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THROUGH THE YEARS

Photo provided

Members of the South Bend Blue Sox women's professional baseball team conduct a speed and agility drill during spring training. The Blue Sox were a charter member of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League and remained in the league until it disbanded in 1954.

Women at the plate

Softball league benefited from some fine local players

By BARBARA GREGORICH

Story first ran Aug. 15, 1993
This month's columns deal with women's history and women in sports. — Editor's note

THROUGH THE YEARS is a Michiana history column coordinated by Travis Childs from the Northern Indiana Center for History. For more information about the column, write the NICH, 808 W. Washington St., South Bend, IN 46601.

The overwhelming majority of women who played baseball came from farms, factories and offices in the Midwest. When it comes to the history of these female ballplayers, Indiana ranks as one of the five most important states, along with Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York.

In the 1930s, as the Bloomer Girl era was ending, softball was beginning to gain popularity. Well aware of softball's growing popularity, Philip K. Wrigley intended to build on it and draw people to the ballparks during World War II, when many Major Leagues were in the armed forces. Thus, in 1943, Wrigley founded the All-American Girls Softball League.

Wrigley's game was played on a diamond with 60-foot base paths, a round 40 feet from the plate, a 12-inch ball and underhand pitching. From the beginning, the game was coached by former Major Leaguers who loved baseball — men such as Terre Haute native Max Carey, famed center fielder for the Pittsburgh Pirates, who, at various times, led the National League in putouts, assists, triples and stolen bases.

Carey, who would be elected to the Hall of Fame in 1961, agreed to head Wrigley's new league. With major leaguers such as Bill Wambsganss and Bert Niehoff managing, the women of the AAGSL played softball with one big difference: aggressive base stealing.

The first four teams were the Racine Belles, Kenosha Comets, Rockford Peaches and South Bend Blue Sox. Only the Peaches and the Blue Sox would field teams all 11 years of the league's existence (1943-54).

Dimensions and name changes came to the league almost yearly, and by 1948, the women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League were pitching overhand with a 10-inch ball from a mound 35 feet from home plate and running 72-foot base paths.

The early years of the AAGPBL were dominated by the Racine Belles and the Rockford Peaches. The South Bend Blue Sox, it seemed, always finished near the bottom, despite having outstanding players such as Betsy "Sockum" Jochum, who won the 1944 batting crown with a .296 average. A native of Cincinnati, Jochum settled in as an outfielder for the Blue Sox and settled into the town as well, becoming a high school teacher in the South Bend school system.

Elizabeth "Lib" Mahon, a teacher from South Carolina, gave up education to become a professional baseball player, starting for the Blue Sox from 1945 to 1952. In 1946, she was the team's leading run scorer, crossing home plate 90 times that season. After the 1952 season, Mahon quit playing. Like Jochum, she made South Bend her home and taught in the school system.

When the AAGPBL switched to overhand pitching, the Blue Sox came into their own, largely because of an experienced group of players and an outstanding pitching staff that included Jean Faut.

In 1946, Pennsylvania-born Faut was a rookie, drafted by the low-ranking Blue Sox straight out of the league's training camp in Pascagoula, Miss. Because she grew up playing hardball and was unable to pitch underhand, Faut started out as a third baseman. Late in the season, the league introduced sidearm pitching. That was when Sox manager Chet Grant, a former Notre Dame quarterback and later backfield coach, asked his third baseman to pitch. She did, posting an 8-1 record. In 1947, Grant sent his sophomore to the mound more often; she won 19, lost 13 and had a 1.15 earned runs average.

By 1949, Faut had given birth to her first child and, as she says, "matured as a pitcher." That year she racked up a 24-8 record. Her most impressive feats were yet to come. On July 21, 1951, she made league history by pitching the first perfect game of the AAGPBL's overhand era. The next morning's South Bend Tribune reported that "Jean Faut, a sturdy gal with a lot of heart, a fast ball that hops and a curve that breaks off like a country road, pitched a perfect no-hit, no-run game to subdue the Rockford Peaches, 2-0, at Playland Park Saturday Night."

Chosen player of the year, Faut helped lead the South Bend Blue Sox to their first Shaughnessy Series victory in 1951 and to their second in 1952. In 1953, she pitched her second perfect game, this one against the Kalamazoo Lassies. Faut, like Jochum and Mahon, became an Indiana resident.

Track down ancestors using railroad maps

By BARBARA S. HARMAN

In the early 1900s, a young man from Sturgis, decided to visit his grandmother in Kansas. He had no money for a train ticket, so he jumped aboard a box car on a west-bound freight train and headed for Chicago. He arrived at the Chicago rail yards and transferred to a train bound for Kansas City, Kan., where he again changed trains for the ride to the depot just two blocks from his grandmother's home in Osawatomie, Kan.

Some say that traveling the rails was in his blood — the man's grandfather and all of his great-uncles were railroad men who helped build the railroad west. His stepgrandfather was an engineer for the Missouri Pacific Railroad for nearly 47 years.

This is a lesson in how researchers get sidetracked because some of us have to know every bit of information about our family. This research proved to be an interesting genealogical find because the young man was my father.

A check of Cyndi's list at www.cyndislist.com/railroad.htm#Maps produces a map list that includes the 1881 Grain Dealers and Shippers Gazetteer. The site was developed by Pam Roesch, who is also the coordinator of the Livingston County GenWeb site. The Gazetteer, which can be viewed at www.livgenmi.com/1881shippersgaz.htm, lists the dealers and shippers in the states of Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio and Missouri. It also lists all the railroad maps of the 1881 era via clickable links to each map at www.livgenmi.com/1881shippersgazindex.htm.

The maps give information on 38 other states including Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas, Indiana and Pennsylvania as well as the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. They may take a few extra minutes to load but are definitely worth viewing. Each railway map includes every stop that the train made along the route, which is another plus for researchers, as there are many paper villages listed that no longer exist.

The railway maps also provide excellent genealogical information because they list the names of grain businesses and the owners, ticket agents and railway freight agents and officers to whom inquiries about shipping should be addressed. And they list distances between cities listed on the site. An advertisers' site also has copies of the original ads placed in the gazetteer, which often include the names of the business owners.

It's interesting to note that The Lakeshore and Michigan Southern Railway was the main line running from Chicago to Sturgis.

The Chicago, St. Paul, Minn., and Kansas City Railroad Route Map of 1891 is not in a conventional atlas format, but is instead shown at www.livgenmi.com/1891shippersgazhistpkr.htm in a large maple leaf design that shows the main lines of the railroad as the veins of the leaf starting in Chicago and branching north to Minneapolis and St. Paul, while the southwestern line runs to Kansas City.

The map also shows the adjoining railroad lines from each of the three main cities. The Missouri Pacific was the main line running to Osawatomie. With information from this site, I was able to pinpoint the line of travel and learned that the route was probably quite easy because only two trains traveled each way daily.

A note to area societies and readers: As you begin your fall meeting schedule, please remember to send your meeting notices at least two weeks in advance to P.O. Box 634, Granger, IN 46530 or via e-mail to Bharman8@aol.com.

I have received numerous letters, e-mails and queries from readers throughout the summer and appreciate hearing from you. I am always happy to hear your comments on this column and will continue to answer your questions as time permits.

NEWS & NOTES

Meetings on archives, ethnic groups, records

■ Doug Archer, reference librarian at the University of Notre Dame, will be the guest speaker at the kickoff meeting of the South Bend Area Genealogical Society (SBAGS) meeting at 7 p.m. Sept. 23 at First Christian Church, 1101 E. Jefferson Blvd., South Bend.

Archer's topic will be "The Resources and Archives at the University of Notre Dame for Genealogists."

The kickoff meeting will begin with a coffee and cake mixer at 6:30 p.m., followed by the meeting. The public is welcome to attend. Further information is available via e-mail from Bill Minish, president, at WHBminish@aol.com.

■ The Elkhart County Genealogical Society kicks off the 2002-03 year with a video focusing on ethnic groups who settled in Indiana. The video, produced by the Indiana Genealogical Society, titled "Who Do You Think You Are," will be shown at 7 p.m. Sept. 26 at First Presbyterian Church, 200 E. Beardsley Ave., Elkhart.

The program focuses on why ethnic groups came to Indiana, how they maintained their ethnic heritage and the contributions they made to Indiana and the nation. The meeting is open to the public. Further information is available via e-mail from Jackie MacKenzie, publicity chairwoman, at gimac414@aol.com or by phone at (574) 295-5784.

■ The Elkhart County Genealogical Society will hold its annual fall genealogy workshop Oct. 19 at Rush Memorial Center, 304 Vistula St. in Bristol. The all-day session begins with registration at 8:30 a.m. Jana Sloan Breglio, a professional genealogist with a specialty in Ohio and Kentucky records, will be the guest speaker.

Cost of the workshop is $22 for advance reservations or $25 at the door. Contact Wanda Hoffman at (574) 533-6190 or email her at wanda946@aol.com for reservations.

For corrections, call 235-6171

FROM OUR FILES

1902

Two lakes near Niles were drained and filled up for a four-mile railroad track between Buchanan and Niles, The Tribune reported on Sept. 15, 1902.

1927

Two-hundred-fifty members of the Studebaker family from across the nation attended a national reunion held at the Studebaker Administration Building, The Tribune reported Sept. 15, 1927.

1952

Thousands of cheering, flag-waving and sign-carrying residents lined South Bend's streets to welcome presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower, The Tribune reported Sept. 15, 1952.

1977

In a letter to the Washington Post, Congressman John Brademas, D-South Bend, complained about "selective and inaccurate reporting," in a story the paper wrote about Brademas and his handling of campaign contributions by Tongsun Park, The Tribune reported Sept. 15, 1977.

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