

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar

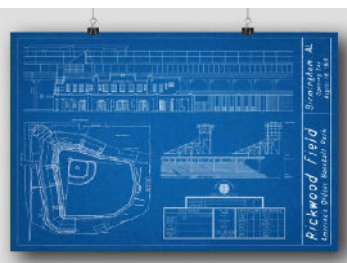
9/4/20 to 12/4/20

- All events are cancelled until further notice.
- Please like our Facebook Page for updates about the ballpark, including the public reopening at: <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood.com>

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

- Caps, t-shirts, posters, books, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase on our website. We have some great new items, which we are excited about. Please visit our online shop to browse and order:

<https://rickwood.com/shop/>



THE 21ST JERRY MALLOY NEGRO LEAGUE CONFERENCE (JULY 29-31, 2021) — UPDATE

SABR's prestigious Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference has again been rescheduled. The Conference will now take place **July 29-31, 2021** at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Birmingham. The event was originally scheduled for 2020 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro National and Negro Southern Leagues. COVID-19 postponed the conference until 2021.

The Friends of Rickwood are excited to welcome researchers and authors from across the

country, who will be visiting the Magic City for the event. According to SABR, "Since 1998, the Jerry Malloy Conference has been the only symposium dedicated exclusively to the examination and promotion of Black baseball history. The conference, which is open to baseball and history fans of all ages, promotes activities to enhance scholarly, educational, and literary objectives."

For more information, please visit <https://sabr.org/malloy>.

The Friends of Rickwood will also post updates about the Jerry Malloy Conference at Rickwood.com.



WHO ARE THE FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD?

It would be easy to conclude that the "Friends of Rickwood" is the 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation charged with preserving the park and restoring Rickwood Field to its former glory. That much is certainly true, but just as the ballpark has an interesting history, so does our organization. We recently sat down with some of the founders and discussed the genesis of the Friends, some of the early challenges they faced, and why they felt compelled to try and save an old ballpark.

On August 18, 2020, on the 110th anniversary of the opening of Rickwood Field, we posed questions to Tom Cosby, Coke Matthews and Bill Cather about the Friends. Tom, Coke, and Bill contributed mightily in the preservation of the ballpark through their dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm,

which was only matched by their collective refusal to allow Rickwood to become a memory.

How many actually know how the Friends of Rickwood Field started, or even when it was organized? Only rough ideas and some stories have been handed down over the years. Most likely, few current board members know the exact details and dates; certainly the general public would have even less of an idea of the how the organization began. Founding member Tom Cosby provided the initial answer:

"Back in the '80's, Stewart Dansby and I were working together at the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce (now - BBA - Birmingham Business Alliance) and we used to regularly give Civic Club presentations entitled 'Birmingham Trivial Pur-

suit'. In this, we asked questions that we knew most people didn't know the answers to, but we felt they would want to know and that it would engender civic pride," Cosby explained. "For years, one of the questions was 'Where is the *second* oldest baseball park in America located?' Of course, the answer was Birmingham as [our ballpark was] second oldest to Comiskey Park."

However, Rickwood's status suddenly changed. According to Cosby, "then when I saw in the news that Comiskey was torn down in 1991, I went to Terry Slaughter, head of Slaughter Hanson Advertising and told him, 'We let them tear down the Terminal Station, now are we going to stand by and let then oldest ballpark in America get torn down, too?' Terry agreed that

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WHO ARE THE FRIENDS? (CONTINUED)

[Continued from page 1]

something had to be done, so we decided to form a committee."

Cosby offered the use of the Chamber of Commerce meeting space at the old Protective Life building on the corner of First Avenue North and what was then 21st Street North downtown. He agreed to staff the committee through the Chamber of Commerce. Slaughter made an excellent decision in assigning one of his partners to the committee. That person was Coke Matthews, who would eventually head the board of the Friends of Rickwood Field.

Cosby recalled, "I told Bill Cather about it and Allen Farr, Brant Beene, and several others I knew through the Chamber and soon we had a committee, started meeting monthly, set goals, took minutes, and established a funding receptacle at the Chamber."

"It's important to know that without the Chamber, there would have been, in my opinion, 'no there, there': no staffing, no place to meet, and no recognized platform other than 'a group of guys.' So, it was organized under the wing of the Chamber, which honestly, gave it some degree of legitimacy and allowed it to be reported on at Chamber board meetings - so CEOs at least vaguely knew about it. The legal organization came a bit later and Coke led that, as I recall," Cosby said.

While Cosby knew almost everyone with the Friends of Rickwood in the early days, Matthews did not. His perspective of joining was different. "I had never met any of the original Friends before my first meeting," Matthews recalled. However, he would go on to forge many lasting friendships within the group. Matthews took on the formation of the organization in a complementary but different manner than Cosby.

The Birmingham Athletics Department had formed a foundation to facilitate the donations of athletic equipment. According to Matthews, "indeed, when we first started meeting at Rickwood, the 'equipment room' on the south end of the Dugout Restaurant building was filled to the brim with Mountain Brook helmets, Homewood bats, and Vestavia's catcher's equipment."

Matthews remembered the "Birmingham Schools Athletics Foundation" name was ultimately not going to further the cause of saving the ballpark, "so we filled the board with Rickwood lovers to the point of having the votes necessary to change the name to 'The Friends of Rickwood Field'. It was a lot of work, but not legal work," he explained.

"The committee which was formed at/by the Chamber, which became the FOR, was essential - not because we had yappers like me - what we had was key individuals with skills/assets that were able to launch the quixotic endeavor," Matthews added that the Friends could not have succeeded without some key figures who offered unique and diverse talents to the organization. These individuals brought the group to life, making it a reality and subsequently into a going concern.

Matthews assessed each person's important contributions and matchless abilities. "Bill Cather and AH Cather Publishing: Bill printed everything for many years for free and often observing that 'we need another printer' but he would have been angry if we had another one!"

Matthews continued, "Do not forget that Bill's dad was in attendance at the most famous game in Rickwood's history, the 1931 Dizzy Dean-Ray Caldwell

[matchup in the first game of the Dixie Series], as was Piper Davis.

"Allen Farr knew Rickwood electrical systems. Lord, he was invaluable. The failing systems were one of the many reasons the City (Birmingham) gave up on Rickwood... They didn't know Allen," asserted Matthews.

"Terry (Slaughter) was the first president of the FOR, with reason," he added. "It was his passion and creative vision for what Rickwood could be, that fueled much of the energy. Keep this in mind: Until the first Rickwood Classic, Terry had never attended a baseball game at Rickwood. He was so smitten with the possibilities; he recruited me out of retirement to 'get involved with Rickwood.'"

"Truth be told, Tom [Cosby]'s energy and bull-doggedness brought the Chamber kicking and screaming to the table, but provided much needed credibility and staying power, including the capital campaign that 'saved' Rickwood," in those early years. However, both Matthews and Cosby recognize that *saving* the park is a never-ending process. The preservation efforts will continue as long as there are people like them who care about America's oldest ballpark.

In the next installment, the actions taken to give Rickwood some desperately needed repairs will be examined. Also, we will remember some unsung heroes, whose efforts were critical in sparing the park from the wrecking ball.

[This story will continue in our next issue

- Joe DeLeonard &
Jeb Stewart

"It's important to know that without the Chamber, there would have been, in my opinion, 'no there, there.'"

“DUSTING ‘EM OFF”: FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rickwood Field, like the rest of the country, has been negatively affected by COVID-19. With the loss of the Rickwood Classic and the rest of the baseball schedule, we are going to need donations to help the Friends in their efforts to preserve America’s Oldest Ballpark. Please consider [becoming a Friend](#) or making a [tax deductible donation](#) today. Thank you.

Although the park has been shuttered since March, we will always have a great deal of enthusiasm for all things Rickwood.

The Friends have continued having monthly meetings. In fact, the grandstand is the perfect place to conduct business while social distancing. We remain hopeful that the Rickwood Classic will return in 2021 and we are already working on ideas to submit to the Barons.

In June, we began to replace the leaky pitch and tar roof over our conference room / museum with a more durable thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) material. On August 5, Hinkle Roofing installed the roof trim to finish the job. Longtime fans of the park will remember the conference room used to be the Dugout Restaurant, which the Barons dedicated in 1950.

However, the challenges of operating an old ballpark never really end. In late June, we had a leak in the conference room. Fortunately, it was simply a hole in a drain pipe, which was easily repaired.

In late June, FOR members painted the exterior fence on the first base side. Thank you Wayne Trammell, Jeff Burkle, Sophie Cosper, Bob Woodward, Jim Adair, Scott Davis, and Leigh and Kathy Lachine. Your efforts are deeply appreciated!

In July, Wayne Trammell also organized a FOR tent at the Tannehill Trade Days and sold merchandise. Lots of people shared their memories of attending games at Rickwood. One gentleman even showed members pictures of original ledgers from the 1960s Barons teams, including gate totals and related items.

As always, there were a number of people who did not know Rickwood even existed. This provided a great opportunity to educate the public about the ballpark, its history, its relevance in 2020, and the importance of preserving it for future generations. Wayne noted that Rickwood’s website visits doubled in the week after Tannehill. Well done, Wayne!

Until next time, please stay safe until we can see you at the ballpark!

- Clarence Watkins

“... the grandstand is the perfect place to conduct business while social distancing.”



Rickwood’s Conference Room Roof ... Before



... and (nearly) after. No more leaks!



FOR Board members painting the exterior fence on a Saturday.

THE '67 A'S VOTED THE BEST TEAM IN THE HISTORY OF RICKWOOD FIELD, 1910-87

From May 30 to June 21, the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter conducted a Facebook poll to determine the best team in Rickwood Field's history (1910-87). 16 teams were selected from the Barons, Black Barons, and A's. Clubs were seeded based on record, winning percentage, regular season pennants, post season performance, statistical data, and anecdotal evidence based on each team's pitching staffs and player rosters. After two weekends of voting only four teams remained.

The final four featured the [1958 Birmingham Barons](#), which was the only Barons team to ever win the Southern Association pennant, the SA Playoffs,

and the Dixie Series in the same season. The Barons semifinal opponent was the [1948 Birmingham Black Barons](#), which won the Negro American League pennant and appeared in the last Negro League World Series. The '58 Barons prevailed by just a single vote.

The other side of the bracket included two Dixie Series winners. The [1931 Birmingham Barons](#) won the SA pennant and an exciting Dixie Series over Dizzy Dean's Houston Buffaloes. The Barons opponent was the [1967 Birmingham A's](#), who had three future Hall of Famers on the roster (Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, and Tony LaRussa)

and won the Southern League pennant before defeating the Albuquerque Dodgers to win the last Dixie Series. SABR Chapter voters overwhelmingly favored the A's in this imaginary matchup.

In the final contest, the '67 A's managed to squeak by the '58 Barons by just one vote.

For the complete brackets and voting results please like the [Rickwood Field SABR Chapter](#) on Facebook. In addition, Jeb Stewart recently published an article about [the 1967 A's and the last Dixie Series](#) in SABR's spring *Baseball Research Journal*, which can be accessed on SABR's website.

"In the final contest, the '67 A's managed to squeak by the '58 Barons by just one vote."

REMEMBERING CHADWICK BOSEMAN (1976-2020)



Chadwick Boseman played Jackie Robinson in the biopic movie, "42" about Robinson's integration of organized baseball in 1947.

The film included numerous scenes shot at Rickwood Field in the spring of 2012. FOR board members who interacted with Boseman during the filming found him to be wonderfully down to earth, friendly, and always approachable. He also took his craft very seriously and worked hard to tell Robinson's story to a modern audience.

The Friends of Rickwood were saddened to learn that Chadwick Boseman died on Jackie Robinson Day, August 28, 2020. Our thoughts are with his family.

RICKWOOD TURNS 110!

On August 10, 2020, America's Oldest Ballpark turned 110. Rickwood is 2 years older than Fenway Park and 4 years older than Wrigley Field, which are the two oldest ballparks in the major leagues.

Back in 1910, the stores in Birmingham closed early as the entire community celebrated the arrival of the first concrete and steel ballpark in the south. At 3:00 that afternoon, Rickwood opened to great fanfare before a partisan crowd estimated at 12,000.

Birmingham's colorful owner, A.H. "Rick" Woodward, wearing a Barons' uniform, walked out to the mound and threw out the first pitch — as in literally. The umpire called it a ball and Woodward was immediately relieved by Harry Covalleski, who "closed" for the next 9 innings. Manager Carlton Molesworth, who also played in the game as a center fielder, scored the first run in the history of Rickwood in the 6th, and the Barons managed to eek out a win over the Montgomery Climbers, 3-2.

Birmingham—						
	AB.	R.	H.	PO.	A.	E.
Marcan, 2b.	2	0	0	5	2	0
Messenger, rf.	4	0	2	1	0	0
Molesworth, cf.	3	1	1	1	0	0
McBride, lf.	3	1	1	0	0	0
McGilvray, 1b.	3	1	1	14	1	0
Elliott, c.	3	0	9	4	1	0
Ellam, ss.	2	0	1	1	4	0
Emery, 3b.	3	0	1	1	2	0
Covalleski, p.	3	0	0	0	6	0
Totals	26	3	7	27	16	0
Montgomery—						
	AB.	R.	H.	PO.	A.	E.
Daley, lf.	4	0	0	0	0	0
Whiteman, cf.	4	0	1	2	0	0
McCay, ss.	4	1	1	2	2	0
Yohe, 3b.	3	1	1	1	1	0
Pratt, 2b.	4	0	2	4	4	0
Burnett, rf.	3	0	0	4	1	0
Greminger, 1b.	3	0	2	9	2	0
Miller, c.	3	0	0	3	0	0
Dugglesby, p.	3	0	0	0	4	0
Totals	31	2	7	x25	14	0

x—One out when winning run scored.
 Score by innings:
 Birmingham000 001 002—3
 Montgomery000 000 101—2
 Summary—Two-base hits, Messenger, Pratt, Molesworth, McBride. Sacrifice hits, Molesworth, Elliott, Emery, Yohe. Stolen bases, McGilvray. Double plays, Dugglesby to Pratt to Greminger; McGilvray to Marcen. Struck out, by Covalleski, 4; by Dugglesby, 1. Bases on balls, Dugglesby, 3. Hit by pitched ball, Covalleski (Burnett), Dugglesby, (Marcan, 2; McBride). Time, 1:40. Umpire, Rudderham.

“Birmingham’s colorful owner, A.H. ‘Rick’ Woodward, wearing a Barons’ uniform, walked out to the mound and threw out the first pitch — as in literally.”

BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

The Friends of Rickwood is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood. As of this issue, 34 people have joined as members and the Friends have raised \$2,700 with this program. **Thanks to all our new members!**

We have four levels of membership for individuals and each level will receive a certificate, a window sticker, and 10% off Rickwood merchandise: (1) Level 1 is a "Little

Leaguer" for a \$10 donation; (2) Level 2 is a "Rookie" for a \$25 donation; (3) Level 3 is a "Veteran" for a \$50 donation (and also gets a patch); and (4) Level 4 is a "Gold Glover" for a \$100 donation (and also gets a Rickwood shirt).

To join, please visit <https://rickwood.com/membership/> or write us at:

**The Friends of Rickwood
 Rickwood Field
 1137 2nd Ave West
 Birmingham, AL 35204**



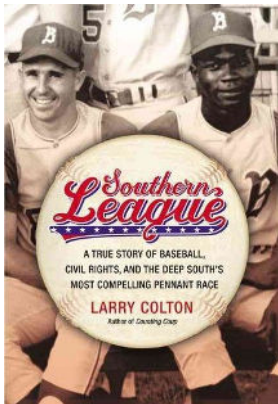
The Friends of
Rickwood

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<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood/>



THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Southern League*

1964 marked a crossroads for the City of Birmingham. Its citizens witnessed unthinkable violence the previous fall, which had shocked the entire nation. Under the clouds of enduring sadness, the struggle for Civil Rights, and forces who stubbornly resisted change, Birmingham businessman Albert Belcher made a surprising decision. Partnering with Charlie O. Finley and the Kansas City Athletics, Belcher returned professional baseball to Rickwood Field, which had been dark since 1961 after the collapse of the old Southern Association. What was truly remarkable was that Belcher invested in the hope of an integrated team in a decidedly segregated city.

In *Southern League: A True Story of Baseball, Civil Rights, and the Deep South's Most Compelling Pennant Race*, author Larry Colton tells the story of the 1964 Birmingham Barons. Colton is careful not to overstate the importance of baseball in the larger context of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. However, he recognizes that — just as baseball's color barrier fell on April 15, 1947 with Jackie Robinson's first appearance with the Dodgers at Ebbets Field — the integration of Birmingham officially started at Rickwood Field on April 17, 1964. On that evening, white and black players became teammates for the Barons in a Southern League game against the Asheville Tourists.

Not only were the Barons finally desegregated, but so was Rickwood Field. Before the season, Belcher personally supervised the removal of chicken wire, which had long separated black and white fans in accordance with Jim Crow laws. Belcher undoubtedly held his breath on opening night, but the game was played without incident. Integrated baseball worked in Birmingham, as Colton observed:

It was too soon, and perhaps too much of a reach, to proclaim that the Barons' experiment was a turning point in the march toward equal rights, but if it could happen at Rickwood, then maybe the same thing could happen at other venues around Birmingham — restaurants, hotels, departments stores, schools, businesses.

The only tension at the ballpark that summer came from the incredible pennant race that unfolded between Birmingham and the Lynchburg White Sox, and whether Finley would keep his promise to Belcher to keep the Barons intact, so the club could compete for a title. The drama of the Barons' fight to win the '64 Southern League flag captivates the reader. Colton provides three dimensions to *Southern League* by exploring the backgrounds of the players and manager Haywood Sullivan, who had quarterbacked the Florida Gators in the early 1950s. He also tells the reader what happened to each of them after their baseball careers ended.

Southern League is action packed thanks to the big bats of Tommie Reynolds, Santiago Rosario, and Wayne Norton, who provided the power, while Bert Campaneris and Hoss Bowlin contributed the speed and formed the best double play combination in the league. Colton also recalls the ups and downs of the pitching staff, which included Paul Lindblad, Ron Tompkins, and Birmingham-favorites Joe Grzenda, Stan Jones, and Paul Seitz. Phenom Blue Moon Odom started that spring pitching high school ball in Macon, Georgia only to sign with the A's and join the Barons in the summer.

Southern League is entertaining, well-written, and expertly researched. Any baseball fan would enjoy it, but so would anyone who likes great storytelling. The book occupies a top shelf in the Rickwood Library.

- Jeb Stewart

