

FB South Bend Tribune

BACK IN TIME

Sunday, July 8, 2001

THROUGH THE YEARS

Play ball — ladies

Women keep baseball alive in wartime

By RENEE KURTZWEIL
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Indiana Center for History

It's summer and baseball is in the air. Whether it is major league or little league baseball, it is still the American pastime. In 1942, as World War II pulled young men from the baseball diamonds to war, women on the home front stepped up to the plate — home plate to come.

Over the next few weeks, the "Through the Years" column will explore a fascinating period of history that encouraged women to participate in professional baseball. As was shown in the film "A League of Their Own," the women who played for the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League had once in a lifetime experience that would leave a legacy for generations to come.

As the national repository for the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), the Northern Indiana Center for History has become an important destination for sports researchers. It was selected to be the nation's repository for the AAGPBL, the women's professional baseball league.

South Bend, a city that hosted one of the original teams, was that lucky location. This collection was donated of more than 10 years ago and contains more than 2,000 photographs, scrapbooks, programs, letters, and histories, among other items.

In 1942, Major League Baseball was facing a major crisis. At that time, more than 1,000 major league players had joined the armed forces or were playing ball in work in defense manufacturing. The following year in 1943, only nine of the 26 major league teams could field enough players to open the season. More than half of the major league players had already reported for service. Despite President Franklin Roosevelt's assurance that baseball might have to suspend play for the duration of the war, it was Philip K. Wigley, the chewing gum mogul, who had inherited the Chicago Cubs Major League Baseball franchise from his

father, who had the idea of putting women on the baseball diamond. In 1942, when Wigley presented the idea of women playing baseball professionally to the National Baseball Commission, he was met with skepticism. Managers such as Max Carey, Dave Bancroft, and Jimmie Fox to name a few, did not take the idea seriously. It did not take long for the fact to realize that women's baseball was more than just a wartime measure. It was a challenge to the status of women in sports.

Wigley promised to provide thrilling baseball and also a "first female game." He imposed strict rules of conduct to preserve the feminine image of the players. Skirts and makeup were required to be worn by the players while in public. Smoking and drinking were forbidden, and strict curfews were mandatory, including having to be home by 10 p.m. after the game.

During the first two seasons, players were required to attend their school during spring training. During these seasons the girls learned how to properly walk, not apply makeup and adopt the appropriate attitude to uphold the major's image. Although the major's image was compromised, the girls' season, players still received a beauty kit and booklet written by Helen Rubenstein, staff which urged them to "be in it respect a truly All-American girl."

In April 1943, the All-American Girls Softball League announced plans for its inaugural season. Using his scouts from the major league, Wigley identified potential players from across the United States and Canada. Thousands of girls, lured by the chance to be paid for playing baseball, attended regional tryouts. Only 286 girls were invited to the training camp of the first season.

The girls played by the girls was a hybrid — not truly softball, yet not quite baseball. The league adopted the standard 12-inch ball underhand pitching, and the pitcher's mound was only 40 feet from home base. These all would gradually change to conform to the men's baseball.

The game was a success. More than 75,000 fans turned out to watch the girls play ball during the 1943 season. With such success, the league added two new teams in 1944. Continued expansion brought the league to eight

teams by 1946, and a total of 15 teams would eventually play for the AAGPBL. With the end of World War II, women were expected to return to their traditional roles, and the league no longer relied on patriotic sentiments to attract fans. With the end of wartime rationing, fans could again travel to large cities to attend major league games. The greatest threat to the league was the growing popularity of television. Many fans preferred watching major league games in the comfort of their own homes. By 1954, the league was struggling. Hardly making out the season with the season, fewer players and reduced pay the franchise could no longer afford to pay. The league even began scheduling exhibitions against men's teams in hopes of boosting attendance. Despite valiant efforts, the league faded away at the end of the 1954 season.

Step back. Next week players from our local teams will be featured. Who was the South Bend Blue Sox player who played at Playland Park during the 1940s? That's the question for the next week. The paper week to be larger than the stone to be folded over the edge and your hand to keep it from moving. And using paper because it may be a reminder. Then, use either a thick child's crayon or a lambswool eraser. Lay it flat and make long strokes in one general direction. Don't make circles or go acrosses. Don't avoid the imperfection in the stone is this

For rubbings, a nice paper called Arches or a dremmeling fabric called Polka are recommended, although butcher block paper will also work. The paper week to be larger than the stone to be folded over the edge and your hand to keep it from moving. And using paper because it may be a reminder. Then, use either a thick child's crayon or a lambswool eraser. Lay it flat and make long strokes in one general direction. Don't make circles or go acrosses. Don't avoid the imperfection in the stone is this



Members of the South Bend Blue Sox women's professional baseball team pose for a team picture.

THROUGH THE YEARS is a Michigan history column coordinated by Renee Kurtzweil from the Northern Indiana Center for History. For more information about the column, write her at RCH, 808 E. Washington St., South Bend, IN 46601. Phone 235-0664.

Use care in taking tombstone rubbings

MICHIANA
ROOTS
CONNIE JOHNSON



Sumner's born, and general advice on taking the high ways. Road trip? There's the old homestead, the ancestor's homestead and, of course, the cemetery to use.

If you're going to a cemetery, here's some tips. Take a camera, several old towels, small gardening tools and gloves, a bucket and a hose, and a soft natural bristle brush. No, this isn't a scavenger hunt, and each of these will probably come in handy.

Some people like to do tombstone rubbings and some don't. Before ever doing this, always check with the cemetery warden. Rubbing isn't advisable if the tombstone is deteriorating or made of sandstone. If the stone is made of sandstone, it is better to make a rubbing of the stone in a bucket of water. Rubbing isn't advisable if the tombstone is deteriorating or made of sandstone. If the stone is made of sandstone, it is better to make a rubbing of the stone in a bucket of water.

will help give the rubbing character. If the stone has raised portions be careful not to break them off or tear the paper. Do not leave any way on the stone.

If your primary goal is to gather the details, take a picture instead of a rubbing. It's better for the tombstone.

Are you going to the PGS Quad City Conference in September in Moline and Rock Island, IL? Both of these communities had a lot of Belgian immigrants. Check belgiumimmigrants.org before going to learn more about the Belgian Cultural Center in Moline. You may want to visit it while at the conference.

If you have permission, gently brush the stone with the natural brush. Sooner use a wire brush. Wash the stone with plain water. That explains the need for the bucket and hose. Then pat dry the stone with a towel. Keep one towel back for sitting or kneeling on. Pull the weeds and tall grass away from the tombstone. Don't use a weed cutter because it might tear the stone.

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In the rankings 'Pitchers Story' deserves first place

By PHIL TATMAN
The Tribune Sentinel

With "A Pitcher's Story," Roger Angell proves that at age 82 he remains one of America's best chroniclers of baseball.

A Pitcher's Story: Innings with Sandy Cone

Roger Angell
Warner Books
\$25

gays in the game. He always has something to say to reporters that will dig out and often write after that perfect game in 1966. Cone was just three games in his next 20 starts. Last year, in his last season with the Yankees, he had a miserable 14-14 record and a 4.19 earned run average. By Angell, Cone was making a pack of March 1966 a day and taking the mild disappointment of Cone, 36, signed with the Boston Red Sox this year but was on the disabled list with a severe right shoulder and wrist. "The more I see Cone in confusion and pain, the better I liked him," Angell writes. "Was it because I could see something familiar and anguished in him? Did I share that same monkey schizophrenia that I'd heard from my friends, that he wasn't on top of things?"

Angell's story is a perfect game. It is a story of a pitcher's life, from his early days in the majors when he was a wild and crazy guy, to his last years in the New York Mets. Cone is a pitcher's story, a story of a pitcher's life, from his early days in the majors when he was a wild and crazy guy, to his last years in the New York Mets. Cone is a pitcher's story, a story of a pitcher's life, from his early days in the majors when he was a wild and crazy guy, to his last years in the New York Mets.

1901

The South Bend Common Council was asked to decide on the location of the central fire station after the Board of Public Works met to confirm a plan to vacate land on St. Joseph Street between Washington Street and Vanita Avenue, The Tribune reported July 6, 1901.

FROM OUR FILES

became a reality when representatives from the 12 teams had an organizational meeting, The Tribune reported July 6, 1906.

1976

South Bend's municipal administration considered dealing with one corner about the age of its fleet of firefighting equipment by meeting a pumper and purchasing a fourth pumper in addition to the three scheduled to arrive later in 1976. The Tribune reported July 6, 1976.

1926

A city assessing baseball league

Helping kids



Wal-Mart and your South Bend Tribune came together to raise over \$2,700 for the Children's Miracle Network. A percentage of each South Bend Tribune sold, was donated to the Children's Miracle Network. Both the South Bend Tribune and Wal-Mart are proud to be a part of helping kids in need.

Participating Wal-Mart Locations:

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- 2304 Lincoln Way East, Goshen
- 2505 North Oak, Plymouth
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