

# THE 1899 Canadian Baseball League

THE LEAGUE THAT

COULD HAVE  
SHOULD HAVE  
WOULD HAVE

# But Didn't

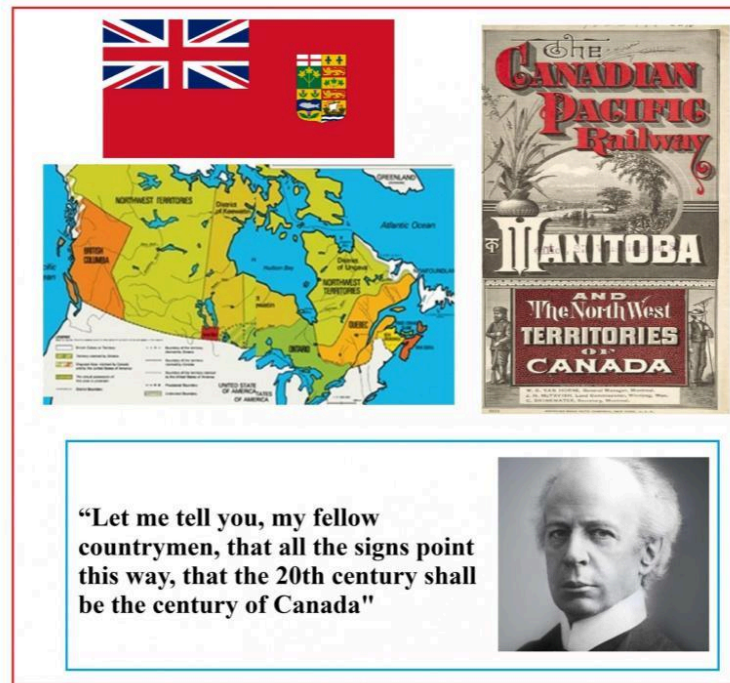
It could have been a viable league. It would have been a success and it should have survived for a long time. But it didn't. It did still have some significance in baseball history. First, we'll look at the story of the league and then we'll do an autopsy on its failure.



Let's go back to that era to see the world as it was 126 years ago. 1899 was the second-last year of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a time of hope and optimism. The Treaty of Frankfurt that ended the Franco-Prussian War

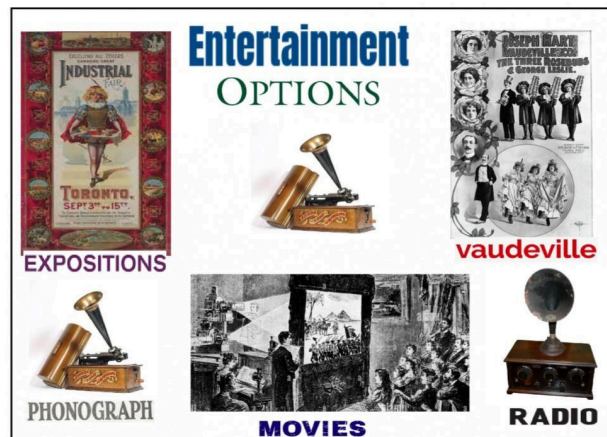
had created a balance of power in Europe, and the world was blessed with a period of peace. As well, the heads and future heads of state of three major powers were first cousins. What could possibly go wrong? It was a period of innovation, progress, and economic good times. The incoming 20<sup>th</sup> century promised a bright future.

That year, Canada was a nation of seven provinces and the very large NorthWest Territories, just waiting to be tapped for its resources. The Canadian Pacific Railway connected the east with the west and provided

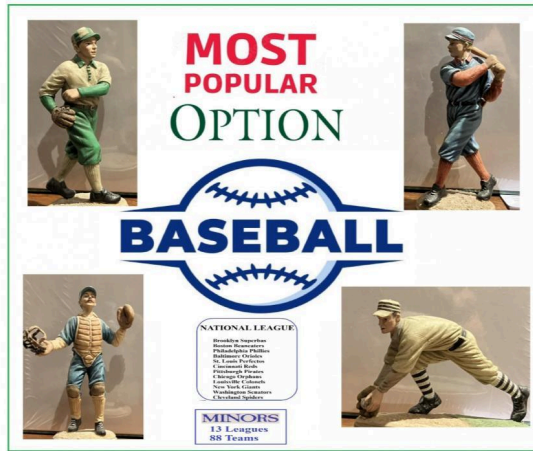


transportation for settlers of the territories. Canada's future looked bright and there was a spirit of optimism. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier proclaimed that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was going to be Canada's century.

There was precious little in the way of mass entertainment in 1899. Fall fairs and church picnics were popular, but were once a year events. Live theatre troupes came through towns

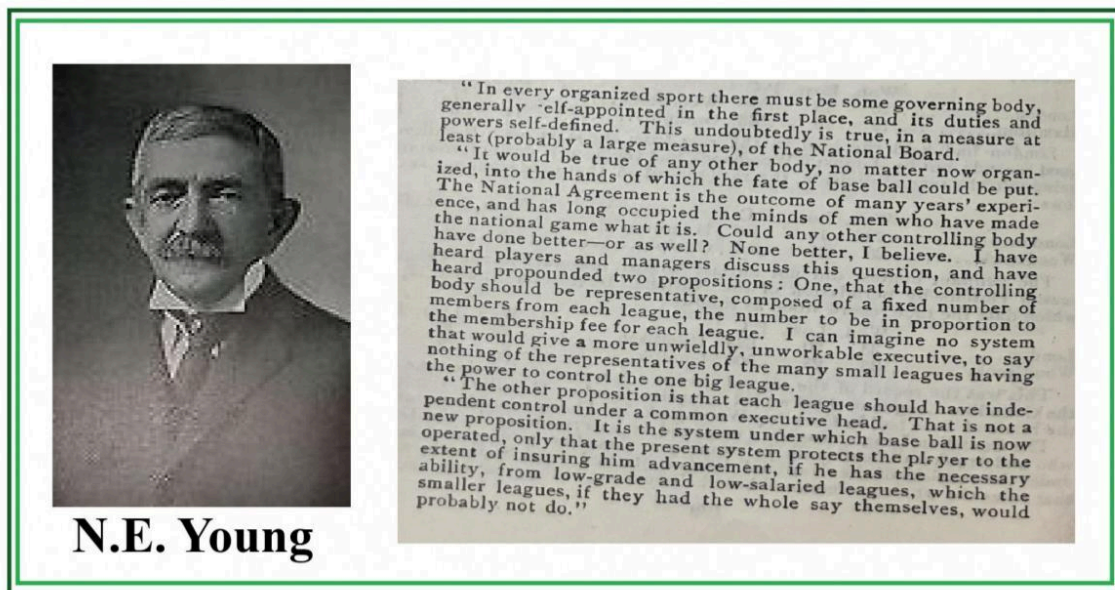


sporadically. Movies were in their infancy and phonographs were rare. Hydro electricity was not readily available until 1910, so these pastimes required a local generator. Public radio was still 15 years away.



Baseball was king, but it was also the only game in town. It was the most common form of entertainment, and was everywhere, led by the very popular 12-team National League. As well, there were 13 minor leagues with 88 teams.

It was in this spirit of optimism that Cal Davis wrote to National League President Nicholas Young in the hopes of getting certification for a new









Canadian Baseball League. His request was approved, and the new league was given a D-level classification.

The basic premise of the league was sound: six cities in close proximity with an efficient rail system connecting them. The league would consist of

teams from London, Hamilton, Guelph, Stratford, Chatham and St. Thomas. Four of the cities were roughly the same size, with London and Hamilton being significantly larger.

# 1899 CANADIAN LEAGUE Cities

<p><b>Chatham</b></p>  <p>Pop: 9,069</p>	<p><b>Guelph</b></p>  <p>Pop: 11,496</p>		
<p><b>Stratford</b></p>  <p>Pop: 9,959</p>	<p><b>Hamilton</b></p>  <p>Pop: 51,639 (5th in Canada)</p>	<p><b>London</b></p>  <p>Pop: 37,981 (9th in Canada)</p>	<p><b>St. Thomas</b></p>  <p>Pop: 11,485</p>

Also, Davis had an ambitious plan. The league would start with six teams in 1899. The next year, the league would expand by two teams chosen from Brantford, Berlin (Kitchener), Woodstock and Galt (Cambridge) .

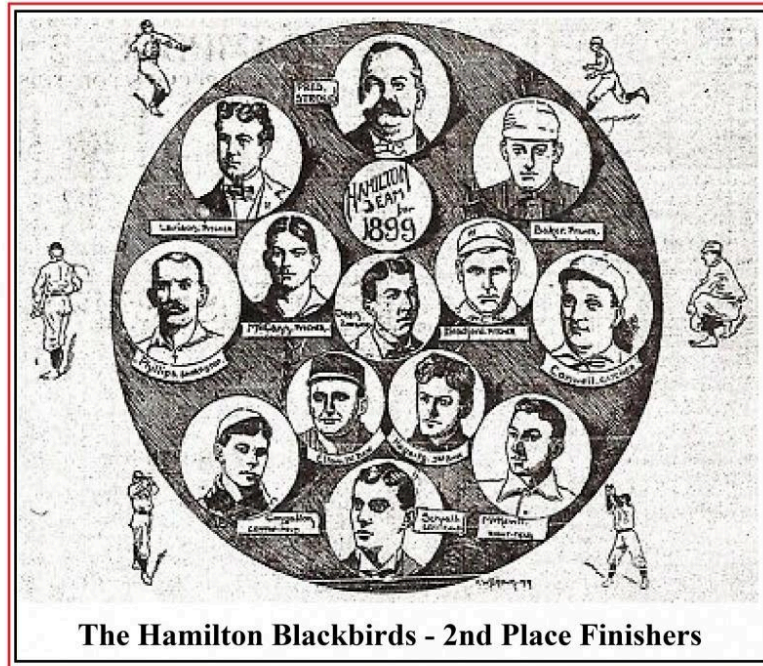
## THE PLAN

<p><b>1899</b> Six teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chatham</li> <li>Guelph</li> <li>Hamilton</li> <li>London</li> <li>Stratford</li> <li>St. Thomas</li> </ul>	<p><b>1900</b> 2 team expansion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Berlin (Kitchener)</li> <li>Brantford</li> <li>Galt (Cambridge)</li> <li>Woodstock</li> </ul>
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So in a progressive and optimistic time, with no real rival for the public's entertainment dollar, the league was born. That day, Wednesday, May 10, 1899, meant it shared a birthday with Fred Astaire. The original teams were the London Cockneys, Guelph Maple Leafs, Stratford Poets, Chatham Reds, St. Thomas Saints, and Hamilton Blackbirds.

On August 12<sup>th</sup>, 94 days after it was born, and before Fred Astaire could crawl, let alone walk or dance, the league died. However the death that made the headlines that day was a young girl who died at a wedding





## Innings Pitched

Team	Pitcher	Games	Innings	Inn/G
Guelph	Sam Damoth	31	252	8.1
Guelph	Joe Kostal	27	234	8.6
London	Tom Cooper	27	229	8.5
London	Ed Siever	27	205	7.6
Hamilton	Gene McCann	27	201	7.5



The league featured no outstanding individual feats. There were no no-hitters, and no great batting feats.

On June 12th, the Stratford Poets pulled out of the league and were replaced by the Woodstock Bains. This was not a transfer of the franchise to a new city, but rather a new team admitted into the league. Six players

from Stratford moved to Woodstock and two moved to St. Thomas. The remainder dropped out of the league or left baseball entirely. The Woodstock Bains fared no better than Stratford: Less than two weeks after being admitted to the league, they had a record of 1 win and 10 losses.



**The Woodstock Bains**  
The mid-season replacement team

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, the league shed two teams: Chatham and St. Thomas. Both teams played double headers on that day. St. Thomas was swept by Woodstock in close games by scores of 5-4 and 9-8. The Chatham Reds ended their existence on a winning note by beating the Guelph Maple Leafs 9-8 and 7-6.

#### BASEBALL.

Records of the Games Played in Various Leagues on Monday.

Note—The name of the club first given indicates where the game was played.

The Canadian League.

Woodstock 5, St. Thomas 4.  
Woodstock 9, St. Thomas 8.  
London 12, Hamilton 5.  
London 11, Hamilton 6.  
Chatham 9, Guelph 8.  
Chatham 7, Guelph 6.

**The last games played by  
Chatham and St. Thomas**

The league powers then decided to split the season into two parts, declaring London the pennant winner for the first half. To make the second half more competitive, each team would start with 10 wins and 10 losses.

#### The Canadian League.

London, July 5.—There was a meeting of the Canadian League magnates at the Tecumseh last night to consider the position of the league as at present constituted, Chatham and St. Thomas having been considered weak spots. As a result the league has finally simmered down to four clubs, viz., London, Woodstock, Hamilton and Guelph, the other two clubs having dropped out. The new league will open at London to-day with the Guelph team as opponents. Woodstock is scheduled to play at Hamilton, but as Hamilton plays an exhibition game with the Toronto Eastern League team, it is likely a double-header will be played between Woodstock and Hamilton on Thursday. The league's schedule will start off with each club marked as having won ten games and lost ten, the idea being to make it more interesting, the percentage of a losing team being small compared with the percentage had they started afresh.

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This helped Woodstock significantly. After three games they had a record of 12 and 11, which saw them tied for second place. They held that position until the end of the season, finishing at 24 - 25. The only team with a winning record in the second season was the London Cockneys at 31 - 29.

#### BASEBALL.

Records of the Games Played in Various Leagues on Wednesday.

Note—The name of the club first given indicates where the game was played.

The Canadian League.

London 6, Guelph 3.

Exhibition Game.

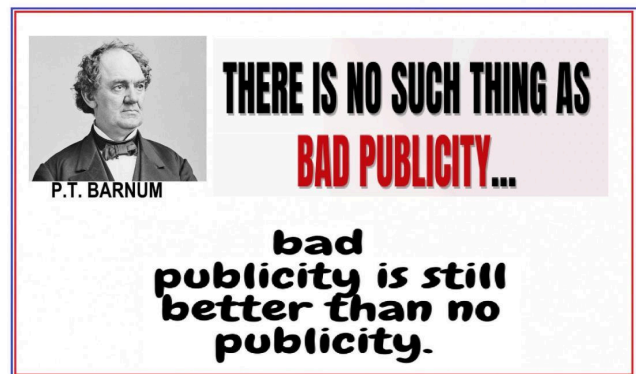
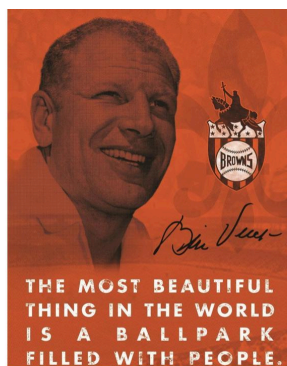
Hamilton 15, Toronto 3.

**In an exhibition game prior to the start of the second season, the Hamilton Blackbirds beat the Single A, Eastern League, Toronto Canucks**

What went wrong? The first and obvious answer was poor management. The league couldn't have done worse under the management of these men (unfortunately they wouldn't be available until 30 years later):



To paraphrase Hall of Fame owner and General Manager Bill Veeck, "The number one job of baseball management is to put bums in the seats." To quote another very successful business owner, "There's no such thing as bad publicity."



The Canadian League of 1899 got very little publicity. Opening Day was a non-event and was not reported. Compare this to the more successful 1911 league where opening day was front page news. There were no stories covering the games. There were no box scores, even though these had

# 1899

BASEBALL.	BASEBALL.
Records of the Games Played in Various Leagues on Wednesday.	Records of the Games Played in Various Leagues on Friday.
Note—The name of the club first given indicates where the game was played.	Note—The name of the club first given indicates where the game was played.
<b>The Eastern League.</b>	<b>The Canadian League.</b>
Providence 1, Rochester 2 (11 in.).	Stratford 4, Guelph 3.
Springfield 4, Syracuse 1.	Hamilton 7, St. Thomas 5.
Hartford 7, Montreal 3.	London 10, Chatham 4.
Worcester 2, Toronto 5.	
<b>The Western League.</b>	<b>The Eastern League.</b>
Buffalo 1, Indianapolis 3.	Hartford 4, Montreal 9.
Minneapolis 12, Kansas City 3.	Providence 11, Rochester 6.
St. Paul 4, Milwaukee 16.	Springfield 11, Syracuse 5.
Columbus 3, Detroit 6.	Worcester 8, Toronto 13.
<b>The National League.</b>	<b>The Western League.</b>
Pittsburg 3, Cincinnati 11.	Buffalo 7, Detroit 4.
Chicago 6, Louisville 2.	Minneapolis 8, St. Paul 7.
Philadelphia 4, New York 3 (11 in.)	Milwaukee 13, Kansas City 7.
Brooklyn 9, Washington 7.	<b>The National League.</b>
Boston 6, Baltimore 3.	Pittsburg 1, Cincinnati 5.
Cleveland 2, St. Louis 12.	Philadelphia 11, New York 0.
<b>The Canadian League.</b>	Philadelphia 7, New York 4.
Guelph 2, Stratford 4.	Brooklyn 3, Washington 0.
Hamilton 3, Chatham 2.	Boston 7, Baltimore 6.
London 7, St. Thomas 1.	Cleveland 4, St. Louis 5.

# 1911

## BERLIN FANS ARE DELIGHTED WITH THE SHOWING MADE BY THE GREEN SOX IN FIRST GAME

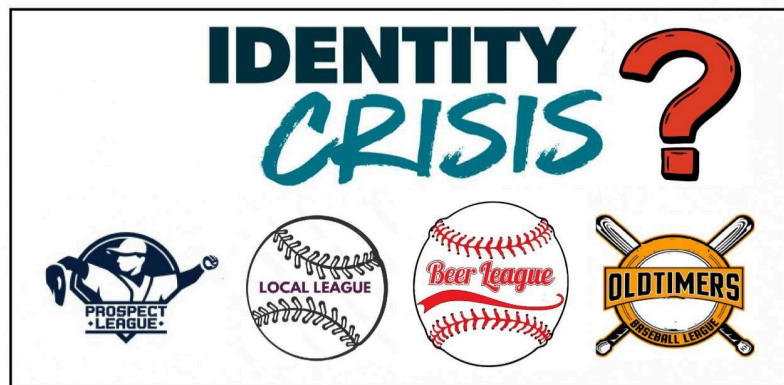
Locals Lost to Brantford By a Score of 6-5, But The Game Demonstrated the Fact That the Berlin Nine is Just as Good as Any of Them.

## PLAYING OF GREEN SOX SURPRISED SPECTATORS

Clever Work in the Field and Timely Hitting Made a Game Second Only To That Seen in the Big Leagues--Team Should be Generously Supported

been common features for more than 40 years. No line scores. Just a final score. The newspaper reports of the first games saw the Canadian League's games as the last scores listed, even though two days later the Canadian League scores were the first ones listed. With little or no publicity, the league never became a talking point in any of its constituent towns: Little to no publicity led to little interest, and that meant few bums in the seats. So they failed at Job #1.

The league also lacked a true identity. Any identity would have helped, but the league never went in any specific direction. This rudderless approach hurt the league. The best option for the league would have been to become a "Local" league that enlisted local talent and played on local rivalries.



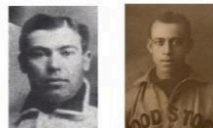


A small digression here, but one that illustrates a point. In the late 1950s, I became a fan of the Kitchener Dutchmen of the Intercounty League. Over

65 years later, I still remember some of the players. First baseman Bob Mc Ardle went to the same barber as I did; he would recount game events in the chair and I would listen intently. Center fielder Dave Smallwood went to our church and lived around the corner from Linda Reeve, the cutest girl in grade eight; I saw the two of them a lot. Shortstop Nick Rintche taught and coached at a rival elementary school. We routinely kicked their butts. (Having a class of 27 boys and only 7 girls helped.) Catcher Joe Yousurak worked for the same people my mother did; they often had lunch together. Utility man Ralph Michaels didn't play much, but his daughter became my high school sweetheart. Many years later, manager "Shorty" Miller's daughter married my nephew.

Why am I telling you this? Because that team had strong ties to the city and the fans. Players were neighbours, co-workers, acquaintances and friends. Fans had a real connection to the team and the players, and they went to the games. The Intercounty League had the small town local feel that the 1899 league lacked.

As a local league like the Intercounty League, it could have drawn good crowds. However I could verify only eight Canadian players. Four teams (London, Guelph, Stratford and Chatham) had no Canadians on their rosters, although Guelph did have a German player. Of the Canadians on

<p><b>Guelph</b> <b>London</b> No Canadians</p>	<p><b>CANADIANS</b> </p>	<p><b>Stratford</b> <b>Chatham</b> No Canadians</p>
<p><b>Hamilton</b> 3 Canadians</p>	<p><b>Woodstock</b> 2 Canadians</p>	<p><b>St. Thomas</b> 3 Canadians</p>
		
<p>Chub Collins - 41 Years old 97 MLB games Bunk Congolton - 24 Years old 309 MLB games George Bradford 25 Years old Left baseball in 1899</p>	<p>George Lee - 23 Years old Founded 1911 Canadian Baseball League H of F Bill Galloway - Age unknown Left baseball in 1899 H of F</p>	<p>Alex Hardy - 22 Years old 7 MLB games Joe Knight - 39 Years old 137 MLB games George Bradford - 25 Years old Left baseball in 1899</p>

team rosters, two were well past their primes: one was 39 and the other 41. One Canadian was born in Buffalo but was adopted by Canadian parents. The only real player that might be considered to be a local hero was 39-year-old Joe Knight from Port Stanley, who played 17 games for St. Thomas. No fan connection also meant few bums in seats.

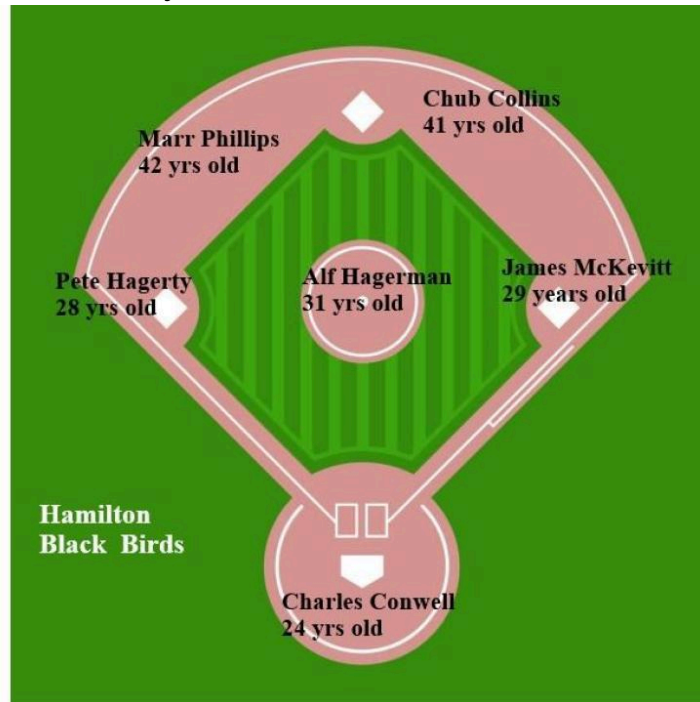
Another option for the league could have been to market itself as a prospect league, in which fans could see future major leaguers before they became stars. But it was not a prospect-driven league. Looking at rosters



for players under 23 years of age who might some day become major leaguers produced the following results. Three teams tied for the most “prospects” on their rosters with two. London’s players had the most appearances, with one prospect appearing in 75 games and the other 59. Hamilton’s two under 23s played 76 games and 18 games. Chatham’s two played 43 games and 18 games. St. Thomas’s one prospect played 11 games, Woodstock’s nine. Guelph’s lone prospect appeared in only two games. Stratford had no players under 23.

As a result the league drifted into becoming an old-timers league, or what we might now call a beer league. Most players were career low level minor leaguers. Although many were in their prime years, they were playing at the

lowest level. The best evidence that this was a beer league was the lineup of the Hamilton Blackbirds for one game: the average age was 32.5 years. That average was brought down by a 24-year-old catcher. Nothing says beer league like a D-level league whose second-place team has a keystone combo over 41 years old.



People have to have a reason to go to the ballpark. Watching beer league calibre teams with players that have no ties to the town is not one of them.

Statistics and record keeping were also not a league strong point, and were reflective of its poor management. The final standings of the four-team league were published with odd results. Newspaper accounts in August of 1899 had London with 60 games played - 10 more than any other team. The total number of league wins was 100, with 109 losses. The results published in the 1900 *Spalding Guide* balance the wins and losses, but individual results vary in different newspaper accounts.

Making things even more confusing is that the season's final results were published in two ways: one with actual games played, and one which includes the 10 wins and 10 losses given each team in July. In the revised standings, London was given two more wins and had two losses removed. Hamilton lost two games (both of which were wins), Guelph lost three games (all wins), and Woodstock lost one win and had one loss added.


London	60	31	29	London	53	33	20
Woodstock	49	24	25	Woodstock	50	25	25
Guelph	50	23	27	Hamilton	51	23	28
Hamilton	50	22	28	Guelph	50	21	29
		100	109			102	102
London played 10 more games 9 more losses than wins							
With 10 wins & 10 losses				Actual games played			
London	92	64	28	London	72	52	20
Hamilton	92	49	43	Hamilton	74	41	33
Guelph	90	42	48	Guelph	73	35	38
Strat/Wood	87	34	53	Stratford*	67	23	44
Chatham	42	19	23	Chatham	44	21	23
St. Thomas	35	11	24	St. Thomas	36	11	25
		219	219			183	183
				* includes Woodstock Stratford 3 - 17 Woodstock 20 -27			
				With 10 wins & 10 losses Standings should be			
London	92	62	30	London	92	62	30
Hamilton	94	51	43	Hamilton	94	51	43
Guelph	93	45	48	Guelph	93	45	48
Strat/Wood	87	33	54	Strat/Wood	87	33	54












There were also some oddities in individual stats. Guelph left fielder Wagner (no first name) batted .302 in 24 games, with no at bats or hits included in his stats (which makes one wonder how his average was computed). Guelph's Johnson was declared the batting champion with a .403 average, despite playing in only 16 games. Runner up Sam Crawford of Chatham hit .370 in 43 games, and Bunk Congalton of Hamilton hit .345 in 63 games; either would have been a more legitimate champion.

Several major leaguers played in the league, generally with little distinction. Most were short-term former big leaguers playing out their careers. 11 had had "cup of coffee" careers of a few games prior to playing in Canada. The five short-term players also were past their prime. Of the seven players who had substantial major league careers, only one had his after playing in Canada.






Despite its short life the league did have two significant highlights. Woodstock used a mediocre player named Bill Galloway, who played in only five games for them, with a batting average of .150. He had more errors than hits, including three in his final game. What makes him significant is that he was Black, one of the earliest to play for any team under the auspices of Major and Minor League baseball. It would be another 17,021 days before Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier with the Montreal Royals. It should be noted that in between the two, there were

### CUP OF COFFEE







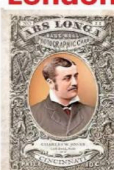


<b>Chatham</b>  <b>Charlie Ziegler</b> 5 games	<b>Hamilton</b>  <b>Bock Baker</b> 2 games	<b>Chatham</b>  <b>Lem Cross</b> 11 games	<b>Stratford</b>  <b>Shorty Gallagher</b> 2 games			
<b>St. Thomas</b>  <b>Alex Hardy</b> 7 games	<b>Guelph</b>  <b>Joe Kostel</b> 2 games	<b>London</b>  <b>Guy McFadden</b> 4 games	<b>Chatham</b>  <b>Lou Nordyke</b> 25 games	<b>Stratford</b>  PHOTO NOT AVAILABLE <b>Bert Miller</b> 4 games	<b>London</b>  <b>Kid Mohler</b> 3 games	<b>St. Thomas</b>  <b>Frank Pears</b> 4 games

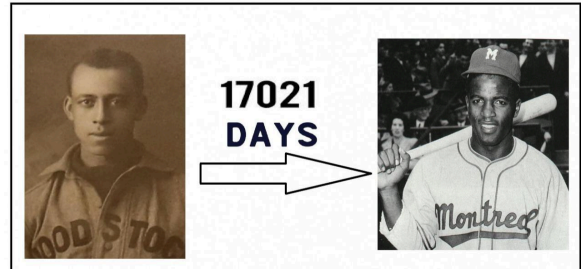
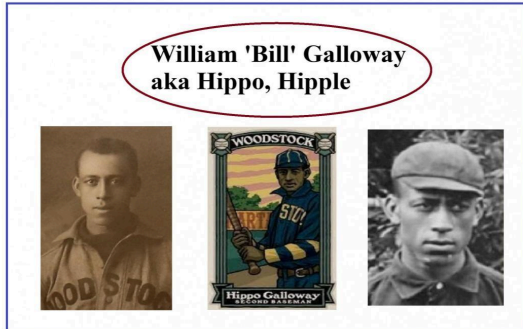
## Short Term

<b>St. Thomas</b>  <b>Joe Knight</b> 2 seasons	<b>Stratford</b>  <b>Fred Hemphill</b> 2 seasons	<b>Hamilton</b>  <b>Chub Collins</b> 2 seasons	<b>Woodstock</b>  <b>Bill Cristall</b> 1 season	<b>London</b>  <b>Pete Lohman</b> 1 season
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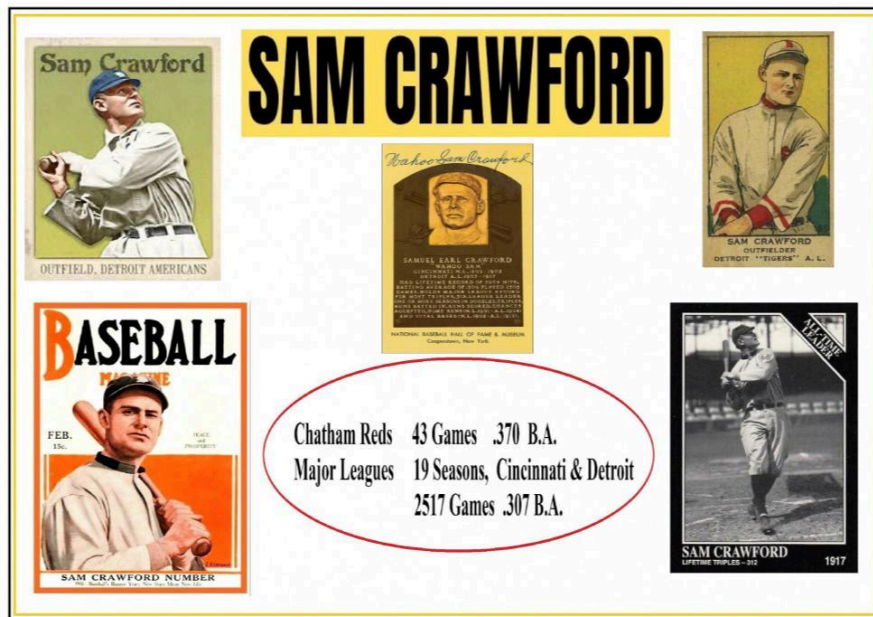
## Long Term

<b>Hamilton</b>  <b>Marr Phillips</b> 3 MLB seasons	<b>Hamilton</b>  <b>Danny Richardson</b> 11 MLB seasons			
<b>London</b>  <b>Ed Siever</b> 7 MLB seasons	<b>Hamilton</b>  <b>Bunk Congalton</b> 4 MLB seasons	<b>Chatham</b>  <b>Sam Crawford</b> 19 MLB Seasons Hall of Fame	<b>Guelph</b>  <b>Myron Grimshaw</b> 3 MLB Seasons	<b>London</b>  <b>Charlie Jones</b> 6 MLB Seasons

several players of colour, such as Cuban player and former Canadian Leaguer Emilio Palmero, who “passed” as white during his five-year career with the Giants, Browns, Senators and Red Sox.



When the Chatham Reds dropped out of the league, some players moved to other teams, but most left baseball. However, 19-year-old Sam Crawford



went directly to the Cincinnati Reds to finish out the year. There he batted .307 in 31 games to launch a 19-year major league career with the Reds and the Tigers. He retired with a .309 lifetime batting average, leading the league in RBIs three times and home runs once. He appeared in three World Series with the Tigers, and was second in MVP voting in 1914. His 309 career triples is a record that will never be broken: The current active career leaders in triples are Mike Trout and Starling Marte with 55.

Crawford was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1957. If anyone is the legacy of the 1899 Canadian League, it's him.

Benno Rosinke  
November 2025