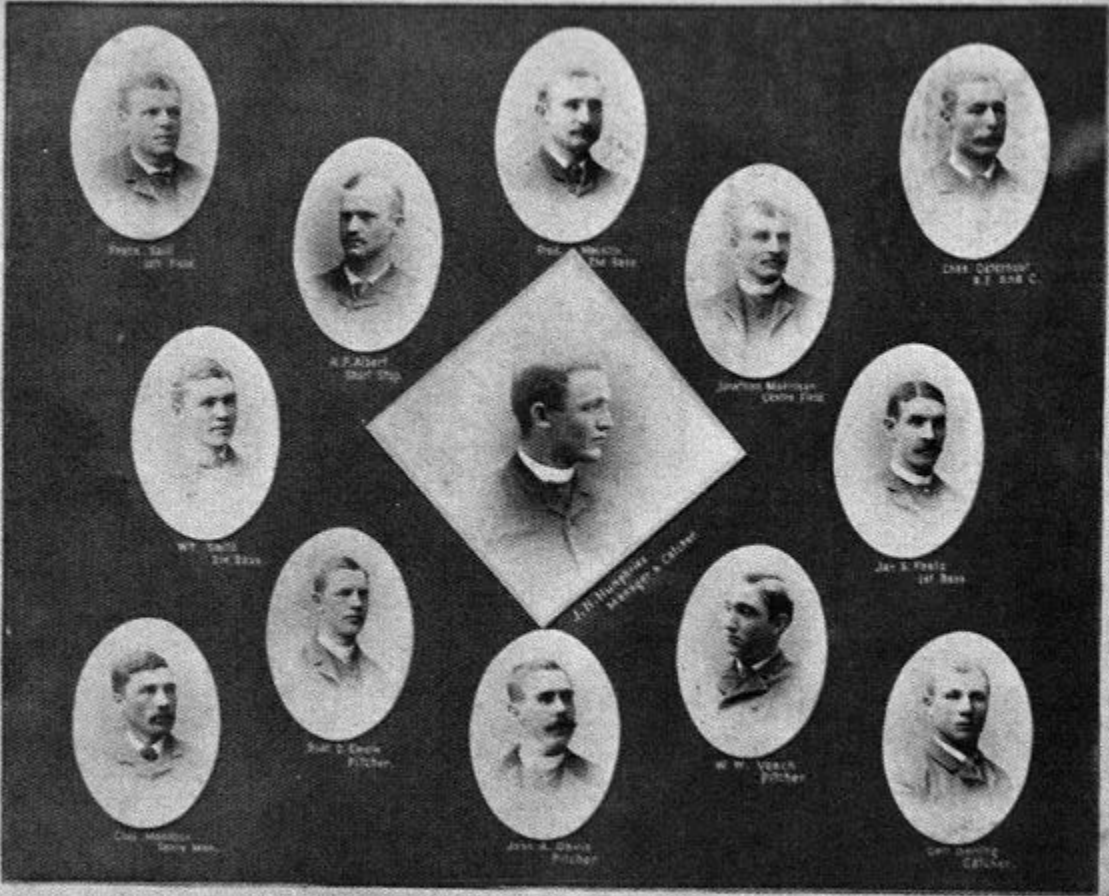
Major League Career

1884 - played 44 games for Indianapolis hitting .264/.306/.401 - featured 3 Canadians - Watkins, Morrison and Tug Thompson

1885 - Indianapolis was dropped from AA and Morrison joined Toledo of Western League - hitting .292

1886 - won batting title for Toronto of International League - hit .346 for city's first pro club

1887 - signed by New York Metropolitans of AA - played 9 games hitting just .118 and released in May - went to Rochester of International Association



Fred. Hall
Jr. Secy



A.P. Albert
Jr. Secy



W.T. Smith
Jr. Secy



Saml D. Cook
Fitcher



John A. Jones
Fitcher



Saml D. Cook
Fitcher



Chas. DeWitt
R.T. & C.



Jan S. Kralz
Jr. Secy



J.H. Thompson
Manager & Cashier

TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL B. B. CLUB
1886

Post Baseball Life

Winter 1886 - married Carrie Herbert - a notorious Toronto prostitute better known as May White - had been witness to notorious brothel murder in 1884

1887-1890 - Couple relocated to Port Huron, where Morrison opened the Home Plate Saloon, charged with murder in 1890 but charges dropped

1890 - Played for Port Huron club in 1890

1894 - briefly with Syracuse, noted to be a drinking man and by 1895-96, the couple had moved to Toledo, Ohio

1896 - Brother Angus died in accident in London - obit said Morrison living in Port Huron

January 1900 - Carrie filed for divorce in Toledo claiming husband had been absent for several years

A possible resting place?

OF 1213 SUPERIOR STREET, WAS TAKEN TO THE Toledo hospital. He has appendicitis.

DIED SUDDENLY.

John Morrison of 424 First street, died suddenly at the county infirmary yesterday afternoon of paralysis. He was taken to the county hospital and died a few minutes after reaching the place. Little is known of his relatives, though the infirmary authorities learned that he has a brother in Chicago. He was about 55 years of age.

UNION WATCH SERVICE.

1901 - Carrie listed as widow in Toledo directory

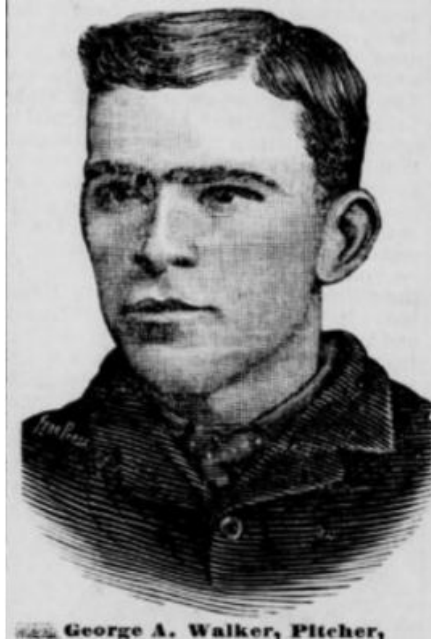
December 19, 1905 - a man named John Morrison died in Toledo

Said to have a brother in Chicago and age 55

Angus Morrison's obituary had mentioned brother Daniel was in Chicago

Death Certificate doesn't list parents and age not a match - but circumstantially fits with our guy

George A. Walker



Ca. 1860 born in Hamilton, Ontario to William and Rachel Walker, 9th of 10 kids - parents ran poultry stand in local market - father referred to as “Chicken” Walker

1881 - Walker began playing baseball for the Young Mechanics club

1882-1886 - Played for local clubs and also Stratford and Oil City

1887 - went to Oneida, New York to play for semi-pro club, then joined Montpelier, Vermont nine in July - played with Bud Fowler - first Black star

August 1887 - Joined Laconia, New Hampshire club - pitched 2 games against Boston NL club in October

Major League Career

1888 - Showed enough promise in those 2 starts vs. Boston that he was signed by Worcester of the Northern New England League

Went 16-10 with 2.47 ERA for Worcester and sold to Baltimore of the American Association for \$500 in late July

Debuted August 1 with 10-4 loss to Louisville, then sat on bench for over a month. Won his second start with 5-0 shutout over Philadelphia Athletics on September 12.

Finished season 1-3 with 5.91 ERA, but was reserved by Baltimore for 1889

January 1889 - Released by Baltimore

strong arm and excellent control of the ball.

George A. Walker, pitcher. Born in Hamilton, Ont. Height 5 feet 9 inches; weight 184 pounds. He played with the Laconia (N.H.) club last season, and made a fine showing. He attracted the attention of Merrill, Madden and Wheelock of the Bostons when they played in Laconia last fall, and through their recommendation Manager Burnham secured him. **Walker** signed with Laconia for the season of 1888, and had received advance money, but as he desired to go where he could make a record, he arranged with Laconia for his release.

T. F. Barrett, pitcher. Age 22 years. Height

A

F

G

T

H

S

f

Minor League Odyssey

1889 - Walker signed with London of the International Association and was with club into May before earning release - went 0-2 with 9.41 ERA in three appearances.

Quickly signed by Detroit in same league for a trial, but allowed six runs in less than five innings in only start on May 13

Then joined New Haven of the Atlantic Association at end of May - but was reportedly laid up with “malaria” at the end of June and was let go

Returned home to Hamilton and signed with home team - but went 0-4 in five appearances with 5.00 ERA and was off the club by September

September 1889 - Reported to have joined Minneapolis in, but no record of him playing

Post Baseball Life

May 29, 1890 - father William Walker committed suicide due to poor economic situation

1890-1892 - Walker appeared for local Hamilton clubs

1891 Census - living with mother Rachel and working as railway fireman

January 19, 1892 - mother Rachel dies - George noted in the obituary

1893 - George listed in Hamilton City Directory living at 46 Cannon Street working as poulterer - family market put up for sale that same year

Disappearance

July 20, 1893 - last sighting of George - appeared in the box score playing for Peterborough club

Disappeared from Hamilton City Directories and no matches on the census

Multiple siblings were still living, but no mention of George in their later obits

Likely stayed in Ontario - but once his parents died, he seems to have lost connection with rest of his family - no known wife or kids either

Bill Magee



July 6, 1875 - born in New Brunswick to Robert and Mary Magee

1881 - Family moved to Boston where Magee grew up and began playing baseball

1895 - Debuted professionally at age 19 with Fitchburg and Brockton of the Northern New England League

1896 - Proved himself a real prospect by going 17-14 with 2.05 ERA in 272 innings for Brockton

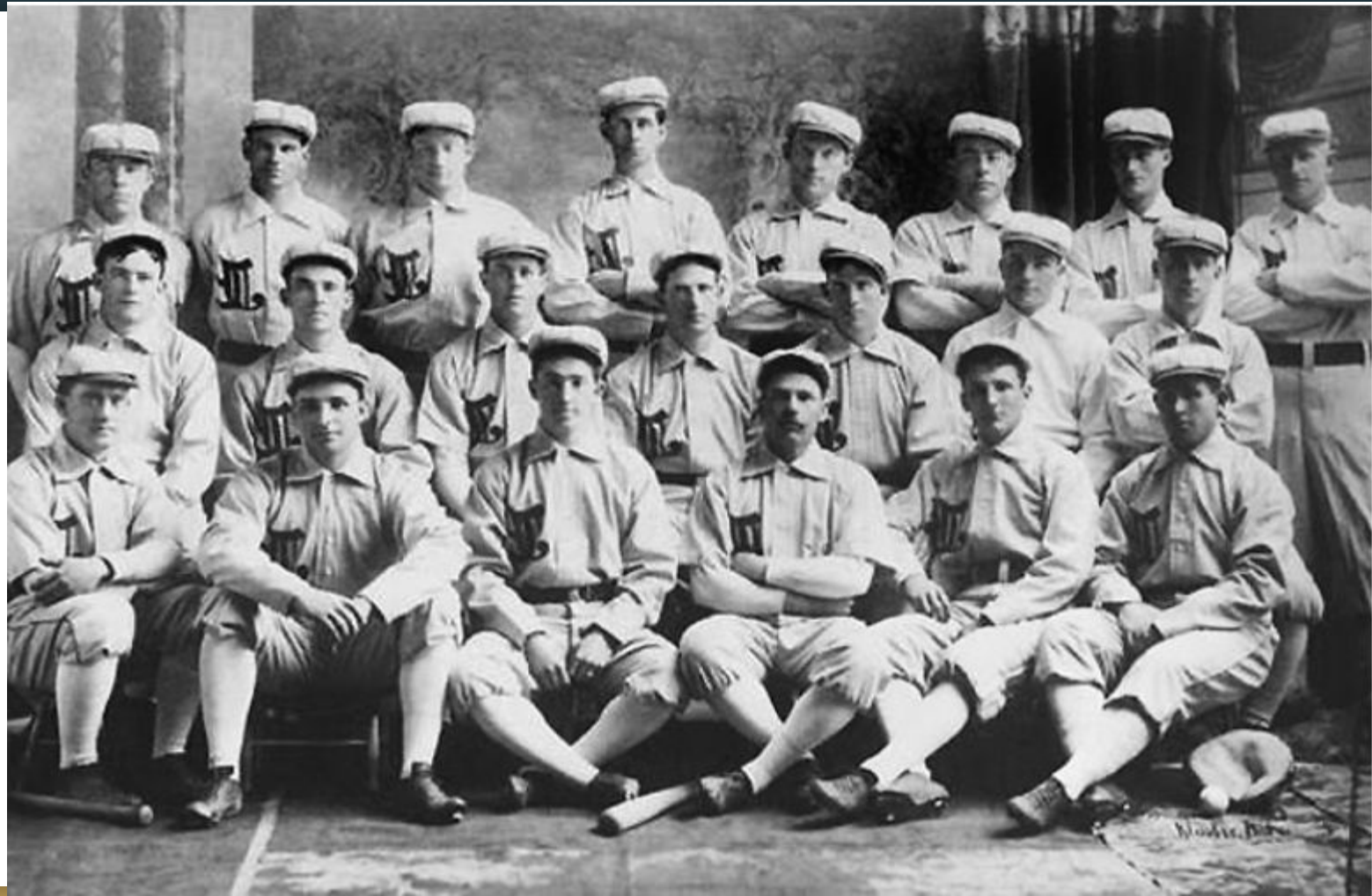
Major League Career

1897 - Signed by Louisville of the National League - went 4-12 with 5.41 ERA, but had major control issues, walking 101 batters in 156.1 innings

1898 - best year of his career - went 16-15 for Louisville with 4.01 ERA in 295 innings playing alongside HOFers Honus Wagner and Fred Clarke

1899 - Couldn't repeat success and split time with Louisville, Philadelphia and Washington going 7-16 with 6.15 ERA

1900 - spent with Worcester of the Eastern League going 16-18 in 299 innings and earning another big league shot



End of Career

1901 - Magee won 15 games for Worcester and was given another shot in big leagues - going 0-5 splitting time between St. Louis and New York in the NL

1902 - Magee went 2-4 with 3.68 ERA in 10 games split between New York and Philadelphia in the NL - also appeared for Buffalo and Montreal in the Eastern League

1903-04 - pitched for Buffalo of the Eastern League winning 29 games over the two seasons and worked as a hotel clerk

1905 - pitched for Toronto - 4-5 record in 98 innings and also appeared for Indianapolis

1906 - joined Wilkes-Barre of New York State League making 23 appearances

1907 - signed with Troy and later joined Haverhill in final appearance in organized baseball

Post Baseball Life

1901 - Eloped with Teresa Carberry of Worcester - couple had three children including Grace Magee born 1903 (other two children died young)

1905 NY Census - Couple lived in Buffalo and appears in directories

1907 - Magee last appears on official records - living in Buffalo listed as clerk in city directory - Magee likely abandoned his wife around 1907-1909

1910 - Wife back in Worcester and when she died in 1930 - she was listed as a widow

Secret Agent?

Daughter Grace Magee married Hilding Ohrstrom - she had no knowledge of her father

Ohrstrom was a big baseball fan and tried to track down Magee - talked to old players like Connie Mack and Nick Altrock

Ohrstrom learned that Magee was possibly involved in some sort of secretive government work - old ballplayers suggested that he not look into it.

No one knows what happened to Magee - man named William J. McGee with the same birthdate and name on his 1918 draft card, but nothing connects him to the ballplayer and other records show him to be much younger

Why Do Ballplayers Go Missing?

1. **Alcohol** - very common for ex-ballplayers to be alcoholics - unreliable + unable to adapt to post-baseball life
2. **Estrangement from family** - common for ballplayers to abandon spouses + children - lose track of them in official records
3. **Traumatic event** - death of parents or spouse/children can lead to upheaval in personal life and drastic change
4. **Financial issues** - struggle to make ends meet or large amounts of debt can cause ballplayer to disappear
5. **Crime** - many cases where ballplayer runs into legal trouble and ends up on the run or using a different name

The Shortstop Was a Crook

Available for pre-order (release date June 2026)

<https://mcfarlandbooks.com/product/the-shortstop-was-a-crook/>

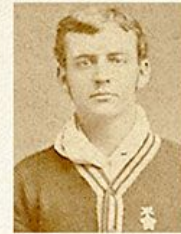
Questions? Comments?

Twitter: [@just_mckinney](https://twitter.com/just_mckinney)

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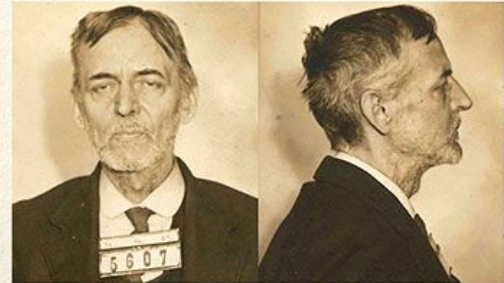
Email: just.mckinney@gmail.com

The SHORTSTOP



Was a CROOK

The SORDID BASEBALL LIFE
and CRIMES of BILLY GEER



JUSTIN MCKINNEY