

Horace Stoneham

Hall of Fame Induction Candidate

It is time to recognize, Horace Stoneham, with election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Stoneham represents one of baseball's cornerstone ownership groups between 1917 and 1977, and more specifically, he was leader as hands-on operator, business visionary, and socio-cultural guide in forming the contemporary framework for major league baseball.

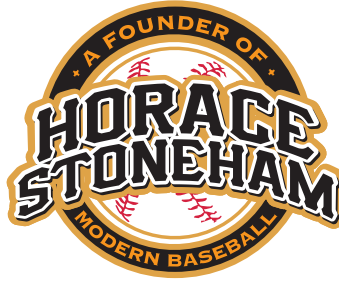
Horace C. Stoneham (April 27, 1903 — January 7, 1990) in 1936 became the youngest principal owner of a major league baseball franchise, the New York Giants, after the death of his father, Charles Stoneham, in 1936. During his leadership of 40 years until 1976, the New York Giants won National League pennants in 1936, 1937, 1951, and 1954, plus the team won a pennant as the San Francisco Giants in 1962, as well as a division title in 1971.

Developing winning baseball teams was only a single dimension of Stoneham's importance to the game of baseball. Throughout his tenure as the Giant's leader, there are a series of important achievements, which contributed both to the enhancement of professional baseball and to the United States' cultural and social structure. A partial list included:

- ☐ Developing War Bonds games during World War II
- ☐ Shifting Spring Training headquarters to Arizona in 1947
- ☐ Leadership in signing African-American baseball players
- ☐ Expanding the impact of Latin American players into Major League Baseball (1956)
- ☐ Moving major league baseball west of the Mississippi in 1958
- ☐ Scouting and signing the first Japanese player to major league baseball after touring Japan with the Giants in both the early 1950's and 60's.
- ☐ Developing professional baseball teams, which included no less than five future Hall of Fame baseball players on the same team

Horace Stoneham was part of the end of an era when families, not corporations or investor groups, owned sports franchises. As important as the above tangible or press worthy accomplishments was Stoneham's reputation for his personal relationships with his players, who he treated as extensions of his own family. He was known throughout baseball as a fun-loving and lusty-living man, prone to great sentimentality over his players. He was one of the last of the old breed of owners who were personally concerned with every detail of club business.

Stoneham was noteworthy for his kindness to players and ex-players in need, when unbeknownst to non-insiders and outside of the terms of any contract, he would always be available to support a player with a personal or financial hardship.



Youngest Owner

After buying the New York Giants in 1917 Charles Stoneham made sure that his son, Horace, received a hands-on education in baseball operations. As a youth, the younger Stoneham sold tickets, helped the grounds crew, and learned all the complex administration of the front office.

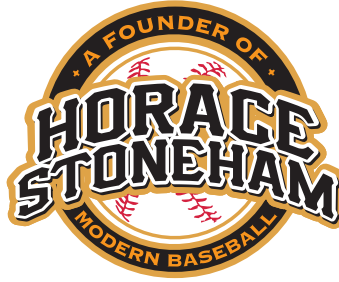


(above: Horace Stoneham and Jacob Ruppert, 1936)

When he took over as president just short of his 33d birthday in 1936, Mr. Stoneham became the youngest chief executive in major league history and the immediate beneficiary of two National League pennants in 1936 and 1937 with players including Carl Hubbell (*Hall of Fame 1947*), Bill Terry (*Hall of Fame 1954*), and Mel Ott (*Hall of Fame 1951*).

He was known throughout his ownership of the Giants as a dedicated executive, vitally concerned with the details of running the team and passionately concerned with the fortunes of the club, including those of his players and staff. If he had any detractors, they only charged that his personal relationships with his players and managers impacted some decisions on personnel strategy or changes.

During World War II Stoneham was a leader in scheduling promotions to sell War Bonds in support of the nation's war effort overseas. There were a series of exhibition games between retired stars, including teams with Babe Ruth and Walter Johnson, and series between the Giants and the other local major league teams, Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Yankees, which supported the War Bonds' effort.



Not only was Stoneham a creative marketer, but he also found creative ways to meet the needs of his human resources, including more than his players. Challenged by the cost of housing in the Bronx in 1945, Matty Schwab, the Giants groundskeeper, noticed some unused space below the leftfield grandstand at the ballpark.

"I asked Mr. Stoneham whether it would be possible to build a place to live right there," said Schwab. "He said it was unheard of. But Mr. Stoneham always took care of his employees. So he asked Joe Traynor, the park superintendent, to see what could be done."

Soon carpenters were at work under the grandstand, followed by electricians and plumbers. Eventually there emerged a cozy two-bedroom apartment with bath, kitchen and living room, plus a private entrance and free parking. In 1946, unbeknownst to most of the thousands of fans who pushed through the Polo Grounds turnstiles, the Schwab family took up residence at the ballpark, just beyond the outfield fence.

"The foul line," says Schwab, "was on the other side of my living room wall. Bobby Thomson's home run, the one that won us the pennant in 1951, landed on my roof." Schwab remained with the Giants until 1979, long enough to see his grandson become a bat-boy.

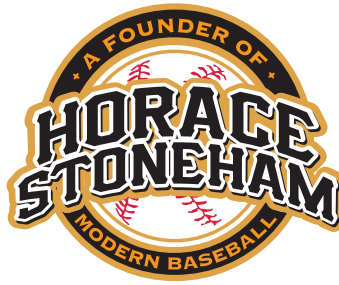
Stoneham also was first to recognize the importance of the emergence of the western United States, as an important major league baseball market. In 1947, he and Cleveland's Bill Veeck (*Hall of Fame 1991*) were the first to move their teams' spring training operations to Arizona. This was unconsciously the dramatic foreshadowing of another shift to occur ten years later.

Although the Dodgers received the primary focus for placing Jackie Robinson (*Hall of Fame 1962*) on their major league roster in 1947, it was New York Giants, along with the Dodgers and the Cleveland Indians that led the way as the only teams who were willing to sign more than a token number of African-American players. Robinson (Dodgers) and Larry Doby (Indians – *Hall of Fame 1998*) broke the color barrier in major league baseball, however coincidentally Stoneham signed several African-American players, including Artie Wilson, Hank Thompson, Monte Irvin (*Hall of Fame 1973*), Ray Dandridge, and Willie Mays (*Hall of Fame 1979*), who also ultimately became the first African-American captain of a baseball team.

Hall of Famer Willie Mays has repeatedly noted that Stoneham's Giants were also at the front of integrating baseball after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947:

"He brought in Monte Irvin and Hank Thompson in 1949," Mays says, noting the Giants also signed Artie Wilson and Cuban catcher Ray Noble in '51. "When I came, all those guys were there."

"He was good to all the players who came to our ballclub," Mays says of the former owner. "He was very good to me... When I needed something, he always made sure I had it."

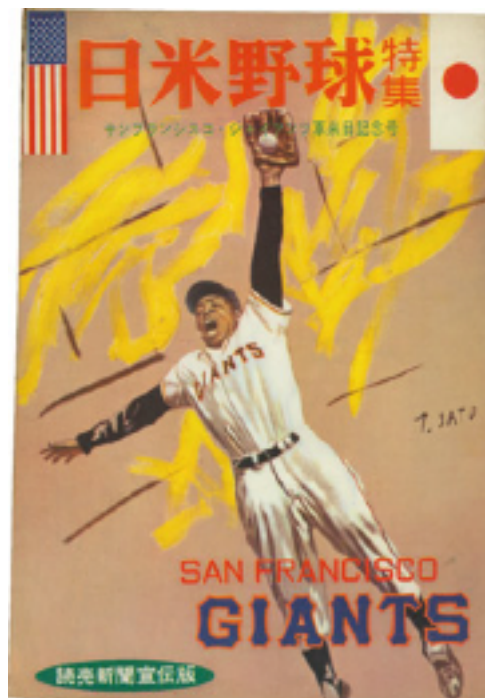


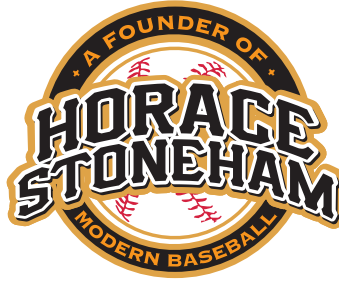
“He didn’t have any sideline (business), like other guys did. He only had baseball,” Mays said.

While the Giant’s history of the early 50’s is most notable for the 1951 National League pennant and the 1954 World Series victory, Stoneham was never personally recognized for his off the field benevolent natures. He was known for his open door policy with players, but what was never publicized was how he took extra steps to take care of his players, even outside the bounds of their contractual requirements. Monte Irvin tells a story of how Stoneham discovered that the sponsors of Monte Irvin Day at the Polo Grounds in 1952 could not raise the funds to purchase an automobile, which was to be Irvin’s gift, so he stepped in and contributed the funds himself.

In 1956 Stoneham led major league baseball’s view of Latin American. The Giants were the first major league team to heavily scout and sign players from the Dominican Republic, as the future source of great players by signing young players, including Ozzie Virgil, Felipe Alou, Jesus Alou, Juan Marichal (*Hall of Fame 1983*), and Manny Mota. Additionally, he signed Orlando Cepeda (*Hall of Fame 1999*) and Jose Pagan from Puerto Rico. Two years later, three Puerto Ricans were the Giants’ starters in their first West Coast game in San Francisco — pitcher Ruben Gomez, first baseman Cepeda, and catcher Valmy Thomas.

Stoneham global view was not limited to the Caribbean, as in 1952 the New York Giants toured Japan as the first major league team to do so since the end of World War II. Then again, in the early 1960’s the San Francisco Giants toured Japan again, and subsequently assigned Cappy Harada to be the first full-time scout for Japanese baseball talent, located in Japan. As a result, in 1963 the Giants signed Masanori Murakami, a pitcher, who became the first Japanese professional baseball player in major league baseball history.





Transition and New Beginnings

There were also the bleak years on the field and at the box office for the franchise. Stoneham, Stoneham was alarmed by a dramatic post-1954 drop-off in attendance at his team's historic ballpark, the Polo Grounds in Upper Manhattan. He knew that he had a serious problem, and it was the ballpark. The Giants' home, the Polo Grounds, was a comfortable, historic old place where the great John J. McGraw (*Hall of Fame 1937*) had managed the Giants to 10 pennants, where Babe Ruth had hit his first New York home runs, where Red Grange had made his debut as a pro football player and Jack Dempsey had knocked out Luis Firpo. But the playing area was ragged.

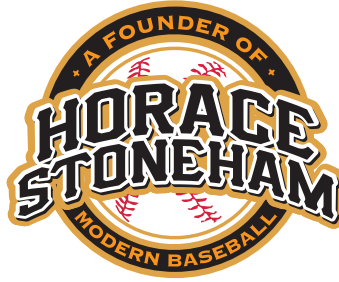
Impressed by the success of the Braves after their 1953 shift from Boston to Milwaukee, Stoneham decided to move his Giants to Bloomington, Minnesota, where a stadium had just been constructed with public funds for his AAA farm team, the Minneapolis Millers.

Stoneham, as owner of the New York/San Francisco Giants, played as important a role in the geographical expansion of Major League Baseball as his Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers counterpart, Walter O'Malley (*Hall of Fame 2008*). In fact Stoneham actually looked west before O'Malley — just not as far.



(above: Horace Stoneham, Walter O'Malley)

When Stoneham confided his plan to O'Malley, the Dodger chief revealed that he was negotiating to move his club – the Giants' bitter rival – to Los Angeles. He suggested that Stoneham contact San Francisco mayor George Christopher and explore moving his team thereto preserve the rivalry. In 1957, attendance at the Polo Grounds sank so low that Stoneham then abandoned his Minnesota plan and shifted his attention, permanently, to San Francisco.



New York baseball fans and media vilified Stoneham and Brooklyn Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley when they moved their clubs to California after the 1957 season. At the New York Giants' last home game, Stoneham was confronted by fans both angry — one sign read: "We want Stoneham! (With a rope around his neck!)" — and grief-stricken. After meeting with a group of weeping youngsters who begged the team to stay, Stoneham was moved, but said: "I feel badly for the kids, but we haven't seen too many of their fathers [i.e. paying fans] around here lately."

Writer Roger Kahn said years later, during promotional tours for his book *The Era 1947-57*, that the Giants' deteriorating ballpark and shrinking fan base made it necessary for Stoneham to abandon New York. He noted, however, that the Dodgers — a year removed from the 1956 pennant and two from Brooklyn's first world championship — were still profitable and O'Malley's move West was motivated by a desire for even greater riches.

In 1959, Stoneham began what has become commonplace in contemporary practice by developing a specialty spring training facility for the San Francisco Giants at Francisco Grande, in Casa Grande, Arizona. Francisco Grande hosted its first exhibition game in 1961, where Willie Mays hit a 375-foot home run in the fourth inning.

After the move to San Francisco in 1958 the Giants used Seals Stadium in downtown San Francisco until Candlestick Park opened in 1960. Candlestick Park, one of the first of the nation's new generation baseball parks, debuted in 1960. The Giants prospered in San Francisco, averaging 1.5 million fans in its first ten years despite the challenging environments at Candlestick Park, which is situated on a point of land that juts into San Francisco Bay. It would be the Giant's home for 40 years.

While their early years in San Francisco produced only one pennant, the Giants of the late 1950s and 1960s were one of the most talented assemblages in the National League. They included five Hall of Famers — Willie Mays, Willie McCovey (*Hall of Fame 1986*), Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, and Gaylord Perry (*Hall of Fame 1991*) — and many other stars.

Although the Giants won a National League pennant in 1962, the team was consistently the most competitive team in the National League in that decade, when their constant foil was the Los Angeles Dodgers, which had also sustained as a powerhouse.

After their initial success, Stoneham's Giants fell on hard times during the 1970s. Attendance at cold and windy Candlestick Park plummeted, and Stoneham faced financial hardship. Finally, in

1976, he put the team up for sale. Local businessman Bob Lurie stepped in as the buyer, and the Giants remained in Northern California.

At his death Mr. Stoneham's immediate family included his wife, Valleda; a son, Charles of San Francisco; a daughter, Valleda Rupert of Hillsborough, Calif.; a sister, Mary Aufderhar of New Jersey, and five grandchildren.