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## The history of professional baseball in Omaha

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THE HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL  
BASEBALL IN OMAHA

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of History  
of the  
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies  
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
John Harrison Freeland

June 1964

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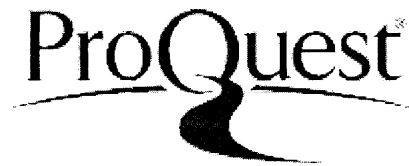


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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
The Infant Years of Baseball	
II. THE FORMULATIVE YEARS: 1879 TO 1900 . . .	7
The First Professional Nine Omaha Joins the Western League Player, Franchise and Lawsuit Problems	
III. THE ROURKE YEARS: 1900 TO 1921 . . . . .	44
Keith and Rourke Go Separate Ways Baseball War in Omaha Rourke Rebuilds Vinton Street Ball Park Pennant Winners and Contenders World War I Thwarts Baseball Rourke Calls It Quits	
IV. BURCH AND THE DEPRESSION YEARS: 1921 TO 1936	87
Living High During the 20's Hints of Financial Problems The Depression Bankruptcy and the Friendly Receiver A Woman Buys the Club The Omaha "Orphans" A Fire Ends It All	
V. THE POST WAR YEARS: 1946 TO 1954 . . . . .	135
Omaha Rejoins the Western League St. Louis Cardinals Back Omaha Ball Park Controversy Back Home in Omaha Pennant Winners in 1950 and 1951 Fans Want Better Baseball	

VI.	OMAHA BUILDS A STADIUM: 1944 TO 1948 . . .	186
	An Idea is Born	
	Omaha Citizens Back Stadium Plan	
	Inflation and Shortages	
	A Political Football	
	A Playing Site is Ready	
VII.	THE TRIPLE A YEARS: 1955 TO 1962 . . . .	204
	Omaha Bids for Triple A Baseball	
	Denver, Omaha or Both?	
	Omaha's Finest Hour	
	The Ticket "Blitz"	
	Baseball in the Late 50's	
	St. Louis and Omaha Go Separate Ways	
	The Ninth Inning	
VIII.	CONCLUSION . . . . .	283
IX.	BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	295

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with professional baseball in the city of Omaha from the day of its inception in 1879, until the "demise" of the sport in Omaha in 1962. The reason for the study is two-fold in scope. Nothing has been written in the field of professional baseball in Omaha, and many people do not realize the colorful history of Omaha in professional baseball. Because of the above reasons this undertaking was commenced.

Although this study covers many years it is limited in range because of a time limit and a lack of complete records. The investigation has been concentrated on the major and most important events in the period of professional baseball in Omaha.

The scrutiny begins with a general look at the broad scope of baseball in the United States when the game only vaguely resembled what is today known as baseball. It canvasses the first professional team; the general movement west of the sport with Omaha finally acquiring a professional baseball team; Omaha's participation in one of the first minor leagues in the United



States, the league which eventually became the American league; the baseball war involving the American Association and the Western League; the World War I years; the depression years; Omaha under the St. Louis Cardinals and the Los Angeles Dodgers in the Western League and the American Association; the building of a stadium; and a general summary of the entire study.

The game of baseball stems from the English game of Rounders and was known under this name until 1834, when a Boston firm copied the Rounders rules and printed them in a book called The Book of Sports, by Robert Carver, who changed the heading from "Rounders" to "Base" or "Goal Ball." However, the possible first recording of an American baseball game came in the journal of George Ewing, a Revolutionary Soldier, who claimed to have played "base" at Valley Forge, on April 7, 1778.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1820's and 1830's baseball was still a very informal game without much organization; soon many organized teams began to replace the informal teams.<sup>2</sup> The first known baseball team to organize was the New York Knickerbockers Base Ball Club, in 1845.<sup>3</sup> Other

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Seymour, Baseball: The Early Years, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

organized teams were formed in the New York area,<sup>4</sup> and by 1854 New York had four firmly established baseball teams.<sup>5</sup>

At first, attempts were made to keep baseball an exclusive pastime of the upper class, but because of its popularity it began to spread among people of all walks of life.<sup>6</sup> By the 1850's baseball interest was gradually making a westward movement and by 1857, people were watching teams in Cleveland daily, and in the Minnesota territory a lot was rented for a game.<sup>7</sup>

In the early 1850's, baseball began to take on its present form. It was becoming a favorite pastime of the young people of the land, played without gloves or suits and played any place there was space, usually in cow pastures. A community of any size would try to field a team to represent them. The game probably received its greatest impetus when, in 1858, the National Association of Baseball Players was organized to develop a definite code of rules.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Charles Cole, The Irrepressible Conflict (Vol. VII of A History of American Life, eds. Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox; 12 Vols., New York: The Macmillan Company 1934), p. 192.

When the hostilities commenced between the north and the south at Fort Sumter, baseball interest declined but did not disappear entirely. The War probably did more for the game becoming a national sport than anything else, for the game was played in training camps, behind the lines and even in prison camps. It was while serving in the army that "the boys from the Mississippi Valley and the border states learned the niceties of the sport at which New Englanders and New Yorkers were becoming adept." The intersectional movement of the armies gave baseball a national scope and introduced it to such young men as Albert G. Spalding,<sup>9</sup> of Rockford, Illinois, who was told of the game by returning soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

According to Albert G. Spalding in his book, American National Game, the war did more to add vigor to the games during the late 1860's than anything else, and promptly established baseball as the national pastime, with hundreds of baseball clubs formed in cities and towns

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<sup>9</sup>Played baseball for the Boston club in 1871; one of the greatest organizers in professional baseball. Founder of the Spalding Sporting Goods Company. SEE: Dumas Malone (ed.), Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1958), Vol. IX, pp. 420, 421.

<sup>10</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 41.

throughout the United States.<sup>11</sup> Though there had been many midwestern teams before 1860, the big expansion came in the midwest after the Civil War through the efforts of men like Spalding.<sup>12</sup> By 1867, there were nine baseball teams in Des Moines and the same year the Iowa State Baseball Association was formed. Also, other teams were formed in Minnesota and Kansas.<sup>13</sup>

It was also during the decade of the Civil War that baseball began to change from a sport of leisure and amusement to a sport that had a tinge of professionalism. As towns became more and more anxious to have winning teams, they soon began to search for the best players available, and as early as 1860 began to pay players.<sup>14</sup> By 1869, the National Association of Baseball Players, which was governed by amateurs, was weakened by their inability to cope with gambling, and the paying of players.

Professionalism began to come to the fore in 1869 with the organization of the Cincinnati Red Stockings,

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<sup>11</sup>John Allen Krout, Annals of American Sports (Vol. XV of The Pageant of America, ed. Ralph Henry Cabriel; New Haven. Yale University Press 1929), pp. 114, 119.

<sup>12</sup>Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern American 1865-1878 (Vol. VIII of A History of American Life, eds. Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox. 12 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Company 1935), p. 219.

<sup>13</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>Nevins, op. cit., p. 47.

the first "admittedly all-professional club in America."<sup>15</sup> By the following year other cities envious of the Red Stockings' success on the field began to follow their pattern of hiring professionals. In the process the National Association and the amateurs lost influence. By 1870, to solidify themselves in baseball ten pro clubs formed the National Association of Professional Baseball Players.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the 1870's and early 1880's numerous cities began to form professional baseball teams and to establish leagues. One such league was the Northwestern League which was founded in 1879, with Omaha a member.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 59. Out of this organization grew the powerful National League, a forerunner of the modern day National League.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

## CHAPTER II

## THE FORMULATIVE YEARS: 1879 TO 1900

Previous to 1879 organized professional baseball was nonexistent in Omaha. The only baseball seen in this geographical area was a few amateur teams that were supported by business establishments and public schools.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until the winter of 1879 when an Irishman, Ted Sullivan, a native of Dubuque, Iowa, saw the necessity for professional baseball in the midwest. He encouraged organization of teams in Dubuque, and Davenport, Iowa; Rockford, Illinois; and Omaha. The four teams were to comprise what would be known as the Northwestern League, and become the first minor league west of the Atlantic seaboard.<sup>2</sup>

In Omaha, a few wide-awake businessmen spent weeks forming a stock company and selling stock to guarantee that Omaha would be represented in the

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, September 15, 1879.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League (published by the Western League, n.p.), 1951, p. 17.

Northwestern League.<sup>3</sup> When it was evident that enough stock had been bought and subscribed for to assure success, a meeting was called to complete the organization of the Omaha Baseball Association. The preliminary meeting of the association was held in the office of the County Clerk, J. R. Manchester, on Saturday evening, March 16, 1879. The association spent the evening adopting the articles of incorporation and electing a board of directors consisting of William A. Paxton,<sup>4</sup> Frank Colpetzer, Chester Pratt, George T. Mills, and F. B. Knight. The members, at a late hour, elected to postpone selection of officers until a more convenient time.<sup>5</sup>

A few days later, on Tuesday, March 18, a meeting was held at the Withnell House. The first order of business was election of officers. Chosen to serve were: General John C. Cowin,<sup>6</sup> president; J. S. Caufield,

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<sup>3</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, September 15, 1879.

<sup>4</sup>A civic leader in Omaha who had been associated with the wholesale grocery business, the Union Stock Yards; built the Paxton block and contributed money to the Paxton Hotel, named in his honor; died in 1903. Alfred Sorenson, The Story of Omaha From the Pioneer Days to the Present Time, (National Printing Company, Omaha), 1923, pp. 552, 553.

<sup>5</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, March 16, 1879.

<sup>6</sup>A captain in the Union Army during the Civil War, after the war became an attorney widely known in Nebraska, died in 1919. Sorenson, op. cit., pp. 368, 369.

vice-president; C. S. Elting, secretary; J. R. Manchester, treasurer; and E. E. Black, manager of the ball team. Black and Manchester were also delegated to attend the first league meeting which was to be held during the first week in April. Their mission was to secure officially, a place in the league for Omaha. The meeting was concluded with the appointment of Manchester, Robert Purvis, Knight, Colpetzer, and Mills as a soliciting committee to attain additional funds in stock, so the necessary three thousand dollars for successful operation would be secured by the time the season started.<sup>7</sup>

On April 1, in Davenport, Iowa, the opening meeting of the Northwestern League was held. The first order of business was the official admittance of Omaha into the league. A representative of each town voted that each team would play thirty-six games, eighteen at home and eighteen games away; and the season would last from May 1 to September 1. In order to avoid confusion for the players on the playing field, the league adopted the provision that each team would wear different colored socks. Omaha was delegated the color green.<sup>8</sup> The final order of business was the disclosure of team rosters.

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<sup>7</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, March 19, 1879.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., April 4, 1879.



The preliminary Omaha roster listed the following members: Thomas Burke, who played with the Fairbanks of Chicago in 1877; J. E. Whitney, of Binghamton, New York; Frank W. Bandle, of Chicago; L. O. Hibben, who played with Marshalltown, Iowa; Philbin, J. Willigood; and local players C. F. Whitney and Gilette, "who are well known here."<sup>9</sup> Other players added previous to the opening of the season were: Contillion, Treffley, Bailey, Burns, Furlong, Dolan, and Thayer.

The first professional league baseball game played in Omaha took place on May 8, 1879, between Dubuque and Omaha. The admission was twenty-five cents; and if a fan wished, he could enjoy the comforts of the grandstand for an additional fifteen cents. An accommodation for those who did not want to be bothered with the crowd at the ballpark, was the opportunity of buying tickets in advance at Joe's and Sam's Confectionary Palace.<sup>10</sup> An interesting sideline for those not just interested in the playing aspects of the game, but men with an urge to wager, could also chance their dollars on the Dubuque and Omaha game in the baseball pool at Clark's Billiard Hall, at 210 South 13th Street, "and

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1879, and April 4, 1879.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., May 8, 1879.

all future games between the home and visiting clubs."<sup>11</sup>

The day of the game finally arrived with fans of all ages at the park to witness the contest. A reporter on the scene of the first professional game related it in the following manner: "At the start the visitors made some very good play, [sic] getting five in two innings, while Omaha got none; but after a short recess to await stoppage of the rains, our boys warmed it up well to the Dubuques,..."<sup>12</sup> However, unable to overcome Dubuque's early lead, Omaha succumbed in their opener, six to three.

During the infant years of organized baseball there were many problems with which a team had to contend. As stated before, only thirty-six games were scheduled for the 1879 season of four months. The schedule was limited by the prohibitive distances of travel and time spent in traveling. The most significant of limiting factors, however, was the restriction of play on the Sabbath, which the people of Omaha considered a serious offense. One violation of the Sabbath law did not involve the Omaha baseball professionals, but "outsiders" who were using the professionals' ballpark.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., May 9, 1879.

On Sunday, May 11, a party of young men climbed the fence at the park and began to play ball. While they were there, "considerable damage" was done. After learning of the incident, the officers of the baseball association elected that a man with police powers would be hired to guard the grounds, and to make arrests if necessary. The officers added, as if they were more concerned by Sunday play than the damage that, "the rules of the association forbid all sorts of playing or practice on Sunday and it is not proposed that outsiders shall step in and violate the rules."<sup>13</sup>

The first professional nine in Omaha uniforms were not a first class team, as their record indicated on their first road trip, winning only three games and dropping ten.<sup>14</sup> Though they were not getting the hits that they should have been on the playing field, they were making a number of "hits" off the field with the ladies in Dubuque, Rockford, and Davenport. As one reporter described it, "With the ladies the club is particularly popular, having already acquired the title of the 'Omaha Mashers.' Indeed their exploits in that line were something quite remarkable, 'Higgins,' 'Tincarron,'

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1879.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1879, and June 15, 1879.

'Phillie,' and the 'Judge' bringing home several trophies of their conquests."<sup>15</sup>

Though the players were popular with the ladies in other cities, they were not with the fans of Omaha. Unable to play Sunday baseball, too few games, and so poor a team<sup>16</sup> that the fans would not part with their money to see them, meant certain financial failure. Powerless to sustain the financial losses the association notified the manager and players, who were then playing in Davenport, that the team was to disband on July 7.<sup>17</sup>

Many fans were upset by the collapse of their team. Some newspapers shared their disappointment. According to the Omaha Daily Republican, other newspapers:

save this one, have been expressing various degrees of sorrow over the disbanding of the baseball club and the consequent demise of the association. This journal does not see that Omaha is any worse for the fact, financially, socially, or morally. In fact it never did see any particular use in keeping nine able bodied men, who ought to be chopping wood or putting their strength to some equally useful, if less arduous employment,...<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., June 17, 1879.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1879.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., July 8, 1879.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., July 11, 1879.

That was the last to be heard of professional baseball for the next five years, Omaha being satisfied with highly skilled semi-professional teams. Not until 1885, when Ted Sullivan, who was in residency in Kansas City, began organizing a new league called the Western League did the people hear of professional baseball and the possibility of a team in Omaha.

About the middle of March Sullivan called a reporter in Omaha announcing that he was coming to the city to induce Omaha to field a baseball team, and if anyone was interested he would meet them at the Paxton Hotel. Sullivan related that clubs were already established in Toledo, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and St. Paul. It was important to Sullivan that Omaha should be represented because it was ideally located to "break the long jump between some of the eastern and western cities."<sup>19</sup> A few days later Sullivan met interested parties at the Paxton Hotel to discuss the situation. He said that he would take all the responsibility of running the club, and expenses, if he could get the citizens of Omaha to provide a suitable ballpark.<sup>20</sup> After the meeting Sullivan journeyed to Kansas City, and

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<sup>19</sup>Omaha Times Dispatch, March 30, 1885.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1885.

a week later sent his personal representative, Fred Hey, to complete the transaction. C. S. Goodrich and John C. Drexel, who represented Omaha's interests, accompanied Hey in looking over various baseball park sites. Hey discerned that the athletic park on Sherman Avenue was the best site available. Hey told Goodrich and Drexel that he would begin the preliminary moves to obtain players, and then returned to Kansas City.<sup>21</sup>

While Hey was obtaining and organizing players, Goodrich and Drexel canvassed the city to discern if sufficient interest was available to field a professional team in Omaha. By March 29, Sullivan had already sent two letters to the two men asking if Omaha was ready to enter a team in the league, and if they were not, he would attempt to secure another city. The representatives, however, were unable to send a favorable reply because the site that was chosen--the Sherman Avenue grounds--had a lien against it, the terms of which could not be met. They asked for additional time which Sullivan granted. Goodrich and Drexel then approached the Bicycle Club of Omaha, which also used the grounds, to see what could be done. The Club said that they would attempt to secure the grounds, but did not know if they

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., March 28, 1885.

could do so in time for a place for Omaha in the league to be pledged.<sup>22</sup>

After a few days of apprehensive waiting, Omaha's position in the new league was secured by the Bicycle Club which had made satisfactory arrangements for the use of the Sherman Avenue park. Hey, to further entrench Omaha in the league, announced that he had completed the roster of the team, which at the time was holding spring training in Kansas City with the local nine.<sup>23</sup> Teams and the league that had been so hurriedly put together were of approximately the same caliber. The Omaha team had been losing a number of games and the fans were giving mediocre support at the gate. By May 22, the rumors were that the club, which was on a road trip, would not return to the city, and in all probability, would disband.<sup>24</sup> On June 4, the Omaha Bee received the news and related to its readers that the "so called Omaha Baseball Club is going to disband."<sup>25</sup> Two days later the Omaha franchise was transferred to Keokuk, Iowa, and ironically

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., March 30, 1885.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1885.

<sup>24</sup>Omaha Daily Bee News, May 22, 1885.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., June 4, 1885.

a week later the league closed.<sup>26</sup> What most people thought of the professional nine that represented Omaha can best be conveyed by an editorial that appeared in the Omaha Bee, which commented: "We notice that several baseball players have been convicted and fined in Cleveland for playing baseball on Sunday. The Omaha Club would be perfectly safe in Cleveland. It could not be convicted of playing baseball on Sunday or any other day."<sup>27</sup>

Omaha did not field a professional team in 1886 after the disastrous results of 1885, but by October of 1886, plans were already being formulated for the 1887 season. At a meeting held on October 18, at Frank Bandle's<sup>28</sup> Cigar Store, a copious number of men met to discuss the feasibility of organizing and fielding a team in 1887. They voted to enter the newly reorganized Western League. It was also decided to form a stock company with a capital of five thousand dollars, of which three thousand had already been subscribed.<sup>29</sup> After a week of diligent selling, the five thousand was secured.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>27</sup>Omaha Bee, June 4, 1885.

<sup>28</sup>Played on the team of 1879 as a catcher.

<sup>29</sup>Omaha Daily Herald, October 19, 1886.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1886.



The second meeting of the organization was held at the Paxton Hotel on the afternoon of October 31. At the meeting George E. Kay was elected temporary chairman, and George W. Shields<sup>31</sup> temporary secretary. The latter part of the meeting was spent discussing suitable playing sites and the financial position of the association.<sup>32</sup>

On November 3 another meeting was held to elect officers of the new Omaha Baseball Association. The following officers were elected: George Shields, president; J. J. Hardin, vice-president; George E. Kay, secretary; and C. S. Goodrich, treasurer. At the conclusion of the meeting Kay and Bandle were appointed to attend the Western League meeting at Leavenworth, Kansas, on November 6, to secure Omaha a place in the Western League.<sup>33</sup>

After the league meeting, the Omaha representatives reported back that Omaha was officially in the league and that the arrangements to obtain the playing grounds at 20th and Lake should be expedited. The site was ideally located for baseball fans, being served by

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<sup>31</sup>An Omaha lawyer, County Judge 1888 to 1892, County Attorney 1889. Sorenson, op. cit., p. 381.

<sup>32</sup>Omaha Daily Herald, November 1, 1886.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1886.

the red and green horse cars and the cable tramway,<sup>34</sup> thus insuring that no fan would be unable to attend the games. The transit company, knowing that baseball meant more business for them, further agreed to have cars run every two and one half minutes on the days of home games, and to help the association to build a grandstand and to enclose the park.<sup>35</sup>

As it were, the 1887 season would be an unusual experience for Omaha. For the first time in her short experience with professional baseball the club would complete the season almost intact, finishing sixth in an eight team league, with thirty-six wins and sixty-five losses. As in previous years, the association did have its troubles--this time with the players. The trouble began on July 5 on Farnam Street, where a fight broke out among the Omaha players and was witnessed by around two hundred people. The reason for the brawl was a fine imposed on players O'Leary and Bader by manager Philbin because of disobedience to him and the team captain, Walsh. When O'Leary saw Walsh in front of Saxe's Hat Store, a few words were exchanged and a fight followed.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1887.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., March 13, 1887.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., July 6, 1887.

The next day O'Leary, Bader and their pal Swift refused to go on a road trip to Lincoln; however, when the train pulled out of the station Bader had a change of heart and jumped aboard.<sup>37</sup> A few days later O'Leary and Swift were suspended indefinitely by the association and fined two hundred dollars.<sup>38</sup>

After a fairly successful season in 1887 and pleased that the team completed the season intact, the association was looking forward to a great 1888 baseball season. However, during the fall of 1887 the Western League reorganized again, eliminating the small cities (Lincoln, Denver, Topeka, Leavenworth, Hastings, St. Joseph), and adding Chicago, Des Moines, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Milwaukee, and St. Louis (later replaced by Davenport, Iowa), and retaining Kansas City and Omaha. The final step in reorganizing was a meeting held October 16 at the Tremont House in Chicago.<sup>39</sup> Since the league was reorganized, the franchise<sup>40</sup> that had been

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1887.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., July 10, 1887.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., October 17, 1887.

<sup>40</sup>In order to protect an organization from being encroached upon in a certain area, a franchise is issued which under baseball law prevents another team or organization from operating within the limits of that franchise.

issued to the Omaha Baseball Association the year before was declared void, thus opening the Omaha territory to any interested party. Though this at first appeared to the Omaha association as a minor obstacle, they later learned that they were not alone in attempting to obtain the franchise. Prior to the meeting in Chicago, Joseph Garneau, Jr.,<sup>41</sup> telegraphed the officials of the Western League declaring he wished to obtain the league franchise for Omaha. At the Chicago meeting the officials decided to issue the franchise to him and the Omaha Baseball Association, even though Garneau did not own a single share of stock in the Omaha association.

At a meeting held by the association on the last Saturday in October, Garneau explained his position to the association. He wanted to organize the team with his friends for he was sure that he could do a better job securing capable players, then adding he would buy five thousand dollars in stock and turn everything over to the association when and if his wishes were carried out. He met opposition from the association which pointed out that his plan was not acceptable; however, he could buy

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<sup>41</sup>Son of Joseph Garneau who built and owned a large cracker factory in Omaha. Joseph Garneau, Jr. managed the factory for many years before settling in New York. Sorenson, op. cit., p. 262.

the five thousand dollars worth of stock if he so desired.<sup>42</sup> The association then made every effort to secure the exclusive franchise, even calling Morton, the president of the league, in Chicago. Morton did not give a definite answer.<sup>43</sup>

After visiting manager Frank G. Selee, in Melrose, Massachusetts, franchise holder Garneau was still waiting to see if the association would sign nine good professionals. On November 16, Selee sent a telegram to association president, Briggs, stating: "Have signed eight men. See letter. How about Garneau and the franchise?"<sup>44</sup> Immediately Briggs called Garneau who had been willing to give up the franchise on the signing of nine good professionals. Garneau then dictated the following telegram to Briggs to be sent to manager Selee: "Everything all right. Franchise difficulties have been settled."<sup>45</sup> On Monday, November 21, the franchise was assigned and delivered to the Omaha Baseball Association.<sup>46</sup> Although the team did not do as well as Garneau had expected, it

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<sup>42</sup>Omaha Daily World, October 31, 1887.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1887.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., November 17, 1887.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., November 22, 1887.

did better than the 1887 team, finishing fourth in an eight team league with sixty-six wins and fifty-two losses.<sup>47</sup>

In 1888 the association was again to have its troubles. Instead of players, it involved an injunction against Sunday baseball. Plaintiff in the action taken against the association was Edward A. Parmelee, whose residence was adjacent to the ball park. His complaint as related by his lawyer in court, was that the arrival of large crowds on early Sunday, who "indulge in vile and offensive language, so that the plaintiff is obliged to keep his family indoors, and is thereby deprived of the undisturbed comforts of his premises and home." The plaintiff's lawyer also stated that baseballs that were falling on his home at "high velocity" were threatening his windows and his family.<sup>48</sup> He then argued that baseball should be classified with circuses and horse racing, and that they were corruptive enough to warrant the court to close them on Sunday near private residences. He

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<sup>47</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>48</sup>Parmelee VS Omaha Baseball Association, Document 8, Case 156, (District Court, Douglas County, Nebraska), May, 1888. Those members of the baseball association summoned to court were stockholders: Josiah S. McCormick, John J. Hardin, Dr. H. A. Worley, John M. Dougherty, John Morrison, John J. Philbin, Edward Brandt.

closed his case stating that the hackmen that loafed around the park and the streets waiting for the game to be completed were the most objectionable to the plaintiff.<sup>49</sup>

The newspapers were curious to know how the other people residing near the park felt and sent reporters to poll their opinions. The majority of them had no complaint and were not disturbed by Sunday baseball.<sup>50</sup>

After a few days of deliberation Judge Wakeley came to a decision, relying on similar cases of the sort. He ruled: "Ball playing of itself, is not forbidden, but it is a much commended sport. It is not immoral or demoralizing. Without undertaking to determine what may be the ultimate rights of the plaintiff, the preliminary injunction is denied..."<sup>51</sup> The judge's reasons for his decision were that other people living in the area were not bothered by the ball playing, baseball had been played at the park for a number of years, and that the plaintiff had had ample time to bring the matter before the court. "I think," said the judge, "the plaintiff has no equity to demand that a court shall suddenly and

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Omaha Bee, May 4, 1888.

<sup>51</sup>Parmelee VS Omaha Baseball Association, op. cit.

without previous warning put a stop to the playing."<sup>52</sup>

During the following winter the Omaha club was strengthened to make it possible for the Omaha team to make a legitimate try for the pennant. In fact, this was to be a banner year for the Omaha Baseball Association and fans. In the early part of the season Omaha seemed to be resigned to a fate of third place; however, by the middle of May the team moved into second. Gradually throughout June Omaha kept gaining on St. Paul, the league leader, and on July 1, Omaha reached first to stay.<sup>53</sup> At the end of the season Omaha had won their first pennant, winning eighty-three games and losing only thirty-eight.<sup>54</sup>

Although Omaha enjoyed a successful season in the

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., Back in January an Omaha christian association had let it be known that they did not object to playing on the Sabbath on purely theological grounds, but protested that the games seriously disturbed their worship, particularly those Churches around the ball park, and that they would "do all in our power to prevent them by legal means." It seems that there was cohesion between this statement and the action taken by Parmelee. Omaha Bee, January 14, 1888.

<sup>53</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, September 15, 1889.

<sup>54</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 22, 33. One of the players, pitcher Charles "Kid" Nichols, later played with the Boston Braves of the National League.



league, Josiah H. McCormick,<sup>55</sup> president of the baseball association, declared on September 25 that business was so unprofitable that he was seriously considering retiring from baseball unless the fans better patronized the games and the street car company reciprocated benefits they derived from the association enterprise.<sup>56</sup> The association felt that a certain percentage of receipts on days of games should be turned over to the association or that the cable car company should build a new park and appropriate building.<sup>57</sup> By October 12, the street car company people had not answered the request of the association and the matter was left in the air.<sup>58</sup>

The 1890 ball club was unable to duplicate the performance of the team of 1889, for throughout the summer Omaha was never in contention for the pennant. By June 9 they had won only fourteen and lost twenty-three games.<sup>59</sup> A typical description of the team was that they

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<sup>55</sup>McCormick was elected president of the association on November 19, 1887. He was the son-in-law of George M. Mills, who owned the Douglas Hotel at 13th and Harney. Omaha Daily World, November 21, 1887, and Sorenson, op. cit., pp. 228, 229.

<sup>56</sup>Omaha Daily Republican, September 26, 1889.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., September 27, 1889.

<sup>58</sup>Omaha World Herald, October 12, 1889.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., June 10, 1890.

"played like farmers."<sup>60</sup> Many times the sports writers were pondering if the team was "trying to play ball or shinny."<sup>61</sup> The lowest point of the season came in September when the team was trying to break an eleven game losing streak. Finally, in a game with Lincoln, the Omahas were able to break the losing streak, not because of baseball prowess but because Lincoln forfeited the game after the fifth inning of play when Omaha refused to give them their gate guarantee until the game was finished. Lincoln walked off the field and Omaha was awarded the game.<sup>62</sup> Omaha finished the season with fifty-one wins and sixty-nine losses.<sup>63</sup>

After three years of professional baseball the enthusiasm for the sport seemed to be wearing thin, and 1890's inept team drawing scanty crowds did nothing to add to the coffers of the association. Ironic as it may seem, Omaha had been either leading the league or in second place. Yet the fans still failed to patronize the games. As early as July 6, 1891, president McCormick was

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1890.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., September 22, 1890.

<sup>63</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 22.

discouraged by the gate receipts and was willing to sell the club. He called a meeting of the stock holders who agreed to back him in any way that he deemed necessary. He explained that he had been offered six thousand dollars for six players and that a certain St. Paul party was anxious to buy the team outright. McCormick then issued the following propositions for the people of Omaha to accept if they wanted to keep the club intact:

He will sell the controlling interest in the club for the sum of 5000 dollars and deliver the club free of all indebtedness up to July 1st, and also the net gate receipts taken in since July 1 which amount to 1590 dollars.

He will guarantee to carry the club through the season if the citizens of Omaha will donate 4000 dollars.

He will guarantee to keep the club intact for the season if a committee of five reputable citizens will dispose of 10,000 dollars worth of baseball tickets, good for twenty games this year, at 10 dollars or more a book.<sup>64</sup>

McCormick then added that these proposals had to be accepted by July 12 midnight, otherwise, the club would be disbanded.<sup>65</sup>

On the following Friday evening, July 10, a large delegation of interested baseball fans gathered at the

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<sup>64</sup>Omaha World Herald, July 7, 1891.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

district court room in the Bee Building to see if anything could be done to keep the present club intact. After a lengthy discussion, a committee was appointed to canvass the business and professional men of the city to solicit subscriptions to raise the four thousand dollars needed to keep the club unimpaired.<sup>66</sup> The committee met with great success, in one day raising twenty-two hundred dollars. However, before the other eighteen hundred dollars could be raised, July 12 arrived. That night, McCormick, true to his word, began the process of disbanding the club by paying off his players and auditing his books.<sup>67</sup> Though the deadline was passed, the committee to keep the club in Omaha was not discouraged and Monday was out trying to obtain the necessary funds.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile Western League president Krauthoff got word of the Omaha disbandment and called manager Shannon of the Omaha team, on Monday, ordering him to proceed to Denver for their next game. Shannon, in answer to a World Herald reporter, said that he was not going. "I would not play ball in Omaha now for one hundred thousand dollars, nor will any other player of the old Omahas..."

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., July 11, 1891.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1891.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

If they (people of Omaha) had not sufficient enterprise to raise this amount they are certainly not interested in baseball."<sup>69</sup> McCormick added it was impossible for him to have the players play ball if they did not choose to do so.<sup>70</sup>

Even at this late date Jack Morrison, owner of the Diamond Pool Rooms, guaranteed to cover expenses for the trip to Denver. On hearing this the World Herald sports editor called the members of the club to see what they would do. They in turn said they would not go or call themselves the Omahas unless five thousand dollars was deposited in the bank to defray traveling expenses and pay players' salaries for the rest of the season.<sup>71</sup> The same day that Morrison made his offer, Garneau, spokesman for the committee to save the team, received a telegram from the League president offering to sell him the franchise, which was now in the hands of league officials, and to contact him in a few days after he had thought it over.<sup>72</sup>

By Tuesday, July 14, it was almost apparent that

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., July 14, 1891.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

it would be impossible to keep the club intact. All efforts to get the team to Denver had failed, and most of the players had left town to seek positions elsewhere. The World Herald seemed to think that there was "insidious influence" among the members of the team. The local newspaper commented:

Baseball enthusiasts do not hesitate to say that baseball is at an end here in Omaha for this year, and that Dick McCormick has killed it. He not only slaughtered the club in violation of all baseball rules and in repudiation of his obligation to prevent members of the club continuing in Omaha under a different management.<sup>73</sup>

Though the World Herald and other baseball fans had given up all hope of continuing a team in the Western League, the league itself had not given up. The league president telegraphed Garneau on Thursday, asking him if he could attend a Western League meeting in Kansas City the next day.<sup>74</sup> When he could not make the Kansas City meeting,<sup>75</sup> the league officials decided to journey to Omaha and hold their meeting there to be closer to the problem.<sup>76</sup> The league officials had a serious problem to solve and it had to be remedied quickly. If Omaha

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., July 16, 1891.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1891.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1891.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

were unrepresented in the league, it meant that scheduling problems would be so difficult that the league would probably fold. If this occurred, each team owner in the league stood to lose a considerable amount of money. Without hesitation, the league officials boarded a train in Kansas City, and by Friday night were checking into the Paxton Hotel for the ten o'clock Saturday morning meeting in the same building.<sup>77</sup>

At the meeting the league members were willing to contribute the players from their own teams that they could spare. Also, the owners of the Kansas City, Denver, Minneapolis, Sioux City, and Milwaukee clubs bought five hundred dollars worth of shares in the club. With the twenty-two hundred dollars already contributed by the citizen's committee, it became apparent that the "new" team would be able to finish out the season. The final business was to elect Hal McCord, of the McCord and Brady Wholesale Grocery Firm, as temporary treasurer. The conference ended on a hopeful note that the team would report to Kansas City, Wednesday, for a scheduled game, and if not then, at least for the Milwaukee series.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., July 21, 1891.

On the following Tuesday the "new" Omaha Baseball Association met to elect officers for the remainder of the season. McCord was elected president; Krauthoff, vice-president; and Fred Smith, treasurer and secretary of the "old" association was re-elected. The new manager was Robert H. Leadley, of Cleveland. After learning that<sup>79</sup> the National Board of Baseball had ruled that the old team members were never legally released,<sup>80</sup> the officers began immediately sending telegrams to the players stating that if they did not report in Milwaukee by Saturday morning, they would be expelled from baseball.<sup>81</sup> A few days later, McCord received a letter from president Nickolus Young of the board, who, after hearing of McCord's action, explained that he had read the riot act to the "bull frogs" and that he was not sure if the players would report to Milwaukee or not.<sup>82</sup>

Omaha did field a team Saturday, July 25, at Milwaukee; however, it was a patched up team, not a single regular of the old team being in the lineup.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1891.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1891.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1891.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., July 25, 1891.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., July 26, 1891.



At the last minute, the manager had to commandeer two local men to fill out the lineup.<sup>84</sup> Though the team was there in body and spirit, they did not have the ability to cope with a polished professional team, and were smothered seventeen to two.<sup>85</sup>

A few days after the Milwaukee series, McCord received a letter from Nick Young, of the National Board of Baseball Leagues, explaining why the "old" team members did not show for the series. After studying the circumstances that had led to the disbandment of the team, he reversed his previous decision and ruled that the players were in fact legally released and that they could play with whomever they wished, unless there was evidence of wrong doings.<sup>86</sup>

The Omahas continued to struggle through the season, operating under adverse financial conditions. By actual count during one home game, only eighty-six people were on hand to watch the locals play.<sup>87</sup> Unable to meet expenses because of poor crowds, manager Leadley

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., July 27, 1891 and July 28, 1891.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., July 29, 1891.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., September 5, 1891.

journeyed to Kansas City, Sunday, August 30, to persuade the president of the league to give him enough money for salaries.<sup>88</sup> Although it was not reported that Leadley actually received the money, he apparently did<sup>89</sup> get enough for two more weeks, for the team finally disbanded on September 13, with only a few games left to play.<sup>90</sup>

After the 1891 fiasco, baseball in Omaha for the future looked doubtful. An exploratory meeting was held Tuesday, January 19, 1892, at the Millard Hotel; however, it was attended by only one person that had enough money to support a team--McCord, president of the 1891 club. McCord explained that he was not there to enter baseball again, but to get out and offered to turn over the Omaha franchise without cost and all debts paid to anyone interested. McCormick, who was also president of the "old" association, conveyed that he was willing to enter the baseball arena again; however, he would want someone else to come in with him. He explained that to go it alone was too risky, and that if he had continued through

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., August 31, 1891.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., September 2, 1891.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1891. A comparison of records of the two teams representing Omaha shows that when the "old" team was disbanded they had forty-three wins and twenty-three losses; the "new" team won eight games and lost thirty-six.

the 1891 season, it would have cost him close to three thousand dollars. Those men in attendance estimated that expenses for fielding a team would take fifteen thousand dollars--twelve thousand for salaries, three thousand for ground rental, traveling, and incidental expenses. Dave Rowe, a former Western League player and manager, was appointed to make preliminary arrangements for Omaha's entrance into the Western League.<sup>91</sup>

Another meeting was held Friday night, February 5, with John A. Spears, president of the Kansas City club, in attendance. He related that if the citizens of Omaha would donate three thousand dollars, the league would assume control and would give Omaha a team as good as any in the league. At the close of the meeting William F. Bechel, auditor of the Pacific Express Company and city councilman, accepted the presidency of the reorganized Omaha Baseball Association. Dave Rowe was elected manager.<sup>92</sup>

The next two days Spears and Rowe canvassed the city trying to raise the needed money but did not meet with much success as the World Herald published: "The people of Omaha are tired. They are a little shy at

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1892.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., February 6, 1892.

putting money up for a baseball club after the disastrous results of last year and the struggle of the team of the year previous."<sup>93</sup>

The baseball situation was in a doubtful stage until March 25, when Ralph Stout resigned his position as sports editor of the Kansas City Star to accept the position of financial manager of the Omaha Baseball Association. With Stout investing<sup>94</sup> a great deal of money along with Bechel and Rowe, baseball became a reality in 1892 for Omaha.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to the obstacle of money, the association was confronted during those late winter months by the problem of obtaining a suitable playing site. Rowe, who was appointed to find a site, went to Council Bluffs to look at the grounds<sup>96</sup> across the Douglas Street<sup>97</sup> bridge. The grounds were suitable<sup>98</sup> for they were easily accessible to Omaha baseball fans, being

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1892.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., March 25, 1892. Apparently Spears talked to Stout about investing in the Omaha club.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Now Midway Park.

<sup>97</sup>Now the AkSarBen Bridge.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1892.

only an eight minute ride from Omaha, and the bridge company agreed to charge only five cents for each transient.<sup>99</sup> Erecting bleachers and dressing rooms loomed as the greatest obstacle.<sup>100</sup>

The proposal fell through after taking into consideration the cost of rental; and Rowe felt that the Omaha team would lose its individuality playing in another city.<sup>101</sup> However, the major inducement to bypass the Council Bluffs grounds was made by the Omaha Street Railway Company, which offered to augment car service to the old association park at North Twentieth Street and "other inducements which figured in the transaction."<sup>102</sup>

Ironically, now that Omaha had a fair team and was fairly stable financially, a few other teams in the league were having their financial troubles. This became obvious around the first of July, when Minneapolis, Fort Wayne, and Milwaukee threatened to disband. A few days later all three quit, leaving the league with five teams and scheduling problems.<sup>103</sup> Unable to cope with the

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1892.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1892.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., March 25, 1892.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., July 9, 1892.

demise of three teams, the league folded on July 16. The only difference between the 1891 team and that of 1892 was that the latter lasted three days longer and the demise was less chaotic.<sup>104</sup>

Replacing Stout, who was reported to have said that he would "rather work in an iron foundry than to tackle baseball again,"<sup>105</sup> as franchise holder was Tom McVitte, a local politician. He was unable to exercise his franchise for the league was unoperative during the 1893 season.<sup>106</sup>

In 1894, the league was again in operation, under a new title: the Western Association.<sup>107</sup> Under the leadership of McVitte, Omaha was able to finish the 1894 season intact, finishing fifth in an eight team league, winning sixty-six games and losing fifty-nine.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1892.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1893.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1893.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1894. When the league was inoperative during the 1893 season, Ban Johnson, who later founded the American League, seized the "Western League" label. Those cities that used the "Western League" label in 1892 reorganized in 1894 under the "Western Association" label. Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League, (published by the Western League, n.p.), 1951, p. 18.

<sup>108</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 22. The manager of the team was William A. Rourke, who later became owner of the Omaha club. See: chapter two.

In 1895 McVitte and his new manager and partner Rowe were not as fortunate, which became apparent when league president Kent called a meeting of the Western Association for July 5, at Lincoln, Nebraska, to discuss the financial plight of the Omaha club. Rowe admitted that poor patronage was getting to be a serious matter and if the club continued to receive sub-par support, the club would have to be moved to some other city where they would be appreciated. Rowe pointed out that no other city in the league, even Jacksonville, Illinois, a city of eighteen thousand population received as poor support as Omaha.<sup>109</sup> The meeting that was to be held in Lincoln was later changed to Omaha's Paxton Hotel. After a lengthy discussion the Omaha magnates announced that the club would stay if it were given the necessary support and financial backing. Kent then added: "There should be too much pride here to permit the club to be transferred when towns with one-tenth the population are supporting the teams liberally."<sup>110</sup> After the meeting, Kent said that he would stay in Omaha to induce the businessmen of the city to support the club with their attendance

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<sup>109</sup>Omaha World Herald, July 3, 1895.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., July 6, 1895.

and money.<sup>111</sup> However, Kent's appeals came to no avail; the team played as representatives of Omaha at Des Moines on July 22, and the following day were transferred to Denver, Colorado.<sup>112</sup> The World Herald commented that the financial position was so precarious the last few days before the team was transferred to Denver, that gate receipts "were not sufficient for buying hay for a burro."<sup>113</sup>

For the next two years Omaha did not participate in the professional ranks of baseball but the situation changed considerably in December, 1897, when it was announced at the winter meeting of the Western League<sup>114</sup> at the Great Northern Hotel in Chicago, that four groups were attempting to obtain the franchise for Omaha: J. D. Myerly, of Omaha; James McKee, of Rockford, Illinois; Pfeffer and King, of Chicago; and Clark Brothers of Chicago.<sup>115</sup> The league's first choice was McKee, who

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., July 23, 1895.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., July 28, 1895.

<sup>114</sup>Again it must be explained that this was not the Western Association which Omaha belonged to in 1894, but the league that was to later become known as the American League under the direction of Ban Johnson. Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>115</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 19, 1897, and January 2, 1898.



at the last minute withdrew saying that the conditions were not right.<sup>116</sup> Over a month later, in February, a fifth party, R. E. Schuman and M. J. O'Brien of Chicago, were sold a three year franchise at a Kansas City meeting of the Western League, and at the same meeting Omaha was officially admitted to the Western League.<sup>117</sup>

Along with Omaha were other large cities, such as St. Paul, Minneapolis, Columbus, Ohio, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Indianapolis. Even with this impressive array of cities to compete with, the Omaha franchise again met with an old Nemesis--financial troubles. The team was losing consistently and the Omaha fans would not support the team. "Attendance has been woefully [sic] scant ever since the season open."<sup>118</sup> The situation was serious but nothing had been done by June 27, though all indication pointed to an eventual withdrawal of the team from Omaha. The decision to disband came on July 6, with Schuman and his partner O'Brien removing themselves completely from the enterprise and

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., February 25, 1898.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., June 27, 1898.

forfeiting the franchise back to the league.<sup>119</sup> The seventh place Omahas were officially transferred to St. Joseph, Missouri, on July 8.<sup>120</sup>

This was the end of professional baseball in Omaha for the nineteenth century; but when the twentieth century dawned, with it came a new era of baseball, an era that will probably go down as the most successful in every respect.

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1898.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., July 8, 1898, and July 9, 1898.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ROURKE YEARS: 1900 TO 1921

During the fall and winter months of 1899 and 1900, plans were being formulated for reactivating the Western League by Thomas J. Hickey.<sup>1</sup> He contrived to have Denver, Des Moines, Sioux City, St. Joseph, Pueblo and Omaha in the league. To promote Omaha's entrance, Hickey journeyed to Omaha to be present at a November 20 afternoon meeting at the Millard Hotel, which was attended by a number of Omaha men anxious to see the game rehabilitated in the city.<sup>2</sup> In attendance at the meeting was Buck Keith, baseball enthusiast and previous manager of a local team, who in the ensuing weeks took it upon himself to make sure that plenty of financial assistance would be forthcoming in case Omaha did gain acceptance

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<sup>1</sup>The Western League title was abandoned by Ban Johnson after the 1899 season for the more grandiose title "American" league, which today is one of the major leagues. See: Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years With the Western League, (published by the Western League, N.P.), 1951, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 20, 1899.

into the league.<sup>3</sup>

The reorganization meeting of the Western League took place at the Millard Hotel in Omaha on December 4, with representatives from St. Joseph, Lincoln, Sioux City, Des Moines and Omaha.<sup>4</sup>

Another league meeting was held in Des Moines on February 12, to which Keith brought his partner, William A. Rourke, who was to be the business manager and field manager of the Omaha Club.<sup>5</sup> Rourke, who was born in Columbus, Ohio, on August 7, 1864, was not unfamiliar with baseball, beginning his career at the age of eighteen with the Muskegon Club of the Northwestern League and later as player and manager of clubs in Duluth and St. Paul, Minnesota; Fort Worth, Texas; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Birmingham, Alabama; and Omaha. His first appearance in Omaha was in 1887 as a third baseman and again in 1894 as manager. From 1896 through 1900, while living in Omaha, Rourke was a scout for the Chicago Cubs during the summer and a tobacco salesman in the winter. When Rourke heard of the Western League being revived he saw the opportunity to get back into the game in a full time

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., December 8, 1899.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1899.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., February 16, 1900.

capacity. Rourke, at the time "stone broke," borrowed two hundred fifty dollars and immediately went to Keith, who was looking for financial backing. The two men then pooled their money and became partners in the Omaha club.<sup>6</sup>

At the meeting it was disclosed that six cities would be represented in the Western League in 1900. They were Des Moines, Sioux City, St. Joseph, Pueblo, Denver and Omaha. To ensure that each team would finish the season and to fortify the league's funds, each league magnate had to put up one thousand dollars.<sup>7</sup>

Besides making arrangements to get Omaha a capable team, Keith was also busy at his office in the Nebraska National Bank Building raising money and making inquiries about a suitable ball park. In the middle of December, Keith expressed the opinion that the most favorable site would be the old Vinton Street grounds, if it were reshaped.<sup>8</sup> By the end of December Keith still had not made much progress on a site for a ball park. Although the Vinton Street park was still his first

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<sup>6</sup>The Cincinnati Enquirer, January 18, 1931.

<sup>7</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 13, 1900, and February 16, 1900.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., December 17, 1899.

choice, everything depended on the property owner.<sup>9</sup> Near the end of January, Keith finally concluded that the Vinton Street park would be the home of the Omaha team. He said that no written contract had been signed yet and that it would cost a great deal more money than two other sites, but due to Omaha south side pressure he had decided to locate there.<sup>10</sup> During the first part of February, Keith came to terms for the use of the park as he related to World Herald Sportswriter Sandy Griswold: "I have already closed the contract for Omaha's new ball park and you can bet it is going to be a dandy--the very best and the finest Omaha has ever had."<sup>11</sup>

Grading and fencing at the park began immediately and at the end of the first week in March, the workmen were busily completing the grandstands for the official dedication on May 7.<sup>12</sup> The park was bounded on the west by Fifteenth Street, on the east by Thirteenth Street, and on the south by Vinton Street. The general outlay of the park called for a fence running from a quarter of the way down Fifteenth Street to the northwest corner over to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1899.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1900.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., February 11, 1900.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1900.

the northeast corner, then to the southeast corner and a quarter of the way down Vinton Street. The bleachers and grandstand covered three quarters of Vinton and Fifteenth Streets. A ticket office was situated on the southeast corner and entrance ways were along Vinton and Fifteenth Streets. The pitcher's box faced the southwest corner.<sup>13</sup>

Considering the late date that the league and the Omaha club were organized, it was remarkable that both finished the season intact. Throughout the first season in the new Western League Omaha was never in contention for the pennant flag, and when the season came to a close Omaha found herself in fourth place, winning fifty-three games and losing fifty-six.<sup>14</sup>

During the winter months of 1901 the dual ownership of the Omaha club came to an impasse, with Keith and Rourke differing in regard to how a professional ball club should be conducted. Their differences finally came forth on Saturday morning, February 16, when Rourke made an offer to buy Keith out. Keith, not in the mood to accept, countered Rourke's offer with one of his own. Rourke then told Keith that he would like to have a couple of weeks to investigate the situation. Rourke's

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1900.

<sup>14</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 22.

partner said he did not want to wait that long and if he wanted to buy he would leave the offer open until two o'clock that same afternoon. Rourke left immediately to interest local capital in his enterprise. Rourke came back that afternoon with the money, "and he did not have to ask twice," and bought Keith out, including the buildings and grandstand, franchise and players.<sup>15</sup>

In the same winter, Kansas City and Milwaukee, dropped by the American League, were immediately picked up by the Western League along with Minneapolis and St. Paul, while the smaller cities were dropped in expanding to an eight-team league. Again, Omaha was in the second division, finishing fifth in the league, but improving on their won-loss record with sixty-five wins and fifty-nine losses.<sup>16</sup>

When Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and St. Paul became a part of the Western League, Rourke harbored the thought that the larger cities would further enhance the success of the league and the Omaha franchise, but did not at anytime conceive that it would involve him in a baseball war.

That winter, Hickey, president of the Western

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<sup>15</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 17, 1901.

<sup>16</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 19, 23.



League, proposed to operate two leagues. One league would include the larger cities of the Western League, such as: Kansas City, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha, along with Columbus, Toledo, and Indianapolis.<sup>17</sup> The smaller league would be composed of Des Moines,<sup>18</sup> Denver, Colorado Springs, St. Joseph, Lincoln, and Sioux City. The new loop Hickey proposed would be entirely separated from the Western League and be called the American Association.<sup>19</sup>

The first meeting of the new American Association was held at St. Joseph, Missouri, on November 28. At the meeting Hickey was chosen president. It was decided by the league representatives that the association would not be affiliated with any minor league in any way. They also emphasized that they would not rank with the only established major league--the National League; however, they would not have any salary limit, so they would be able to attract players of major league caliber.<sup>20</sup> The owners of the Western League clubs that were not included

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<sup>17</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 27, 1901.

<sup>18</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 19. According to their book Des Moines was to be in the larger city league and Omaha in the smaller.

<sup>19</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 20, 1901.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1901.

in the association were naturally perturbed by the developments, because the larger cities that were a part of the league in 1901 would be taken away and those cities usually drew the larger crowds, at home and away.<sup>21</sup>

To protect himself in case the American Association did not operate in 1902, Rourke left for a Western League meeting in St. Joseph on December 5. Rourke was not the only person who had doubts about the American Association. Griswold of the World Herald thought the association was built "on a foundation of hot air."<sup>22</sup>

It was at this meeting that the first cracks in Hickey's plans began to appear and they involved Rourke. At the meeting Rourke conveyed to the Western League officials that he entered the association in good faith but he discovered that Hickey was planning to double-cross him by offering the Omaha franchise to a Van Brunt from St. Joseph. Not to be discouraged, Hickey said "We will put a club in Omaha and the circuit will stand as originally arranged."<sup>23</sup> As in the 1880's and 1890's, it was not a problem of not having a professional team in Omaha but of having too many. A few days later Hickey

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<sup>21</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>22</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 4, 1901.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., December 5, 1901.

was expelled from the National Association of Baseball Leagues, the body that governed all of minor professional baseball.

The controversy between Hickey and Rourke was dormant until the latter part of December when Hickey contacted Rourke by letter reminding him that he had been awarded the American Association franchise for Omaha and that he had failed to make good his guarantee to join the league. Leaving the door open for Rourke to enter the association, Hickey invited Rourke to attend the association's Kansas City meeting during the last week in December and if he did not wish to, at least give up the franchise to avoid legal difficulties. Rourke responded that if any attempt were made to obtain the Omaha American Association franchise from him, it would be met by legal action in the courts.

At the association meeting in Kansas City, on December 30, Hickey announced that he had three year leases for parks in all the association cities except Omaha. At this meeting, representing Omaha interests was Frank Bandle,<sup>24</sup> who was supposedly being backed by Milwaukee capital. Bandle made a strong plea for Omaha

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<sup>24</sup> Played on the first Omaha professional team, and owned a cigar store in Omaha.

to be accepted into the association and for attempts to be made to award him the franchise. His plea met sympathetic ears, which amounted to a declaration of war against the Western League and Rourke.<sup>25</sup> Bandle, returning to Omaha after the Kansas City meeting, conveyed that "it was the most enthusiastic minor league meeting that I ever attended." In fact, Bandle was so optimistic about American Association baseball for Omaha that he said he would immediately begin organizing "a good, fast team [as soon as] the settlement of some minor business details relative to the putting in of the club here...."<sup>26</sup>

Rourke was not enthusiastic. He was doubtful that anything concrete was accomplished concerning Omaha when he stated:

The famous Wisconsin trio, who are to finance the new association club in this city, were conspicuous for their absence at the Kansas City meeting, and it is funny if these gentlemen intend to invest fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in a strange city, that not even one of them was present to learn what they were likely to get out of their investment. Does that look like legitimate business?<sup>27</sup>

In regard to his adversary in Omaha Rourke had

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<sup>25</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 31, 1901.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., January 2, 1902.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

only sympathetic words.

So far as Frank Bandle is concerned, I have only the friendliest feeling for him, and the report that he is to be at the head of the opposition in Omaha has not altered my relations toward him one particle. Like all other businessmen Bandle is simply looking out for his own interests.<sup>28</sup>

With the battle lines clearly drawn between the Western League and the American Association, more specifically, between Rourke on one side and Hickey and Bandle on the other, the war was soon to reach its climax. As the adversaries were preparing to meet, Rourke, in a spirit of true sportsmanship, related that "if the so-called new American Association really intends to put a club in here, which I seriously doubt, I am fully prepared to meet them and may the best club win."<sup>29</sup>

On Tuesday, January 3, Hickey contacted Rourke and offered him five thousand dollars for his park. Rourke demanded seventy-five hundred dollars, hoping that it would be just enough to discourage Hickey, for Rourke thought that when the 1902 season opened, there would only be one professional team in Omaha. Hickey countered by stating that an American Association team would be in

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

Omaha, Western League or no Western League.<sup>30</sup> The negotiations for the park, however, were not closed because that Monday Hickey again saw Rourke and again offered five thousand dollars. After the meeting between the two men, Rourke had still not made up his mind and told Hickey that by Wednesday he would be in a better position to give a final and decisive answer.

Unable to wait any longer, and becoming increasingly impatient, Hickey made arrangements with Rourke to meet at the Paxton Hotel on Tuesday afternoon, January 7.<sup>31</sup> At the meeting were Rourke and his brother James, Hickey and Bandle. Bandle opened the meeting stating:

Gentlemen, what I most want to see here and now is harmony. We are all friends, and we certainly desire to have one ball club here this coming season, for we all realize what two clubs could mean, disaster to both, and maybe in a few months no baseball at all.

Now my proposition to you "Bill," is that if you will accept the franchise in the American Association and work in the interest of the association solely, I will hand it over to you and step down and out.<sup>32</sup>

At this moment, Rourke interrupted Bandle and interjected, "You are offering me something I already own." Bandle

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., January 5, 1902.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1902.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., January 8, 1902.

not understanding Rourke's statement asked what. Rourke answered: "Why, the American Association franchise for Omaha; I have it locked up in my safe, and intend to keep it there until the time I deem proper to dispose of it."<sup>33</sup> Bandle then insisted that it had been awarded to him. What followed was a lengthy discussion as to who owned the franchise, with neither convincing the other.<sup>34</sup> Seeing that the argument about the franchise was coming to no avail, Rourke concluded the meeting by relating:

I want to see harmony here and nobody wants to see it more heartily than I do. I have my all invested in my baseball park and baseball club, and while I am simply seeking to protect my own interests, I have not lost sight of the interests of the city of Omaha and its army of enthusiastic fans,...and to do what you ask me to do would be to throw down these good people and go to the enemy.

He then told Hickey and Bandle that he would give them an answer by Thursday.<sup>35</sup>

After the meeting Rourke told reporters that the meeting was an intended "grandstand play" to put him in an unattractive position with the Omaha baseball public. "They would like to make it appear that I am, in my own selfish interests, standing in the way of Omaha's

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

securing a good baseball team under the most favorable auspices." Rourke then told the reporters that if the American Association is to have such great baseball why do they want me and my Western League team.<sup>36</sup>

On the following day, in defiance of Hickey, Rourke journeyed to Kansas City to meet with the Western League president, James Whitfield, and other league magnates to discuss the situation and to make plans for the next Western League season.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, Hickey and Bandle, who had been negotiating for Rourke's park, had also been looking at other sites that could be a home for his Omaha American Association team. He had been seeking a baseball park since Saturday, January 4.<sup>38</sup> By Thursday, January 9, Hickey announced that he was about to complete a deal for a site at Twentieth and Paul Streets, and that all he needed to close the arrangements was City Council permission, which he expected to receive in a few days.<sup>39</sup>

It was not until a few days after the Western League meeting that Rourke revealed that he was not

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1902.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., January 5, 1902.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1902.



worried by the American Association. His main reason for not worrying was that the American Association was banned as an outlaw league which meant that any players who participated in any association game would never be able to play in the major league. The second reason for his lack of uneasiness, and probably the most important to Rourke, was that Hickey was unable to lease the grounds at Twentieth and Paul Streets and had not even secured an option on those grounds or any others. Rourke seemed to be right when he said that, "The Omaha move was a gigantic and a very cheap bluff..."<sup>40</sup>

Two days later, Sandy Griswold reported in his sports column that Hickey claimed he was unable to obtain a suitable park site and had to look elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> By January 30, the baseball war in Omaha, between Rourke representing the Western League, and Hickey of the American Association, came to an end when it was reported in the paper that Omaha was to be dropped by the American Association.<sup>42</sup> Although the American Association had been defeated in Omaha, they did make inroads in

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., January 17, 1902.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1902.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1902.

Kansas City, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Milwaukee. When the 1902 baseball season opened, Kansas City and Milwaukee saw themselves with two teams, representing the Western League and the American Association.<sup>43</sup>

The baseball situation remained the same in both leagues until the winter of 1903. On December 21, George Tebeau, who was a supporter of the American Association and a friend of Hickey, stopped off in Omaha for a day's rest from a train trip from Chicago to his home in Denver. However, his specific reason for stopping was not for rest but to see Rourke and to persuade him to join the American Association. Tebeau thought the Western League was dead because the larger cities were pulling out. Tebeau said, "Omaha has nothing to fear in the event of the Western League being unable to take the field in satisfactory shape this spring; we stand ready to take her in our fold."<sup>44</sup> Unable to convince Rourke that the Western League was folding and that he should join the American Association, Tebeau offered Rourke seven thousand dollars for his Omaha holdings, which Rourke turned down.<sup>45</sup> Not buying him, Tebeau tried to persuade Rourke

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<sup>43</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>44</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 22, 1903.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1904.

to convince the Western League to move out of Kansas City, so the American Association could consolidate their holdings, which Rourke also refused to do.<sup>46</sup>

Aware that the Western League holdings were in jeopardy in Kansas City and Milwaukee, the Western League magnates called a meeting for January 13, at Lincoln, Nebraska. At the meeting rumors were circulating that Rourke would "jump" to the American Association, but he denied it saying his future was with the Western League.<sup>47</sup> At the meeting Rourke led the fight to keep the league intact,<sup>48</sup> but unsuccessfully. The National Association, governing body of minor leagues, lifted their ban on the American Association and succeeded in convincing the Western League magnates to withdraw from Kansas City and Milwaukee.<sup>49</sup> By the end of January, the Western League magnates had, at a Chicago meeting, pulled out of

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., December 27, 1904.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1904.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1904.

<sup>49</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 19. One reason for the Western League's reluctance to withdraw from those two cities was that this would put the league population below the Class A ranking, then they would drop to Class B and have poorer baseball to sell to Western League fans. To convince them to leave those cities the Board promised that the Western would always be Class A regardless of population.

Kansas City and Milwaukee, and had transferred those franchises to Lincoln<sup>50</sup> and Pueblo, respectively, with the Peoria franchise going to Sioux City.<sup>51</sup>

Rourke returned from Chicago on January 30, and reported that the conflict between the leagues was now over, the Western League was only a six team league; he was glad, and ready to proceed with the new season. As for Tebeau, "I fought him assiduously; however, I am simply willing to acknowledge that he is a thorough baseball man and should lend much stimulation to the progress of our league."<sup>52</sup>

In 1904 "Pa" Rourke was to experience one of his more successful years in Omaha, after surviving the 1903 season in which his team had finished eighth in an eight-team league with forty-six wins and seventy-two losses.<sup>53</sup> Knowing he could not stay in business with

<sup>50</sup>Lincoln did not enter the league in 1904, as the franchise went to Colorado Springs. See: Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>51</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 29, 1904.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1904. Tebeau was instrumental in getting the Western League out of Kansas City; however, he also became owner of Denver which was a Western League member during the Chicago meeting. See: World Herald, January 29, 1904.

<sup>53</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 23. This was to be Rourke's worst season in the Western League.

many seasons like 1903, he got together for the 1904 season a number of highly talented young players with enough veterans to don the red and white of the Omaha club to make a serious threat for the pennant.<sup>54</sup>

Omaha got off to a languid start and was in last place at the end of April;<sup>55</sup> by June 1 the team had improved its position and moved into fifth place of a six team league, six full games behind the league leading Denver team.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the month of June the team continued to play better baseball and were one game over the five hundred mark with twenty-nine wins and twenty-eight losses, and had secured third place; though they were still six full games out.<sup>57</sup> On August 1, the Omaha Club was still in third place but had lost ground on the league leader, Colorado Springs, trailing them by seven games.<sup>58</sup> On September 1, with less than a month to go and still seven games behind the leader, many of the Omaha fans had given up any hope that the team could win the pennant. With Denver and Colorado Springs both in

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<sup>54</sup>Omaha World Herald, March 27, 1904.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1904.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1904.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., July 1, 1904.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., August 1, 1904.

front of Omaha, it appeared that Omaha was destined for a third place.<sup>59</sup> Then, just as Rourke had predicted a few months earlier, that "they'll get together before long and then watch them go,"<sup>60</sup> the Omahas began to make their move, and by September 18, were in second place only one half game behind Denver.<sup>61</sup>

On Sunday, September 18, before a crowd estimated between seven and ten thousand, said to be one of the largest crowds to see a game in Omaha, St. Joseph and Omaha battled. When the two games were over, Omaha had taken both games,<sup>62</sup> while Denver had lost. Through to the end of the season, Omaha was to lead the league, winning the pennant on Sunday, September 26, 1904. The finish was remarkable, for it had seemed that everyone except Rourke and his professionals had given up any hope that the team could win the pennant. The Omahas had won an almost unheard of seventeen out of eighteen games, fifteen of them consecutive.<sup>63</sup>

Although Omaha's pennant aggregation was

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., September 1 and 4, 1904.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., September 18, 1904.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., September 19, 1904.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., September 26, 1904.

basically a team effort, a few on the squad were outstanding during the 1904 season. Two of these performances were by pitchers Mordecai "Three Fingers" Brown and Jack Pfeister. Brown, who later played with the Chicago Cubs, led the league that year in winning percentages with twenty wins and only eight defeats. Pfeister, who went to the Boston Braves, led the Western League in strikeouts and also pitched a no-hit game. The other outstanding plays were by infielders Ivan Howard, who later played for the Detroit Tigers and St. Louis Browns, and led the league in total bases; and catcher John Goding, who led the league in fielding for catchers.<sup>64</sup>

In 1905 and 1906 the "Rourkes" finished third in six team leagues, and not until 1907 did Omaha again make a serious drive for the pennant.<sup>65</sup> On paper the Western League race looked like a tight battle between Omaha and Lincoln with Des Moines and Denver "troublesome." If Omaha were to make a good showing it would depend entirely on their pitching staff, which had looked good in the spring.<sup>66</sup>

Again, as in 1904, Omaha got off to a slow start

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<sup>64</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 3, 32, 33, 34, 49, 51, 52, 54, and 59.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>66</sup>Omaha World Herald, April 21, 1907.

but at the end of June, Omaha was in second place, only one game out of first.<sup>67</sup> The race continued to be tight but Omaha had moved into first place during the middle of July,<sup>68</sup> and held a sizeable lead until September 1. At that time most fans felt that no team in the circuit, or no combination of teams, would have a chance to overcome them.<sup>69</sup> However, during the first week of September the Omaha professionals fell apart and lost seven straight games, while Lincoln and Des Moines continued their winning ways, only three and four games behind Omaha.<sup>70</sup>

The stage was set on Tuesday, September 10, for the most important games of the season at the Vinton Street park between Omaha and Des Moines. If Omaha won the three games, the pennant would almost be theirs, but if they lost the three games, chances to win the pennant would almost be nonexistent.<sup>71</sup> With the park overflowing with fans, the Rourkes called upon all their resources and won the first game seven to three<sup>72</sup> and followed this

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., July 1, 1907.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., July 15, 1907.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1907.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1907.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1907.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1907.



victory with two more wins on the following two days, winning five to four,<sup>73</sup> and two to zero.<sup>74</sup> This put Omaha five games ahead of Lincoln and seven games in front of third place Des Moines.<sup>75</sup> All that was needed now to clinch the pennant was one more victory which was accomplished at Des Moines on September 13, when Omaha shut them out two to zero.<sup>76</sup>

The 1907 club did not have as many great players as the 1904 club but did have two players that were exceptional. Infielder James "Pepper" Austin, who later went to the New York Yankees, the Chicago White Sox, and the St. Louis Browns, and led the league in stolen bases. Pat Ragan, who was to become a Brooklyn Dodger, and who pitched a no-hit game,<sup>77</sup> was the other player.

Even though Omaha did not win the pennant in 1908 it did participate in one of the closest and most exciting finishes of the Western League. Omaha had led the league except for a few days in May<sup>78</sup> and briefly in

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1907.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., September 13, 1907.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1907.

<sup>77</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 33, 34, 50, and 51.

<sup>78</sup>Omaha World Herald, May 1, 1908.

July.<sup>79</sup> Otherwise, they were on top and looked like they might win their second consecutive pennant. On September 11, the stage was set for the five game showdown at Sioux City, between Omaha, which had eighty-four wins and fifty-five losses, and Sioux City, which had eighty-three wins and fifty-six losses. To win the pennant, Sioux City had to take four out of five games, and if Omaha won only two out of five, the teams would be tied for the pennant.<sup>80</sup> The first game was won by Sioux City and put the two teams in a tie for the lead.<sup>81</sup> Omaha came back and took the second game four to one, putting Omaha only seven percentage points ahead of Sioux City.<sup>82</sup> If Omaha were to win the pennant, it would have to win two out of the next three games; if Sioux City were to acquire it, they would need three victories. On Sunday, September 13, with superb pitching, Sioux City took both ends of a double header, shutting out Omaha five to zero and nine to zero.<sup>83</sup> Going into the last game of the series, Sioux City

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., July 4, 1908.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1908.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1908.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., September 13, 1908.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1908. Over 10,000 people saw that game; until that time it was the largest crowd to ever see a Western League game. See: Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 20.

needed only a victory to clinch the pennant, with Omaha hoping to salvage the last game to get a tie for the pennant, with hope of winning a play-off. In the final game, Sioux City again received good pitching and timely hitting, to trounce Omaha nine to zero, putting them in second place.<sup>84</sup>

Again in 1908 Omaha fans saw great performances from their ball players, with Pat Ragan leading the league in pitching percentages with twenty-nine wins and only seven losses. Outfielder Harry Welch led the league in batting with a .362 average. Finally C. A. "Runty" Rhodes pitched a no-hitter for the Rourkes.<sup>85</sup>

Rourke had been making a profit every year, never making less than eight thousand dollars. Good support by the Omaha fans and the sale of players to leagues of higher classifications brought his profits. He, therefore, decided to make improvements at the Vinton Street park. What started as a renovation on a liberal scale grew into a rebuilt ball park with a total outlay of thirty-two thousand dollars when the reconstruction was finished.<sup>86</sup> Construction began in the middle of November.

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., September 15, 1908.

<sup>85</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 33, 34, 46, 51, and 52.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., March 26, 1911.

Many fans who desired a new stadium expressed feelings that these improvements were rather extravagant.<sup>87</sup> But Rourke, who had great faith in the future of Omaha baseball, felt that it was an investment in the future growth of Omaha, which meant larger crowds at his stadium.<sup>88</sup> By March 19, construction of the Vinton Street park was almost completed with everything new except the clubhouse which had been built just a few years previously.<sup>89</sup> Along with regraded grounds and a new and higher fence, was a completely new grandstand with a capacity of eighty-five hundred, and, "with a little crowding it is possible to seat more than nine thousand."<sup>90</sup> The grandstand, "the pride of Rourke's heart," seated four thousand people, the reserved section twelve hundred, and the box seats held eight hundred and thirty-one.<sup>91</sup> Instead of coming to the grandstand from the front, the fans could now buy their tickets and enter the grandstand from the rear by climbing stairs to a runway which was conveniently located

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., November 13, 1910.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1911.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

to reach the grandstand, reserved or box seats with ease.<sup>92</sup> "To get to the bleachers or to enter with your automobile or buggy you would buy your ticket at a separate ticket office...."<sup>93</sup> Besides these conveniences, the park also had an auto yard which allowed "the occupant of the machine to see the games plainly."<sup>94</sup> The only part of the park that was not completed by opening day was the infield which had not been sodded but which was to be completed while the team was on their first road trip.<sup>95</sup> Frank Bandle, who was Registrar of Deeds for Douglas County, thought the park was wonderful, especially when compared to the parks of the 1800's. Bandle said, "They weren't grandstands at all, as the present day fans understand the word. They were planks set on stringers, and about as hard and uncomfortable as lumber could be made."<sup>96</sup>

Rourke was never to win a pennant in his new park as a manager, for he was to announce after the 1914

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>The Omaha Bee, March 26, 1911. A picture of the stadium can be found in this particular issue.

season that he was stepping down as manager and would devote his time strictly as president of the club. Whether he quit managing because he wanted to "take things easier," as his wife stated,<sup>97</sup> because of his age, or because he had married<sup>98</sup> for the first time the year before is unimportant. What was important, at least to Rourke, was to choose a successor who would continue in the Rourke fashion. His decision was finally made in January of 1915, after several weeks of negotiations, with one of his own players, second baseman Marty Krug, being chosen.<sup>99</sup>

Under the direction of Krug, the Rourkes won only one more pennant, in 1916. The team was probably the best that Rourke ever assembled in the Western League, winning ninety-two games and losing fifty-seven. Omaha got off to a lethargic start, but by the end of May began to move upward and were only one game behind the league leaders, Lincoln.<sup>100</sup> On June 1, Omaha and Lincoln were

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<sup>97</sup>Interview with Mrs. William Rourke, June 6, 1963.

<sup>98</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 6, 1913. He married the former Mary Kelly of Omaha at St. John's Church.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1915.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1916.

tied for the league lead,<sup>101</sup> and throughout the month Omaha set a blistering pace winning twenty out of twenty-seven games and was ahead of second place Lincoln on July 2.<sup>102</sup> However, Lincoln was also setting a fast pace and remained near to league leading Omaha; on August 1, was only four and one half games behind Omaha.<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the season Omaha set the pace and clinched the pennant on September 21,<sup>104</sup> finishing the season five and one half games ahead of Lincoln.<sup>105</sup>

Accompanying the winning of the pennant, the Rourkes were given the honor of playing their first inter-league game. An agreement was reached by flip of a coin on September 11, via telegram between the league presidents of the Western League and the higher classified American Association. The two men also agreed that the entire series would take place in Omaha during

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1916.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., July 2, 1916.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., August 1, 1916.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1916.

<sup>105</sup>Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League, (published by the Western League, N.P.), 1951, p. 23.

Ak-Sar-Ben week, starting the first week in October.<sup>106</sup> According to Rourke, which was typical of the man, the players were to receive all the receipts except what was needed for expenses.<sup>107</sup>

The first game between Omaha and Louisville was played Wednesday, October 4, and had to be called because of darkness, ending in a three to three tie. The second game of the five game series was played at 10:45 A.M. to avoid a conflict with the Ak-Sar-Ben parade that afternoon, which featured President Woodrow Wilson. The game was won by Omaha, eleven to seven.<sup>108</sup> On Friday, the tie game was replayed with the American Association team winning by an eight to two score.<sup>109</sup> On Saturday, Louisville was again trouncing Omaha eleven to three.<sup>110</sup> Going into the final day of the series Omaha needed two victories to win the series, Louisville one. On Sunday, in the first

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<sup>106</sup>Omaha World Herald, September 17, 1916. The reason all the games were played in Omaha was the cost of traveling prohibited equal play in each park.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1916. From reading newspapers, talking with his wife and people who were his friends, one can understand why he agreed to let the players have the receipts after expenses. Having been a player himself, he knew that his men could use the money.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1916.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1916.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1916.



game of a double-header, the Association team won the game six to five and the series, but because the fans came to see two games the unnecessary fifth game was played with Omaha again being outclassed eight to two.<sup>111</sup>

The next year, which baseball magnates thought would be another usual year, saw that the war was beginning to affect their business. After a number of years of observing the turmoil in Europe, the United States became embroiled in the conflict of World War I in 1917. When the news broke that the United States was involved in the war, baseball owners did not know exactly how the war itself would affect baseball and its young players. They did know that the high cost of living caused by the war would make it almost next to impossible for the poor man to attend many games, besides making it rather difficult to operate a ball club.<sup>112</sup> By the fall of 1917, baseball in the minors was becoming an uncertain proposition, especially if the war continued on into the following spring. Besides the unrest in Europe, there was unrest in baseball circles regarding league realignment, which was caused by the demise of many minor leagues due to financial failure. The talk of realignment originated

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1916.

<sup>112</sup>The Omaha Bee, April 15, 1917.

rumors that Omaha would become a member of a higher classified league.<sup>113</sup> By October 7, Ban Johnson, president of the American League, was talking of a third major league, which Omaha's fans hoped would give them an opening in a better league.<sup>114</sup>

Near the end of October another development took place when the Indianapolis, Louisville and Toledo owners let it be known that they were quitting the American Association and would join with five International League cities in a new circuit. The development gave rise to further hopes of Omaha fans that they would become members of the association in 1918.<sup>115</sup> With all the rumors and speculations, Rourke did not even attempt to make plans for the 1918 season; not knowing which league Omaha would be in, he could not buy any athletes until the enigma was solved.<sup>116</sup>

At Louisville, Kentucky, on November 11, 1917, Western League officials met prior to the annual minor league meeting in the same city. At the meeting, four

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., September 23, 1917.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1917.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., October 28, 1917.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1917. Since the association was a better baseball league, Rourke did not know what caliber of players to buy.

other league owners agreed with Rourke that in order to save the minors during war time, the minor leagues would have to be redistricted and consolidated.<sup>117</sup> A few days later, on November 13, Omaha baseball fans had their hopes crushed when Hickey, president of the American Association, announced that the "five owners of the American Association will not permit three of these clubs to secede and enter a new league."<sup>118</sup> The final demise of hopes of receiving higher classification baseball in Omaha came the following day when the minor league magnates voted down redistricting.<sup>119</sup>

Though the war had taken its toll among the minor leagues, eight minors did start the 1918 season,<sup>120</sup> one of which was the Western League. Early in the season of 1918, Rourke began to realize that the war had finally reached Vinton Street park. With small weekday crowds because of the shortage of help to run the businesses and factories to further the war efforts, employers could not permit their employees to take time off to see the Rourkes

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1917.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., November 14, 1917.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., November 15, 1917.

<sup>120</sup>Robert L. Finch, L. H. Addington, Ben M. Morgan (ed.), The Story of Minor League Baseball, (The Stoneman Press, Columbus, Ohio), 1952, p. 22.

play.<sup>121</sup> As Rourke conveyed: "We have been playing great ball and have had perfect weather, but attendance has been about one-third of normal. Unless something can be done to increase attendance I will have to close our gates."<sup>122</sup>

To help Rourke during the trying time the Omaha Chamber of Commerce announced that it would attempt to sell twenty thousand admissions to the Vinton Street park, to insure the tenure of the team for the 1918 season.<sup>123</sup> As C. O. Talmage of the Chamber said, "We look upon the club as one of Omaha's best publicity agents, we need Rourke park for the entertainment of the boys at Fort Omaha and Fort Crook, to say nothing of visitors to our city."<sup>124</sup> To aid the war effort on the moral front and to better his image with the Omaha public, Rourke agreed to allow soldiers and sailors in uniform to see all games free except those on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.<sup>125</sup> Corollating the Chamber's assistance, Rourke aided himself by innovating twilight

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<sup>121</sup>The Omaha Bee, May 26, 1918.

<sup>122</sup>The Omaha World Herald, May 22, 1918.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

baseball which Sandy Griswold of the World Herald said was being used for the first time and being endorsed by cities of the American Association.<sup>126</sup> The twilight baseball idea came to Rourke through popular demand and also as a patriotic measure to give the working man a chance to relax during weekdays without interrupting business hours.<sup>127</sup>

Baseball in the Western League, specifically Omaha, seemed to be doing fine, until May 23, when Provost Marshall Crowder added an amendment to the selective service act by requiring every man of draft age to "work or fight." The order was far reaching, affecting not only the habitual loafers but men in "nonuseful" jobs such as clerks in stores, waiters, bartenders, employees at places of amusement, passenger elevator men, employees around hotels, clubs and business buildings, gamblers, fortune tellers and race track attendants.<sup>128</sup> The editor of the World Herald seemed to wonder where a person would draw a line to define useful work from nonuseful work and emphasized the point by the following:

Take theatrical performers and professional ball players. The rule is that actors may

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., May 25, 1918.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., May 26, 1918.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., May 25, 1918.

continue in their present calling, on the ground that the public must be entertained, but that ball players may not. Is the theater more useful or essential to the prosecution of the war than the baseball park?<sup>129</sup>

On Rourke's squad the "work or fight" rule would take a heavy toll, with only two men, manager Bill Jackson and catcher Kelly, too old for the draft. The other members were already making plans for the duration of the war. Al Bashing would go back to Peoria, Illinois, where a government job awaited him; Charlie Hanford would work in the ship yards; J. W. "Doc" Holderman, who held a medical degree, was waiting to be called since he was a member of the Navy Reserve Corp; Clyde "Tony" Defate was to work in the ship yards; Harry Donica, would go back to LaPorte, Indiana, to work as a machinist; Otto Nip was waiting to be called, as he was already classified 1A; Van Geldes would return to the farm in Missouri; Charlie Kopp would also do farm work; and Al Callahan, who did not have any profession other than baseball, had not "given the matter a whole lot of attention yet."<sup>130</sup> The war had already taken two men who had started the season with the Rourke's--Cy Lingle and Oscar Fuhr.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., May 29, 1918.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

By the middle of June, Rourke and his squad seemed a little more optimistic about finishing the season when he commented, "I never have had a losing season in Omaha...and we are doing a nice business this year. Just so long as league baseball is played the Western League will continue in existence."<sup>132</sup> Tom Fairweather, owner and president of the Des Moines club was even more optimistic, when he commented on what good shape the league was in, even though his "club had been hit hard, but a good cause got the boys, and we are not kicking. We will fill the gaps."<sup>133</sup>

With this kind of thinking, the Western League, and Omaha in particular, looked forward to September when a team would be crowned champions. Without warning, Rourke learned from league president Emerson W. Dickerson that a league meeting would be held Sunday, July 7, in Omaha. Dickerson explained that seventy-five percent of the organized ball players had already been called and that he expected at least another fifteen percent would be lost before the season was over. With these ominous facts, Dickerson wanted to consult the team owners on whether to continue with the league or end it now and

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1918.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

hope for an end to the war before the 1919 season.<sup>134</sup>  
 After discussing the pros and cons of the advisability of closing operations for the season, each owner, without quivocation voted to call it quits. Although the war was foremost in their minds in quitting, because it was the only "righteous course...to set the players loose" so they could respond to the call of their country, another reason, though less patriotic, was the simple fact that most owners, up to the time of the meeting, had lost between five and seven thousand dollars and stood to lose more if the season continued.<sup>135</sup>

After agreeing to end operations the magnates drew up a resolution, as follows:

Be it resolved. By the members of the Western League of professional baseball clubs that

Whereas, The great American public is, at the present time, interested in but one great pen-  
 nant race, that being the great battle now being fought on our Western front; and,

Whereas, The baseball profession has furnished five hundred of those boys in khaki who are now in the different branches of service; and,

Whereas, Those now employed in playing the great national game are anxious to do their full part in helping to make the victory a knockout to clubs representing the Kaiser; and,

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1918.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., July 8, 1918.



Whereas, Both club owners and players are desirous of complying with every wish of the government and to conform with the order of Provost Marshall Crowder.

Therefore, Be it Resolved By the several owners of clubs representing the Western League that we place patriotism above profit and that it is the sense of this meeting that the Western League does hereby abandon its operation until the close of the war and that each club owner and player does hereby offer his service to his country in order that the greatest of all American pennants the United States flag may wave triumphant over the spires of Berlin.<sup>136</sup>

While the league magnates were discussing disbandment, the Rourkes were playing a double-header in Omaha and were unaware that they were to be released, and did not receive the information until after the game.<sup>137</sup> The following morning Rourke released his players, to "be governed by their individual sentiments, but with the entire bunch, obeying the great injunctions of the government, it will be immediately work or fight."<sup>138</sup> A day after the meeting Rourke commented that "all agreed that it was our country first of all, and there was not even a single halfway vote registered on the proposition to quit--it was spontaneous, simultaneous and

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid. Dickerson received his call to report while the meeting was in session.

unanimous,..."<sup>139</sup>

In 1919, with a number of his players still in uniform, Rourke was to have a dismal season and finish at the bottom of the league for only the second time in his long career in Omaha.<sup>140</sup>

The year 1920 found the Rourkes with a much better team, finishing fourth in an eight team league;<sup>141</sup> however, many people were disillusioned with the team feeling that they should have won the pennant, but lacked the desire to be pennant-winners. As the Omaha Bee commented, "certainly on paper they had the best team."<sup>142</sup>

This was to be Rourke's last year as the owner of the Omaha club. Omaha baseball fans would remember Rourke not only as a man who gave Omaha successful baseball for two decades, but also for the men he developed and sent to the big leagues. In addition to those mentioned previously were such players as: pitchers, Charles "Buster" Brown, Boston Braves; Tom Hughes, Chicago Cubs; infielder, John "Red" Corriden, Detroit Tigers, and Cubs; outfielders, Burt "Barney" Shotton,

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., July 9, 1918.

<sup>140</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>The Omaha Bee, September 12, 1920.

St. Louis Browns, and Cardinals.<sup>143</sup>

Also during his twenty-one years of owning the Omaha club, Rourke had the unique reputation of never missing a ball game or baseball meeting. He was also very active in minor league affairs and eventually was recognized all over the country as one of the best informed men on players, rules, and general baseball affairs.<sup>144</sup>

The first public announcement that Rourke was contemplating the sale of the Omaha club was on Monday, November 22, 1920, when it was learned that John Fagan Burch,<sup>145</sup> nephew of John H. Kirby, of the Kirby Lumber Company of Houston, Texas,<sup>146</sup> had been in Omaha the

<sup>143</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 32, 33, 34, and 35.

<sup>144</sup>The Cincinnati Enquirer, January 18, 1931.

<sup>145</sup>Burch, who received a wound during the war, could no longer play his position as catcher and came out of the service with the idea of buying a club. He first heard of the Omaha franchise being sold through Dutch Schierken, who used to play first base for Rourke. It was at this time that Burch talked to his old manager at San Antonio, Mike Finn, to become his partner if they got the Omaha club. See: Omaha World Herald, January 14, 1934.

<sup>146</sup>According to Edward Hazen, a former player and friend of Burch, and now a resident of Omaha, Burch claimed that Kirby was one of the richest men in Texas and as will be pointed out in Chapter IV, was one of the backers of Burch financially in acquiring the Omaha club.

previous week investigating the baseball situation in the city. At first Rourke was not too anxious to sell, but he announced on Tuesday, November 23, that any young baseball magnate, business man, player or sportsman who was willing to pay seventy thousand dollars for the club could buy it. Burch meanwhile admitted that he liked the town and its prospects for the future but refused to say whether he would meet Rourke's terms. Rourke gave Burch until December 6 to either accept or reject his terms, which called for Burch to post five thousand dollars at the time of the purchase and to pay the balance by January 5.<sup>147</sup> Rourke's initial terms were met by Burch on December 4,<sup>148</sup> and a little over a month later, on Friday evening, January 7, Burch arrived in Omaha to complete the deal.<sup>149</sup> On Saturday, January 8, Burch and Rourke completed the transfer of the buildings, grandstand, players' contracts, suits, bats and other paraphernalia for what the World Herald reported was a sum near the one hundred thousand dollar mark.<sup>150</sup> Officially,

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<sup>147</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 24, 1920.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., December 5, 1920. The Omaha Bee reported that it was seventy thousand dollars.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., January 8, 1921.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1921. An interview with Edward Hazen disclosed that the total was sixty thousand dollars exactly.

Rourke was no longer owner of the Omaha baseball club, but formally the Rourke years came to an end on February 14, at a Western League meeting in Des Moines, when Rourke ceremoniously severed his relations with Omaha and the Western League and turned it over to "Barney" Burch.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1921. Rourke retired from baseball until 1927 when he became a part of the Cincinnati Reds until his death on February 6, 1932. See: Cincinnati Enquirer, January 18, 1931, and Omaha World Herald, February 6, 1932.

## CHAPTER IV

## BURCH AND THE DEPRESSION YEARS: 1921 TO 1936

Barney Burch, who had been told by Bill Rourke that Omaha was "a steady going town that will give a fair profit every year,"<sup>1</sup> began immediately buying and selling players, preparing for his first season in the Western League.

Besides the important business of giving Omaha fans a team that would be a pennant contender, Burch and Mike Finn were also busy building an image to enable them to obtain the support of the Omaha fan. To create interest in the club prior to their first season in the league, the Omaha management opened a contest to rename the Omaha team.<sup>2</sup> Any person who wished to enter the contest could get entry blanks at the Bee newspaper. After filling out the entry blank the contestants were to mail them to the Sports Editor of the Bee, no later than March 1.<sup>3</sup> On Tuesday, March 1, thousands of nicknames

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 14, 1934.

<sup>2</sup>The Omaha Bee, January 23, 1921.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 5, 1921.

had been received and Burch, who was anxious to get his team named, declared the day a holiday, and he and Finn spent the entire day going over the entry blanks, with hopes of ascertaining a winner.<sup>4</sup> On March 4, Roger Campbell, Winnie Smith, Ray Raynor and E. E. Odell were named winners of the contest, all suggesting "Buffaloes" as their title. The four winners received season passes worth forty-one dollars for eighty-two games. Burch felt the nickname was appropriate because it was popular in the sports world, and "buffaloes" was suggestive of strength, typical of Nebraska and the West.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the majority of the world's nations were experiencing rather difficult times economically, the United States was entering a period that would be typified by free spending, crime and, in general, an era that was bent on having a good time. People were hungry for entertainment after the war; one such media to benefit from this hunger was baseball.<sup>6</sup> The Omaha baseball club was not isolated from this desire for entertainment, and

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1921.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., March 4, 1921. It might be interesting to note that the Omaha World Herald called them "Burches" and "Burch Rods."

<sup>6</sup>Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League, (Published by the Western League N.P.), 1951, p. 24.

in 1921, drew one hundred and twenty-three thousand paid admissions.<sup>7</sup>

In 1922 and 1923 the Buffaloes finished fourth.<sup>8</sup> Not until 1924 was Burch to acquire his first pennant. Though this would be the only pennant winner Burch was able to produce, it was the best team Omaha fans were to observe, for they won one hundred and three games and lost only sixty-one.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1924 season Omaha and Denver had a continuous battle for first place and it was not until June 29 that Omaha took over first place undisputed.<sup>10</sup> Omaha held that lead and finally won the pennant on Saturday, September 27, by beating Oklahoma City, while Denver was beaten by St. Joseph, making it mathematically impossible for Denver to overtake Omaha's lead.<sup>11</sup> Returning from their final road trip as the Western League champions, the team pulled into the Union Depot, expecting a large crowd of fans to be on hand to greet them. Much to their surprise, they were unheralded

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<sup>7</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 14, 1934.

<sup>8</sup>Burch's partner, Mike Finn, died in 1922 of heart disease. Death took place on May 6 while he was attending a baseball game in Omaha. See: Omaha World Herald, May 7, 1922.

<sup>9</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>10</sup>Omaha World Herald, June 29, 1924.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., September 28, 1924.



conquerors, with only one hundred personal friends, wives and sweethearts on hand.<sup>12</sup>

On this outstanding team were a number of exceptional players that included infielders Nick Cullop, who went to the New York Yankees; Fresco Thompson, who later played with the Pittsburg Pirates and Philadelphia Phillies; pitcher Bill Bailey, who led the league in innings pitched and strikeouts; catcher F. J. Wilder; third baseman James Wilcox; and outfielder Joe Bonowitz, who led the league in fielding in their respective positions.<sup>13</sup>

Preparing for the 1925 season after faring fairly well financially in 1924, Burch felt that the Omaha club was the team to beat for the 1925 season,<sup>14</sup> although eight members of the championship team would be missing on opening day.<sup>15</sup> "Barney" Burch was to be sadly disappointed with his club for it was not the team to beat, but the team that got beat quite regularly, finishing

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., October 5, 1924.

<sup>13</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 34, 35, 53, 54, 57, 58, and 59.

<sup>14</sup>The Omaha Bee, February 8, 1925.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1925.

sixth in an eight team league.<sup>16</sup> Again the following year the Omahas were to finish sixth, winning only seventy-seven and losing eighty-nine games.<sup>17</sup> The 1925 and 1926 baseball seasons were disastrous for Burch because the teams were not winning and the fans were staying away from the ball park, refusing to support losing teams. Burch felt that it was not only losing teams that were hurting him in his pocketbook, for other forms of amusement, such as "movies and the horse races, the air meets, bridge playing, whoopie parties, and car driving," were giving baseball competition.<sup>18</sup>

Previous to the opening of the 1927 season, the Omaha Chamber of Commerce held a public affairs luncheon to publicize the need for public support of the Omaha baseball club. At the meeting Burch announced that he would build a concrete grandstand with an up-to-date ball park if the city would only support and make the baseball team a financial success during the following two years. He also added:

I am willing to give Omaha a real ball team because I know that if the city doesn't have such a team, the fans won't come to the

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<sup>16</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 14, 1934.

games. I don't want your patronage if the team isn't a winner and by a winner I mean a team in the first division.<sup>19</sup>

H. M. Baldrige, a member of the Chamber, talked on "What a Baseball Team Means to the Business Man." In his appeal Baldrige emphasized that it would be profitable for the average Omaha businessman to back the team because a thorough spot check showed that on weekdays seventy percent of the automobiles at the ball park were from outside Douglas County. He concluded that it was necessary for Omaha to be in the public eye of other Western League cities.<sup>20</sup> Also at the meeting was Jack Holland, owner of the Oklahoma City team, which was to play Omaha the following day. He said that the fans must support the team because overhead and expenses were heavy in the league. Holland then concluded that "something has been wrong in Omaha, as far as your baseball team is concerned."<sup>21</sup>

Holland was right when he said something was wrong but it was doubtful that it was only the fans, for 1927 was to prove again that the fans would not support

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<sup>19</sup>The Omaha Bee, April 28, 1927.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

a losing team, which finished in seventh place.<sup>22</sup> As if following Burch's instructions, the fans did not patronize his park and Burch again sustained a loss, this time for twenty-eight thousand dollars.<sup>23</sup>

The first indication that the baseball situation was not on stable ground came in an editorial during the second week in August. It was reported to the Bee by Burch that three Sioux City stockmen were interested in getting the Omaha franchise for the Iowa city for the 1928 season and if they made the right kind of propositions, Omaha would be without a team in 1928. Burch seemed to think if Omaha were without a team for two or three years, maybe the city would half-way support a team if the league saw fit to return here. According to Burch, three league owners wanted Burch to leave Omaha before the season was half over.<sup>24</sup>

By September 4, Burch let it be known that the New York Yankees had sent him the following telegram:  
"New York Yankees desire to purchase Western League franchise for Yankee farm. Plan chain of minor league

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<sup>22</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>23</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 14, 1934.

<sup>24</sup>The Omaha Bee, August 8, 1927.

clubs to develop players. Have eyes on two cities."<sup>25</sup> Burch added while talking to a Bee reporter that, "If the Yankees will give me what I think my ball club is worth, they can have it. That goes for anyone else, including yourself."<sup>26</sup>

A few days later on September 12, it was announced that an important Western League meeting would be held in Omaha on Tuesday, September 20, at the Rome Hotel to reorganize the league. The season was one of the worst financially in the history of the league because of long jumps to Amarillo, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City, and the northern Western League owners were desirous that the league reorganize.

On Saturday night, preceding the September 20 Western League meeting, Burch admitted that heavy financial losses caused by second division baseball teams and waning interest in the league, was causing him to still harbor the idea of selling the club or moving the franchise to some other city.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1927.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Omaha World Herald, September 18, 1927. There seems to be a conflict on reporting by the two major Omaha papers for the Bee reported on September 12, that Burch had given up the idea of moving the team to Sioux City.

The meeting convened at noon, with Burch announcing officially to the Western League magnates that he was entertaining the thought of moving his franchise to Sioux City.<sup>28</sup> However, after six hours of discussing the entire situation in the Western League, the owners announced that the league would remain the same for the 1928 season. President Dale Gear felt that, "Omaha and the entire league is due for its banner year in 1928."<sup>29</sup> Gear felt that a town with over two hundred thousand population should never draw less than one hundred thousand fans to the ball park. He went on to explain that transportation was the big cost for an owner but there was not a thing that could be done about it.<sup>30</sup>

Burch disagreed when he talked to a World Herald reporter after he was out of the baseball business in 1934. He explained that:

We were all a little crazy back then, paying salaries we couldn't afford, taking the long sleeper jumps to Denver and Pueblo, and expecting a winner next year...We were in a spending race, jumping salary limits and taking ball players who had big dough written into their contracts.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1927.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1927.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., January 21, 1934.

On a scale like that, Burch said he had to average over eight hundred paid customers for every home game or go broke financially. "I told them we could not keep up that style, but they would not listen."<sup>32</sup>

Sports Editor of the World Herald, Frederick Ware, had a different theory:

If the magnates are able to burnish and brighten the game itself, to restore its one-time glamour, the greater number of their financial worries will be at an end.

Better players make better teams and uniformly better teams over the Western domain mean a revival of that interest...<sup>33</sup>

In 1928, Burch and his Crickets<sup>34</sup> were again to experience a dismal season, losing more games than they won both halves of a split season in the Western League.<sup>35</sup> Through the 1928 season Burch found himself in one predicament after another; to make matters worse, he had to sell his best ball players to keep the club alive financially.<sup>36</sup> Burch was borrowing from "Peter to pay

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., September 22, 1927.

<sup>34</sup>According to the Bee, Burch wanted a new nickname, so a contest was held with the name Crickets chosen. See: Omaha Bee, March 22, 1928.

<sup>35</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>36</sup>Burch sold five players throughout the season, the fifth sale took place September 15. See: Omaha Bee, September 16, 1928.

Paul," for each player that he sold weakened his team which in turn pushed his team further into second division of the league, and no Omaha fans were going to support a loser as they had proved in the past. Evidence of the financial plight that Burch was coping with came on the last road trip of the year when Burch announced that he would not journey to Amarillo, Texas, because the cost of the trip would be prohibitive.<sup>37</sup>

In 1929, the Omahas were to enjoy their best season in the league since 1924, finishing third, winning eighty-one games and losing seventy-five.<sup>38</sup> In addition to his winning season, Burch made a sizeable profit from the sale of his pitcher, John McGrew, who won 24 games that season, to the Philadelphia Athletics for an understood sum of thirty thousand dollars.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Burch finished another season intact, the economical woes of the entire country would add another problem to his baseball interests in Omaha.<sup>40</sup> In October, 1929, the United States entered into the worst depression of its entire history. As Burch explained

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<sup>37</sup>Omaha Bee, September 19, 1928.

<sup>38</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>39</sup>Omaha Bee, September 7, 1929.

<sup>40</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 21, 1934.



later in 1934, baseball was at its lowest ebb and then along came "old man depression [who] put his foot on its neck."<sup>41</sup>

Burch admitted that baseball was "a game for the working man and always has been. When he gets back on his feet...minor league ball will come back and pay dividends." Barney was not a man to take anything lying down. To promote his club for the 1930 season he announced his "thriving thirties" program, which called for the selling of advanced season tickets. A special inducement was for merchants, who could obtain season tickets that were worth \$57.75 for \$20.00, to pass among their employees and customers.<sup>42</sup> Baseball men in the minor leagues knew that to save baseball during these trying times would call for more drastic measures than cut rate prices and gimmicks to get the working man back to the park. They knew that money was scarce and so were jobs, and that any man who had a job would not be able to leave in the afternoon to attend a baseball game.<sup>43</sup>

It was in Des Moines, Iowa, a member of the Western League, that baseball men saw what they thought

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Omaha Bee, February 23, 1930.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

would be the "saving angel" of baseball--night baseball. This novel idea was introduced on Friday, May 2, 1930, and was attended by baseball magnates from throughout the country. One of those in attendance was Burch, who was willing to witness anything that might keep him from going under financially. Burch thought it was the most wonderful thing he had ever seen, and wondered if night ball would save his club. After the game he consulted with the General Electric Company engineers, Fred Ralston and Frank Winkley, who had designed the lighted ball park in Des Moines. He asked their help in planning and installing lights for the Omaha Vinton Street ball park.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the month of May construction workers were busy installing the light towers which reached seventy feet into the sky and would yield fifty million candle power.<sup>45</sup> Within less than a month the lights were ready for a game between the Denver Bears and the Omaha nine on May 29.<sup>46</sup>

Burch, who was hoping that this novelty would save him financially, expected crowds that would equal

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., May 3, 1930.

<sup>45</sup>Omaha World Herald, May 11, 1930. Estimated cost was between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars.

<sup>46</sup>Omaha Bee News, May 13, 1930.

the crowds of the 1921 through 1924 years.<sup>47</sup> The gates were opened at six o'clock in anticipation of a record crowd.<sup>48</sup> At approximately 8:20 o'clock, the lights were turned on and from the crowd came a roar of approval.<sup>49</sup> As a reporter described it, "transforming the darkness and drabness of the ball park into a bright symphony of color...like the green of a billiard table and the bright colors of the advertising signs on the park walls were intensified."<sup>50</sup> In a way, though, the night was a bitter disappointment for Burch, for only approximately seven thousand fans made their presences known for the game.<sup>51</sup> But, as was to be shown, night baseball was to be a temporary remedy for the ills of minor league baseball in Omaha. At first it was a novelty for the fans, but soon the freshness wore off and did not boost attendance as Burch had expected it to. When he was asked whether he lost money or made money during the 1930 season, he answered: "I broke about even."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Omaha World Herald, May 29, 1930. The record crowd was eleven thousand eight hundred.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Omaha Bee News, May 30, 1930.

<sup>50</sup>Omaha World Herald, May 30, 1930.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1930.

Adversity was yet to come for the Omaha owner as the attendance continued to slump at the Vinton Street park in 1931. To add insult to injury, a wind storm hit the park in August, causing nearly three thousand dollars damage to the park, blowing down one light tower and completely wrecking the right field fence. Burch had no insurance to cover the damage.<sup>53</sup>

During the first part of August, Gear called a meeting to discuss the financial plight of the "salary crazy owners." It was at this meeting that the league owners advanced Burch enough money to carry him through the season. Gear explained that, "With thousands of people out of work throughout the league territory, it has been a ding-dong battle all season long." Gear explained to reporters that he tried to induce some of the owners to sell players to cover expenses but pointed out that in Omaha's case there was little "marketable material."<sup>54</sup>

Going on their last road trip of the year, Burch found himself without the necessary number of players after many had abandoned him in his inability to pay salaries. As the Omahas arrived in Denver, only ten

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1931.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., August 26, 1931.

players were present to answer the roll call. With several players injured, the manager faced the prospect of calling off the contest. Not wanting to lose the guarantee that goes to a visiting club, the manager hurried into town and procured five sand lot players.<sup>55</sup> Following the Denver games the patched Omaha team journeyed to Pueblo and finished the season with only three regulars in the lineup; the others were sand lot players.<sup>56</sup>

Though the odds of making a success of baseball financially in the Western League were slim for 1932, the owners did not declare a moratorium. Throughout the 1932 campaign the Omahas continued to bring poor baseball to meager crowds. To keep the team going, Burch, during mid-summer, sold his star player, Leon Riley, for fifteen hundred dollars, to Rochester, of the International League, to pay off back salaries.<sup>57</sup>

By July, Burch was at the end of his resources and the team was able to make only a single road trip that month because H. C. Lee, the Pueblo owner, advanced the seventy-five dollars guarantee to Omaha prior to

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<sup>55</sup>Omaha Bee, September 20, 1931.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., September 23, 1931.

<sup>57</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 16, 1933.

their leaving for the Colorado city.<sup>58</sup> When the team returned they were in a angry and rebellious mood, even threatening to quit because the management was several thousand dollars in arrears of salaries. At a meeting held Monday afternoon the players agreed to give Burch another chance to make good on his promise to pay off back salaries. Burch agreed to let the players have all the gate receipts of the game to be played Tuesday night, after expenses.<sup>59</sup> Tuesday, Denver moved into town to play that night; however, they demanded their guarantee in advance. Burch could not pay it, so Denver left. Again the players agreed to give Burch another chance to make good his promises. Burch told the players that his previous agreement would hold for a Thursday night game matching Des Moines and Omaha.

Thursday night the players were hoping that they would be able to obtain part of the money owed to them, but that night only one hundred sixty-five people were in the stands, paying sixty-five dollars to see the game. Realizing that it was financially impossible to play the games in Omaha, the remaining games of the series were

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1932.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1932. Once in Denver, some of the players sold their baseball bats to buy food. See: Omaha Bee, September 9, 1932.

transferred to Des Moines.<sup>60</sup> The team made it to Des Moines and played the remainder of the series.

It was in Des Moines that Burch learned that he was being sued by the ex-wife of one of his players, Mrs. Vera Dailey, for one hundred dollars. Previously, Burch had agreed that he would deduct fifty dollars from her husband's salary for alimony.<sup>61</sup> Since Burch had not paid her husband she petitioned that the club pay her one hundred dollars, and she also obtained a writ of attachment against the club's property. With a fast tongue Burch was able to talk the sheriff out of the uniforms until the end of the season.<sup>62</sup>

Able to make it through the 1932 season even though he was in his most extreme financial plight since he came to Omaha, Burch was not ready to give up in Omaha, despite rumors that the Omaha franchise was to be

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1932.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid. Besides the salary crisis Burch was also sued by one of his players for a debt contracted during spring training. In early spring, Edward W. Brown had loaned Burch one thousand dollars to pay spring training expenses. Burch, in the following month, paid three hundred and fifty dollars but was lax in paying the balance. As a last resort Brown brought a judgment against Burch on Tuesday, August 30; however, when the constable went to collect, he learned that the gate receipts for that night had already been promised to the players. See: Omaha World Herald, August 31, 1932.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1932.

transferred to Joplin, Missouri,<sup>63</sup> a rumor Burch denied.<sup>64</sup> At the Western League meeting in Kansas City on Wednesday, January 25, Burch told the other owners that he was not going to give up, that he still would fight to keep the club going, for

I've the greatest confidence in baseball. This may not be the year to make money. I don't think I will. But with conditions as they are, lowered salaries and reduced overhead, I can break even on a season attendance of forty thousand.<sup>65</sup>

Burch was confident that he could make it through the 1933 season, but others in the league, including president Gear, were not so confident. During the second week of March, Gear and other officials of the Western League filed a bankruptcy suit against the Omaha club.<sup>66</sup> Gear's motive was to clear the territory so a club could operate in Omaha for the Western League season of 1933. According to Western League lawyers, the bankruptcy suit would settle the Omaha club's debts, but would not settle

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1932.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1933.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Burch owed the league approximately \$4,791.53 in unpaid dues. See: Omaha World Herald, March 27, 1933, and Bankruptcy Case Number 4958, District Court of the United States, District of Nebraska, Omaha Division, March 17, 1933.



the claims of players for back wages due them.<sup>67</sup>

Though Gear planned to have Omaha in the league for 1933, other creditors, especially one, who would not disclose his name, claimed that small creditors were at a disadvantage and would lose out by the bankruptcy action.<sup>68</sup> On March 17, the bankruptcy petition against Burch was filed in the United States District Court of Nebraska, Omaha Division, with three petitions listed: the Western League, Giant Manufacturing Company of Council Bluffs, and P. Melchior and Son of Omaha.<sup>69</sup>

Francis "Pug" Griffin<sup>70</sup> announced while in Omaha Thursday, March 30, that he would like to operate the club for the 1933 season depending on three conditions: if there would be a Western League in 1933, if creditors of Burch agreed to him as friendly receiver, and if he

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<sup>67</sup>Omaha World Herald, March 28, 1933. Baseball rules state that before a club may operate in a given territory for any season all back players' salaries have to be paid. Since Burch owed the players back wages, Omaha could not have a club in 1933.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., April 2, 1933.

<sup>69</sup>Bankruptcy Case 4958, U. S. District Court, District of Nebraska, Omaha Division, March 17, 1933.

<sup>70</sup>Nicknamed "Pug" because of his pugnacious attitude on the playing-field as a player. He was a resident of Lincoln and former major league outfielder, and manager of the 1932 Omaha team.

could raise the necessary funds. Griffin felt that he could persuade the Omaha business men to buy enough stock in the club to operate for the 1933 season.<sup>71</sup> Griffin spent the entire following day contacting businessmen and friends about the feasibility of operating a club in Omaha for the 1933 season and becoming league magnates on a share basis. After summing up the general consensus of his contact's opinions, Pug was encouraged; however, he thought the best thing to do was to wait on the disposal of the bankruptcy case before taking any definite steps toward reorganizing the Omaha club.<sup>72</sup>

A few days previous to Griffin's arrival in Omaha, a subpoena was served on Burch at his residence at 18 $\frac{1}{2}$  St. Marys Avenue, Apartment 2, on March 20, to answer charges of bankruptcy on April 6.<sup>73</sup> At the federal court hearing Burch was unable to outline why involuntary bankruptcy action should not be taken against him and admitted that he owed the petitioners the money as stated; he would ask for a jury trial. Then federal Judge J. W. Woodrough appointed Griffin as friendly receiver for the

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<sup>71</sup>Omaha World Herald, March 31, 1933.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., April 1, 1933.

<sup>73</sup>Bankruptcy Case 4958, op. cit., March 17, 1933.

Omaha baseball club, which got the full approval of Burch.<sup>74</sup> The judge also ordered Griffin to post a five thousand dollar bond to insure his position as receiver of the Omaha club.<sup>75</sup> On April 7, Griffin posted the five thousand dollars.<sup>76</sup>

During the 1933 season the Omaha management did not fare much better than they did in previous years, but the club almost broke even. According to Griffin, "I think we did real well, all things considered."<sup>77</sup> After the season Griffin, according to court order, began the time-consuming ordeal of accounting for all money received and paid out, so everything would be in order to present to the federal judge. Though the receivership was like a cloud hanging over his head, Pug felt that he would take over again in 1934 if the court would write off the bankruptcy action.<sup>78</sup> He stated optimistically:

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid. The petition asking for the receiver was filed by William A. Day, attorney for the petitioners. The reasons for the receiver were two-fold: "The alleged bankruptcy is deteriorating or liable to do so...[and] that the said franchise for operating said baseball club will be forfeited unless the same is operated."

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Omaha World Herald, April 8, 1933.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1933.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

I'd like to have a debt-free proposition here. The Omaha club has been under a cloud so long it is time we brought it out in the clear. And by paying our bills this season, I think we have won back the confidence of the Omaha businessmen.<sup>79</sup>

On November 14, Burch waived the jury trial and consented to be adjudged bankrupt.<sup>80</sup> A few days later Burch presented to the court his total assets and liabilities.<sup>81</sup> Burch listed the following as his assets:<sup>82</sup> franchise, \$25,000; grandstand, \$5,000; money due by R. G. Mohr for operating concession stand, \$8,238.10; and the Western League, because the league is of the nature of a co-partnership, thus making each liable; life insurance policy, \$5,000. Creditors cataloged by Burch were: Coca Cola Company, \$1,757; Union Credit Corporation of Omaha, \$5,036.35; Nebraska Power Company of Omaha, \$2,633.47; Pittsburg Baseball Club, \$12,004.84; taxes, \$3,153.53; Western League, \$7,094.83; players' salaries, \$3,040.59; W. E. Hapgood, \$2,756.68; First National Bank of Houston, Texas, \$3,000; John H. Kirby,

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., September 24, 1933.

<sup>80</sup>Bankruptcy Case 4958, op. cit., March 17, 1933.

<sup>81</sup>Because there were so many assets and liabilities listed, only the major ones will be mentioned. The other assets not mentioned totaled: \$1580.

<sup>82</sup>Bankruptcy Case 4958, op. cit., March 17, 1933.

Houston, Texas, \$55,353; John Ostronic, \$3,180; Mrs. Mike Finn, \$2,500.<sup>83</sup>

On December 9, referee in the case, Herman Aye, had come to two decisions in regard to Burch's list of assets and liabilities. First, that the Western League would not be liable for debts incurred by the Omaha baseball club, and secondly, that whoever bought the club would not be responsible for old debts incurred by the Omaha club. It was at that time that G. P. Horn was elected trustee for the creditors to find a buyer of Omaha's baseball assets.<sup>84</sup>

On Wednesday, December 27, a public auction was held to dispose of the assets of the Omaha club. The auction was at two o'clock at the Vinton Street park in the wooded frame club house. Inside by a crackling stove were G. P. Horn, John Ostronic, who owned the park grounds, Joseph A. Vijar, Ostronic's attorney, Griffin and his "henchman" "Choppy" Rhodes, a newspaperman and Burch, "drawn to the scene by curiosity and a nostalgic feeling."<sup>85</sup> At the "auction" no bids were forthcoming so Horn announced that he would attempt to sell the assets

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid. Burch's total debts including those not mentioned came to \$104,114.65.

<sup>84</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 20, 1933.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1933.

privately to protect the creditors.<sup>86</sup>

On the first Tuesday in January, Griffin and Cy Lingle<sup>87</sup> approached Horn privately to buy the club. Griffin asked Horn what he considered would be a fair price for the franchise. Horn answered that if he were to offer fifteen thousand dollars he probably would recommend sale. Griffin thought the price was ridiculous when he commented, "Cy and I are willing to buy a club and have the cash to turn the deal. But fifteen thousand is a heap of cash, especially when it is not absolutely certain that the Western League will operate."<sup>88</sup> Griffin expressed his desire to be considered a preferred purchaser because he operated the club in 1933 and did not receive one cent and since, "I took it on the chin last season I feel that I should be given first consideration when the club is sold."<sup>89</sup> Other visitors to Horn's office later that day were Edward Brown, a former player of Burch, and John Ostronic, both of whom expressed that the asking price was too high.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Played with Rourke's ball club.

<sup>88</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 6, 1934.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

After rejecting Griffin's and Lingle's offer of five hundred dollars and unable to negotiate a private sale, Horn decided that the club's assets would be put up for public auction at his office, Room 200, Sunderland Building, at ten o'clock February 5.<sup>91</sup> Hoping to clear the whole affair after many weeks of frustrated negotiations in which he "was not interested,"<sup>92</sup> Horn was anxious along with the Western clubs to see someone buy the club.<sup>93</sup>

At the auction were approximately twenty-five people, of whom several were prospective buyers. Those interested were Cy Slapnicka, of the Cleveland major league club, Pat Ragan,<sup>94</sup> representing "a certain national league club," Griffin, Ostronic, and Burch. When the bids were asked "the silence was deafening."<sup>95</sup> As it were, three old Nemesis made the prospective bidders shy when confronted with the question of whether the Western League would operate; a matter of back salaries which

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1934.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., February 4, 1934.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., January 12, 1934.

<sup>94</sup>Played under Rourke. See: third chapter.

<sup>95</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 6, 1934.

amounted to around six thousand dollars; and back taxes.<sup>96</sup> Gear, in attendance at the auction, urged a faster pace in the sale emphasizing that the other clubs in the league were marking time until the club sale was completed. Horn, seeing that no bids were about to be made, postponed the proceedings until Tuesday afternoon at two o'clock.<sup>97</sup>

For the third time Horn tried to dispose of the club at a public auction. This time he received a bid of one thousand fifty dollars from Anthony C. Ostronic,<sup>98</sup> who was representing the Ostronic brothers. According to Horn the bid was not high enough to satisfy the creditors. Also at the auction was Frank Wetzel, a former Omaha player, who the night before had flown in from Los Angeles. He sat through the entire proceedings without uttering a word but as soon as the auction came to an impasse he immediately arose from his chair to send a number of wires.<sup>99</sup>

By Tuesday, there were still no buyers from the

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Brother of John Ostronic.

<sup>99</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 7, 1934. It was not known at the time but one of the wires was sent to Mrs. E. B. Branconier of St. Louis, a woman of some means, and a close friend of Wetzel. See: Omaha World Herald, February 18, 1934.



interested parties for the Omaha club, but rumors had it that a conference between Horn and Wetzel would probably end with Wetzel as the next owner of the club. Wetzel himself felt that his plans to buy the club would work out.<sup>100</sup> On Saturday, Horn and Wetzel met to discuss the transaction, with the Pittsburg debt as the only obstacle. At the close of the meeting Horn told Wetzel that the debt could be circumvented. Horn then gave Wetzel permission to represent Omaha's interests at the next Western League meeting.<sup>101</sup>

After the Saturday meeting, Wetzel journeyed to St. Louis to discuss the deal with Mrs. E. B. Branconier. He explained that he had called baseball Commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Landis, concerning the Pittsburg debt and that he ruled that it was beyond the jurisdiction of baseball law and that it would have to be a matter settled between Burch and Pittsburg management. Learning of the development Mrs. Branconier gave Wetzel her approval of the transaction. Immediately Wetzel called Horn and agreed to buy the Omaha club for twenty-five hundred dollars. Wetzel also agreed to assume all unpaid wages.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., February 11, 1934.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1934.

By Tuesday, the deal was closed when Horn commented, "Wetzel is the only fellow who came to me in a business-like way and did business. The others seemed to fumble around apparently not sure what they themselves wanted."<sup>103</sup>

A few days later the Omaha baseball fans were still wondering who really owned the club. A World Herald reporter asked Wetzel who owned the club. Wetzel answered, "I am the sole operator, the man who hires and fires and signs the checks. My backing is partly my own money and partly that of a St. Louis party. The reporter added, "Come, come, Mr. Wetzel." Wetzel then admitted it was a St. Louis woman but would not reveal her name.<sup>104</sup>

On Saturday, February 17, Mrs. Branconier arrived in Omaha by train and authorized Wetzel to reveal her identity. At this time it was disclosed that she was the major stockholder and she would be president and treasurer of the club, while Wetzel would be vice-president, general

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1934. The bankruptcy case against Burch was dismissed on August 27, 1934. See: Bankruptcy Case 4958, U. S. District Court, District of Nebraska, Omaha Division, March 17, 1933.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., February 16, 1934.

manager and secretary.<sup>105</sup> Mrs. Branconier admitted that the only reason she had bought into the club was not because of any particular interest in baseball, but to help an old friend.<sup>106</sup>

Wetzel was now ready to make Omaha baseball the profitable business that it once was.<sup>107</sup> As the season progressed Wetzel saw that just a change of owners would not cure the illness that affected baseball in Omaha, nor put money in the working man's pocket to spend on entertainment. With the team playing poor ball and near the tail end of the league, attendance at home games was meager, averaging about three hundred per game. This meant that on every home game, the management would suffer heavy financial losses. Unable to understand the continuous losses, Mrs. Branconier arrived in Omaha on Friday, July 27, to discuss the chaotic situation.<sup>108</sup> After a lengthy discussion, Wetzel told her that he could no longer take the financial losses and wisely convinced

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., February 18, 1934. The investment to get the Omaha Baseball Associates started amounted to twenty-five thousand dollars, with two hundred and fifty shares at par value of one hundred dollars.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., July 6, 1934.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1934.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., July 28, 1934.

the woman that he wanted to sell his investment. She agreed, hoping maybe that something could be salvaged from the original investment. On Saturday, July 28, Mrs. Branconier became sole owner of the club. She said that, "Mr. Wetzel and I part business relations the best of friends. He felt that perhaps a change would better the situation and I agreed."<sup>109</sup> Mrs. Branconier also let it be known that if any local interest came along and made the right offer, she would be willing to sell her interest.<sup>110</sup>

The Omaha team with the financial subsidy of Mrs. Branconier managed to struggle through the 1934 season,<sup>111</sup> and looked forward to the 1935 season with doubtful hope. With the 1935 season only about a month and a half old, Omaha fans did not know if the team would finish the season or not.

The Western League owners, knowing that if Omaha dropped from the league, it would make it so difficult

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., July 29, 1934.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>The Western League had a split season in 1934. Of the eight teams in the first and second halves of the season, Omaha finished seventh both halves. See: Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League, (published by the Western League, N.P.), 1951, pp. 21 and 25.

for the league to operate that they probably would not be able to finish the season themselves. To solve the problem, league president Gear called a league meeting for Friday, June 7, at Des Moines. All league owners were present except Mrs. Branconier. The league owners knew that something drastic would have to be done since the club was badly in arrears with player salaries (they had not been paid on June 1) and rent owed to John Ostronic and "umptein other creditors."<sup>112</sup> When a World Herald reporter asked Mrs. Branconier about the situation, she had the usual "nothing to say."<sup>113</sup>

At the meeting the league owners decided that since the Omaha owner did not seem to care if the players got paid or whether the team finished the schedule, they would defranchise her,<sup>114</sup> which automatically left Mrs. Branconier very much out of the baseball picture in Omaha and the Western League. The league owners then turned the franchise over to manager Joe McDermott

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., June 7, 1935.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., June 13, 1935. Mrs. Branconier had to forfeit the franchise when she failed to provide transportation for the team to play in Rock Island, Illinois. She also tried to attach the team uniforms but was talked out of that move. See: Omaha World Herald, June 13, 1935.

temporarily.<sup>115</sup>

The league owners announced that they would assume the transportation cost for a trip to Rock Island. They also stated that if something had not been done about the future ownership of the Omaha club by the time the team got back from their road trip, the league would liquidate the Omaha club.<sup>116</sup> After hearing of this, business manager of the club, Paul Hammon, began preparing financial statements in case he found someone who might be interested in buying the club.<sup>117</sup>

By June 12, the fate of the club was still an enigma. Elmer S. Rood, a local hotel manager, then indicated his interest in getting the backing of local businessmen to operate the club, but he wished to see the financial statement of the club's business manager before making a decision. Arrangements were made for Rood and Hammon to meet Wednesday night, but the statement was not forthcoming. Finally, late Thursday, the long-awaited statement was delivered to Rood who told a reporter that, "I have not had time to analyze the statement as yet, and

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1935. Friday night the players voted to stay with McDermott until something could be done about back wages. The club's indebtedness amounted to around six thousand dollars.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., June 7, 1935, and June 13, 1935.

don't want to make any definite moves until I've gone over a few puzzling items with Paul Hammon Friday."<sup>118</sup>

After studying the report, Rood said that the situation was not any better than he had anticipated and that without hesitation he had told Hammon "too much," because of liabilities totaling twelve thousand dollars, which would total around eighteen thousand dollars by the end of the season.<sup>119</sup>

On Sunday, league president Gear journeyed to Omaha to confer with Hammon on the prospects for a new owner and what to do until one could be found, when the team returned from their road trip. At the close of the meeting the two men agreed to keep the team under league management until an owner could be found.<sup>120</sup>

Gear then called a league meeting in Omaha for Wednesday, June 19.<sup>121</sup> At the meeting, Tony Ostronic, brother of John Ostronic<sup>122</sup> and one of the creditors, was given an option on the Omaha club for five days to seek a

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1935.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., June 15, 1935.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., June 17, 1935.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1935.

<sup>122</sup>An interview with John Ostronic on August 12, 1963, disclosed that he was anxious to have the park played in because he would lose money on the property if it were not rented.

buyer.<sup>123</sup> One of the men approached was Joe McDermott, the Omaha manager, who said Thursday night that he wanted no part of the financial end of the Omaha club. He explained there were enough worries running a club on the field without taking on the added responsibility as part of the management. McDermott commented that he probably would quit if there was not a settlement soon:

It's a pretty discouraging task to attempt to ask boys to play their best ball when they haven't been paid for thirty-five days. I am willing to stand by for a few days and so are the players, for the home games. But it is out of the question to think about taking the club on the road again until salaries have been paid and the club put on a sound financial basis.<sup>124</sup>

Not to be discouraged, Tony Ostronic continued to search for a buyer.<sup>125</sup> The deadline for Ostronic was twelve noon Monday, June 24, when, if he did not find a buyer, the option would be nullified. On Sunday, Dale Gear and the Western League officials agreed to extend the zero hour till Friday, June 28. If a buyer could not be found by then, the club would be disbanded and the players would be declared free agents.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Omaha World Herald, June 1935.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., June 21, 1935.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., June 24, 1935.



To worsen matters, the team returned home to discover that it had no home park. Since Mrs. Branconier still retained a lease on the Vinton Street park, she refused to allow the home games to be played.<sup>127</sup> The problem was now twofold, to find a new owner, and to find a home for the Omaha "orphans." With this development the league officials were approaching desperation, realizing that they had three alternatives: disbandment, make them a road team, or find a new home.<sup>128</sup>

On Tuesday, a new development occurred when league officials conferred with the Council Bluffs Junior Chamber of Commerce on the possibility of the team finishing the 1935 season in Council Bluffs, with an option until November 10, to buy the club. Following the meeting, Leon Morse, president of the Chamber, issued the following statement:

The Junior Chamber holds a lease on Broadway Park, and we are merely renting the park to the Western League. We are assuming no obligations whatever. Salaries and all operating expenses will be paid by the league. The only profit we can hope for is from a

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1935. On Monday, June 25, Mrs. Branconier also claimed her share of the baseball bats.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

percentage of the gates.<sup>129</sup>

This action meant the first venture into organized baseball for Council Bluffs and the end of organized baseball in Omaha for the first time in thirty-five years.<sup>130</sup>

The move did not improve the baseball fortunes of the old Omaha team. After almost two months across the river, the Council Bluffs Rails found themselves in the same situation--no payment of salaries. By Saturday, August 24, McDermott and the players were contemplating giving up the 1935 season as a bad experience. When the team arrived home from their most recent road trip they found no paychecks waiting for them. The prospects of getting paid were even dimmer, since the Chamber had no obligation to pay salaries, and were not about to. In a spirit of optimism the players agreed on August 24 to take a wait and see course and finish the five game home stand before calling the season to an end.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., June 26, 1935. A letter from Joe McDermott revealed that Adolph Liska, a former big ball player and a member of the Omaha team, bought the club on option for paying the back salaries of the players. Letter from Joe McDermott, July 23, 1963.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., August 25, 1935.

On Tuesday, August 27, the "opera comique" finally reached a climax. President of all the minor leagues, Judge William G. Bramham ruled that the players were free agents, thus ending Council Bluffs' brief episode in organized baseball.<sup>132</sup> The same day Gear told the Chamber that the Western League was no longer responsible for the Rails' future and that if they had any complaints they should contact Liska. Liska replied that he did not own the team nor the franchise, that he was appointed by the league to be the team's business manager and that was all.<sup>133</sup> To clear the confusion of ownership and responsibility, Bramham a few days later ruled that the Western League would be held liable for all debts incurred by the club while in Omaha and Council Bluffs during the 1935 season.<sup>134</sup> What appeared as a final and uncomplicated decision by Bramham later turned into a mystery that had a comic tint to it.

On September 7, Griffin expressed an interest in getting back into baseball for the 1936 season. A few

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., August 28, 1935. The St. Louis Cardinals exercised their right to four players which cost them two thousand five hundred dollars, which the judge used to pay off the players' salaries and other expenses.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1935.

days earlier Griffin had gone to Council Bluffs to investigate the baseball conditions, finding them very discouraging. He still thought that Omaha would support a team; when he tried to find the owner of the Omaha club, he discovered that his first problem was to "find out who holds the franchise for the Omaha territory."<sup>135</sup>

Bramham also could not locate the owner of the franchise. When he wrote to Liska about about a statement explaining salaries due, Liska wrote back saying that he was not the owner. Gear, in a telegram to Bramham on August 15, explained that he "thought Liska is the owner of the Council Bluffs franchise."<sup>136</sup> By September 24, the situation began to reach a climax when Bramham reversed his previous ruling and ruled that the Keokuk franchise, owned by Larry Harlan,<sup>137</sup> which had been transferred to the Omaha territory, would be responsible for all indebtedness due the other clubs for purchase of players' contracts, Western League umpires, salaries, hotel bills and transportation.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1935.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., September 24, 1935.

<sup>137</sup>Although it was not publicly announced Larry Harlan, a Lincoln insurance man, who owned the Keokuk franchise had bought the Omaha franchise from Liska. See: Omaha World Herald, October 19, 1935.

<sup>138</sup>Omaha World Herald, September 24, 1935.

Co-partners Harlan and his brother-in-law, Jim Payton, knowing that it would be difficult to make a success of baseball in Omaha if they continued the old ways of past owners, decided to offer the Omaha fans a "new deal." This would involve three aspects: regain public confidence; present a pleasing team to watch; and to keep the player standard high.<sup>139</sup>

During the winter of 1935 and 1936 Harlan also was negotiating with R. A. Drum, president of the Fontenelle Brewing Company,<sup>140</sup> to give financial support to the team. Finally on Monday, April 6, the two men came to terms when Drum announced that, "We have agreed to substantially underwrite the Omaha club. You can't get away from those summer bed fellows, beer and baseball, so we united 'em."<sup>141</sup> Harlan then added, "This alliance assures Omaha of continuous baseball. With this backing, our financial situation is secure."<sup>142</sup>

As the season progressed the Robin Hoods were not any better than recent Omaha teams, since they were

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1935.

<sup>140</sup>Maker of Robin Hood beer.

<sup>141</sup>Omaha World Herald, April 7, 1936.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid. The financial aspects were withheld but Drum said it involved "a bundle of cash." Since Drum was backing, the team name became the Robin Hoods.

firmly entrenched in fifth place of a six-team league. As the team continued to play poor baseball, the attendance continued to dwindle, and again the Omaha management saw themselves in poor financial condition. As Frederick Ware, sports editor of the World Herald, related:

It is no secret that the Robin Hoods have been the beneficiaries of subsidies all season. First it was a brewery,...that payed new life into the treasury. Since, ...businessmen have helped.<sup>143</sup>

By the middle of July Harlan announced that if the fans did not turn out for the next home stand that he would consider transferring the club to Lincoln. When it was pointed out that the Lincolnites failed to support their team, which was in the Nebraska State League, he answered, "I have lived in Lincoln a long time and believe I know the mental attitude of the baseball fans there. They do not care to attend a state league game because the teams in that league do not have the speed of the Western League clubs."<sup>144</sup>

The Omaha fans received a reprieve from Harlan's ultimatum when Mother Nature intervened on July 19, causing approximately three thousand dollars damage,

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1936.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

destroying three light poles. Unable to play in the Omaha park, Harlan made arrangements for the home stand to be played in Lincoln, at least till the Vinton Street park was repaired.<sup>145</sup>

By Tuesday, August 4, the park would be repaired and ready for play.<sup>146</sup> A little over a week later, more destruction would befall the Vinton Street park and the Omaha baseball club. Friday morning, August 14, a few minutes after midnight, Robert Ostronic, fifteen year old son of John Ostronic, whose residence was across the street from the baseball park, awoke and happened to look out his bedroom window and saw that the park was on fire.<sup>147</sup> The boy immediately ran downstairs and gave the alarm and then returned to awaken his father. By that time the flames were "shooting sky high." Within a few minutes the first of the firemen arrived.<sup>148</sup> By then the fire was out of control. Adding to the confusion, the firemen

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., July 20, 1936.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., July 31, 1936.

<sup>147</sup>The account of the Omaha World Herald and what was related by John Ostronic differed considerably. Ostronic said he was attending the Vinton Street Improvement Club's meeting a few blocks away when someone rushed in and told him the ball park was ablaze. Interviewed August 13, 1963.

<sup>148</sup>This was the first three alarm fire since the man power of the Omaha Fire Department had been reduced because funds were lacking.

could not find the fire hydrant hidden in the weeds next to the ball park southeast corner fence.<sup>149</sup> A few minutes after the firemen were on the scene they realized that the park was beyond saving. The heat was so intense that they could not get within seventy-five feet of the fire, and they began to concentrate the water on surrounding homes.<sup>150</sup>

On the scene was Harlan, who stood nervously smoking innumerable cigarettes while he watched the fire consume three thousand dollars' repair work, besides team uniforms, dozens of baseballs, ledgers of accounts, typewriter, desk, and a thousand dollars worth of hot dogs and beer.<sup>151</sup>

When the losses were estimated the damages amounted to about twenty thousand dollars to nearby homes, of which seven were totally destroyed; twenty-five thousand to the ball park; and fifteen persons

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<sup>149</sup>Personal interview with John Ostronic, August 13, 1963.

<sup>150</sup>Omaha World Herald, August 14, 1936. Witnesses of the fire related that it was thirty minutes before the first water was poured on the flames.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid. At the time, Ostronic thought that the fire was started by arson. In an interview, he still believed it and even had his suspicions, but would not disclose who he thought it was. Interviewed August 13, 1963.



hurt.<sup>152</sup>

Harlan, who had financial problems, had his headaches doubled when he faced the problem of finding a home for his club with sixteen remaining games on the schedule. On Friday, Harlan instructed his business manager, Hank Severied, to call Council Bluffs to make arrangements for Broadway Park.<sup>153</sup> By Friday, August 14, preliminary arrangements with Harwood McKain, lessee of the Broadway Park, were settled; however, two obstacles in closing the deal seemed insurmountable. Harlan had to negotiate with the Grant Manufacturing Company of Council Bluffs for the use of the lights, and the rates of the toll bridge.<sup>154</sup> The same day Paul Legomarrino, president of the Davenport, Iowa, Western League team, offered to help make arrangements for Harlan to move to Rock Island, Illinois.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid. Ostronic admitted that he would not rebuild the ball park. The day after the fire Omaha businessmen began talking about building a municipal stadium. See: Omaha World Herald, August 15, 1936.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1936.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid. The reason for the offer was that during the second half of the split season, Omaha and Davenport battled for first place in the standings. Legomarrino figured that since Rock Island was across the river from Davenport, it would create interest and draw large crowds, thus solving the financial problems of both men.

Meanwhile the Council Bluffs deal fell through, as Harlan related:

The Council Bluffs situation was hopeless. They wanted us to pay five hundred dollars for the lights, two hundred for fixing up the grounds, buy liability insurance, pay for a beer license, and give them the concession.<sup>156</sup>

Realizing that Legomarrino's offer was most lucrative, Harlan agreed to move his club to Rock Island. Learning of the move, Bramham refused Harlan's request to move the franchise until the old baseball debts owed by a Rock Island team of a few years before were paid.<sup>157</sup> The same day that Harlan got the news that he could not move, he called Baseball Commission Judge Landis and received his approval. When Bramham learned of this, he had no alternative but to reverse his decision explaining that he did not know the plight of the Omaha baseball club. So on August 17, 1936, the Omaha Robin Hoods became the Rock Island Rocks.<sup>158</sup>

This marked the end of organized baseball in Omaha after thirty-six years in the Western League. A feeble attempt was made during the winter meeting of the

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1936.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

league to place a team in Omaha under the sponsorship of the St. Louis Browns of the American League, but this did not materialize when it was learned that Omaha had no suitable park.<sup>159</sup>

Though Omaha fans experienced only one pennant from 1921 through 1936 they did see the performances of outstanding players: pitchers Walter Brown, New York Yankees and Cleveland Indians; Mel Harder, a local boy who later played for the Indians; Allyn Stout, St. Louis Cardinals; Monte Stratton, Chicago White Sox; Lyle "Bud" Tinning, Chicago Cubs; Bill Walker, New York Giants, and Cardinals; catcher Hank Severeid, Cardinals and St. Louis Browns; first basemen George Grantham, Pittsburg Pirates and Cubs; Ed Konetchy, Cardinals; infielders Nick Cullop, Yankees; Fred Haney, Detroit Tigers, Cincinnati Reds; Ed Moore, Pirates and Brooklyn Dodgers; Fresco Thompson, Pirates and Philadelphia Phillies; outfielders Floyd "Babe" Herman, Dodgers, Reds, and Cubs; Heinie Manush, Browns, Tigers, and Washington Senators; Emil "Irish" Meusel, Giants; Ernie Orsatti, Cardinals.<sup>160</sup>

The preceding list consists only of players who made it to the big leagues; others were outstanding,

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1936.

<sup>160</sup>Bryson and Housh, op. cit., pp. 32, 33, 34 and 35.

such as: Jack Lelivelt, who led the Western League in hitting in 1921; Frank "Dutch" Wetzel, who led the league in two base hits in 1928; Fred "Snake" Henry and Joe Rabbitt, who led the league in total bases in 1926 and 1927, respectively. "Fats" Hetherly led the league in stolen bases in 1928; Dan Tipple, who pitched no-hit games in 1922 and led the league in pitching percentages the same year with 23 wins and 6 losses; John McGrew, who led the league in games won in 1927 with 24 victories; Bill Bailey, who led the league in strikeouts in 1924; Art Griggs, who led first basemen in fielding in 1925; J. J. Tober, who led second basemen in 1930 in fielding; Stan Tutat, top fielder for third basemen in 1933; outfielders Rick O'Connor, Joe Bonowitz, Bill Allington, and Al McNeeley, who led the league in fielding in 1923, 1924, 1930, and 1934, respectively; and catchers F. J. Wilder and Clifford "Bud" Knox, who led the league in fielding in 1924 and 1933.<sup>161</sup> There were hundreds of others who contributed much to baseball, but who, like people in everyday life, contributed to the success of others but go unheralded and are forgotten through the passing years.

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., pp. 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 58, and 59.

A few depression years and a World War would pass before Omaha would again realize professional baseball. When the new era began the fans would experience probably the most exciting years of baseball in Omaha.

## CHAPTER V

## THE POST WAR YEARS: 1946 TO 1954

After the Second World War millions of returning service men and women began the transition from military life to civilian life. With those men and women came the desire for jobs, for families, and for entertainment. Among the returnees were thousands of former baseball players who had had their careers interrupted by the war. Because of the war, no minor leagues were operative. In the summer of 1946 the World Herald reported that baseball men throughout the country were making plans to reactivate the minor leagues, including the Western League. Rumors were widespread that Omaha, Denver, Des Moines, Tulsa and Oklahoma City would be members of the reactivated Western League.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the summer and early fall no concrete development took place. It was revealed in late October that Joe Mathes, manager of minor league operations for the St. Louis Cardinals, had attended a Western League meeting at Denver on October 26, representing Robert Hall,

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha World Herald, July 7, 1946.

an Omaha banker, and Omaha interests. At the meeting Mathes accepted the Omaha franchise in the Western League for Hall.<sup>2</sup> The next day Hall told a reporter that

The Cards expressed a willingness to back an Omaha entry in a new league if it could be organized on a sound basis. I am in the picture because I sincerely want to see Omaha back in baseball. We acted at the Denver meeting in order to keep the Omaha franchise from falling into the hands of less desirable persons than the St. Louis Cardinals.<sup>3</sup>

Hall was convinced that this would be the only opportunity for Omaha to get into organized baseball since the American Association had no openings. Also, he realized that the Western League would reorganize even if Omaha did not take the franchise, which would leave the door open for Council Bluffs interests to freeze the territory and leave Omaha completely out of the baseball picture. Hall realized that the first year would be difficult, mainly because of playing facilities and because he did not know if the people would still be satisfied with Western League baseball. He felt that "the baseball fans of Omaha will support a team which plays good

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., October 24, 1946.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

baseball and has sound management."<sup>4</sup>

Besides Omaha, Denver, Pueblo, Sioux City, Lincoln, and Des Moines were represented in the new Western League, which hoped to start play in 1947, though many of the cities did not have suitable parks, including Omaha.<sup>5</sup>

By November 1, native Nebraskan Mickey McConnell, Promotions Director for the Brooklyn Dodgers, was upset that the Western League had awarded the Omaha franchise to Bob Hall and the Cardinals. McConnell felt that "Omaha has no peers as a sports-minded city," and that the Dodgers were interested in giving the best baseball possible. He continued:

I feel it would be a mistake for Omaha interests to be affiliated with the Cards...the Dodgers and Cards operated clubs in nine of the same leagues last season. Dodger clubs finished first in three leagues, second in one, third in three, fourth in one and seventh in another. One Card club finished fourth and all the others were in the lower division.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid. After many attempts for a personal interview and a number of letters, I was unable to obtain any personal information from Hall; however, an interview with John Rosenblatt disclosed that Hall put up approximately five thousand dollars of his own money to get baseball for Omaha. Interview July 24, 1963.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., November 1, 1946.



McConnell said that Branch Richey, Jr., one of the Brooklyn Dodger executives, had asked him to bring the matter to the attention of civic leaders of Omaha concerning bringing the best athletic activity to Omaha. Their attempts were in vain, for legally Hall and the Cardinals were in Omaha and no other club could do anything about it. Nothing came of the protest of the Dodgers.

At another Western League meeting on the afternoon of November 15, at the Paxton Hotel in Omaha, Mathes and Bill Walsingham of the St. Louis Cardinals, along with Hall, disclosed that they were ready to back Omaha baseball to the extent of building a fence and putting up lights at Fontenelle Park until the Municipal Stadium was finished.<sup>7</sup> Mathes declared that

We're ready to back Bob Hall to the limit. If it is going to be necessary to install lights and a fence at Fontenelle Park until such time as the new stadium is ready, then the Cardinals are prepared to do it.<sup>8</sup>

Though the Cardinals and Hall were ready to do their utmost to get Omaha back into organized baseball, others, led by Edward Hinton, who was an active member of the Stadium Committee, were opposed to Omaha's entrance

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<sup>7</sup>The story of the stadium will be related in chapter VI.

<sup>8</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 15, 1946.

into the Western League. Hinton declared:

I have said all along that I would not be in favor of Omaha getting into a tank-town league and that's exactly what they're proposing to do. I'll fight the move with all of my ability. And I'll oppose granting of public parks for such use. As I've said before, I'd sooner see the parks...used exclusively by the kids and the amateurs, rather than put Omaha into the Western League type baseball.<sup>9</sup>

In his defense Hall issued the following statement the next day:

The Association [of minor leagues] was going to sanction a league that would include Omaha or Council Bluffs. The franchise would have been ordered to someone, and the league would have been formed whether I took over or not. It wasn't a case of waiting for a berth in the American Association as some insist. Had the Western League franchise been awarded to Council Bluffs, for example, Omaha would have been frozen out under the ten-mile rule of professional baseball. I did what I thought was good for Omaha. And I'll back every effort to see that we have high class professional baseball.<sup>10</sup>

To gain support for his plan to bring Western League baseball to Omaha Hall began addressing various civic groups in Omaha. On Monday night, November 17, Hall addressed the Better Omaha Club, which, after his speech, voted "fullest support and co-operation" to the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1946.

proponents of the new Western League.<sup>11</sup>

As battle lines were drawn by the public, so were they drawn in the City Council of Omaha. On March 19, two members of the Council asserted flatly that they were against use of Fontenelle Park and the Stadium when finished, for any baseball other than triple A league baseball. However, other commissioners favored the use of the park and Stadium, with the remaining two "still wide open" as to a stand. Omaha Mayor Charles Leeman was also against Western League baseball expressing that if you "tie up the city with this class of baseball, you have lost triple A ball forever." Public Improvements Commissioner Arthur Weaver was equally strong in his opposition. But Commissioner Harry Trustin stated that he was for the use of the park and Stadium, "that there was not a chinaman's chance in the foreseeable future" of Omaha getting American Association baseball.<sup>12</sup>

A few days previous to the statement of the Council and city officials, Hall admitted to a friend that if he could not obtain the use of Fontenelle Park he would "take the team to Council Bluffs," and use their

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., November 17, 1946.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1946.

Legion Park.<sup>13</sup> A few days later when Hall was asked about the possibility of moving the franchise to Council Bluffs, he declared that he had nothing to say.<sup>14</sup>

Later Hall arrived back in Omaha after attending a minor league baseball meeting in Los Angeles. At the meeting Hall wanted to learn officially if Western League baseball would keep Omaha from obtaining higher classification baseball in the future. Questioned on his return, Hall issued the following statement to alleviate the fears of the proponents of higher classification baseball:

I thoroughly investigated baseball law...and found that our membership in the Western definitely would not interfere with moving into higher classification if such an opportunity comes....Saying that membership in the Western would keep Omaha from ever moving into the American Association is as silly as saying that Milwaukee or Los Angeles or Baltimore can't move into the majors, simply because they belong to lower leagues now. As a matter of fact, Omaha can better cement its claim for a place in double A or triple A baseball by proving that it can support baseball in class A first.<sup>15</sup>

Though Hall's statement was reassuring the Stadium Committee requested Arthur Weaver, Public Finance Commissioner, to ask the City Council to issue a sixty day moratorium on their ability to grant use of city

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., November 21, 1946.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1946.

parks for professional baseball.<sup>16</sup> The committee asked the moratorium so they could have additional time to secure a higher classification baseball. This, however, the Council refused to do as expressed by Harry Trustin, "I don't want to be the one to stab anyone in the back. That is all this can accomplish."<sup>17</sup>

By the end of December Mayor Leeman was getting rather upset over the bickering of the various baseball committees and said that a united front was needed by the baseball fans of the city. "When the time comes for Mr. Hall to ask for the park," said the Mayor, "I would like to see baseball fans come in unified with a recommendation either for or against use of the park."<sup>18</sup> The major then added the fans would be asked through the cooperation of the World Herald, three questions.

Do you want to see the return of professional baseball to Omaha?

Do you believe that Omaha should enter the class A Western League for play next summer?

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<sup>16</sup>Stadium Committee: John Roseblatt, Edward Hinton, Bert Murphy, William Lane, Frank Ryan, Floyd Olds, Tom Dailey, Edward Lawton, Charles Winston, Rudy Tesar, Dick McCann, Chip Bowley, and Robert Hall. Hall did not take part in this request.

<sup>17</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 17, 1946.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., December 30, 1946.

Or should Omaha wait for a possible chance to enter the Class AAA American Association at some time in the future?<sup>19</sup>

The polls for the vote remained open until two o'clock Saturday afternoon, January 4.<sup>20</sup>

When the poll closed the results showed that 3,283 answered yes to the first question and only two answered no. To the second question 3,215 answered yes and 70 answered negatively, with the opposite results for question three.<sup>21</sup>

The same day that the major's poll closed it was disclosed that Hall had not officially asked the City Council for the use of city property for the Western League, but was preparing to. He said that he would tell the Council that the Cards would pay for fencing the park and installing the lights and other needed improvements and use the park until the Municipal Stadium was finished.<sup>22</sup>

Two days later Hall learned that there was more opposition to his plan to play at Fontenelle Park. At the City Council session on Tuesday, January 6, E. B.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., December 31, 1946.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., January 3, 1947.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., January 5, 1947.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1947.

Petersen, of 4319 North Forty-second Street, presented a petition bearing two hundred and fifty signatures protesting the enclosure of Fontenelle Park. He explained that the protest was not "against professional baseball." He added:

We feel that Fontenelle is a playground and a children's park. This would take our best park and sandlot ball diamond. The only way you can make pro ball pay is do away with sandlot baseball. We don't want to see this park provide the first inroad.<sup>23</sup>

He added, too, that professional baseball would reduce property values in the Fontenelle area and on game nights would block streets, thus adding an inconvenience to the residents.<sup>24</sup> Commissioners Harry Knudsen and Trustin disagreed with Petersen and a mild argument ensued. Seeing that nothing was being accomplished Leeman pleaded that the matter be dropped until an application for use of the park was made. He then adjourned by saying: "It looks like we've got a real feud brewing now."<sup>25</sup>

On Thursday, January 8, a new development entered the picture and presented another obstacle for Hall to

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

clear. Leeman announced that before the City Council could act, the City's Recreation Commission would have to decide whether to recommend the use of city property for the professional team. Clarence L. Kirkland, Chairman of the Park and Recreation Commission, said that he was for professional baseball "but if taking Western League baseball cuts us out of higher league possibilities for the future, I am against it. I would rather develop sandlot baseball in Omaha."<sup>26</sup> He also added Fontenelle Park would present "a terrific" parking problem.<sup>27</sup>

On Wednesday, January 14, fifty north-Omaha residents appeared before the City Council in behalf of Western League professional baseball and Hall. Doctor H. L. Karrer, spokesman, presented to the Council a petition signed by two hundred forty people. He then charged the Council with the following:

1. The mayor had delayed calling a meeting between Robert Hall, president of the Omaha Western League Club, and the Council.
2. The Council was passing the buck in saying the Parks and Recreation Department would have to decide on use of Fontenelle Park or Municipal Stadium.
3. Three men, Mayor Charles Leeman, Edward G. Hinton, and Commissioner

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1947.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.



Arthur Weaver, were about the only men blocking the return of professional baseball.

4. The mayor has placed Mr. Hinton, a known opponent of Western League ball, on the new commission--and that the north Omaha business men were not represented on that or any other of the new commissions.<sup>28</sup>

Karrer then commented on Mr. Weaver, "I don't think he knows any more about baseball than I do," and Mr. Hinton "doesn't have his hand on the public pulse."<sup>29</sup> Trustin then said that the Council would probably vote six to one in favor of professional baseball; then added that the Council knew about the World Herald poll and were not "foolish enough" to forget about it. At the end of the statement Trustin sat down and the north Omaha business men rose and clapped in approval.<sup>30</sup>

Ten days later Hall sent a letter to the Parks and Recreation Commission applying for use of the Fontenelle Park with the following points:

1. The Cardinals would install woven wire fence, using canvas to cover the fence during games--to be taken down after games and there would be no board fence or advertising.
2. The Cardinals would install temporary lights, pay for damage incurred and

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1947.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

- pay all expenses for transporting them, installing and returning them.
3. The Cardinals would provide at their expense an experienced groundskeeper.
  4. Pay two thousand one hundred dollars rent.
  5. The Cardinals would only play night games and others would have the privilege of using the park during the day.
  6. The Cardinals would pay the city ten percent of gross receipts when playing at home and twenty percent of gross concession receipts for any other occasion.

Hall then added: "This application is submitted with the knowledge and intention that the facilities at Fontenelle Park shall be temporary, and that its baseball playing facilities there will be turned back to the city in as good or better condition than it now is in."<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the application letter Hall sent another letter pointing out the following facts to the Parks and Recreation Commission:

1. That he [Hall] had no financial interest in the Omaha Cardinals.
2. That the team would make a material contribution to the community.
3. The St. Louis Cardinals were not asking one cent from the community.
4. That Western League class A baseball is good regardless of what some people have said.

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<sup>31</sup>Letter from Robert H. Hall to Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission, January 27, 1947.

5. That class A baseball would not keep Omaha from obtaining triple A baseball.
6. That few people living near Fontenelle Park would be affected by baseball.
7. It would provide more payroll, more entertainment and contribute economically to the community.<sup>32</sup>

After hearing of Hall's letter Petersen appeared before the Parks and Recreation Committee on January 30, explaining that "many people, not few, are affected, and people don't want to be kept awake at night by baseball." Petersen then told the Commission that his group would convey their story more fully before a decision was made.<sup>33</sup>

A few days later City Solicitor and attorney for the Commission, Edward Sklenicka, said that city could legally allow the Omaha Cardinals use of Fontenelle Park with the following reservations:

1. The city could not lease the park, but the city could grant the Omaha Cardinals a license, 'or permission' to use the park.
2. The light problem could be handled as seen fit.
3. The city, not the Cardinals, should hire groundskeepers since the city could not delegate control to private individuals.
4. The amount of the fee is up to the Commission.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 31, 1947.

5. Control and use of the grounds should remain with the city except when being used by the Cardinals.
6. The city could allow ordinary types of concessions, such as soft drinks and pop corn.
7. As to future use of Municipal Stadium, an opinion is promised shortly.<sup>34</sup>

On Thursday, February 6, Sklenicka decided to appoint a four man committee, made up of Clarence L. Kirkland, Edward Hinton, Ray N. Towl, and John G. Jelnik, to investigate whether to recommend that no professional baseball would be played in Fontenelle or the conditions which would allow the Cardinals to use the park. The decision to appoint the committee came after Hinton said that the "two letters from Hall are too vague. As I read them they offer us nothing in return for these facilities."<sup>35</sup>

Eight days later the Commission reported the following:

1. The committee does not recommend acceptance of the offer made. Reasons for the recommendation are first, that according to advice of our attorney, the offer as made could not legally be accepted and second, the offer itself is not satisfactory.
2. The following conditions would have to be accepted before Fontenelle Park could be used by the Omaha Cardinals:

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., February 6, 1947.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1947.

- (a) Permission would be temporary, for certain designated nights--games not to last past 10:30 p.m. except in tied games or incomplete games.
- (b) Parks and Recreation Committee shall retain full control.
- (c) At all times, except when in use by the Cards, the park shall be opened to the public, and except for a short period prior to the game.
- (d) Fence shall be erected under the supervision of the Commission--fence shall be constructed so as to permit the premises to remain open at other times.
- (e) Licensee shall at his own expense install lights.
- (f) Commission shall have complete charge of groundskeeper and hiring him.
- (g) Commission to fully retain all rights and privileges to all types of concessions in park and adjacent thereto.
- (h) No advertising of any nature except programs and ticket advertising.
- (i) Park under control of Park and Recreation Commission--police cost will be payed by licensee.
- (j) \$90.00 for each game played plus upkeep, police, groundskeeper.
- (k) Licensee will provide effective insurance.
- (l) Payment will be made on the first of the month and last day of each month.
- (m) If, as, and when muny stadium is turned over to the Commission, it will then state the terms under which it will permit use thereof.<sup>36</sup>

Forty-eight hours later the recommendation was turned over to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Although the Commission was not bound by the recommendations

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1947.

of the committee, the chance of its passing was greater since four of the committee were members of the Commission. On February 7, at 4 p.m., the Commission voted for the recommendation six to zero with Hinton abstaining, while approximately one hundred persons observed the voting. After the voting many people cast doubts that the Commission's conditions would be met by the Cardinals, simply because the Cardinals could not afford the ninety dollars a game plus paying the fees of lights, fence, groundskeeper and policing. After the meeting Hall said he would "call Mr. Breaden [president of the St. Louis Cardinals] and see what he says."<sup>37</sup>

That night the City Council met to hear the pros and cons for the use of the park. Those who were for the Cardinals' use of the park emphasized the following points:

1. That fencing wouldn't stop children's play nor affect amateur programs.
2. That play would be for only one season and that property would not be depreciated.
3. That 'a few' should not stand in the way of what most of Omaha wanted.
4. That the park would be left in better condition than before.
5. That Omaha should welcome new industry.
6. That it was the only way to get professional baseball for Omaha.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., February 18, 1947.

7. That it would cut juvenile delinquency and help an Omaha starved for recreation.
8. That Western League ball will be needed shortly to help pay off bonds for the Municipal Stadium.<sup>38</sup>

Those who were against the Cardinals' using the park contended that:

1. Licensing the park was a subterfuge to leasing it and set a dangerous precedent.
2. It would create a general nuisance.
3. It would depreciate property values.
4. They would be kept awake nights.
5. It would give the area 'an eyesore.'
6. The parking problem would be bad.

After the two sides presented their arguments the Council and the mayor agreed to keep both sides' opinions in mind. By February 20, Council Bluffs had entered their bid to accept the Cardinals for the 1947 season. With this development Mayor Leeman named Richard McCann, a local sports announcer, to mediate the dispute to put the Western League Cardinals in Omaha instead of Council Bluffs. The mayor's action resulted after Trustin, "self appointed mediator," met with Hall and Kirkland of the Parks Commission on February 19 to come to an agreement. Although some progress resulted no one would comment except to say another meeting was to be held February 21. That night Hall arrived at the request of Trustin and several prominent businessmen, and after a lengthy

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

discussion Hall agreed to delay his decision on where the Cardinals would play until February 23.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile Council Bluffs fans were delighted over the turn of events and of the prospect of having a team play in their city. As some fans put it, the Cardinals' playing in Council Bluffs is "pretty much in the bag for 1947."<sup>40</sup> "If the team comes here, it will be the first time we ever got anything from Omaha," commented fan and County Auditor Chet Bowers.<sup>41</sup> Another fan said "that set of terms [demanded by the Parks and Recreation Commission] sounds like Council Bluffs tactics."<sup>42</sup>

Finally on Saturday, February 23, Hall released a statement that was to be most disheartening to the Omaha baseball fans.

It is with sincere regret that I must announce to the many baseball fans in Omaha that the Omaha Cardinals will play in Council Bluffs this coming season.

Hall explained further that "a small minority group alone is responsible for keeping fine professional baseball from Omaha this year." He then added that "at any time

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., February 21, 1947.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.



during the year any person could get a restraining order, even though the restraining order was without justification."<sup>43</sup>

With the arrangements completed between the Omaha Cardinals and the Council Bluffs Legionnaires for the Cardinals to play in Council Bluffs, and for work of renovating the old Broadway Park at thirty-fifth and Broadway, the Legion planned to spend approximately five thousand dollars. They intended to add two or three turnstile gates, old bleachers were to be dismantled and replaced with modern seats, box seats rebuilt, concession stands, toilet facilities and dressing rooms were to be improved, and a complete resodding of the infield was on the agenda. In addition, the outfield fence was to be "pulled back and straightened."<sup>44</sup> Bill Walsingham, assistant to president Sam Breaden of the St. Louis Cardinals thought that "Council Bluffs has an outstanding lighting system. As for general appearance of the park, I have seen much worse in larger cities. I am confident the Legion and the Cardinals will have an agreeable surprise awaiting fans on opening day."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1947.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., March 3, 1947.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

While renovation of the park was continuing, Hall and his cohorts were busy getting ball players and making arrangements for spring training at Daytona Beach, Florida. On March 15, the first professional Omaha team in ten years reported for spring training.<sup>46</sup>

They arrived at the assigned hotel and received their instructions for the first day of training. The players left the hotel around 8:30 A.M. and were on the field for work by 9:30 A.M. Here they were greeted by their manager who explained what would be expected of them, and their spring training schedule. During the first few days of training pepper games, light throwing, batting practice, infield and outfield practice were the daily routine. By the fifth day the team was ready for inter-squad games and a few days later the scheduled exhibition games were played.<sup>47</sup>

By April 25, the team was in condition and packing their bags to return to Omaha for the 1947 Western League season.<sup>48</sup> The general consensus of the team was

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1947.

<sup>47</sup>Interview with former Omaha Cardinal Jim Herringer, April 13, 1961. Although he did not participate in the 1947 spring training he did express that, in general, all spring trainings are the same regardless of managers and teams.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1947.

that they were fast on foot, possessed good throwing arms, were lean, eager and in good physical condition, of good size, averaging twenty-three years of age.<sup>49</sup>

The team arrived Monday, April 28, and on Tuesday night, April 29, the team was given a Welcome Banquet by the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce at the Chieftain Hotel. Attending the dinner was a capacity house, and each player was introduced and given a merchandise gift and a membership card for the Elks Club. Each speaker at the dinner, however, "carefully referred to the team as the 'Western League Cardinals.'"<sup>50</sup>

On May 1, Omaha again was back in professional baseball, although the games were being played in Council Bluffs. To many fans the idea of going to the city across the river, and the toll bridge were irksome; the majority was satisfied that professional baseball was back in the area, regardless of the small inconvenience.<sup>51</sup>

The 1947 Omaha Cardinals were a five hundred club, at their best remaining in fourth place, making them eligible for the four team Western League play-off.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1947.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., April 30, 1947.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1947.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., August 27, 1947.

In the playoff, Omaha faced the league champion Sioux City. In the first game Omaha was beaten eight to one,<sup>53</sup> which was followed by another defeat four to three.<sup>54</sup> On September 13 Sioux City took the best of a five game series, thus ending the first year in professional baseball for Omaha since 1936.<sup>55</sup>

As in 1947, the Omaha Cardinals were once more at Legion Park in Council Bluffs. It was decided to sign a new lease for the park after Hall assumed that the partly-finished Municipal Stadium would not be ready for the season opener.<sup>56</sup> Hall did not feel dismayed by playing another season in Council Bluffs for the Cardinals drew over 145,000 the previous season, and with more seats, better parking facilities and no toll bridge, he felt attendance could be boosted still higher.<sup>57</sup>

The tentative spring roster was completed by February 15. Omaha business manager, Ray Oppegard, felt that of the thirty-four men on the roster, only ten would be left by April 22. However, he expressed confidence

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1947.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1947.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1947.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1948.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

that additional class A caliber ball players would be optioned down from St. Louis farms of higher classifications. In summary of the talent Oppegard said: "It is definitely a much better squad than we had in camp last year. We know it isn't good enough for A ball. But it's a start, and we have spotted players we can use in other camps."<sup>58</sup> The young hopefuls of the Omaha Cardinals reported to Manager Ollie Vanek at Golden Park, of Columbus, Georgia, on March 24.<sup>59</sup> The spring training team did not do as well as was expected, and Oppegard was hopeful that additional help from more prominent St. Louis clubs would be sent to Omaha.<sup>60</sup>

On April 15, the Cards broke spring training camp with twenty-eight players heading north for the 1948 campaign.<sup>61</sup> During this season, the Cardinals did not fare too well, for on May 16, they were in third place with an eleven and nine record, two games behind the league leaders--Pueblo.<sup>62</sup> They were to continue in third place throughout June and July. In August disaster

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1948.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., March 25, 1948.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1948.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1948.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., May 16, 1948.

overtook the team and by August 22, they were fifty-three and sixty-eight, eleven and a half games behind first place Des Moines.<sup>63</sup> At season's end the Cards were in last place, fourteen games back, with a sixty-two and seventy-eight record.<sup>64</sup>

Though the Cardinals finished in the cellar of the league, the fans and influential businessmen of Council Bluffs were not dejected. A few months previously, they had made it clear that they wanted the Cardinals to stay and if they could not keep the Cardinals they wanted a team of their own. William Ware, a radio announcer, conveyed the message to League president, Senator Edward C. Johnson. Council Bluffs believed that they could field and support a team if the Western League would be expanded from a six team to an eight team league. In addition to Ware's message, two letters were sent by R. R. O'Brien and Leon Morse, officers of the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce. The action of these civic minded people also had the backing of Emmett O'Donnell, president of Legion Activities Incorporated, who was in charge of the park. The big obstacle in their path was

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., August 22, 1948.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1948.

that the St. Louis Cardinals held the franchise for the Omaha metropolitan area, and would have to approve any Council Bluffs franchise.<sup>65</sup>

Anxious to get back into the city of Omaha and into the new Municipal Stadium for the 1949 season, the Omaha Cardinals were in a better bargaining position to negotiate terms with the city of Omaha, for if they did not receive fair terms, Council Bluffs would be glad to have them. On Friday, September 16, 1948, bargaining between Property Commissioner John Rosenblatt, and Robert Hall, were convened. Rosenblatt confirmed that the Cardinals offered the following terms:

1. A five year lease of the stadium during the Western League season, with an option for five more years.
2. Payment of 10 per cent of gate receipts (after taxes) to the city.
3. The Cards would operate the refreshments concessions. The city would share only to the extent of 20 per cent of the gross take from sales at non-Western League attractions.
4. The city would be free to rent the stadium for other purposes when no baseball games are scheduled.
5. The Cards would build a wood fence around the baseball field. After advertising proceeds had paid for the fence, the city would get 25 per cent of the proceeds.
6. The baseball club would control and police parking lots, which would be free to the public.
7. The Cards would pay for repairs and upkeep.

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1948.

Of these terms, Rosenblatt was still undecided about articles five and six.<sup>66</sup>

Negotiations went on intermittently for another two months; by October 25, at a press luncheon at the Fontenelle Hotel, Hall announced that no new developments on leasing the stadium had occurred.<sup>67</sup> A few weeks later the two parties came to an agreement and a lease was awarded by the city of Omaha to the Omaha Cardinals for use of the stadium, on November 8, 1948. The important terms were summarized as follows:

Article II  
Meaning of "baseball season"

The lease shall commence seven days prior to the opening game of the season and expire five days after the season closes or after the post season games, whichever is latest.

Article III  
Term and purpose

Leased from 1949 to 1951 inclusive for all regularly scheduled league games.

Article V  
Percentage of ticket sales

The Cardinals agree to pay the city 10 per cent of gross admission receipts, after taxes.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., September 17, 1948.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1948.



## Article VI

The Cardinals will build concession stands for \$35,000 and upon completion will be turned over to the city.

Article VII  
Percentage of concession Sales

The Cardinals will pay 20 percent to the city of the gross amount of all concessions at any event or activity in which the team of the Omaha Cardinals is not participating.

## Article VIII

The Cardinals shall make up the difference of monies paid to the city if it is not at least \$12,500.

Article XVII  
Fence and scoreboard

The Cardinals shall build at their expense between the foul lines a fence. The Cards will be in charge of sales and control of any advertising upon said fence. After payment of cost of painting and maintaining said fence, shall be applied against the original cost of said fence. And at such time as the net revenue from sale of advertising exceeds the cost of the fence, there shall be paid to the city 25 percent of the gross income of the sales of advertising upon said fence.

## Article XIX

The Cardinals have option of renewing this lease for an additional two years on or before August 1, 1951.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Original contract for leasing of stadium taken from stadium file at City Auditorium. Also see: World Herald, November 9, 1947.

Meanwhile, the head office of the Omaha Cardinals was busy signing a new manager and many new ball players, to make the Cards contenders in the 1949 Western League race. The new manager for the 1949 season was announced by Robert Hall at a luncheon at the Fontenelle Hotel, on October 25, as Cedric Durst, who had played eight years of major league baseball with the New York Yankees, the St. Louis Browns, and the Boston Red Sox. During his years with the Yankees he played outfield with such stars as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Tony Lazzio and Leo Durocher. He had managed the San Diego team of the Pacific Coast League, and the Rochester team of the International League, both triple A teams, preceding his Omaha position.<sup>69</sup>

Spring training was well under way by March 20, at the new camp at Albany, Georgia; Durst was still not sure who would be with the team on opening day. He wanted to give each rookie a fair chance, feeling "that many of these lads aren't ready for class A ball. I want to determine whether they are ready for Class B, C, or D."<sup>70</sup>

While the Cardinals were preparing for the home

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<sup>69</sup>Omaha World Herald, October 26, 1948.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1949.

opening the city was having trouble with the arc lights for the stadium and it became necessary to delay the game until April 25. Hall felt they should give the contractor six more days to install the lights, as it was unlikely they would have them ready for the home opener on April 19. He commented: "It's the only thing we can do in fairness to our fans" for they were expecting a night game and we did not want to inconvenience any fans.<sup>71</sup> By Sunday evening, April 24, the workmen were making last minute checks on all the lighting equipment. Before leaving the stadium that night, Rosenblatt and Hall stated that the stadium would be ready for the opening game on April 25. The test proved that the field was well lighted, using 437,000 watts.<sup>72</sup>

The opening day was a momentous event for many people in Omaha, for on April 25, 1949, the first professional Omaha baseball team in nearly thirteen years began to compete. Opening ceremonies were brief with a flag raising observance by the Marines, and the first ball thrown out by Mayor Glenn Cunningham, who presided over the game between the Des Moines Bruins and the Omaha

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., March 27, 1949. The late open was made possible by playing at Lincoln on April 19 and 20.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., April 25, 1949.

Cardinals before 9,416 paid fans. The Cards gave the home town fans plenty to cheer about, winning the opener nine to eight in twelve innings. The fans were hungry for baseball and were readily applauding a good play and would have "stayed all night if necessary" to watch the game which lasted three hours and twenty-five minutes.<sup>73</sup> As the season progressed the Omaha fans were to have little cause for cheering. On May 22, the Cardinals were in fourth place, six and a half games behind Pueblo, the leader of the six team league. By June 17, the Cards dropped to fifth; by July 17, they were back in fourth place.<sup>74</sup> Again in August they dropped to fifth, and by September 7, the final day of the season, they were still in fifth place.<sup>75</sup>

Although the Cards were in position during the entire season to win the pennant, up till the last few weeks, the reaction of the sportswriters was one of vicious attack. By July the criticism was heavy because they were not in first division and many felt they did not deserve the support they were receiving. The main criticism was for the lack of hitting displayed; they

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1949.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1949.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1949.

were also degraded because they were slow-a-foot on the bases and were described as "fat men at a political barbecue," and as usual, the typical jabs at the manager for poor leadership were heard.<sup>76</sup>

At season's end more rational attitudes prevailed, for the Cardinals ended only six and a half games out of first and missed the play-offs by a "whisker," finishing only three games out of third place. The Cardinals were first in fielding and had the best pitching in the league; during the last weeks of the campaign it looked like a first division club, but there is no substitute for hitting which proved to be the Cardinal's failing, finishing sixth in that department.<sup>77</sup>

Through the winter months of 1949 and 1950 the president and business manager of the Omaha Cardinals made various sales, trades and purchases to strengthen not only the ball club on the field but also the financial aspects of the ball club for the 1950 eight team Western League baseball race.<sup>78</sup> The Cards returned to train at Albany, Georgia, beginning on March 13. Here fourteen other St. Louis farm clubs trained on a seven diamond

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1949.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1949.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., October 5, 1949.

seventy-five acre plot,<sup>79</sup> which had plenty of locker and club house facilities, all of which were installed by the St. Louis Cardinals.<sup>80</sup>

By March 31, Al Hollingsworth, the new manager, had sized up his players and only classified eleven of his players as capable of playing Class A ball. Ray Oppegard was pleased to hear that such an early estimate of the talent had been made "so Joe Mathes (St. Louis farm director) can start helping him" with players from higher classifications, like Houston (Class AA), Rochester, and Columbus, both Class triple A teams.<sup>81</sup>

The Cards broke camp April 13, with only seventeen players making the trip north. Hollingsworth made this estimate of the players during their last month of training: "I've looked at a lot of ball players in the last month and am satisfied that these fellows can play Class A ball. I'm now in a position to accept fellows from triple A and double A ball without having to juggle my roster."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Letter from Albany, Georgia, Chamber of Commerce, April 12, 1961: property was sold to the city of Albany, with a one and a half million dollar high school recently completed on this property.

<sup>80</sup>Omaha World Herald, January 22, 1950.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., April 1, 1950.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1950.

Robert Phipps, World Herald sportswriter, had this to say in summarizing the 1950 Omaha Cardinals:

It appears to be a better outfit than the one which opened last year. Manager Hollingsworth probably needs more pitching--which he expects to get from higher St. Louis affiliates--and he may have to doctor one or two other positions. But at present the regulars certainly look good enough to deserve retaining. They have played good ball and have looked promising all spring.<sup>83</sup>

Phipps was correct on his summary of the 1950 team, for it would fare much better than the 1949 Cards. From the opening game against Lincoln, played in Omaha before 5,080 chilled fans, won by the Cardinals three to two, the Cards were to remain in the race and eventually win the pennant.

By May 1, the Cardinals had built a healthy lead and were playing at a 750 percentage. They were winning on their hits, by taking advantage of their opponents' mistakes, by daring base running, by good defense and superb pitching.<sup>84</sup>

The Cards retained their lead through June and July and by August 6, they were firmly entrenched in first place with a nine game lead over their nearest

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1950.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1950, editorial by Floyd Olds.

follower, Sioux City.<sup>85</sup> By September 6, the Cards had cinched at least a tie for the Western League pennant having beaten Des Moines nine to six and Lincoln having slammed second place Sioux City twice nine to five and five to four.<sup>86</sup>

The day of reckoning came, September 8, when the Omaha Cardinals won their first Western League pennant since 1924. This was achieved by whipping Lincoln twice three to zero and eight to six, needing only the first victory for the flag.<sup>87</sup> The Cardinals, who had led the league from the opening day pitch, finished the season seven games ahead of second place Sioux City.

The Cards were able to win the pennant with superior fielding and fine performances from the pitching staff. Bob Mahoney was the first hurler in the league since World War II to win twenty games, ending with a twenty and six won-lost record; Bob Clear had sixteen wins and seven losses; Octavio Rubert had sixteen and eight; and Bob Cohan had a thirteen and nine record.<sup>88</sup> Without these fine pitchers, Omaha would probably have

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., August 6, 1950.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1950.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1950.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1950.



been lucky to have finished higher than fifth place in the league. The team won twenty-five hundred dollars to split for their efforts<sup>89</sup> and a chance to win more by attaining the right to compete in the league playoffs, with the first four teams in the league.

The Cardinals' opponent was Wichita, which had finished nineteen games out in fourth place. The opponent was decided upon on September 8, by the flip of a coin, after a game between Omaha and Lincoln.<sup>90</sup> However, the Cardinals did not do well, losing the first three games of a best of five series. No disgrace was shed on the team for two of those games were against such hurlers as Don Larson and Bob Turley, both destined to become stars for the New York Yankees.

During the off-season months the head office was readying the team for another "crack" at the Western League title. Probably the most outstanding change was the hiring of a new manager to replace Hollingsworth, the pilot who led the 1950 Cardinals to success.<sup>91</sup> The new twenty-nine year old player-manager, George Kissell, was

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1950.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1950.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., April 18, 1951. Promoted to Houston, Texas, Class AA team as manager.

described by Hall "as the outstanding young manager in the St. Louis Cardinal organization."<sup>92</sup> Hall had reasons and facts to back the statement, for Kissell had worked his way up through the St. Louis Cardinal chain as a player in Class D ball in 1947, to a pennant winning manager at Winston-Salem the following year. Kissell was described as the fiery type of manager who gets thrown out of his share of ball games, which was later to become a reality to the Omaha fans.<sup>93</sup> What made him exceptional as a manager is the fact that he held a Bachelor's and a Master's degree from Ithaca College, which even to old baseball fans in Omaha must have been a novelty.<sup>94</sup>

The Omaha Cards returned to train at Albany, Georgia. On March 19, Kissell got his first look at the new candidates for the 1951 season. There were thirty-two players signed to the Omaha roster.<sup>95</sup> After a fairly successful spring training season the Cards broke camp under a Georgia Sunday sun on April 15, and traveled by bus to the Atlanta train depot for the trip north.<sup>96</sup> The

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., February 6, 1951.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., March 18, 1951.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1951.

Cardinals arrived at Union Station Monday evening to engage in the 1951 baseball season.<sup>97</sup>

The Cardinals got off to a slow start owning a five and eight record and six games behind the league leader on May 5.<sup>98</sup> It was not until additional help came from Rochester and Houston that the Cards began to move up in the standings of the league.<sup>99</sup> By June 3, the Omahas moved into fourth place<sup>100</sup> and by July 1, the Cardinals were in third place, two games behind Pueblo, the league leaders.<sup>101</sup> Many people felt the team was not playing up to its best ability, especially Robert Phipps, the World Herald sportswriter. Phipps felt the team was not putting out a hundred percent and their hitting was far below par.<sup>102</sup> Yet Phipps had only praise for the Cardinal pitching staff which he described as "carrying the team." He thought the "mound staff...would look all right in higher company."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1951.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., May 5, 1951.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., May 2, 1951.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., June 4, 1951.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., July 1, 1951.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., July 6, 1951.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

By August 5, the Cards were in first place three games ahead of Denver. The Cardinals kept this lead until September 9, when Lincoln beat Omaha twice and Denver won, which knotted the two teams with eighty-eight wins and sixty-four losses apiece.<sup>104</sup> The tie was short lived, for Omaha beat Des Moines, and Denver fell on Monday night, September 10, leaving the Cards with a one game lead.<sup>105</sup> On Tuesday night the Cardinals won their second straight pennant before 5,327 fans, taking Des Moines eight to five. Thus, the Cardinals accomplished something that had not been done since the league was revived.<sup>106</sup>

When the "chips were down" and the league pennant the goal, the team came through like champions. The Cards squandered a fairly comfortable lead the last week of the season; however, under pressure, they won the last two games of the season to secure the pennant and assure themselves of extra money and a chance to win more in the Governor's Cup playoff series. In winning the pennant each player and the manager received a full share of \$113.50; the bat boy received a half share of \$56.75;

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1951.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1951.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1951.

the groundskeeper received a quarter share of \$28.38, which left \$2.86 which went to Manager George Kissell.<sup>107</sup>

A flip of a coin decided that the Sioux City team, which had finished fourth in the league, would be Omaha's opponent in the playoff following the pennant winning game at Omaha's Municipal Stadium.<sup>108</sup> The idea of the play-off was originated to stave off bankruptcy and to give the players a chance to win more money. With the gate receipts for the games, the league gave fifteen hundred dollars to the winning team and one thousand dollars to the runner-up.<sup>109</sup>

Again, though, the Cardinals did not live up to their billing as a championship club losing the first two games in Omaha and being beaten at Sioux City with a score of ten to three on Sunday, September 16, giving their opponents the series three games to one.<sup>110</sup>

During the summer of 1951 the Omaha Cardinal front office was given a two year extension on their lease of the stadium by unanimous vote of the City Council, with

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<sup>107</sup>Letter from Robert H. Hall, president of the Omaha Cardinals, to members of the team and other personnel. September 13, 1951.

<sup>108</sup>Omaha World Herald, September 12, 1951.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., September 13, 1951.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., September 17, 1951.

terms exactly the same as the preceding lease of 1948, thus assuring the fans of more professional baseball.<sup>111</sup>

Again George Kissell was nominated to lead the team; however, he was dissatisfied with the personnel and asked for additional help to bolster the club. He worked hard with what he had; Robert Phipps' opinion was that they were the best conditioned Omaha team to head north in six years of Class A ball. Phipps felt that the pitching staff was the strong point of the team with adequate outfield and infield for their class of baseball.<sup>112</sup>

The Cardinals lost their opener; as the season progressed it was clear that the Omaha club had pitching without batting, with only two players hitting over the three hundred mark on April 29.<sup>113</sup> In the league standings of June 22, the shortcomings were more evident. The Cardinals were playing five hundred ball, five games behind the league leader, but batting and fielding seventh in an eight team league.

Still, the youthful Cards, who did not have a man over thirty on the team, averaging twenty to twenty-three years of age, stayed in the thick of the pennant race and

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., July 24, 1951.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1952.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1952.

by August 17 were in third place, four and a half games behind league leading Colorado Springs.<sup>114</sup>

On September 7, the league was close, with Colorado Springs holding a one game lead over Denver and Omaha.<sup>115</sup> Two straight losses to Sioux City the last two days of the season dropped Omaha into third position, two games behind Denver, the pennant winner.<sup>116</sup> It was the closest finish since 1949. The Cardinals had many chances to win their third straight pennant but could not quite pull it off.<sup>117</sup> Robert Phipps felt that the biggest "hold-back" during the final week was the lack of a clean-up hitter.<sup>118</sup>

With a third place finish the Cardinals did win the right to compete for the Governor's Cup play-off series. They squared off against Colorado Springs, beating them three games out of four, winning the right to meet Denver for the play-off championship.<sup>119</sup> Denver

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., August 5, 1952.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1952.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1952.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., Article by Floyd Olds.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., Article by Robert Phipps.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., September 14, 15, 16, 1952.

took the Cardinals three games in a row;<sup>120</sup> but the Cardinals did have one compensation--it was the first time they had won a series in a playoff.<sup>121</sup>

One instance of ambitious ball playing that probably got as much attention as the final days of the pennant race took place in July when the fiery Omaha manager and players got out of hand at a ball game with the league leading Colorado Springs team. The turmoil was the outcome of supposed verbal abuses made toward two Negro players on the Colorado Springs team by Kissell and several members of the Omaha team on July 18.<sup>122</sup> The president of the Sky Sox, William McPhail, sent a telegram to league president, Senator Edward C. Johnson, protesting the action and demanding that there be "no repetition of these tactics" of discriminating remarks against players nor profanity directed against the crowd nor poor sportsmanship. If they were not assured that these would not be repeated, they would demand a hearing before the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., September 19, 20, 21, 1952.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., September 18, 1952.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., July 20, 1952.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.



Robert Hall, the Omaha president, protested, not to the charges, but to the manner in which accusations were made publicly in the press, which he felt was unfair. Hall suggested that it was usually the custom of the office of the president to release such items of news. Hall then added: "Baseball is a game for men, and over the years the fans know those participating must play the game to the hilt. Players worthy of a uniform must be able to take it as well as dish it out."<sup>124</sup>

After all the accusations and counter-accusations, president Johnson stepped in and made an "unprecedented apology" not only to the Sky Sox club but also to the fans. It read:

Members of the Omaha Club in this game employed conduct detrimental to baseball and indulged in foul language which was heard by fans and others. Manager Kissell tolerated this conduct and didn't stop it but to observers apparently enjoyed it. Baseball is the great American game. It is a contest of skills and strategy and vile and abusive language has no place in Western League parks and will not be tolerated.<sup>125</sup>

He later added that no action would be taken against Kissell or the Omaha club. This was the biggest rhubarb to take place in the league in years, but it was

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1952.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1952.

understandable since it was one of the closest pennant races to take place since the war.

While the head office was going through the administrative details, the team was preparing for the 1953 baseball season. The players on the Cardinal roster were considered by some as the strongest in years. At a "Welcome Cardinals" banquet sponsored by the Old Timers Baseball Association held at the Chamber of Commerce Tuesday, April 14, manager Kissell warned that his club was "a green club but one with good speed and good balance. The pitching staff is green."<sup>126</sup>

Truer words were never spoken, for by June 21, the Cardinals were in fifth place, eleven games off the pace.<sup>127</sup> Robert Phipps felt that the club's liability was its youth and lack of experience, and that: "It doesn't miss by too much--but it misses." The youthful pitchers especially lacked experience. They were unable to go all the way and were too wild and careless. Phipps opined they would finish no higher than fourth, maybe as low as sixth.<sup>128</sup> The Cardinals ended their worst season in Western League baseball since World War II, finishing

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1953.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., June 21, 1953.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1953.

in fifth place with a seventy-four and eighty record, twenty-one games off the pace.<sup>129</sup>

The big news came following the season when it was announced that manager Kissell would not return. The new manager was not announced until October 8, 1953. Ferrell (Andy) Anderson, who had been a second string catcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, was named as new manager. This was to be his first year as a manager in pro-ball.<sup>130</sup>

The bigger change came on Monday, November 29, when Robert Hall quit as president of the Omaha club (he had served as president of the club and treasurer of the league without salary) and was replaced by L. W. (Bill) Bergesch. Bergesch, a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, had been an executive in baseball the last seven years, the latter three at Columbus, Georgia. The resignation of Hall, who gave no explanation at the time, came as a complete shock to Johnson, Western League president, who praised him so:

We are grieved to lose him. Bob had a lot to do with getting the league started and

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1953.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1953. Anderson graduated from Kansas University and was All Big Six guard in 1938. Kissell moved to Columbus, Georgia, to manage the Class A Sally League team.

his business ability and capacity have been responsible to a large extent for making it successful.<sup>131</sup>

With office changes there also came a change in the new stadium lease. On October 13, the City Council approved a three year lease of the stadium which provided that the Cardinals would get a "ten percent cut of all concessions instead of twenty percent just on special days," which would boost Cardinal profits between four and five thousand dollars a year. It also boosted the minimum guarantee to the city from twelve thousand five hundred to fourteen thousand dollars.<sup>132</sup>

Another change was announced December 19: that the Cards would train at DeLand, Florida, with six other St. Louis farm clubs. The site was about twenty miles from Daytona Beach, located on a former naval air station used during World War II. The site had three playing fields, with adequate players' housing, and other facilities necessary for a training ground.<sup>133</sup>

The "vanguard" of the Omaha team arrived at Union Station Thursday night, April 15, after a mediocre spring

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1953. Hall did not respond to requests for an interview or a letter stating his reasons for resignation.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., October 14, 1953.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., December 20, 1953.

training record. Others were to come by private cars with a deadline for arrival set at noon Friday.<sup>134</sup>

The home opener was played the afternoon of April 18, before 5,011 fans, who saw Omaha squeak by Des Moines eleven to ten in a slug-fest. During the rest of April and the first half of May the Omaha fans were devoid of anything to cheer, with the Cardinals hovering around the five hundred level. May 11 saw Omaha tied with Wichita for the cellar,<sup>135</sup> though by May 18 the Cardinals had won six straight and were in fourth place with thirteen wins and thirteen losses, five and a half games off the pace.<sup>136</sup> The Cardinals were to remain around the five hundred percent level the rest of May.

In June the Cardinals began to move up in the league. On June 1 they possessed a nineteen and twenty-one record;<sup>137</sup> by June 29, they were thirty-nine and thirty-two;<sup>138</sup> Denver was keeping such a hot pace that the Cards were seven games out yet in second place--on June 1, they had been nineteen-twenty-one in fifth place

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1954.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1954.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., May 20, 1954.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1954.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1954.

and seven games out.

The big chance for Omaha to make inroads on the Denver lead came July 17, on a Saturday night when Omaha faced the Bears for the first game of a two game series. The game was played before a record crowd of 12,691 fans.<sup>139</sup> Energetic promotion, cut prices and pre-game entertainment boosted the attendance; the prospect of seeing Omaha cut Denver's lead was also an incentive to draw fans to the park. The Cards did not disappoint the record crowd, for they beat the Bears four to two,<sup>140</sup> and encored the following night, downing them two to one and three to one, taking three straight from Denver, cutting their lead to six games.<sup>141</sup>

Throughout the rest of the season, the Cards shifted from second to third place and back without over-coming Denver's lead. Final league standings showed the Cardinals in third place, eleven and a half games behind the league leaders, Denver.<sup>142</sup> Omaha did win a right to the playoffs but were quickly eliminated with the

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1954.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1954.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1954.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., August 1 through September 13, 1954.

Des Moines Bruins winning three out of four.<sup>143</sup>

This was to be Omaha's final year in the Western League. On October 13, World Herald headlines blazed: KANSAS CITY GETS A'S; A.A. EYING OMAHA. Though this was to be Omaha's terminal year in the Western League, many fans would have many fond memories of the past eight baseball seasons and the many ups and downs of the Class A Cardinals.<sup>144</sup>

They would remember such players as: catcher John Bucher, who played with the St. Louis Cardinals; first basemen Harvey Zernia and Joe Cunningham, Cardinals; third basemen Eddie Kazack and Ken Boyer, Cardinals; outfielders Larry Miggins, Edon Repulski, Jack Brandt, and Wally Moon, Cardinals; pitchers Jack Cohan, John Yuhas and Larry Jackson, Cardinals; Ken Johnson, Philadelphia Phillies; Bob "Red" Mahoney, Chicago White Sox; John Klippstein, Cardinals, Chicago Cubs, and Phillies; and Jack Cullum, Cardinals and Cincinnati Reds.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., September 15 through September 18, 1954.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., October 13, 1954.

<sup>145</sup>Bill Bryson and Leighton Housh, Through the Years with the Western League, (Published by the Western League, N.P.), 1951. p. 30. As of the 1963 baseball season Joe Cunningham was playing for the Chicago White Sox; Larry Jackson, for the Chicago Cubs; John Klippstein, for the Philadelphia Phillies and Wally Moon for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Outstanding performers not making it to the major leagues were: Edward Lewinski, who led the league in hitting in 1947; pitcher Don Stephens, who pitched a no hit game in 1950 against Denver, and Charlie Bishop, who led the league in strikeouts in 1947.<sup>146</sup> There were hundreds more who were not so fortunate as to have made the major leagues or the record books but were, nevertheless, the players who make it possible for others to attain glory in the baseball domain.

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 46, 51, 54.



## CHAPTER VI

## OMAHA BUILDS A STADIUM: 1944 TO 1948

When Omahans heard that they were in contention to receive triple A baseball many did not realize that Omaha had had other chances to enter the American Association as stated previously. During the early fall of 1943, then general manager of the Chamber of Commerce, Frank Fogarty, had received an inquiry from George Trautman, president of the American Association, as to the baseball picture in Omaha and to see if there would be any interest in being affiliated with the Association. It was at this time that the St. Paul franchise was for sale and Omaha was given first consideration.

Fogarty brought it to the attention of the Chamber and for several months, under the direction of Edward Hinton and with the help of Robert Hall, a committee studied the situation. The investigation brought about correspondence with Trautman, the St. Paul president, and officials of the major leagues. Hinton and Hall made trips to St. Louis to confer with the president of the Cardinals and the Browns on the prospects of sponsoring

a club in Omaha. However, instead of adding farm clubs, the major league clubs were cutting down because of the war. The committee also made extensive studies of a playing site and financial status.

The committee found that the only suitable playing field in Omaha was at Fontenelle Park, but the officials of the American Association were very dissatisfied for it was too far out of the way, with poor transportation service and minimum parking facilities. The last resort was to build a stadium but time and the war were against them.<sup>1</sup>

Two young men, John Rosenblatt and Eddie Jelen, were disappointed that Omaha did not get triple A baseball, simply because Omaha had no adequate playing site. In 1944, they decided to do something about the situation in case Omaha had another chance.<sup>2</sup> Rosenblatt, who at the time was sales director of Roberts Dairy Company, was not alone in this gigantic undertaking for he also enlisted the aid of Edward Hinton, general manager of Armour Packing Company; Robert Hall, vice-president of the North Side Bank; Bert Murphy, president of Andrew Murphy and

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<sup>1</sup>Documented by Frank Fogarty. Letter December 19, 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with John Rosenblatt, July 24, 1963. Eddie Jelen was killed during the war.

Sons; William O. Lane, president of Eggers o'Flying Company; Frank Ryan, sales manager of Metz Brewing Company; Floyd Olds, sports editor of the Omaha World Herald; Tom Dailey, sportscaster for WOW Radio Station; Edward Lawler, sales representative of Milder Oil Company; Charles Winston, sales representative of Westinghouse Electric; Rudy Tesor, attorney; Dick McCann, sportsbroadcaster for KBON Radio Station; and Chip Bowley, American Legion Baseball Director.<sup>3</sup>

On December 28, Rosenblatt, chairman of the Municipal Sports Stadium Committee, approached the City Council to request a city election to ask the voters to approve a bond issue in April for construction of a stadium.<sup>4</sup> Getting approval of the Council, the Stadium Committee busily studied all the possible sites for the stadium. After lengthy inquiries and discussions the committee finally approved the Thirteenth Street and Deer Park Boulevard site on January 16, 1945. Rosenblatt pointed out that nine square blocks provided plenty of room for a stadium and parking space, it was centrally located, with good transportation, and that the city had no use for the site and it was an ideal choice for the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 29, 1944.

committee to make. Rosenblatt then announced that the architects and engineers were already completing plans for the stadium and as soon as the plans and estimated costs were obtained, they would submit their petition stating a definite amount to be asked in the bond issue.<sup>5</sup>

A few days later the City Council approved the committee's plan to ask the voters to approve a bond issue of \$480,000 for post-war construction of a memorial stadium at thirteenth and Deer Park Boulevard. Rosenblatt announced that the estimated costs were broken down into seven major items: grading of hilly, wooded site \$5,300; permanent stands to seat 15,000, and playing field \$302,500; flood lighting \$20,000; paving of parking lots, streets, and entrances \$58,000; landscaping of grounds \$8,000; permanent fence around field \$13,500; and removable bleachers to boost seating capacity to 30,000 for football, boxing and other activities \$25,000. Committee-man Hinton said that baseball was only one use for the stadium, "it would be used for Legion and sandlot baseball, for high school, college and professional football; for boxing and wrestling; for political meetings and conventions; for music festivals; for ice skating; in fact,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1945.

all outdoor activities."<sup>6</sup>

In the following months the committee members were busy addressing various groups to garner their support for the election of April 17.<sup>7</sup> The committee members were very anxious about the situation, not knowing what the outcome would be. Bert Murphy felt the committee should be together election night and invited all the members to his home for that evening. Tom Dailey accepted Murphy's invitation in a letter and probably expressed the sentiments of the rest of the committee:

Dear Bert:

In response to your letter of March 28, thanks for the invitation. It will be a pleasure to attend the "wake" at your home on the night of April 17.

Whether we shed tears of gladness, or tears of sadness I believe we should all be together at such a critical time.<sup>8</sup>

The committee's worries were all in vain, for the people of Omaha overwhelmingly approved the bond issue by more than three to one.<sup>9</sup>

Actual work on the site did not begin until July

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., January 23, 1945.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1945. By April 10, 1945, forty-six clubs in Omaha had given their approval of the stadium.

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Tom Dailey to Bert Murphy, March 29, 1945. Taken from Bert Murphy's scrapbook.

<sup>9</sup>Omaha World Herald, April 18, 1945.

16, when clearing weeds and building approach roads were initiated. Park Commissioner, Ray Towl, and Public Improvement Commissioner Arthur Weaver, who were heading the stadium project, stated that the clearing of the area was necessary to permit closer study of the site, especially landscaping possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

Weaver announced on August 25 that he had appointed a committee to assist in planning the stadium. The new committee included the following men: Frank Heinisch, chairman, attorney and executive secretary of the Omaha Education Association; Bert Murphy, Dick Ryan, Floyd Olds, Matt Pascale, Dave Noble, Lyle Pembee, Ernest A. Adams, John Rosenblatt and Soren Munknof, all sports figures.<sup>11</sup>

During September and October the survey project was in progress; by November the job was almost completed. The surveyor had some "Daniel Boone" work which had four men hacking their way through forty-one acres of heavy undergrowth and brush with corn knives and axes. Other men were engrossed at the Leo A. Daly Company, working on

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1945.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., August 29, 1945. This "new" committee was to cause much resentment among the members of the original stadium committee, especially Rosenblatt, Murphy, Ryan, and Olds, who refused to serve on the new group. See: Omaha World Herald, November 15, 1945.

engineering details of the stadium, which were to be presented to the "new" committee.<sup>12</sup>

The architect's plans submitted by the Daly Company were generally the same as those the voters approved in April. The stadium was to be "L" shaped with 8,000 seats under a "horse shoe" covering behind home plate. The playing field itself was to face northeast, with a capacity of 27,500 seats, parking for one thousand cars. These plans were accepted by the committee on November 15, and were to be submitted to the City Council the following week. The only disapproval came from Towls, who did not like the plan to slope off the northeast corner of the site which he felt could be used for additional recreation area. Daly explained that the cliffs and banks in that area would be too unsightly and would hide the stadium from view.<sup>13</sup> Because of Towl's objections, he was removed from the job of overseer of the construction of the stadium and Weaver was alone put in charge.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, the Carlson Construction Company was to clear the site of trees and brush by November 22. The general manager of the company said that the grading would

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1945.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1945.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., December 12, 1945.

be a day and night operation and did not believe the freezing weather would halt the grading, because the ground was extremely dry.<sup>15</sup> However, a month later the winter weather became so severe that the grading was halted for the winter.<sup>16</sup>

During the winter Daly continued to work on the construction plans and by May 28 the City Council was advertising for bids on the construction of the stadium for June 15.<sup>17</sup> Daly felt that if there were no delays, construction could be started about five days after the bids were received. He also added that the stadium should be ready by the following spring providing there were no unforeseen delays.<sup>18</sup>

On June 15, the bids were given to the City Council at a special meeting and it was discovered that all the bids exceeded the available stadium funds which were \$411,000. The lowest bid submitted was \$665,918.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., November 22, 1945.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1945.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., May 29, 1946.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. Because of inflation, there was doubt among many involved in the stadium construction whether the increased cost would be covered by the original plans and bond issue.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1946.



With the difference of \$254,918, a revision of plans was initiated and completed during the month of July. City Engineer Edward Woodbridge said, "Essentially the plan is the same," in defending the revision; however, Rosenblatt charged the new plans "are not what the people were told they were going to get."<sup>20</sup> Because of the wide differences of views, the City Council was perplexed, and called for both parties to express their views at a hearing on August 6. Rosenblatt was against the revision mainly because the plans called for a reduction in the seating capacity from the 25,000 to 30,000 called for in the original plans to 10,000 seats. On the other side the Stadium Advisory Committee approved the revised plans and wanted the Council to approve the plans.<sup>21</sup>

After heated arguments in which Weaver said he was "sick and tired of the bickering and misunderstanding which is hindering progress of the stadium," the Council, with the approval of five members, approved a stadium which would have 27,500 seats, and an opening for new

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., August 2, 1946. Daly's revised plans were: (1) permanent seats reduced from 12,500 to 10,500; (2) fifteen feet would be cut off the front edge of the grandstand roof; (3) architectural concrete would be substituted for brick facing on the outside; (4) four instead of eight stairways would lead from the seating deck to the playing field; (5) trimmings were to be eliminated.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., August 6, 1946.

bids.<sup>22</sup>

By August 20, four Omaha construction firms submitted the following bids: Peter Kiewit Sons Company, \$413,995; Parsons Construction Company, \$420,113; Rorick Construction Company, \$422,196; and Boyd Jones Construction Company, \$462,150.<sup>23</sup> The following day the Council determined that Peter Kiewit Sons Construction Company should receive the contract.<sup>24</sup>

A few days later Rosenblatt again attacked the Council and the revised stadium plans stating that it "will not give the people of Omaha what they were promised when they approved the stadium bonds in 1945." Rosenblatt claimed that under the contract that was let, the people would only get a 10,000 permanent seat stadium and not the original 12,500 permanent seat stadium. He conceded that construction costs had risen, but "unnecessary delays" on construction had allowed costs to rise. This was denied by City officials. Rosenblatt concluded that

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1946. Towl was the lone dissenter. The basic argument was that Rosenblatt thought the 15,000 temporary seats would be eliminated. Daly on the other hand said they would not.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., August 21, 1946.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., August 22, 1946. Kiewit's bid was based on the simplified plan which did not include the architect's fee of \$25,000, a flood lighting system for \$25,000, and 15,000 temporary seats at \$30,000.

he "studied the revised plans and wished to clear our [original] committee with the public."<sup>25</sup>

If rising costs, constant bickering, and seemingly endless revisions were not enough to cause the City officials headaches, the announcement that shortage of reinforced steel would cause further delays was sure to do so. Kiewit Company officials said they were continuing the search for the "scarce" steel which was needed to reinforce the stadium's concrete work.<sup>26</sup> Even though construction of the stadium was halted Weaver stated in February that "there is nothing dreary or gloomy" about the progress of the stadium, "the stadium will be finished this summer--just as we said it would." Weaver added that it had been arranged for the steel to be fabricated during the winter and the superstructure of the stadium would begin in March.<sup>27</sup> Over a month later the steel had not arrived; spring construction was held up. Because of this failure Peter Kiewit made a speedy trip to Gary, Indiana, to do everything possible to expedite the necessary steel.<sup>28</sup> A week later, Mayor Leeman expressed

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., August 25, 1946.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1946.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1947.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., March 26, 1947.

"great disappointment that the stadium would not be completed before autumn because of a coal strike, which Kiewit confirmed, reporting that the steel scheduled to arrive in June would not be delivered until July or early August.<sup>29</sup>

Over a month later Weaver again reestimated the completion date of the stadium and said it would be finished by Thanksgiving; he also estimated that \$150,000 more would be needed because of rising costs. The extra money, according to Weaver, was to be used for parking lots, 15,000 portable bleacher seats, landscaping, drainage, sidewalks, a sprinkling system and lighting. "The reason we'll have to have the extra money is simply a matter of arithmetic and economics," Weaver added.<sup>30</sup>

By August 18, the stadium steel was trickling into Omaha<sup>31</sup> and by September 14, most of the steel had been delivered, but the construction firm declined to start construction work until they were assured that all the steel would be delivered in time to permit uninterrupted work.<sup>32</sup> Approximately two weeks later the stadium

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., April 1, 1947.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1947.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1947.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1947.

construction was resumed<sup>33</sup> and by January 1, the major permanent portion of the stadium itself was completed. Because the stadium fund was without money to complete the playing field, and install lights and parking lots, the stadium itself would be useless.<sup>34</sup> It was now very obvious to all concerned that more money was needed.

Early in February brought the knowledge that \$297,007.76 was necessary to finish the stadium.<sup>35</sup> Having spent over \$600,000 on the stadium, Weaver admitted that the city did not have the money to finish<sup>36</sup> and recommended that the Parks and Commission, which had a \$300,000 fund, take over the stadium. They refused to do so,<sup>37</sup> suggesting instead that the voters be given a chance to vote on an additional bond at the May 11 election. Towl objected because he felt that a bond issue would

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., September 29, 1947.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., January 8, 1948.

<sup>35</sup>This sum was to go for: 7400 stadium chairs, \$68,968; 870 bleacher seats, \$3,740; concrete walk, \$15,000; completion of diamond, \$10,000; field lighting and towers, \$70,000; electric wiring, \$11,800; plumbing, \$35,000; scoreboard, \$5,000; 15,000 portable bleachers, \$52,000; flag pole, \$1,988; turnstiles, \$3,000; fire protection, \$3,200; architects' fees, \$16,811.76. Letter from Leo A. Daly, Jr. to Commissioner Arthur J. Weaver, February 5, 1948.

<sup>36</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 7, 1948.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., March 3, 1948.

defeat the current administration. Trustin, however, urged that an election on additional bonds be put forth to the voters.<sup>38</sup>

By the middle of April it was agreed that a new bond issue of \$290,000 to complete the stadium would be on the ballot.<sup>39</sup> Because of the election of new city officials in the May 11 election, the stadium bond issue turned into a political football. Rosenblatt, who was running for City Commissioner, based his campaign on the mishandling of the stadium construction and the funds involved. Most of the accusations were directed at Weaver. Weaver, who planned retirement, answered that the stadium could not have been built on the original bond issue, pointing out that rising costs and steel shortages were the reasons the stadium had cost more and was not completed. Weaver commented:

The stadium mess began with your (Rosenblatt's) refusal to assume a post of civic responsibility and has continued with your constant shouts of "Don't build it now." It has been made worse by your listening to misinformation about the stadium funds without finding out the facts yourself before you spoke.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. Walter L. Pierpoint, president of the Association of Omaha Taxpayers, said that the additional \$297,000 would bring the cost to over \$347,000 more than the original \$480,000 voted.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1948.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., May 9, 1948.

Whether the stadium issue played a part in the outcome of Rosenblatt's election as a City Commissioner is debatable, but it seems to have done so. With his election came the approval of the bond issue with a majority of two to one.<sup>41</sup>

As soon as Rosenblatt took office, he officially called together the original stadium committee, which had been cast aside by Weaver. Heinisch, who was the head of the second committee, had no objection to a new committee. Heinisch commented:

...but I cannot see that there is anything further for a citizens' advisory committee to do in connection with the stadium. The plans are all argued upon. The committee couldn't change those plans if it wanted to. This is much ado about nothing.<sup>42</sup>

During the early summer, work was speeded up on the stadium with labor on the playing field started during the last of July.<sup>43</sup> By August 1, the stadium became more of a reality. Everyday scores of people visited the site and were overwhelmed by the progress. Rosenblatt, who had much to do with the program, declined to take all

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1948.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., May 26, 1948. Edward Hinton and Bob Hall, members of the original group, asked that they be left off the reorganized committee "for business reasons."

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., July 23, 1948.

the credit stating that "I am getting wholehearted help and cooperation from everyone."<sup>44</sup>

By the end of August the stadium was almost completed except for a few odds and ends and the invariable plaque. The job of getting the plaque belonged to Bert Murphy whose leadership and reputation had much to do with getting the stadium idea approved. In a letter to Murphy Rosenblatt asked him to make arrangements for the plaque:

Dear Mr. Murphy:

Will you please make arrangements regarding plaque for the Stadium Dedication Day.

Our present plans call for dedicating the stadium October 17, 1948, so it will be necessary to give this immediate attention in order to have the plaque completed by that time.

Very truly yours,  
John Rosenblatt  
Commissioner  
Department of Public Property<sup>45</sup>

On September 30, 1948, the City Council unani-

Acqu  
mously approved Rosenblatt's resolution of naming the  
Repe  
stadium Omaha Stadium. Later the stadium was dedicated  
cost  
during a special baseball game between a major league  
Abou  
traveling exhibition team and Storz semi-pro team.<sup>46</sup>  
of 20

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1948.

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August 23, 1948.  
<sup>45</sup>Letter from John Rosenblatt to Bert Murphy,

<sup>46</sup>Omaha World Herald, October 18, 1948.



Although the stadium was now usable, there were a few items to be completed. In recognition of Rosenblatt's leadership in the stadium project, Murphy presented Rosenblatt with a beautiful watch which Rosenblatt accepted in the following letter to Murphy:

Dear Bert:

Mere words can not express the feelings that overwhelmed me as I was presented with your wonderful gift. The watch is beautiful; the engraving is characteristic of the simplicity and humility of the men that worked with me. Without the concentrated effort of each and every one of the committee, our goal could not have been achieved.

I should always prize the moments of our association together.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Sincerely,  
John Rosenblatt<sup>47</sup>

From the time Rosenblatt approached the City Council to the day of dedication, four years, seven months and twenty days elapsed. Time was insignificant when compared to the money that went into the stadium. According to Charles W. Warren, Director of Parks and Recreation and Public Property Departments, the total cost came to \$1,110,420.70.<sup>48</sup> Even though this was far above the original estimate, Omaha had reason to be proud of their all-purpose stadium. It was and is one of the

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<sup>47</sup>Letter from John Rosenblatt to Bert Murphy, October 28, 1948.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Charles W. Warren, July 8, 1963.

best stadiums in the mid-west, and played an important part in getting triple A baseball in Omaha.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE TRIPLE A YEARS: 1955 TO 1962

Ironically, many people in Omaha in the fall of 1954 thought that it was the first time Omaha had been considered for triple A baseball; however, as was stated in previous chapters, Omaha did have other chances to become a member of the American Association. Another opportunity came in 1951, when the Major Leagues were considering various moves to other cities. One rumor regarded the prospect of the St. Louis Browns moving into Milwaukee of the American Association, and their franchise going to Omaha.<sup>1</sup> At the time, there was much favorable reaction to this move, particularly among St. Louis Browns officials, who were suffering the agonies of poor attendance. Even Fred Saigh of the Cardinals, who claimed he did not know anything about it, did feel it would "be practical to add Omaha to the Association."<sup>2</sup> The St. Louis Post-Dispatch was quoted by Associated Press as saying,

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha World Herald, May 11, 1951.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

"Saigh would relinquish the Columbus franchise in exchange for the Milwaukee franchise, and then would move it to Omaha."<sup>3</sup>

As in most transfers of teams, things do not work out in practice as well as they do on paper. Fred Saigh owned the ball park in Columbus, Ohio, and before he could move he had to have a fair price for his stadium. The move could not take place until he obtained the Milwaukee franchise. The Browns would have to move into Milwaukee. There was strong opposition in the Western League to any proposed move of Omaha into the American Association.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the officials in the Western League were against the move, particularly president Edward Johnson, who felt "the League cannot afford to give up Omaha and will not do so."<sup>5</sup> Bob Howsam, general manager of the Denver Bears, said that Omaha could not leave without league approval and "a lot more than just shifting papers is involved."<sup>6</sup> This was the general consensus of Western League official opinion, for they all were inclined to believe that loss of Omaha would hurt the league in

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

attendance especially for teams visiting in Omaha, who were sure to draw bigger crowds than in the smaller cities in the league.<sup>7</sup>

Some people did not just disapprove of the move but became outright indignant, as the Denver Post claiming that "Omaha is getting too big for its britches."<sup>8</sup> Jack Carberry, Denver Post sportswriter, went further and stated that Omaha "is a right nice little town whose mind is a lot bigger than its britches--a not-too-good sports town but for all that a fair class A property."<sup>9</sup> It was to be expected that Denver should feel indignant about a possible move of triple A baseball into Omaha; Denver was larger in population and had outdrawn every other team in the league.

In the final analysis, Omaha was not chosen, but Toledo, Ohio, was given the Milwaukee franchise. In a letter addressed to Rosenblatt, in which William Walsingham, Jr., vice president of the St. Louis Cardinals, explained why Toledo was chosen over Omaha. In the middle of the 1952 season the Toledo franchise was

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1951.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., May 19, 1951. Cartoon: a cigar-smoking red bird puffing while pondering a pair of pants (labelled Western League) obviously too small.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

transferred to Charleston. This in turn aroused the people of Toledo to get baseball back in their city by making an attractive offer to Milwaukee for the franchise. Toledo was "'open territory' and no payment need be made to any league or any club to compensate it for damages." Walsingham continued that it:

may not have been a good move to get Toledo in the American Association but was expedient....Should a town have been drafted from an existing league, it would have had a chain reaction as it would have forced clubs in lower classification to be drafted.<sup>10</sup>

In the letter Walsingham was specific enough to inform Rosenblatt that the St. Louis Cardinals would not stop Omaha in any way from obtaining triple A baseball.

As the 1953 season progressed, many rumors were circulating that changes in the major leagues were imminent, which inevitably involved changes in leagues of lower classification. In the preceding winter, the Boston Braves had moved to Milwaukee, and during the summer months of 1953, people were contemplating moves of the St. Louis Browns to Baltimore or possibly Kansas City, Los Angeles or San Francisco. The Philadelphia Athletics were rumored to be contemplating moves to Baltimore, Montreal, Toronto or one of the coast cities. With the

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<sup>10</sup>Letter from Willian Walsingham, Jr., V.P., to Mayor John Rosenblatt, April 1, 1953.

persisting rumors, Omaha's hopes of American Association baseball for 1954 soared because of its geographical closeness to other members of that league.<sup>11</sup> Again Omaha's chances were frustrated as the St. Louis Browns moved to Baltimore, a member of the International League, and the Athletics stayed in Philadelphia, thus altering no franchise in the American Association. The decisive blow came when the St. Louis Cardinals announced that "after kicking the situation around again, our staff can not see how it will be possible to shift our franchise from Columbus to Omaha for next year."<sup>12</sup>

During the latter part of September, Omaha's re-buffs from the American Association seemed to be nearing an end, when Parke Carroll, general manager of the Kansas City Blues (New York Yankee farm club) told the World Herald that "no formal discussion relative to a new home for the Association franchise if Kansas City gets into the majors" had been initiated, but would probably be in the near future. Although Carroll could not say what would happen to the Kansas City franchise if major league ball were to move into the town, it did give impetus to hopes that no city had been picked yet for the possible

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<sup>11</sup>Omaha World Herald, July 22, 1953.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1953.

vacancy in the American Association.<sup>13</sup> Carroll then added that, "I see no reason why Omaha would not be acceptable to all other members [American Association] if the chance comes."<sup>14</sup>

The next step was left to the Mack family, owners of the Philadelphia Athletics, and Arnold Johnson, potential buyer of the Philadelphia team, to make arrangements to transfer the Philadelphia team to Kansas City. The sale and transfer took place on October 13, 1954, thus creating an opening in the American Association. Edward S. Doherty, American Association president, announced at his office in Louisville, Kentucky, that he would call a meeting of the Association members as soon as he received official notification of the transfer. He indicated that four cities had a chance to get into the Association: Omaha and Denver of the Western League, and Memphis and Atlanta of the Southern Association. Parke Carroll would not make any definite statement to the World Herald regarding the destination of the Yankee farm club. He did say that Omaha had the "necessary population to support a triple A club, and suitable park facilities."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., September 23, 1954.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., October 13, 1954.



Bill Bergesch indicated that "The next move will be up to the Association," which were probably the most truthful words spoken during the momentous day. He added that any move made would have to be transacted quickly because official baseball rules stated that franchise changes had to be made by November 30.<sup>16</sup>

With the announcement of the Kansas City move the Chamber of Commerce immediately went into action, forming a Citizens' Committee to get Omaha into the American Association. Frank P. Fogarty, president of the Chamber, announced:

An Association team here would add much to Omaha's status as a leading sports city. Higher class of ball would attract greater attendance, would bring in many more people from out of the city and would be an aid to our economic growth. We intend to make every effort to interest the Association in filling its vacancy with Omaha, and I hope we may succeed.

The City Council unanimously adopted a resolution urging American Association officials to approve Omaha as a replacement for Kansas City. The resolution was to be sent to all officials in the Association.<sup>17</sup>

While nothing of great consequence happened during the next two weeks concerning the transfer of the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

franchise, the people of Omaha, especially Mayor John Rosenblatt, were busy making plans to get the Kansas City franchise. Rosenblatt immediately ordered a beautification of the Municipal Stadium and various meetings were held among influential people in Omaha. The most important took place on November 9, at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon which was called by Rosenblatt. In attendance were the mayor, Norman Harried of the Chamber of Commerce, Al Sorenson of the City Council, Frank Fogarty, and other notables around town, such as Edward Hinton, J. J. Isaacson and Bert Murphy. Harried urged Omahans to send telegrams to George Weiss, general manager of the New York Yankees; Edward S. Doherty; Richard Meyer, executive vice president of the St. Louis Cardinal farm system; in support of Omaha's getting Association baseball. He also urged a ticket selling campaign to back up their desire for triple A baseball.<sup>18</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce telegram campaign received a great response from the people of Omaha. During the first few days more than a thousand telegrams had been sent to the various officials concerned with the franchise move of Kansas City.<sup>19</sup> Rosenblatt announced

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., November 10, 1954.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1954.

that, "This is the greatest civic drive we have had in Omaha since the flood years. It has been a wonderful thing for Omaha--a great boost for us around the country, and a great awakening of civic pride." Sorensen believed Omaha would be in the Association next year and he was just "as firmly convinced that the credit for the advance should be given to all the people who joined in the wonderful display of civic drive and desire for something better for Omaha."<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, practically every baseball fan in Omaha was making his estimate of the situation. The Association, according to baseball law, had the right to draft one city from any one league to fill the vacancy. To get both Denver and Omaha the Association would have to make financial arrangements with the Western League. Floyd Olds, of the World Herald, guessed that the Yankees would take the money received from Arnold Johnson for the Kansas City territory to pay the owner of the Colorado city club for allowing them to move into Denver. Furthermore, St. Louis would move the Columbus, Ohio, franchise to Omaha with due compensation to the Western League for

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., November 18, 1954.

damages.<sup>21</sup>

To get further support from the people of Omaha and explain the position of Omaha's attempt to get triple A baseball a committee with the aid of KMTV arranged a half hour television program for November 12, 1954, "AAA Baseball for Omaha." It consisted of the history of the Western League, purpose of the Stadium, how the committee to get triple A baseball was organized and its objectives, the importance of triple A baseball, telegraphic responses presented by John Rosenblatt, Al Sorenson, Norman Harried and Dick Charles.<sup>22</sup>

Besides an appeal to the Omaha fans, the Citizens' Committee to get triple A baseball also prepared a pamphlet titled A Logical Plan for American Association Baseball in Omaha, Nebraska Now! which was sent to the American Association headquarters, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, Illinois. The opening letter read:

Gentlemen:  
OMAHA AND ITS TRADE TERRITORY WANT ASSOCIATION  
BASEBALL!

This brochure had been completed to tell you the Omaha story and of the spontaneous

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., October 14, 1954. No money would need to be payed to Omaha because the St. Louis Cardinals owned both Columbus and Omaha baseball clubs.

<sup>22</sup>KMTV, Channel 3, Omaha, Nebraska, November 12, 1954. The program schedule can be found at Omaha City Hall, Public Parks and Recreation Department.

enthusiasm of Omaha area citizens for triple A ball.

It tells about our new Municipal Stadium--one of the finest in the nation; it tells about our ticket selling program; it tells about Omaha and its thousands of ardent baseball fans.

It contains assurances of cooperation from our business and civic organizations, all united in extending a welcome and helpful assistance in making triple A baseball in Omaha a continuing success.

It includes detailed, factual information that is pertained to the operation of American Association baseball in Omaha.

We urge your favorable consideration of the facts presented in this brochure, and the area-wide interest in and enthusiasm for, triple A baseball in Omaha.

OMAHA WANTS ASSOCIATION BASEBALL!

Respectively yours,  
A. V. Sorensen  
Chairman of the  
Omaha Citizens' Committee<sup>23</sup>

While Omahans were making their plea for Association baseball, the Western League was making plans for a possible baseball realignment. On November 16, the World Herald learned that the Western League was to hold an emergency meeting at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. It was also rumored that the price tag for both cities would be \$200,000.<sup>24</sup>

Sorensen was in St. Louis conferring with the

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<sup>23</sup>A Logical Plan for American Association Baseball in Omaha, Nebraska Now! A. V. Sorensen. This brochure can be found at Omaha City Hall's Public Parks and Recreation office.

<sup>24</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 16, 1954.

officials there to get Omaha in triple A baseball. Because of the Lincoln meeting Sorensen dropped his plans to go to New York, instead travelling to Lincoln with Rosenblatt to inform the Western League directors that Omaha had no wishes to stay in the class A loop.<sup>25</sup>

At 10:00 A.M., November 17, the Western directors met to negotiate a price for the two cities, so the American Association could either reject or accept the price.<sup>26</sup> The terms the Association wanted were to be categorized into three areas: Denver only, Omaha alone, or both cities.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the meeting the Western League directors were unable to come to a decision on price and issued the following statement: "It was voted that the Western League is unable to place a valuation on any Western League territory at this time without definite information as to the exact desires of the American Association." The vote was six to two with Denver and Omaha casting negative votes.<sup>28</sup> This information was

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., November 17, 1954. A few days previously, Doherty, president of the American Association, announced that the American Association would negotiate with the Western League rather than draft a Western League city. See: Omaha World Herald, November 4, 1954.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., November 18, 1954.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., November 19, 1954.

passed on to Doherty who in turn informed the American Association directors who were to meet in Chicago, to decide which Western League territory was to be annexed-- Denver, Omaha, or both.<sup>29</sup>

After five hours of deliberation no concrete decisions were arrived at, but "considerable progress" had been made. Speculation had it that no decisions were final because civic minded citizens of Columbus, Ohio, were backing a drive to buy the St. Louis Cardinals owned stadium in Columbus, should the Yankees move an American Association team there. Brad Wilson, Sports editor of the Columbus Dispatch, claimed that Bill DeWitt, assistant general manager of the Yankees, told the Columbus Chamber of Commerce officials by telegram that the Yankees might draw up terms for a contract.<sup>30</sup> Approximately a week earlier the mayor of Columbus had promised to back a ticket selling campaign in the city to keep the Columbus Cardinals from moving out.<sup>31</sup>

This was not the only setback to Omaha's hopes for triple A baseball. George Trautman informed Edward Johnson that the American Association should "bypass" the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1954.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1954.

Western League.<sup>32</sup> John Rosenblatt was very indignant about the "bypass" statement and referred to it as "penny wise and pound foolish."<sup>33</sup>

The only good news that consoled the Omaha fans was, as Sorensen said, that the Association directors were "deeply impressed by the way Omaha fans responded to this campaign." After all the confusion and difficulties could be met, Sorensen felt certain that Omaha would "be taken into the A.A. officially during the minor league meeting in Houston."<sup>34</sup>

The first indication that the Cardinals were not planning to stay in Columbus, Ohio, came on November 22, when the Columbus City Council approved of buying the Cardinal Stadium if they could get a top flight team to replace their present ball club.<sup>35</sup> On the following day the St. Louis Cardinals agreed to sell the stadium for \$550,000.<sup>36</sup> A few days later an article appeared in the Ohio State Journal that the Columbus Cardinals would close their front office by December 10, leaving the city

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1954.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., November 21, 1954.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1954.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., November 24, 1954.



without a ball club.<sup>37</sup>

With prospects looking better and with the minor league meeting concerning league changes to take place in Houston, Rosenblatt and Sorensen were preparing to leave to help in any way possible to get triple A baseball in Omaha.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile Doherty was conferring with Commissioner of Baseball, Ford Frick, and Parke Carroll, George Weiss, and Dick Meyer, about what city they wished to take into the American Association by a draft. Doherty felt that they would come to a definite choice that week and would be ready to negotiate with the Western League at the minor league meeting in Houston.<sup>39</sup>

The enigma began to clear and with four definite facets certain to be established, according to the World Herald: (1) Omaha would be picked for the American Association; (2) negotiations and agreement would take place between the Association and the Western League; (3) Western League officials were beginning to come to their senses and would agree to a price and settle negotiations rather than have their territory drafted; (4) the Western League would operate in 1955 even without Omaha and

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., November 27, 1954.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1954.

Denver.<sup>40</sup>

By November 25, the baseball officials were ready to get on with the business at hand at the Rice Hotel, Houston, Texas, at 11:00 A.M.<sup>41</sup> The next morning the puzzle pieces were beginning to fit into place very neatly. The American Association voted to draft Denver and to replace Kansas City with Omaha, the latter having the possibility of getting the Columbus franchise.<sup>42</sup> No St. Louis Cardinal official would admit anything. The draft of Denver closed the door to the possibility of Omaha being drafted since only one team could be drafted from any one league. Richard Meyer said, "the next step is up to the Western League, which is now reduced to seven teams."<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, Western League officials conferred among themselves on the future of the team and the transfer of the Columbus, Ohio, franchise to Omaha, but would

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., November 24, 1954.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., November 25, 1954.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., November 29, 1954.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1954. Doherty admitted that the damage asked by the Western officials was so high that the American Association was unable to negotiate, and subsequently drafted the Denver territory. The Yankees and Cardinals failed to reach an agreement on letting the Yankee farm club play in Columbus with the Cardinals moving to Omaha, because of disagreement on park arrangements.

not disclose anything, leaving apprehension as to what was in the future for baseball in Omaha.<sup>44</sup> Later the situation was still confused, but Doherty felt that "the present make up of the Association is not permanent." Robert Phipps learned through one Western League director that the Western League would be a six team league in 1955, with the Omaha shift to come later. Money, the amount that would pay for the franchise concern and damages received, was the delaying Nemesis.<sup>45</sup> A little light was thrown on the "muddle" at an hour-long meeting held by Western League officials. Acting Western League president, E. R. Saltwell, disclosed after the meeting that the St. Louis Cardinals had "expressed interest" in moving Omaha into the American Association but they had not started any negotiations for such a move.<sup>46</sup>

On the following day the "log-jam" of getting triple A ball into Omaha had been blasted clear. George Sisler, president and general manager of the Cardinals' Columbus farm club, requested approval from the Association to negotiate with the Western League to have Omaha

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., December 1, 1954.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. Saltwell admitted that a \$100,000 price tag had been placed on the Omaha franchise in earlier talks.

as a replacement for Columbus. The move was approved unanimously by the American Association. This was the first public admission by the St. Louis Cardinals that they were planning to move the Columbus franchise to Omaha. Sisler stated, "We felt that we could not continue to take the heavy losses of the past five or six years at Columbus."<sup>47</sup>

On December 1, the St. Louis Cardinals and the Western League officials met for an "exploratory" meeting and to lay the ground rules for the hassle that was to prevail. Saltwell, Western League secretary, said, "It's a question of values on both sides and what affects these values." The "scuttlebut" among the reporters outside the meeting room had the Western League asking \$100,000 for the Omaha territory and the St. Louis offering \$50,000. The next morning the two negotiating parties were to meet again to "lock horns."<sup>48</sup> By noon, "no official word" was given about a move but the shift of Omaha into the American Association "still seemed certain."<sup>49</sup> The meeting, which lasted ninety minutes, recessed until the afternoon. Both sides stated the meeting

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., December 2, 1954.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

was "amiable." O. M. Hobbs of Pueblo, a Western League official, reported: "We are closer together now" on the price tag for the Omaha territory.<sup>50</sup> Later a "secret meeting" was held with Western League officials reducing their asking price from \$100,000 to \$60,000. The Cardinals countered with an offer of \$35,000. Dick Meyer explained that "we gave the Western League an offer, and while they didn't accept it, neither did they reject it. I have every reason to believe that we will come to an agreement very shortly. All our negotiations up to now have been very amicable."<sup>51</sup> Though the meeting was "amiable," the Western officials requested a halt in negotiations until League president, Senator Johnson, arrived.<sup>52</sup> With Johnson on the scene the Houston negotiations came to an end "with an air of amicability." It was agreed to table the discussion until more time could be given to study the negotiations between the two parties involved. Johnson was asked if the two parties were still \$25,000 apart. He replied, "I wouldn't be so hopeful if they were that far apart." Meyer, of the St. Louis ball club, said, "We have every reason to believe that

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., December 3, 1954.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

our negotiations will be brought to a successful conclusion within the next ten days."<sup>53</sup> Reporters, baseball fans, and the two interested parties packed their bags and agreed to meet in New York City, at the major league meeting to resume negotiations.<sup>54</sup>

On December 7, Al Sorensen, in an address to two civic and business group leaders, related that:

Within twenty-four hours Omaha will be in the American Association. It is my understanding that each of the eight Western League representatives have until tonight to meet with their individual boards of directors. After that, they'll give Senator Ed Johnson, league president, their answers. They in turn will be relayed to Ed Doherty, the Association president, who will make the announcement.

He then added it might be made later in the week.<sup>55</sup>

The next night Senator Johnson said he "hadn't heard a word on the Western League decision of releasing Omaha to the American Association." Later from Denver, Johnson told reporters that the Western League had made a firm offer to the St. Louis Cardinals regarding the price the Western delegates expected for the Omaha franchise, declining to say what it was.<sup>56</sup> In St. Louis, vice

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., December 4, 1954.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., December 8, 1954.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., December 9, 1954.

president Bill Walsingham of the Cardinals, said we "are now considering Johnson's offer. We expect to make a decision within the next forty-eight hours."<sup>57</sup>

After many weeks of negotiations and haggling over prices for franchise and damages, the long-awaited word was conveyed to the Omaha baseball fans, that shortly after 9:00 A.M., Omaha would be a member of the American Association. The official announcement was to be made in the office of Mayor Rosenblatt, at the request of Bergesch.<sup>58</sup> At that meeting Bergesch made the official announcement on behalf of Richard Meyer, vice president of the St. Louis organization. He said, "Negotiations for the purchase of the Omaha territory from the Western League were completed at nine o'clock this morning. The Cardinals have authorized me to announce that the way now has been cleared to move their triple A operation from Columbus to Omaha."<sup>59</sup>

The agreement was disclosed the same day, stating that:

The St. Louis Cardinal organization will accept your offer of \$56,625 cash, plus 10 cents on each paid admission over 300 thousand for the

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1954.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

scheduled American Association games in Omaha during the 1955 season, with the understanding that the Western League will pay the Omaha Cardinals \$12,625, representing their share of Western League funds, all of this in consideration for the Western League territory to the American Association.<sup>60</sup>

With the negotiations at an end, only the perfunctory congratulations by notable baseball dignitaries remained before the citizens of Omaha would begin a large scale movement to support triple A baseball. Probably representative of most congratulations was sent from the Louisville office of the American Association, by president Edward Doherty, who told the World Herald that:

I am tickled to welcome Omaha into our league. I know you have a fine park, and the terrific spirit shown by your Mayor, John Rosenblatt, Al Sorensen and others is wonderful for baseball. I always like to go where I am wanted and Omaha certainly made it plain that it wanted triple A ball. I have no worries about Omaha attendance, with that kind of spirit and leadership.<sup>61</sup>

Although Omaha now had triple A baseball, the price for such a favor did not come cheaply. It was at the Houston meeting while the St. Louis Cardinal organization was haggling over the cost of moving into Western League territory that the impetus for moving was given to them. At the meeting Al Sorensen agreed, with the approval

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



of certain city officials of Omaha, to share with the Cardinals the cost of moving Omaha into the American Association.<sup>62</sup> According to Richard Meyer, the total cost was \$40,000, plus the Omaha club's share in the Western League, which was in excess of \$12,000.<sup>63</sup>

The exact amount of money involved was disclosed when Al Sorensen wrote the following letter to John Rosenblatt, April 20, 1955:

Had a visit with Bill Walsingham the other day. He said he had had breakfast with you and discussed that 20 grand. Asked me for my ideas about it and I told him frankly I was very very concerned about bringing it out in the open for all sorts of people to take "picks" and especially the Council members who might use it as an opportunity to embarrass you, and all in all put the Cardinals in a very bad light locally. Frank Fogarty agrees with me that we as a community should not "renig" on a pledge. He also agrees publicity will be of little help in our long range community building. Can't we figure out a way to get this job done without going to the Council? "You're the doctor" and you know best but we feel very strongly that some of the Council might like to have this issue to use against you. Walsingham I am sure does not want the Cards to get involved in a city spat.

Sincerely,  
Al<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Letter from John Rosenblatt to Richard Meyer, March 23, 1955.

<sup>63</sup>Letter from Richard Meyer to John Rosenblatt, April 7, 1955.

<sup>64</sup>Letter from Al Sorensen to John Rosenblatt, April 23, 1955.

Though the \$20,000 worried all parties involved, the mayor did present an amendment on July 5, 1955, to the leasing of the Omaha Stadium, to the City Council, which they approved. The amendment reads:

In consideration of the Omaha Cardinals bringing to the city of Omaha a franchise AAA Baseball League, and correspondingly increasing gross revenue, the city agrees to accept during the years 1955 and 1956 seven thousand dollars (7,000) in each year less than the proceeds from all sources of revenue at the Omaha Stadium occurring from the lease of October 26, 1953, and or the event the Omaha Cardinals shall exercise its option under paragraph XVIII of the lease, the city agrees to accept during the year 1957 six thousand dollars (6,000) less than the proceeds from all sources of revenue at the Omaha Stadium occurring from the lease of October 26, 1953.<sup>65</sup>

Though the deal to give Omaha Triple A baseball worried Rosenblatt and his close friend Sorensen, this did not outwardly keep them from being satisfied with their efforts. No one was more elated over the good news than the two dynamic forces behind the move to get triple A baseball. They were not complacent, not letting the baseball situation take its own course. As soon as the announcement was made concerning the agreement between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Western League, Chamber of Commerce vice-president Sorensen announced,

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<sup>65</sup>Letter from John Rosenblatt to William Walsingham, Jr., vice president of the St. Louis Cardinals, July 6, 1955.

"We are ready to show our appreciation to the Cardinals for this move, by launching a ticket selling campaign that will assure a satisfactory attendance."<sup>66</sup>

The Associated Retailors of Omaha launched the ticket selling campaign with M. Cooper Smith as chairman. The first step was to place a coupon in the local paper for tickets captioned:

I want AAA Baseball Tickets! Count me in for the following Omaha Cardinal American Association Baseball seats:

Each coupon had the price and number that would be desired, and was to be mailed to the Associated Retailors of Omaha.<sup>67</sup>

Within a day Smith reported that every delivery of the mail was bringing in additional ticket coupons. He felt that if there were no obstacles, a "ticket blitz would be the outcome."<sup>68</sup> If the first reports were any indication, the drive was going well. First tabulations showed fifty-nine season box seats requests, sixty-four for season's reserved seats, and forty reserved for

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<sup>66</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 10, 1954. Sorensen had promised on November 22 that if Omaha got triple A baseball a ticket selling campaign would be initiated within twenty-four hours. See: Omaha World Herald, November 23, 1954.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., December 11, 1954.

forty-five games.

A few days later, Al Sorensen said, "I am being conservative when I say we now have orders for about 65,000 seats." He broke this figure down into 305 box seats and 518 reserved seats sold for the season.<sup>69</sup> By December 14, the "ticket tornado" had reached 75,000, with Smith hoping to obtain pledges for 300,000 or more seats for the 77 games of the 1955 season.<sup>70</sup> December 15 found more than 85,000 orders for tickets had been received.<sup>71</sup> By the eighth day, A. V. Sorensen believed that the 300,000 admissions goal was low. Coupons representing 101,020 seats had been received by the ticket committee.<sup>72</sup> This was to be the final phase of the initial ticket drive; it was felt among the retailers, regardless of their enthusiasm for baseball, that the campaign would interfere with the Christmas shopping season if prolonged. Therefore, Sorensen announced that the civic drive to pledge support would close at 4:00 P.M. December 17, 1954.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., December 13, 1954.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1954.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1954.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., December 18, 1954.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., December 16, 1954.

Though actual soliciting of tickets had diminished, promotional aspects and preparations for the 1955 season had not ceased as far as the Cardinals were concerned. On December 14, Johnny Keane, a native of St. Joseph, Missouri, was named field boss of Omaha's first triple A baseball team. Keane, a highly successful manager in the higher minors since World War II, had been manager for thirteen years, beginning at Albany, Georgia, in Class D. He served at Mobile, Alabama; New Iberia, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; Rochester, New York; and Columbus, Ohio, where he had managed the three previous years. During those thirteen years, he had won five pennants and finished in first division four times. Although he never was a major leaguer, he had played triple A baseball.<sup>74</sup>

The announcement of Keane as manager gave an added impetus to the ticket drive during the Christmas season. The fact that he was coming to Omaha gave the promotional aspects an additional boost. Keane arrived in Omaha from Houston December 14 for a press conference and public appearances. His first was at the Birchwood Club, with Bergesch, at the National Office Management

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1954. Keane, now 52 years old, became manager of the major league St. Louis Cardinals during the 1961 baseball season.

Association Christmas party on December 15.<sup>75</sup>

To add glamor and prestige to the campaign during the latter part of December and to give the Omaha fans a feeling of closeness with St. Louis, a plan to have the entire "St. Louis Cardinals official family" for a baseball dinner on January 24 was announced by John Rosenblatt. The family included: owners August A. Busch, Jr., Eberhard Anheuser, executive vice president John L. Wilson, vice president and general manager Dick Meyer, director of player personnel Walt Shannon, Tony Buford of the legal department, Al Fleischman, public relations, as well as big league player Stan Musial, manager of the St. Louis Cardinals Eddie Stanky, and Johnny Keane. Only Musial was a question mark, for he thought he might have to go to New York for a player award.<sup>76</sup>

The idea of the banquet was to give the Omaha area a mid-winter stimulant. If anything would promote ticket sales, St. Louis Cardinal names would, if only by adding their popularity to the publicity wagon. On January 23, most of the men arrived via Busch's private plane. Busch and several others arrived the next morning in his private railroad car. An added attraction was the

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., December 16, 1954.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., December 18, 1954.

arrival of Association president Ed Doherty.<sup>77</sup>

An informal press conference was held by the Chamber of Commerce, attended by more than 450 persons. Mr. Busch, brewer and president of all Cardinal properties, declared he was one of the most enthusiastic about the move to Omaha and felt that "the move to the Association is going to be a big treat for your fans." He added, "Without making a definite promise we're going to do everything in our power to see that you have a hell of a team here."<sup>78</sup>

Toastmaster Frank Fogarty, president of the Chamber, said: "This is indeed a great day when we can thank in person the Cardinal officials."

Manager Johnny Keane joked that, "This turnout would have been a good crowd in the Columbus, Ohio, park in the middle of the season."<sup>79</sup> Probably the greatest compliment given by any dignitary was bestowed by Edward Doherty on John Rosenblatt, not at the banquet but in a letter reading:

Dear John:

I shall always regard January 24 as a red letter day in my life and in the history

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1955.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1955.

of the American Association. All of the credit goes to a guy named John Rosenblatt, who in my book, is one of the finest guys I have ever met.<sup>80</sup>

Another promotional gimmick to sell tickets was the challenge offered by the Denver Mayor, Quigg Newton, in a February 8, 1955, letter to Rosenblatt. Newton felt that it would generate a healthful rivalry and develop public interest in the coming season. He suggested these rules to govern the contest:

1. That all ticket sales (except tickets for the opening game) including those already made and those made through the closing date of the contest be counted.
2. That the contest close at midnight April 1, 1955.
3. That only actual ticket sales and firm commitments be counted.
4. That the tickets be tabulated on the basis of scheduled home games in each city.
5. That a certified audit report on advance sales be submitted at the close of the contest.<sup>81</sup>

Rosenblatt was in a sickbed, but was quick to answer the Denver Mayor's letter. He had a wire sent to Newton stating that Omaha would accept the challenge to see which city could sell the most tickets to American

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<sup>80</sup>Letter from Doherty to Rosenblatt, February 1, 1955.

<sup>81</sup>Letter from Mayor of Denver, Quigg Newton, to John Rosenblatt, Mayor of Omaha, February 8, 1955.



Association games.<sup>82</sup> It read:

Dear Mayor Newton:

With pleasure and anticipation we accept your challenge to a pre-season AAA baseball ticket sales contest.<sup>83</sup>

Through the promotional efforts of the many civic minded people of Omaha, the mayor, John Rosenblatt, and men directly connected with the Cardinals, the Omaha Cardinal office was being "avalanched" by ticket orders, and were "trying to dig out" from under this deluge of orders. General Manager Bergesch estimated that thirty per cent of the letters were from out of town.

Meanwhile, high in the Rockies of Colorado the people of Denver were also hard at work selling tickets and claimed that between 100,000 and 120,000 tickets had been sold by February 26, 1955.<sup>84</sup>

While preparations were going on in Omaha for the 1955 season, the Cardinal team was headed for the sunny southlands. Their training site was Daytona Beach, Florida. Chamber of Commerce president, R. Irving Blanchard, Jr., expressed his gladness to have the Omaha Cardinals as "residents" in a letter to Rosenblatt,

<sup>82</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 1, 1955.

<sup>83</sup>Telegram from Rosenblatt to Newton, February 18, 1955.

<sup>84</sup>Omaha World Herald, February 27, 1955.

though it would be for only a "short time."<sup>85</sup>

On March 9, seventeen eager baseball players were greeted by Keane for the first day of baseball practice. The weatherman, cooperating with the manager, provided a hot, calm day. After checking out equipment the players headed for the field to run through the pace of getting back into shape. Besides the routine of calisthenics and lots of running, the players also took their turns at several rounds of extensive batting practice against "Iron Mike," a mechanical pitching machine. Though the practice went well, all was not bright and cheerful for Keane--only seven of the players had had previous triple A baseball experience. The Omaha staff remained optimistic that additional help would come down from their parent club, St. Louis, which previously had promised a first division club.<sup>86</sup>

By March 13, "Iron Mike" was retired and the pitchers were throwing hard. Keane's primary worry now was to get at least three pitchers in shape for the first exhibition game with Louisville on March 16. Keane put the players through the "longest and most rigorous" drill

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<sup>85</sup>Letter from R. Irving Blanchard, Jr., to John Rosenblatt, March 2, 1955.

<sup>86</sup>Omaha World Herald, March 10, 1955.

with temperatures soaring into the 90's.<sup>87</sup>

As spring training progressed, the Cardinals dropped a few players and added a few, but were not very impressive in their exhibition game. Keane felt that the problem was finding hitting balance, or enough right handed hitters in ratio to left handed hitters. In order to have a first division contender a balance is needed among the batters. Keane expressed his concern about left handed pitchers being thrown against his club when he stated: "Last year they saved up left handers for us all around the league."<sup>88</sup>

The Cardinals lost more spring training games than they won. If anyone was happy it was because of the work accomplished. The team heading north consisted of ten pitchers, two catchers, six infielders and four outfielders. In view of the unsuccessful spring campaign, American Association writers picked the Louisville team to finish first, with Omaha to finish sixth in the eight team league.<sup>89</sup>

Omaha lost its opener in a pitchers' duel of one

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1955.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., April 3, 1955.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1955.

to zero.<sup>90</sup> The Cards came back strongly the next night to win Omaha's first triple A game ten to six.<sup>91</sup> They moved on to Toledo; after this series, they showed a four and two record, and shared first place with Toledo.<sup>92</sup>

The team was to return by chartered plane at 11:15 A.M., April 20, to be guests of the Junior Chamber of Commerce at a noon luncheon followed by a parade through the downtown area.<sup>93</sup> Due to inclement weather in Toledo the Omaha players were stranded at the Toledo airport for three hours, thus ruining the official welcome.<sup>94</sup> The sun shining on their quiet afternoon arrival was considered a good omen, with just a few children, relatives, reporters and photographers greeting them. They went to their hotel in Junior Chamber of Commerce-supplied convertibles. World Herald sportswriter Robert Phipps, travelling with them, predicted the Cards would show good baseball all season, stating that the players are "likeable and capable."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1955.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1955.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1955.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., ~~April 20, 1955.~~

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., April 21, 1955.

Though the civic minded people of Omaha could not extend their official welcome, this did not stop the Cardinal management from showing its appreciation for its new home. To introduce Omaha to her new team, Keane scheduled a workout at Municipal Stadium the same night. The special feature began at 7:30 P.M. with approximately three thousand fans watching the team go through hitting and fielding drills.<sup>96</sup> Announcer Don Hill, of KBON radio, introduced the players to the fans. The evening was capped with the management passing out soft drinks and hot dogs.<sup>97</sup>

April 21, 1955, began a new chapter in Omaha's baseball history with the first American Association team to play in Omaha. The Cardinals were to tangle with pre-season favorites, the Colonels of Louisville.<sup>98</sup> However, the first Association game was a disappointment, not only because the Cardinals lost seven to one, but also the expected overflow crowd did not appear. The latter was apparently due to a false rumor of a sell-out. At 6:30 P.M. fans were lining up to buy general admission tickets, and a half hour later the lines had dwindled

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1955.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., April 21, 1955.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

away. Some felt that it was due to the fact that all reserved seats had been sold, which gave emphasis to the sell-out rumor.<sup>99</sup>

First impressions of the new team were mixed, but Floyd Olds, World Herald sportswriter, felt that these players were more "mature" and "serious-minded" about baseball than old Cardinal teams of class A caliber.<sup>100</sup> The average age of the twenty-two players was twenty-five and a half, which, according to Olds, gave no time for outside "foolishness."<sup>101</sup>

As the season progressed there was no change in the primary need of the Cardinals. As Keane had emphasized in spring training, to be a contender the Cardinals needed right handed hitting power.<sup>102</sup> To remedy the situation the Cardinals purchased twenty-seven year old Danny Schell from the Philadelphia Phillies for a "price considerably over the major league waiver price of \$10,000."<sup>103</sup> Keane was pleased when he stated: "I haven't seen this boy, but I have followed him in the

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., April 22, 1955.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1955.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., April 28, 1955.

past couple of years and have had fine reports on him. He bats right-handed, and he swings a big bat up there. That's what we want."<sup>104</sup>

By May 2, the Cardinals were tied with Louisville, a game behind Minneapolis.<sup>105</sup> By May 4, the Cardinals had taken over undisputed first place with a twelve and six record and a seventeen percentage point lead over Minneapolis whose record was thirteen and seven.<sup>106</sup> May 10 found the Cards again in second place, one-half game out of first.<sup>107</sup> On May 12 they were two games behind the Minneapolis Millers.<sup>108</sup> By May 23, the Cardinals were three and a half games back of league leading Minneapolis after splitting with the Millers in their first encounter.<sup>109</sup> At the end of the month the Cards found themselves in fourth place, holding that slimly.<sup>110</sup>

Knowing that additional help was needed, two players were added to the roster. The first to arrive was

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1955.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., May 2, 1955.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., May 4, 1955.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1955.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1955.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., May 23, 1955.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1955.

outfielder Charlie Peete, acquired from the Rochester club.<sup>111</sup> The second arrival was twenty year old, \$40,000 bonus baby, Dick Schofield, from Springfield, Illinois.<sup>112</sup>

With timely hitting and good pitching plus Peete and Schofield, the Cardinals found themselves sharing first place after taking two straight from the Millers.<sup>113</sup> They did not occupy first position long, for the Cardinals lost seven games in a row, continuing their losing streak until July 12. Even with such a disaster, the Cards were in first division, only three and a half games behind front running Toledo.<sup>114</sup>

At the start of the fifth month of the season the first four teams were so close that it was necessary to go back to the 1942 season to encounter such a close pennant race in the American Association. As of August 3, Minneapolis was sole occupant of first place, Denver one percentage point out and Toledo one half game out. The Cardinals were only a game and a half out.<sup>115</sup> Their drive for the pennant did not last long; by August 16,

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1955.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1955.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1955.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., August 3, 1955.



the Cards were ten and a half games off the pace and in fifth place.<sup>116</sup> What happened to the Cardinals during that two week period was a case of too many depending on too few, according to the World Herald. The pitching staff was inadequate except for two pitchers, Stu Miller and Jim Pearce, the outfielders a bit below triple A par. Another problem was clutch hitting. By team percentages the Cardinals had good hitting; however, with men on base the hits were not delivered. Also the Cards lacked power hitting. Not any one of these led to their second division plunge, but a combination of these over the last tell-tale months of a season can only lead to "woes and losses."<sup>117</sup>

Though the Cardinals did not win the pennant, they did gather their forces to end the season in a respectable second position behind the Minneapolis Millers.<sup>118</sup> The fans were well pleased with their first year performances. On September 2, the fans showered many of the players with gifts for their exploits on the field. Don Blasingame, rookie of the year in the American Association, won the popularity award and received a hundred dollar wrist watch; he also received a suit of

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., August 17, 1955.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., August 25, 1955.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., September 2, 1955.

clothes from the press-box vote for most valuable player. Pitchers Stu Miller and Jim Pearce each received hundred dollar savings bonds for winning the most games, and pitcher George Spencer for appearing in the most games also received a hundred dollar savings bond. Mo Mozzali received the sportsmanship trophy from the Cardinal Fan Club for his popularity. The rest of the club received medallions; John Keane and Bill Bergesch each received a chess set.<sup>119</sup>

With a first division finish the Cardinals qualified for the American Association play-offs with the winner to play in the Little World Series against the International League play-off winner. Omaha's first foe in the play-off was the Louisville Colonials, who they beat out in seven games. Minneapolis, who had beaten the Denver Bears, was to be Omaha's foe in the play-off finals starting September 15, at Minneapolis.<sup>120</sup>

Minneapolis won the first game eight to five.<sup>121</sup> Chaos broke loose in the second game in a rhubarb that was to change an apparent Omaha win into a defeat. The rhubarb began during the first half of the seventh inning.

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., September 15, 1955.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1955.

The game was scoreless with Monte Irwin of Minneapolis, later to play with the New York Giants, at bat. Ed Taylor, umpire behind the plate, called Stu Miller's second pitch a ball. At that point Stu Miller wanted Taylor to check with third base umpire Bob Stewart about whether Irwin had taken a half swing. In the following confusion Taylor had talked over the call with everybody but Stewart. During the ensuing argument, Miller and catcher Dick Rand were thrown out of the game by Stewart. Meanwhile the fans were throwing seat cushions onto the field; one spectator had to be taken bodily from the field.

As things began to settle down, General Manager Bill Bergesch had Taylor talk to league president Ed Doherty, who was watching the game. After the meeting the Omaha battery was allowed back into the game. Then Bill Rigney, now manager of the Los Angeles Angels, made an official protest. At the end of the game the Cardinals were leading three to one.<sup>122</sup>

Later in his hotel room Doherty reviewed the Rigney protest with the three umpires. At the meeting Stewart admitted that he did make the motion that Irwin did take the half swing. As Doherty listened to both

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., September 18, 1955.

sides he knew that only he could make the final decision. If Minneapolis had won the game the protest would have been forgotten. Doherty probably knew that he had no right to overrule the umpires and that the only reason for putting Stu Miller back into the game was to stop a riot. With this in mind he decided that it would be best to reverse the original decision and replay the game from the point of the argument.<sup>123</sup> If the Cardinals had won the game they might have won the series. They lost the replayed game seven to two and the series two out of three to the Millers.<sup>124</sup>

Another phase of the second place 1955 campaign that pleased the Omaha fans and especially the Cardinal management was the box office success. Back in April a sports page byline stated that there was "no reason to worry about attendance." The reason for this statement was the simple fact that although poor weather hindered attendance somewhat, it did not discourage it. During the first five games of the season the Cardinals drew 18,932 persons for an average attendance of 3,786. This number doubled Western League attendance of the previous year. This was an indication of a 300,000 attendance at

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., September 19, 1955.

Cardinal games.<sup>125</sup>

By the middle of May attendance had reached 59,231 for fifteen games. At this time in the previous season only 18,659 had passed through the turnstiles.<sup>126</sup> On June 2, paid attendance had reached 101,445.<sup>127</sup> By June 7, the Omaha fans had surpassed the Columbus total attendance for 1954 as 114,591 were counted by the turnstiles.<sup>128</sup>

As 10,611 fans watched the August 11 game the total count soared to 234,772, which more than doubled the Omaha 1954 season attendance. Al Sorensen was so pleased by the turnout that he sent a telegram to August A. Busch, Jr., that "I'll be sending you a telegram about the third week in August announcing that Omaha has fulfilled its commitment."<sup>129</sup> That commitment would be fan number 300,000. As fate would have it, number 300,000 did not go through the turnstile until September 3. As soon as the commitment had been reached Sorensen sent telegrams to Doherty and Busch giving the attendance at

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1955.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., May 18, 1955.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., June 5, 1955.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1955.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1955.

304,403, and adding, "These thousands of Omahans and their good neighbors have kept their pledge to support AAA baseball, and have demonstrated their good faith by their enthusiasm and attendance."<sup>130</sup> The final attendance mark reached September 5 was a new all time high for Omaha as 317,637 fans watched the first triple A baseball season in Omaha.<sup>131</sup>

Bill Bergesch, in a letter of congratulations to John Rosenblatt, expressed his feeling about the attendance and his splendid promotional activities and backing:

We have just completed the finest season the Cardinal organization has ever enjoyed in Omaha, and I fully realize that a very great measure of our success was due to you for your wonderful help in getting the fans of Omaha and surrounding territory so interested in our club.

I sincerely hope that we have justified your support, and most humbly request that you continue to give us the same sort of backing during the coming seasons that you gave in 1955.

Cordially,  
Bill<sup>132</sup>

When the final figures were in for attendance in the American Association they showed that Omaha ranked

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1955.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., September 6, 1955.

<sup>132</sup>Letter from Bill Bergesch to John Rosenblatt, September 27, 1955.

second only to Denver, which drew 426,248 fans.<sup>133</sup>

Another feather in Omaha's baseball cap was that Omaha ranked third behind Denver and Toronto in total attendance for all minor league teams.<sup>134</sup> After glancing over the final attendance figures Bergesch said:

Where else could this happen except in Omaha, these people are the greatest fans in the world and the whole Cardinal organization appreciates the tremendous backing and fine support of the Cardinals in their first year in the American Association.<sup>135</sup>

When most people were talking football and basketball, the Cardinals were making preparations for the 1956 season. Besides sending out contracts to prospective players, the Omaha Cardinal management was also promoting ticket sales for the coming season. In order to get on the commercial Christmas "bandwagon" the Cardinals put the 1956 tickets on sale earlier than the previous year. "Because many fans like to give them for Christmas presents," Bergesch explained.<sup>136</sup> To satisfy last year's customers the head office mailed letters to its season

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<sup>133</sup>Omaha World Herald, September 7, 1955.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., September 23, 1955.

<sup>135</sup>Cardinal news released by Edward Bastian, Public Relations, September 22, 1955. Obtained from files at Municipal Auditorium, Omaha, Nebraska.

<sup>136</sup>Omaha World Herald, December 11, 1955.

ticket holders. Those fans who received the letters were to renew their ticket orders by February 1 in order to obtain the same seat that they had had the previous year. If the letter went unanswered by that date the tickets were to go to the general public. An incentive to get season tickets was choice parking spots near the stadium and first choice of seats in the April 13 Chicago White Sox--St. Louis Cardinal exhibition game at Municipal Stadium.<sup>137</sup>

While the management was promoting ticket sales, the manager and players were preparing themselves for the rigors of a new season. They enjoyed one of their best spring training sessions with a seventeen and five record which ended April 12 with a victory over Rochester.<sup>138</sup> As the Cardinals packed their bags and began to head north, the scribes were getting out their crystal balls to forecast the pennant winner for the 1956 season. According to the sportswriters, the Omaha Cardinals would win the pennant by an eyelash over Denver and Minneapolis. If the Cards did not win the pennant, the sportswriters figured that Keane's crew would be a cinch for the first

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., January 6, 1956.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1956.



division.<sup>139</sup>

As the Cardinals arrived in Omaha for their first home stand after playing five hundred ball in six road games, several aspects of the team's "spotty" showing were illuminated according to the World Herald. The starting pitchers were below par, fielding was "adequate" but not spectacular, and the outfielders were hitting from "mediocre to poor."<sup>140</sup> Probably no observations were more correctly analyzed than those made of the Cardinals during their first few games.

As the season progressed the percentages showed that the 1956 Cardinals were not pennant contenders. On May 13, the Cardinals were eleven and eleven and in fifth place.<sup>141</sup> By the middle of June the Cards were twenty-eight--thirty-two, still in fifth place.<sup>142</sup> During July the Cardinals moved into fourth place, but still under five hundred with a fifty-two wins and fifty-four losses, twelve and a half games behind league leader Denver. By mid August the Cards dropped back to fifth place with sixty wins and sixty-one losses, thirteen games off the

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1956.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., April 24, 1956.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., May 13, 1956.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., June 17, 1956.

pace. The only explanation Bergesch could offer was "inconsistency." "Too often," he said, "when pitching has been good, the hitting has been poor. When our hitters have found the range, our pitching has gone to pieces." Other explanations, by fans, were: "Infield wobbly until we got Dick Schofield, then we had to wait for him to get his batting eye." Also, the Cardinals suffered injuries to important personnel.<sup>143</sup>

Moving into the last month of play the Cardinals began to jell and were almost sure of a third place finish.<sup>144</sup> With a win over St. Paul on September 8, the Cards cinched third place and a chance in the playoffs.<sup>145</sup> By playing their best ball during the last few days of the season the Cards won fourteen games out of the last nineteen and ended the season with eighty-two wins and seventy-one losses, nine and a half games out.<sup>146</sup> The Card's first opponent in the playoffs was the Denver Bears. The winner of the best of seven series was to play the Indianapolis-Minneapolis winner. The Bears, with good pitching and hitting, knocked the Cardinals out

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1956.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1956.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1956.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1956.

in six games.<sup>147</sup>

Along with the Cardinal plunge in league standings went a dip in Omaha attendance. Two reasons were given by the World Herald for the decrease in attendance: poor weather and Cardinal losses. According to World Herald sportswriters the fans could be grouped into three categories: fans who will attend any game of the year regardless of weather and league standings; fans who believe baseball is a warm weather game; and fans who want to watch a winner.<sup>148</sup> At the end of the season the Cardinals had drawn 212,859, which is an excellent turnout in itself, but compared to the previous year's attendance of over 300,000, was disappointing.<sup>149</sup> The early season's bad weather and later the "inconsistent" team added, in all probability, to the fact that the novelty of triple A baseball was beginning to wane among the fans.

Manager Keane opened the Daytona Beach spring training camp on March 3.<sup>150</sup> By April 6 he was well satisfied with most phases of spring training except for the inability of his pitchers to complete a game. To boost

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid., September 17, 1956.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1956.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1956.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., March 4, 1957.

their endurance he gave them a thorough workout on April 5.<sup>151</sup> By April 12 the squad had been cut to a manageable twenty-two men.<sup>152</sup> They had compiled a respectable seventeen and eleven record in the grapefruit league.<sup>153</sup>

While Omaha fans were anxiously waiting for the opening game in Omaha, Keane was taking his team through four foreign parks, Charleston, Louisville, Indianapolis and Wichita, where they posted a four and four mark before reaching home.<sup>154</sup> After six weeks in the South and a ten day road trip, the Cards arrived at the airport in the early morning hours of April 21. Following a brief rest the team was officially welcomed by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and luncheoned by the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>155</sup> A full house of Cardinal fans attended and heard Johnny Keane express: "We're not going to be kicked around," but also warned that the league would be tougher this year. Later players were introduced. A. V. Sorensen made the prediction that Omaha would top the

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1957.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1957.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1957.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., April 21, 1957.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

1955 attendance with 319,000.<sup>156</sup>

Since the opening game was not until April 25, Keane let the boys have a day off. What players do depends on their temperament and marital status. Some went shopping, others looking for housing, some to the movies, and few were "sizing up the local beauties." They gave Omahans the impression that they were "clean cut young men, sharp dressers, too."<sup>157</sup> But this type of day is rare in the life of a baseball player during the season. They met the Charleston team in a new innovation of two opening-day games, at 3:00 P.M. and at 8:00 P.M. Bergesch explained, "We are having an opening day game in answer to requests from many persons who cannot get out for a night game."<sup>158</sup>

The unexpected occurred during the pre-game ceremonies of the afternoon game, which presented a humorous situation. The announcement was made that the "National Anthem" would be played, the Marine color guard moved into position, the fans rose, but in "ringing silence," nothing happened. Again the announcement was made: "The organist will play the 'National Anthem'," but the only

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., April 24, 1957.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., April 25, 1957.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1957.

thing heard was a "cough here and there from fans." To save the situation, Vincent Emmanuel, the director of a six-piece "clown" band came through with their own rendition of "what may come to be known as the 'National Anthem Polka'." Later over the public address system came the announcement that the organ had blown five straight fuses. After the chuckles and howls, the Cards went out to beat Charleston six to two.<sup>159</sup>

When the season was about a month old the Cards were in sixth place, five and a half games off the pace.<sup>160</sup> It was obvious to even a novice that additional help was needed. The help came in the name of Tom Cheney, later to pitch for the World Champion Pittsburg Pirates of 1960, who had had a ten and five record with Omaha,<sup>161</sup> and Jim King, who played the 1962 season with Washington of the American League, both obtained from the parent Cardinals.<sup>162</sup> However, Omaha was not a pennant contender. Only Wichita, Minneapolis, and St. Paul were squads with championship aspirations. The Omaha problem was an inadequate infield, and listless hitting. The bright spot of

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1957.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1957.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., May 14, 1957.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., May 16, 1957.

the Omaha club was the pitching staff.<sup>163</sup> Frank Barnes pitched forty-one and two-thirds straight innings of scoreless ball, breaking an American Association record that was set by Ray Schordt of Indianapolis in 1915.<sup>164</sup>

On June 16, with record breaking pitching the Omaha Cards moved into fourth place, two and a half games behind leading Wichita.<sup>165</sup> By June 20, Omaha was one half game behind the new league leader, St. Paul, posting a thirty-eight--twenty-nine record.<sup>166</sup> At the half way mark, Omaha was two and a half games out of first and looked like a cinch for the first division. Due to inability to hit and drive in enough runs, they just were not up to par with St. Paul, Wichita and Minneapolis, all of which were tied for first.<sup>167</sup>

As the season progressed into July the Omaha pitching staff continued to be the "envy" of the league, but with a seventh ranked team batting average of 255, and sixth in league fielding, the Cards were not a

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1957.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1957.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1957.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., June 24, 1957.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1957.

pennant contender.<sup>168</sup> Pitching carried the team as far as it could, but without adequate hitting and fielding, the club took a nose dive, dropping eight and a half games behind league leader Wichita.<sup>169</sup> With the team's poor showing the fans looked for a scape goat. There were two. As closely as Bob Phipps' "pink ears" could gather, most of the blame was directed at St. Louis.<sup>170</sup> The manager was blamed by some.<sup>171</sup> Most felt as one fan who defended Keane, adding that he had "been an ardent Cardinal fan ever since their entrance into the Western League and subsequently--during the regimes of managers Hollingsworth, Kissell, Anderson and Keane, and I'll say that the latter is absolutely the BEST."<sup>172</sup>

Some fans even defended the St. Louis brass in their manner of treating "poor little Omaha." They felt that, "Fans must be made to realize that Omaha would have no players if it weren't for St. Louis Cardinals... [and] Omaha has one function and that is to produce ball players

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., July 14, 1957.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., July 27, 1957.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., July 30, 1957.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., August 1, 1957.



for St. Louis."<sup>173</sup>

As the season drew to a close the Cards found themselves in fifth place with seventy-six wins and seventy-eight losses, seventeen games behind the association pennant winner, Wichita.<sup>174</sup>

Fan dissatisfaction with the situation was given emphasis when the attendance showed that only 177,838 paid to see the 1957 Cards.<sup>175</sup> The seriousness of the baseball situation in Omaha was expressed by Rosenblatt who knew that if attendance kept dropping off year after year, Omaha might lose her team. In a letter to Richard Meyer, Rosenblatt expressed his concern with the caliber of players being sent to Omaha.

We must start our next season with a studed array of top triple A talent...and be sure that we have a club that will be close to the top in standings throughout the year. This should assure, as well as insure, over 300,000 attendance. We showed our sincerity when we approved the recommendation of Mr. Sorensen in appropriating \$25,000 to the St. Louis Cardinals to assist them in bringing triple A baseball to Omaha. We certainly want to protect your investment and ours and we can be successful if highly talented players are on our Omaha club.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., August 4, 1957.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1957.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1957.

<sup>176</sup>Letter from John Rosenblatt to Richard Meyer, vice-president of the St. Louis Cardinals, August 2, 1957.

To save the attendance situation during the 1957 season, Rosenblatt pleaded for 32,000 "minute men" to attend Omaha's remaining home games, and to boost the attendance to a total of 200,000. This appeal was made so Omaha could maintain a "reputation as one of the best baseball cities in America."<sup>177</sup> Rosenblatt later clarified his statement that the appeal was for Omaha, not for the Omaha Cardinals. "We have a major investment in Municipal Stadium. We want the prestige that goes with high-level baseball affiliation. We want the 'hidden dollars' that out-of-town fans will spend here."

Rosenblatt went on and warned that Omaha attendance was approaching the Columbus, Ohio, figures when St. Louis pulled out of that city; that major reshuffling throughout baseball including the majors might put St. Louis on the spot to make a choice between Houston and Omaha. He then asserted, "Omaha must be able to present a good case when the chips are down."<sup>178</sup>

If Omaha was to lose her franchise by the St. Louis Cardinals' moving out, it was not indicated by Walter G. Shannon, St. Louis farm director, when he was interviewed during the World Series in Milwaukee by

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<sup>177</sup>Omaha World Herald, August 30, 1957.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1957.

World Herald sportswriter Wally Provost. Shannon said, "As far as Omaha's concerned, the picture definitely is better. Next year we will be able to send a player anywhere we want to. That may sound odd, but we couldn't do it this season because of the strong agreement with Rochester and a few other entanglements."<sup>179</sup>

Though Shannon talked about Omaha's prospects for 1958, reports were being circulated by the Associated Press "that the American Association might be enjoying a Texas League city." Bill Bergesch of the Omaha Cardinals was quick to discount the rumor when he said, "I've just come from St. Louis and the organizational meeting, and know that Omaha is considered a very valuable franchise to the Cardinals."<sup>180</sup>

Apparently, Bergesch's statement reassured Rosenblatt, for he felt that Omaha had no fear of losing their professional baseball team. Rosenblatt added that, "The city contract with the Omaha Cardinals for use of Municipal Stadium runs through next season."<sup>181</sup> Finally, to put an end to the transfer rumors, league president Edward Doherty called the whole thing "gobbledegook" and

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1957.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1957.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., October 16, 1957.

said Omaha was one of the best cities in the league.<sup>182</sup> Omaha fans had their spirits rekindled when the Omaha Cardinals announced that they had spent over \$125,000 for new players to improve the 1958 Cardinal team.<sup>183</sup>

With the continued decline of attendance at Omaha baseball games, the Cardinal management and civic minded people of Omaha felt that a concentrated backing of ticket sales was needed. One of the first promotional gimmicks by Bergesch was to bring two major league exhibition games to be played in Omaha. With the purchase of season tickets, a fan received the seat he had bought without cost to see the two exhibition games, on April 11 and 13. Bergesch also explained that thirty percent would be saved by fans ordering season passes.<sup>184</sup>

Another promotional idea to attract fans was to have the fans vote on when the best starting time for the games would be--at 7:30 P.M. or the traditional 8:00 P.M. The big complaint about 8:00 P.M. was that fans got home too late to get a good night's sleep for work the next day. However, 7:30 games might interfere with the evening meal, and the ability for some working

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., December 12, 1957.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1958.

people to get to the ball park at 7:30 was less.<sup>185</sup> The final voting tabulation showed that the fans were overwhelmingly in favor of the 7:30 P.M. starting time. The vote ran approximately fifty to one in favor of the change. The Cardinal management also decided to change double-header starting time from 6:30 P.M. to 6:00 P.M.<sup>186</sup>

While the management was doing its part, the Mayor, John Rosenblatt, and attorney Jim Green were backing a ticket drive as co-chairmen. The two men were hoping to top \$100,000 in advance ticket sales. To get them on the right footing, Bergesch gave them a running start of \$54,000 when he "tossed them the ball."<sup>187</sup> The mayor began the campaign with the following statement: "This is the year Omaha must show its strength in baseball. It's almost certain that there will be a realignment of the leagues after this year. We will be judged by our performance this year." Jim Green added: "It's really important to our community life that we keep triple-A baseball."<sup>188</sup>

The ticket drive failed miserably, falling short

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1958.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1958.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1958.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1958.

by \$40,000. Bill Bergesch explained almost apologetically that bad weather hampered the advance ticket sales. He added that, "We don't ask Omaha to support a bad team, and we had one last year, but if the city keeps producing it will have no trouble when the realignment comes." According to Bergesch, 250,000 attendance is producing.<sup>189</sup>

Following a fairly successful spring training season the Cardinals played their last game on April 13, and began their trip northward.<sup>190</sup> On their arrival home the Cardinals had a three and three record, an indication of the future. As the season progressed into June, the Cards were still playing five hundred ball with a twenty-five and twenty-five record, six and a half games off the pace.<sup>191</sup> By the end of June the Cards remained in fourth place but had moved to within four and a half games of league leader Charleston.<sup>192</sup> From the high water mark of June 30, the Cards dropped to fifth, eight to eleven games behind the leader.<sup>193</sup> By August 17, they were sixty-five--sixty-five, still in fifth place, eleven

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., April 21, 1958.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1958.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., June 4, 1958.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., June 30, 1958.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1958.

games out.<sup>194</sup> During the latter part of August the team began to move, winning twelve of sixteen starts, with six wins in a row, moving them into fourth place.<sup>195</sup> By August 31, second, third, fourth and fifth places in the league were up for grabs, and would be settled during the last eight days of the campaign.<sup>196</sup> On September 4, the league standings were:

Charleston	86 - 62
Denver	77 - 67, 7 games behind
Minneapolis	78 - 70
Wichita	78 - 71
Omaha	78 - 72

Although the Cards did not have a chance for the championship, they did have a chance to get into the American Association play-offs if they could obtain fourth place.<sup>197</sup>

By September 7 the league was still close, except for first place:

Charleston	88 - 62
Minneapolis	82 - 70, 7 games behind
Wichita	81 - 71
Omaha	79 - 73
Denver	77 - 71

Going into the last day the Cardinals needed at least a

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., August 17, 1958.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., August 24, 1958.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., August 31, 1958.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1958.

split with St. Paul in a double-header and a Denver loss to Minneapolis to attain the play-offs.<sup>198</sup> However, Denver did win, thus putting Omaha in fifth place, out of the play-offs.<sup>199</sup>

Again the Cardinals did not fare well in league standing nor in attendance. It continued its downward trend and reached a low of 152,000 for triple A baseball. Only the 1952 and 1953 seasons were worse.<sup>200</sup>

Their concern for the Omaha club came from many fans in a variety of ways. Marilyn Schade, of the Omaha Cardinal Booster Club, felt that the Cardinals would play better ball if the audience would pick up, and that Omaha asked for triple A ball, that St. Louis did not "ask us if they could put their team here."<sup>201</sup> In answer to her letter came a critical reply from Orville Landen, an "ex" Cardinal fan. He wrote:

Yes, we asked for triple A baseball in 1954, but as yet we have not received it, despite continued promises of the St. Louis brass. It's no fun to go night after night and see players who can't hold a lead--or overcome one. My friends who started to go to the games in 1955 have long since quit.

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1958.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1958.

<sup>200</sup>Taken from Omaha Public Parks official attendance records.

<sup>201</sup>Omaha World Herald, July 21, 1958.



It [baseball] has to compete with other entertainment and will have to fall or succeed on its merits.

If we must tolerate shabby clubs and treatment to keep the franchise, then let it go. Omaha will continue to grow and prosper whether we have organized baseball or not.<sup>202</sup>

Though many fans were critical and some were fearful of losing their ball club, Bill Bergesch seemed to think that Omaha was not finished as a baseball city and was confident that they would finish no worse than fourth in the league in attendance. He also said that he recommended to Busch that he renew the contract for use of Municipal Stadium in 1959. He said that Busch was in complete agreement. Bergesch cited two reasons why attendance declined:

- (1) Because this area had its longest, coolest spring in many years, a number of our fans didn't get the stadium habit until the season was well along;
- (2) Although this has been one of our most interesting clubs, there is no substitute at the gate for a serious pennant contender.

He added: "Give us favorable weather and a consistent winner, and there will be no baseball problem in Omaha."<sup>203</sup>

As Bergesch was painting blue skies for the future of baseball in Omaha, he seemed to have missed the sky

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., July 25, 1958.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., August 24, 1958.

above City Hall, for Rosenblatt was becoming very disillusioned and skeptical about pro-baseball in general. The mayor was critical of the constant raiding of minor league teams by the parent club. "I can see a lot of other uses for that place, and you can quote me on that," he said. This attitude was emphasized by the fact that Rosenblatt did not attend as many games in 1958 as he had in the past.<sup>204</sup>

By October 7, Omaha's future in the American Association looked "clouded" as St. Louis made the announcement that they were backing Houston for a berth in the American Association or Pacific Coast League. Rosenblatt felt that St. Louis would be back in Omaha, "since the Cards have been anxious to renew their Omaha contract."<sup>205</sup> While the rumors were circulating Bergesch was in St. Louis at the annual St. Louis organizational meeting.<sup>206</sup> He assured Rosenblatt that St. Louis would back Omaha, even though this meeting to renew the contract with Omaha was taking longer than any other year.<sup>207</sup> One of the reasons for the delay was the anticipated

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1958.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., October 7, and October 2, 1958.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1958.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., November 7, 1958.

addition of two teams from the Texas League into the American Association which included Houston, a St. Louis farm club. If the major leagues expanded, they would move into Minneapolis and St. Paul;<sup>208</sup> this would leave the Association with eight teams.<sup>209</sup>

On November 18, 1958, the St. Louis Cardinals came to an agreement with Omaha for a one year contract.<sup>210</sup> Dick Meyer, a few days later, explained to Rosenblatt that St. Louis would not pull out of Omaha because Houston had expressed a desire for major league baseball, which, if they did attain while St. Louis was there, would leave St. Louis without an American Association club. Rosenblatt added: "I could not see how Omaha would have been left out of the American Association. We have a strategic location and outstanding park and a wonderful drawing territory."<sup>211</sup>

With a one year contract in the city's pocket, Omaha was moving into the 1959 season. It looked more and more like they were on trial to see if they could

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<sup>208</sup>This is what happened when the American League expanded to ten teams and moved to Minneapolis and St. Paul during 1960 for the 1961 season.

<sup>209</sup>Omaha World Herald, November 11, 1958.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., November 18, 1958.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., November 21, 1958.

support triple A baseball, to be judged by the officials from St. Louis.

During the winter months of 1958 and 1959 a re-vamping of the American Association took place. At the annual meeting, three Texas cities were added to the American Association, Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth. It was also announced that the league would be divided into a western and an eastern division. Denver, Omaha and the three Texas cities would make up the western division; Louisville, Charleston, Indianapolis, Minneapolis and St. Paul would make up the eastern division.<sup>212</sup>

Again the Omaha Cardinals journeyed to Daytona Beach for spring training.<sup>213</sup> As always, the manager was optimistic about the 1959 Cardinal roster, when he said, "It looks like an interesting summer. We have a big squad, in physical size and in number of players. They've shown me good power and fair speed..." in sizing up the prospects.<sup>214</sup>

In order to have a good team to boost attendance, Walter Shannon, St. Louis farm chief, said, "Plans call for Omaha to get three of the next five pitchers trimmed

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., December 5, 1958.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., January 23, 1959.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1959.

by St. Louis and four of the next six."<sup>215</sup> Going into the last few days of training Joe Schultz, the new Omaha manager, gave a more professional account of the 1959 squad, which he felt had "front-line pitching," and would have good speed, power and be "outstanding defensively."<sup>216</sup> In spite of such optimism, the team played mediocre baseball finishing spring training with seven wins and nine losses and one tie.<sup>217</sup>

The sportswriters of the American Association picked the Cardinals to finish second to Fort Worth in the western division; Robert Williams in his private World Herald poll picked them to finish second to Denver.<sup>218</sup> The World Herald's Wally Provost disagreed completely, believing that Omaha was not a pennant contender. According to Provost, St. Louis still had a heavy commitment to Rochester, which received most of the top talent.<sup>219</sup> His crystal ball seemed to be correct for

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., March 31, 1959.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1959. The pitchers were Frank Barnes, Bill Smith, Ray Sadecki, \$50,000 bonus baby who pitched with St. Louis in 1961 and early 1962, and Dean Stone who started for Boston in 1962.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1959.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1959.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid.

the Cardinals started the season disasterously with two and nine, eight losses in a row. With the team scoring only one run in thirty-four innings, Schultz was not discouraged. "We've got a pretty good ball club here. They're young and they're still getting experience. We've had injuries and the strain of opening the season with a long road trip."<sup>220</sup>

The Cardinals began to move from the cellar of the five team western division into third place by June 21.<sup>221</sup> By July 17, the Cards had moved into first place, one and a half games ahead of Fort Worth.<sup>222</sup> August 14 found the Cardinals deadlocked with the Fort Worth team.<sup>223</sup> The two teams' race for first place in the western division continued through to the last few days of the season.<sup>224</sup>

Though the Cardinals were in good physical shape,

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<sup>220</sup>Ibid., April 24, 1959.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., June 21, 1959.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1959. It must be pointed out that if the two divisions were combined into one league the Cardinals would be in fourth place, behind Minneapolis 62-37, Louisville 60-43, Indianapolis 60-45, with a 52-52 record. Though the league was divided into two separate divisions they did play inter-divisional games which showed that Omaha was in the weaker division.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1959.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1959.

their manager was not. Going into the final phase of the campaign he began to have back trouble. It became so painful that he was finally hospitalized. From his bed he congratulated the Cardinals who cinched the western division pennant by winning the second game of a double-header at Denver on September 7. He said, "I think it's a helluva ball club. It took a real good team effort. We have no stars. Everyone just picked up where another left off."<sup>225</sup>

Their pennant qualified them to participate in the play-offs.<sup>226</sup> Their opponent was Minneapolis. At the third game of the series, Joe Schultz was able to re-join the team after ten days in Clarkson Hospital.<sup>227</sup> The smile that showed on his face following the Cardinal victory in the third game did not remain, for the Cards lost the series in six games.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1959.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., September 10, 1959. Omaha finished with a 83-78 record, two and a half games ahead of Fort Worth. In the Eastern division Louisville had a 97-65 record; Minneapolis 95-67; Indianapolis 86-76. Again it must be pointed out that Omaha would have finished in fourth place without the division, and not a serious pennant contender for they would have finished thirteen and a half games behind Louisville.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1959.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., September 17, 1959.

Back in July manager Joe Schultz had said that Omahans had a team they could be proud of and "now I just hope that they keep coming out to see them."<sup>229</sup> But the fans did not come out to see them for the 1959 attendance showed that only 116,097 people attended the sixty-three home games.<sup>230</sup> Schultz said the fans had something to be proud about, and in January of 1959, Bergesch had said that to solve the attendance problem was to have good weather and a pennant contending team.<sup>231</sup> According to the 1959 league records the Cardinals had a five hundred percentage, a team which won a few more games than they lost. They did win the western division, but this is no compensation when compared to the records of the eastern division.

In January Bergesch had predicted an attendance of around 250,000.<sup>232</sup> An optimistic attitude may be a prerequisite to becoming a general manager of a professional baseball team. The change in starting time of games for "countless" fans who wanted the change did not

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<sup>229</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1959.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1959.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1959.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1959.



seem to help.<sup>233</sup>

The thought of St. Louis leaving Omaha began to become a reality when John Rosenblatt announced in July that he would attend the United States Conference of Mayors in Los Angeles to boost Omaha's chances for entering the proposed third major league.<sup>234</sup> The Mayor knew that chances would be slim that St. Louis would return to Omaha in 1960, so he felt it was best to move before St. Louis could. Rosenblatt learned that Omaha would not qualify since it had less than 800,000 population and their stadium would not seat 40,000 people.<sup>235</sup>

With the Continental League out of the question, the fate of triple A baseball in Omaha was left to the officials in St. Louis. On September 29, Bergesch announced that the St. Louis officials were "considering" leaving Omaha. He emphasized that those decisions take time and the Cardinals would not come to a final decision for a couple of weeks.<sup>236</sup> By October 10, concrete

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<sup>233</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1959.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., July 10, 1959.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., July 28, 1959. The continental league never developed because the American League expanded to ten teams and moved into Los Angeles and Minneapolis and St. Paul for the 1961 season. The National League also expanded, moving into New York and Houston for the 1962 season.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., September 29, 1959.

evidence that St. Louis would give up Omaha was indicated when the Cards negotiated a working agreement with double A Memphis of the Southern Association. Bergesch pointed out that no final decision had been made.<sup>237</sup>

The "handwriting on the wall" seemed evident now, especially to Mayor Rosenblatt, who announced on October 15, that he would open negotiations with the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox to sponsor a team in Omaha during the 1960 season. Though the St. Louis Cardinals had not yet terminated their club in Omaha, the Mayor knew that the ax was soon to drop.<sup>238</sup>

The news was not long in coming for on October 16, 1959, at the Stadium, at a press conference concerning the future of St. Louis sponsorship of Omaha professional baseball, St. Louis general manager Bing Devine disclosed:

The St. Louis Cardinals do not plan to operate the Omaha franchise in the American Association next season. It is no longer practical for us to operate two triple A clubs under our new streamlined program. In addition, the financial losses at Omaha have been great, even when the club won.

Bill Bergesch added: "I don't consider baseball a dead issue in Omaha."<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup>Ibid., October 11, 1959.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1959.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., October 16, 1959.

Another reason that Omaha was dropped and the other triple A team, Rochester, was kept was that St. Louis had a five year contract which had three years to run. Rochester drew approximately 250,000 fans during the 1959 season.<sup>240</sup>

The end of the Cardinal baseball era in Omaha did not mean the loss of baseball forever. As a World Herald poll indicated in November of 1959, eighty-four per cent of the fans still wanted baseball, seven were opposed and nine were undecided.<sup>241</sup> The American Association officials were anxious to have Omaha in the league for the 1960 season. They said that "speedy action" was necessary. The big obstacle was to find someone to operate the team, and the only prospect was to operate a team independently.<sup>242</sup> On November 7, Rosenblatt met with Charles Warren, Public Property Director, Jake Isaacson and E. F. Pettis to determine what course to take. Gordon Jones, St. Paul president and general manager, who hoped for an affirmative answer from Omaha, warned the group that they should not "go into this as a stopgap

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<sup>240</sup>Ibid.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1959.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1959.

move or for the good of the league.<sup>243</sup> His warning was well founded for it was pointed on November 3 in a telegram communication from Ed Doherty to John Rosenblatt that at least \$150,000 would be the minimum for operations and personnel.<sup>244</sup> The mayor himself was "reluctant" to solicit the money on behalf of baseball.<sup>245</sup> These men pessimistically hoped to come to a conclusion before the annual American Association meeting on November 30, when the league would have to make the decision. The leaders of this drive to keep baseball in Omaha felt it was too much of a gamble to risk \$150,000 to keep baseball in Omaha. Rosenblatt, spokesman for the group felt it would be better to "lay out a year." With this decision, Omaha had its franchise removed by the Association with the statement in a telegram from Jim Burris, secretary of the Association, to the World Herald on November 30. "Despite exhaustive efforts on the part of the American Association to retain Omaha as a league member our attempts in this objective failed. Accordingly, the Omaha franchise was surrendered to the league."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup>Ibid., November 7, 1959.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1959.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., November 7, 1959.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1959.

With relations between Omaha and St. Louis severed, and Rosenblatt unable to get a major league team to back Omaha in the Association, Omaha was without baseball for the 1960 season.<sup>247</sup> Through the following winter and summer he kept his eye open for any possibility that Omaha might get back into the Association in 1961. In October Rosenblatt announced that he was hopeful that Omaha might return to baseball in 1961. Minneapolis and St. Paul were being drafted into the major leagues, leaving two franchises in the American Association open. Since the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox held the franchises for the two cities, Rosenblatt immediately began negotiations.<sup>248</sup>

On November 1, Rosenblatt received a telegram from E. J. Bavasi, executive vice president of the Dodgers saying that Doherty of the American Association would approve the Dodger move to Omaha. After receiving the telegram, Rosenblatt made plans to fly to Los Angeles to discuss terms which would make baseball a reality in Omaha for the 1961 season.<sup>249</sup> On November 4, Rosenblatt

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<sup>247</sup>Ibid., December 10, 1959. Only five cities larger than Omaha had no baseball for the 1960 season.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., October 20, 1960.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1960.

announced from Los Angeles that the Dodger organization accepted the contract offered by Omaha. Bavasi announced:

The entire Dodger organization is looking forward to bringing baseball back to Omaha, and we trust the association will be profitable to both parties. We look forward to a very happy relationship and certainly thank Omaha for the invitation.<sup>250</sup>

A few days later Bavasi arrived in Omaha from Los Angeles and announced that, "I am thrilled Omaha is back in baseball," and that he was sure that the Dodgers would give Omaha a good team.<sup>251</sup>

Because the major leagues were cutting down on the number of minor league clubs they would support, the American Association became a six team league in 1961 and 1962. The Omaha Dodgers were never contenders for the pennant and set no attendance records. Following the 1962 season, reduction of minor league clubs was continued and Omahans feared that they would be cut from minor league baseball. The first indication that the dodgers would pull out of Omaha came at a Chamber of Commerce sports committee luncheon when Omaha's general manager, Elton Schiller, announced that, "In my own heart I feel the Dodgers will not be here next year."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1960.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid., November 5, 1960.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1962.

Two weeks later a group of baseball enthusiasts was called to a meeting at the Sheraton Fontenelle Hotel by Municipal Stadium manager, Charlie Mancuso, to study the possibility of keeping baseball in Omaha under local ownership. Bruce Woodward, business manager of the Omaha Dodgers, pointed out that \$230,323.41 would be needed to operate a triple A baseball club for one season. After lengthy discussion, a few, including Mayor James Dworak and Rosenblatt, decided to explore the possibility of raising \$50,000 to \$100,000 in capital for operating a franchise in 1963. Also at the meeting was Jake Isaacson, general manager of Ak-Sar-Ben. He was asked if Ak-Sar-Ben would be interested in underwriting a triple A franchise. Isaacson answered that he could not "speak for the board of governors."<sup>253</sup> Later Omaha received Ak-Sar-Ben's answer. They had decided unanimously that financing a professional baseball franchise was not a proper function for Ak-Sar-Ben. The board was willing, however, to pay the expenses of a four man committee to attend the minor league convention in Rochester, New York. The mayor indicated that if the money could not be raised it might not be worthwhile to send a committee to Rochester. Woodward expressed the same sentiments, indicating that a committee

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1962.

attending the meeting should have the capital pledged and "ready to go." He also pointed out that if Omaha did not have a team it might mean the end of the American Association.<sup>254</sup>

Though the committee headed by Dworak did not have the pledged money, they journeyed to Rochester. Baseball fans through the midwest, especially in Omaha, were shocked at the events that took place. Since only five teams remained in the Association it was decided by the mayors and minor league officials to merge their teams into the International League and the Pacific Coast League, thus ending the American Association and Omaha's chances for minor league baseball in 1963.<sup>255</sup>

At times the Cardinals and Dodger fans did not see the type of baseball they wished, though they did see many players who would eventually make the big leagues. Some did not stay long, others are now highly paid stars. From the Western League, the following started the 1962 season with major league clubs: Ken Boyer, St. Louis; Jackie Brandt, Baltimore; Joe Cunningham, Chicago White Sox; Wally Moon, Los Angeles; Larry Jackson, St. Louis; and John Klippstein, Cincinnati. From the triple A

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<sup>254</sup>Ibid., November 24, 1962.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1962.



American Association Cardinal clubs, these went to the major leagues and started the 1962 season: Don Blasingame, Cincinnati; Dick Brown, Detroit; Chris Cannizzaro, New York Mets; Curt Flood, St. Louis; Gary Geiger, Boston; Jim King, Washington; Jim Schaffer, St. Louis; Dick Schofield, Pittsburgh; Bobby Gene Smith, New York Mets; Luis Arroyo, New York Yankees; Jim Donohue, Los Angeles; Bob Duliba, St. Louis; Bob Gibson, St. Louis; Marty Kutyna, Washington; Joe McClain, Washington; Lindy McDaniel, St. Louis; Stu Miller, San Francisco; Billy Muffett, Boston; Ray Sadecki, St. Louis; Barney Schultz, Chicago Cubs; Dean Stone, Houston; Bobby Tiefenauer, Houston. From the Dodgers, these went to the major leagues: Larry Burright, Doug Cammili, Nate Smith, Dick Tracewski, Willard Hunter, Charlie Spell, to the Los Angeles Dodgers. John Goryl, Minnesota Twins; Bill Lajoie, Kansas City, Athletics; Art Fowler, Los Angeles Angels.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1962.

## CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

Although Omaha is currently without a team the people of Omaha can be assured that they can be proud of the rich heritage of professional baseball in their city. It all began in 1879 in the Northwestern League, one of the oldest organized professional leagues in the United States. Omaha was without a team from 1879 until 1885, and for a few years until the turn of the century, but they can look proudly back at the colorful history of those first Omaha professionals, who were not always of the best character but were professionals in a true sense of the word. Omaha did not finish the 1885 season and did not participate in professional baseball in 1886; another attempt was made in 1887 and for the first time they finished the season intact. In 1888 an injunction brought against the club for playing Sunday baseball threatened the sport, but it was declared a good, wholesome game by the judge. Finally, in 1889, Omaha won its first pennant in organized baseball; however, in the following decade baseball went through financial woes in the

midwest, with Omaha in and out of professional baseball for a number of years. In 1898 Omaha participated in the Western League which developed into the present day American League, but because of poor attendance disbanded in July.

In 1899 and 1900, the Western League label was discarded by Ban Johnson taking the American League title, allowing the old Western League to be reorganized. Again Omaha ventured into professional baseball under the directorship of Buck Keith and William "Pa" Rourke. This dual ownership was short-lived, coming to an end during the winter of 1901, with Rourke left as the sole owner of the Omaha club. For the next twenty-one years Omaha fans were to enjoy continuous baseball broken only for a brief duration of United States participation in World War I. Although Rourke experienced great success financially, he did have his troubles, especially during the baseball war between the American Association and the Western League, both of whom wanted the Omaha territory in their league. Rourke overcame this threat to his baseball position and went on to greater things, building pennant winners and contenders in 1902, 1904, 1907, 1908, and 1916. He rebuilt the Vinton Street Park for the convenience of his customers and provided the fans with topnotch ball players who later went on to higher classification baseball.

The Rourke years came to a close during November of 1920, when Rourke sold his holdings to a young Texas man, John Fagan Burch, who was to operate the club until the early thirties. Burch, with the financial backing of his uncle and friend, Mike Finn, came to Omaha with great expectations of making a financial success of baseball in Omaha like "Pa" Rourke. Burch was successful in the early 1920's when thousands of amusement-hungry people flocked to the park. In 1924 Burch had his greatest success financially, winning the pennant. Lean years in the mid-west affected the pocketbooks of the fans. Burch became so disgruntled during the mid-twenties that he contemplated selling his holdings but was persuaded by Western League officials to stay on and try to make a go of it. Burch continued to sell his better players weakening his team and their selling power, thus the crowds kept growing smaller. In 1929, Burch received another blow, when a nationwide depression hit the country. Burch did not give up, thinking night baseball would save him financially. The first season of night baseball kept Burch out of the red, but soon the novelty waned and during the early 1930's Burch was unable to pay his players and was even being sued by some players and their wives. Burch declared bankruptcy, showing that he owed \$104,114.65 to creditors. From 1933 until 1936 the club changed hands

frequently. In 1933, the club was operated under the friendly receiver, Pug Griffin, and in 1934 and 1935, under "Dutch" Wetzell, and Mrs. Banconier. During those years the Omaha club continued to experience financial woes. Because of difficulties between the Western League and Mrs. Banconier, who had a lien against the Vinton Street Park, the club had to finish the 1935 season in Council Bluffs, Iowa. In 1936, Larry Harlan bought the Omaha franchise and operated the club until the Vinton Street ball park burned in July of 1936, moving the club to Rock Island, Illinois, on August 17, 1936. Until 1949, this was the last professional baseball to be played in Omaha and the Omaha area after thirty-seven years of continuous baseball.

Following World War II, the minor leagues were reactivated, with Bob Hall of Omaha bidding for a place in the Western League for Omaha and the St. Louis Cardinals backing. For Hall the least difficult phase was getting a franchise for Omaha, and finding a place to play was the major problem. After months of trying to find a place to play in Omaha, meeting much opposition, Hall decided to play in Council Bluffs until Municipal Stadium was completed. The Cardinals played in Council Bluffs for two seasons, in 1949 moving to their new home in Omaha. It was not until 1950 and 1951 that Omaha baseball

fans enjoyed their first pennant in twenty-six years. These were the twilight years in Western League baseball for Omaha, with 1954 their last year.

The following year Omaha participated in the American Association. Omaha had had a chance to join the American Association in 1943, but had lacked adequate playing area. This led John Rosenblatt and Edward Jelen to formulate a plan to build a baseball stadium for Omaha. Under the direction of Rosenblatt, the people of Omaha approved the idea in a municipal election, voting funds for the stadium. The project was delayed many times because of weather, rising prices, steel shortages, lack of funds, and politics. After a number of years the stadium was completed, and was first used by the Omaha Western League Cardinals in 1949.

It was not until 1955 that the original goal for use of the stadium was realized--Omaha became a member of the triple A, American Association. Getting into the Association was probably Omaha's brightest hour in baseball, with civic leaders, and rank-and-file baseball fans backing Omaha's bid for triple A baseball. After a number of months of negotiations between the Western League, American Association, St. Louis Cardinals, and Omaha officials, the way was cleared for Omaha to enter the Association.

During those first few years, Omaha expressed her satisfaction with higher classification baseball by setting all-time Omaha attendance records. Businessmen and leaders showed their civic pride by launching successful ticket campaigns which put Omaha near the top in minor league attendance. As the years went on, Omaha began to realize a decline in attendance. Though Omaha had respectable baseball teams, they never won the pennant nor the playoffs. In 1959, the St. Louis officials let it be known that they were withdrawing from Omaha. Attempts were made to get other major league teams to back a team in Omaha for the 1959 season, all unsuccessful. The 1961 season found Omaha back in the American Association, sponsored by the Los Angeles Dodgers. This affiliation was short-lived for the Dodgers pulled out of Omaha at the end of the 1962 season.

Baseball has developed extensively through the years, with twenty major league teams in our major cities from coast to coast. Millions of people have gone through the turnstiles at the major league ball parks, with others who are not within easy access to the major league parks watching the games on television. Besides major league baseball, there is throughout the United States a lower caliber of ball called minor league baseball, which is viewed by thousands more Americans. Though the overall

picture of baseball seems bright, the baseball situation involving the minor leagues is precarious, and at best "sick." Baseball in the minor leagues has been dwindling continuously since its high water mark following World War II, when there were over fifty minor leagues, till today when there are less than twenty. This situation really did not affect Omaha until recent years when one of the oldest leagues in the midwest, the American Association, took its last gasp of air and died, leaving Omaha not only without a major league sponsor but also without a league in which to participate.

Omaha in professional baseball has had a colorful past, with many highlights, and with many disappointments. Reflecting on Omaha's years in professional baseball, one point comes to mind--the attendance aspect. To have and to keep a professional baseball team in any city, a primary requisite is to have solid financial backing. Before the turn of the century, Omaha baseball had its financial problems, and during some years they had no team. The same thing occurred during the thirties, and again in the 1950's and early 1960's.

What are some reasons for the financial plight of so many Omaha professional teams? They are many, some more difficult to pinpoint than others. During the 1890's the midwest was involved in a depression that might have



contributed to a decline in attendance, similar events occurring in the late twenties and the thirties. Poor teams that lacked drawing power have plagued many Omaha owners and business managers. Poor weather, competition from other amusement media, starting times of games, poor transportation to ball parks, concessions too high priced, admission too costly and poor business management are other factors.

Many people have given their diagnoses of what was wrong with minor league baseball in the past and what is wrong with it today. Al Schacht, the clown prince of baseball, had listed the following as ills of minor league baseball:

1. Poor approach to the grounds.
2. Ball park located in worst part of the city.
3. Poor parking facilities.
4. Ramshackled parks.
5. Poor playing fields.
6. Players in dirty uniforms.
7. Late games because of poor transportation (getting players to games).
8. Poor lighting systems, dirty rest rooms, poor set of refreshment stands.
9. Poor and inadequate promotional and public relationship on the part of the owners.
10. Television.<sup>1</sup>

Busch, president of the St. Louis Cardinals in 1955, viewed that "baseball must be sold, not merely displayed with a sort of off-hand invitation 'come and get

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<sup>1</sup>Al Schacht, "Who's Killing Minor League Baseball?" American Mercury, LXXIX (September, 1954), pp. 15-18.

it, if you can, and if you want it'." Busch said selling baseball entails the same techniques as selling beer-- there must be friendly relations between the buyer and seller.<sup>2</sup>

Bob Howsam, general manager of the attendance-record-breaking Denver Bears in 1951, said he used every promotional device that had a "direct or indirect bearing on ticket sales." He said he used pictures and news releases for all papers with special attention given to special group publications such as: The Catholic Register, Negro papers, Jewish periodicals, club publications, on the team's activities, given away by the thousands each month during the winter. Home games were broadcast on four stations. Besides these promotional devices, there are advertisements in the newspapers, tourist pamphlets, special baseball night for different groups, and on childrens' T-shirts. To coordinate these activities Howsam hired a full-time publicity man (the only one in the league at that time) who would devote many hours to personal public relations by attending luncheons for many diversified groups around Denver.<sup>3</sup>

Floyd Olds of the World Herald itemized the

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<sup>2</sup>Omaha World Herald, March 24, 1955.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1951.

following grounds for declining attendance in 1953: horse racing, television, weather, stock car racing, and wrestling. Olds also emphasized that horse racing was over by July 4, and summer television programs were not any good. He then concluded that a poor team was the major cause for poor attendance.<sup>4</sup>

In 1950 Jerry Jordan, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, made a study of the decline of baseball attendance in both the major and minor leagues. He pointed out that there were five major factors:

1. Weather was responsible for about one-third of the loss in the majors, and probably as much in the minors.
2. Teams with improved performances had a relatively better season regardless of other factors. However, in the majors improved performance on the average shifted to the smaller drawing clubs which contributed to an over-all attendance decrease.
3. Levelling out from the extraordinarily high postwar peaks was a definite factor in the general decline which lowered attendance totals in 55 of the 60 leagues operating at the start of the season.
4. Novelty-happy new TV owners hurt temporarily but this loss decreased as the season progressed.
5. Too many major league sportscasts, both radio and TV, were partially responsible

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1953.

for the greater loss in the minors than in the majors.<sup>5</sup>

Of all these factors Jordan emphasized that "the biggest danger to baseball, in particular the minors, comes from sportscasting (both radio and TV)," which he called overemphasis on the 'Major League frame of mind.'<sup>6</sup> He pointed out "that major league telecasts hurt attendance at minors located nearby."<sup>7</sup> He added that if this trend continued with national televised major league games the results could be multiplied, thus conditioning the minor league fans to becoming too major league conscious.<sup>8</sup>

Jordan stated that the trend of the minor league fans developing a "major league frame of mind" began during the twenties with the development of radio which brought major league baseball into the homes across the nation. He declared that syndicated sports columnists made their appearance in the papers and through necessity picked major league baseball as a common interest subject to all areas in the United States. The war which put an

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<sup>5</sup>Jerry Jordan, Analysis of 1950 Baseball Attendance (Washington, D.C.: Radio-Television Manufacturers, 1950), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

end to minor leagues in turn shifted baseball interest to the majors.<sup>9</sup>

As has been pointed out there are a number of reasons for poor attendance in the minor leagues and how to remedy the situation, but because of the diversification of the United States, every section of the country had its own unique problems and solutions for the ills of minor league baseball.

All in all, perhaps the blame rests in two places. Poor teams, with the loss of public confidence in the sincerity of professional sponsored teams to integrate themselves with the community as one. If a town fails to support a poor product, the owners rather than try to improve their product will look elsewhere to sell it. Second, most important in recent years, has been the advent of rapid communications. Today people in the midwest are no longer in the back waters but are in the mainstream of life. When an event occurs in the east, people in the midwest immediately feel the impact. Also amusements that were reserved for people in the east are no longer their monopoly. Today, people of the midwest may take a weekend trip to one of six major league parks without great difficulty. Better yet timewise, they can flick the dial on their television set to watch major league baseball.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IX

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