Entering Sacred Ground:
Public History at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

by

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ABSTRACT

Baseball is the quintessential American game. To understand the country one must also understand the role baseball played in the nation's maturation process. Embedded in baseball's history are (among other things) the stories of America's struggles with issues of race, gender, immigration, organized labor, drug abuse, and rampant consumerism. Over the better part of two centuries, the national pastime both reflected changes to American culture and helped shape them as well. Documenting these changes and packaging them for consumption is the responsibility of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

Founded as a tourist attraction promoting largely patriotic values, in recent decades the Baseball Hall of Fame made a concerted effort to transform itself into a respected member of the history museum community—dedicated to displaying American history through the lens of baseball. This dissertation explores the evolution of the Baseball Hall of Fame from celebratory shrine to history museum through an analysis of public history practice within the museum. In particular, this study examines the ways the Hall both reflected and reinforced changes to American values and ideologies through the evolution of public history practice in the museum.

The primary focus of this study is the museum's exhibits and analyzing what their content and presentation convey about the social climate during the various stages of the Baseball Hall of Fame's evolution. The principal resources utilized to identify these stages include promotional materials, exhibit reviews, periodicals, and photographic records, as well as interviews with past and present Hall-of-Fame staff. What this research uncovers is the story of an institution in the midst of a slow transition.
Throughout the past half century, the Hall of Fame staff struggled with a variety of obstacles to change (including the museum's traditionally conservative roots, the unquestioning devotion Americans display for baseball and its mythology, and the Hall of Fame's idyllic setting in a quaint corner of small-town America) that undermined their efforts to become the type of socially relevant institution many envisioned. Contending with these challenges continues to characterize much of the museum's operations today.
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I am indebted to the staff at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum for all their help and cooperation in providing vital research materials for this study. No
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Isaac Singer had a problem. In 1848 he was on the verge of bankruptcy due to a number of patent-infringement lawsuits filed against his single-thread chain-stitch sewing machine. By the mid-nineteenth century, the sewing machine was already fifty years old but unpopular with American consumers due to its inability to produce consistent stitch patterns. Isaac Singer intended to improve upon the machine’s performance with his own design. Once marketed to the public, Singer hoped sales might alleviate his personal financial hardships caused by years of producing unsuccessful inventions while supporting three wives he lived with simultaneously—and the sixteen children he fathered with them.¹

Singer hired attorney Edward Clark to represent him in the pending lawsuits. Clark was a shrewd and cultured product of Wall Street and skillfully negotiated a settlement allowing Singer to mass-produce his sewing machines by paying royalties from his sales to the various patent holders. Recognizing the potential of Singer’s operation, Clark refused cash for his services, instead taking a 50 percent stake in I. M. Singer & Company as his payment. Within a matter of years, the two men were extremely wealthy.²


² Reisler, A Great Day in Cooperstown, 11.
Success did not last long for Singer, however. Authorities arrested him for bigamy once his three marriages became public. Further investigation uncovered a fourth wife after Singer fled to Europe, where he eventually took a fifth wife. Upon Singer’s death in 1875, Clark became president of the sewing machine company. As his fortune increased, Clark began pouring money into philanthropic causes in his wife’s hometown of Cooperstown, New York.³

When Edward Clark died in 1882, financiers estimated his worth to be approximately $40 million. This money went to Clark’s only son, Alfred. Over the course of his life, Alfred tripled this windfall, splitting it among his four sons upon his death. One of these sons, Stephen, following his grandfather’s example, was a well-known Cooperstown philanthropist.⁴

Stephen Clark lived in an era when owning wealth came with implied responsibilities to educate and better the lower classes, particularly through romanticized displays of American patriotism. It was the time of John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Colonial Williamsburg and Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village. With America in the throes of the Great Depression, Clark looked for a way to boost the economy in Cooperstown (where he, too, had a summer home), without compromising its small-town charm. This meant no heavy industry and no corporate land development.⁵


⁵ Garet D. Livermore, “Revisiting ‘The Cooperstown Idea’: The Evolution of the New York State Historical Association.” *The Public Historian* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 2
The early twentieth century was also a time of rapid growth in the museum profession. While there were only approximately six hundred museums in the United States in 1910, by the end of the 1930s that number reached twenty-five hundred. Historians attribute much of this growth to the rise of the automobile. As Laurence Vail Coleman declared in his study published in 1939 by the American Association of Museums, “Until people could travel casually and leave beaten paths with ease, they were not ready to visit scattered historic spots.” But the newfound mobility brought about new opportunities for Americans to travel to remote destinations, opening a window of opportunity for Stephen Clark. He took advantage of some locally found baseball artifacts and a legend attributed to a Cooperstown war hero and opened a one-room museum exhibit on “America’s national pastime.” The overwhelming attention the exhibit garnered inspired the dream for a larger national baseball museum in Cooperstown.

This dissertation will examine the growth of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum from its founding as an object shrine and tourist attraction through its transformation into a history museum. More specifically, it will analyze how the


7 Ibid., 35.

evolution of American values and ideologies drove changes to the museum’s exhibits that both reflect and reinforce the museum-going public’s demands for the inclusion of such things as social history, shared authority, transparency, audience focus, and education in the application of sound public history practice. I argue that while the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum moved to address these concerns by attempting to transition away from the sterile celebratory history displays traditionally associated with halls of fame, it is still very much an institution in transition.

Themes pertaining to racism, sexism, violence, consumerism, drug abuse, exploitation, and other controversial topics that both tarnished baseball’s image and challenged the mono-dominant cultural understanding of American identity all emerged in the museum exhibits in recent decades, but represent more of an acknowledgement of this less glamorous side of history than complete engagement with the ambiguity and complexity of the subject matter. In addition, the Hall of Fame demonstrates a willingness to share authority, provide a degree of transparency in their processes, enhance the professional training of staff, and incorporate new and innovative technologies to improve education within the museum, but numerous factors hamper the Hall’s ability to reinvent itself completely.

The obstacles to more dramatic change are numerous and date back to the Hall’s formative years. The nostalgic and patriotic sentiments prevalent in America at the time of the museum’s founding continue to play an important part in shaping the identity of the Hall of Fame today. These carefully crafted themes still run throughout the museum and speak to their cherished place within American culture and the dedicated approach taken to their preservation over the better part of the last century. While an influx of
professionally trained graduates of museum studies programs (like the Cooperstown program) broke new ground in exhibit design in recent decades, the benefits of this training do not filter through the organization at all levels. Finally, the idyllic setting in which the museum resides (Cooperstown, New York), hangs over everything the museum does, providing a constant reminder of the purity and innocence found in the game’s “small-town America” mythology.

The ongoing transformation of the museum comes into clearer focus through an examination of its exhibits. By looking at changes in the exhibits over time, patterns emerge that illustrate the conflicts and compromises faced by a museum in transition. This dissertation analyzes these changes by placing them within the context of modern public history scholarship. Rather than treating present standards of scholarship as the pinnacle of achievement and using them to unjustly evaluate the merit of past museum displays, however, this study uses standards of modern public history practice as a way of looking at how history was treated at the Baseball Hall of Fame in the past and analyzes what this tells us about how we live and what we as a society value today.

What this dissertation will not discuss are topics covered in the traditional scholarship which debate the credentials of players enshrined or denied enshrinement in the Hall of Fame and the voting procedures used to arrive at those decisions. Although analysis of history outside of the academy typically involves questioning the integrity of history presentations, this dissertation recognizes the challenges of capturing complexity and diverse interpretations in a label, panel, or even entire exhibit, and is not intended to mirror one-sided studies that do little more than provide critiques of every fault found in
an exhibit. Instead, this paper will suggest some ways in which displays in the Hall of Fame Museum might better meet the evolving needs of the museum-going public by achieving greater balance and consistency with modern public history standards.

This dissertation only discusses topics outside of museum exhibit displays to the degree to which these topics influence the history found in the final displays. While this study looks at transformations occurring within the context of developments in the broader museum community, it is not a museum studies piece in the traditional sense. The focus on the exhibits precludes an in-depth study of organizational structure, funding, leadership, and curatorial methods. This dissertation does touch on object conservation and staff training, but only as they relate to an awareness of changes in museum priorities that coincide with an increased appreciation for the importance of sound historical practice (e.g., choosing which objects to protect behind glass and which objects to leave exposed in order to provide more meaningful multisensory experiences for visitors). Finally, this dissertation will not be a review of every exhibit (past or present) at the Hall of Fame, but focuses on the exhibits determined to be significant for how they illustrate the principles in question.

**Baseball and American Culture**

When referring to the game of baseball, author George Grella once wrote, “Anyone who does not understand the game cannot hope to understand the country.”

Historian Edward J. Reilly called baseball a “sociological touchstone for understanding

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our country,” claiming the sport had a “close involvement in virtually every important social development in the United States, both past and present.”\textsuperscript{11}

A brief look at just how intertwined baseball is with American culture helps illustrate their inseparability. Baseball’s influence makes its way into almost every aspect of our lives. Expressions like “striking out” and “being thrown a curveball” are parts of everyday language. A multitude of successful baseball-themed movies, shows, and music demonstrates the depth to which the game pervades popular culture. Baseball grew alongside the popularity of television and the game’s expansion westward mirrored that of population shifts in the twentieth century. The country’s battles over race, gender, organized labor, and illicit drugs, also coincided with the emergence of similar issues within the game. Finally, baseball remains a nostalgic place where the nation turns in times of crisis when seeking a place of solace from the realities of an increasingly complex and confusing world.

The baseball craze in America really found its footing in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The years following the Civil War witnessed a rapid rise in the popularity of sporting culture throughout the United States. It was during this time, that baseball became the national pastime. A population fractured by Reconstruction, and later, waves of immigration, saw baseball as a way to unify its citizens through the

game’s natural inclination to teach players the benefits of sportsmanship, competition, and healthy male recreation.\textsuperscript{12}

By the early twentieth century, baseball was a thriving business helping bring together a diverse mix of classes, religions, races, and ethnicities through common experience. Its identity was not associated with a strictly male population or an Irish population or a Republican population, but managed to bring together fans of varying backgrounds. Author and baseball enthusiast Harold Burr once wrote, “Baseball is the great equalizer. Prince and pauper sit beside each other, share their bag of peanuts, argue about the system of crediting base-hits and debiting errors, and fall joyfully into an embrace when their mutually favorite player hits the home run that wins the game. It’s a game for poor people—and the sport of Presidents.”\textsuperscript{13}

Much of baseball’s appeal came from a belief in the wholesome nature of the game. Despite its increasingly visible business-oriented style, the professional game carefully crafted an image of itself as a small-town, virtuous enterprise, and Americans, desperate to cling to the nostalgia of simpler times, bought into it willingly. A 1937 article in Baseball Magazine demonstrated the faith Americans placed in baseball to preserve the country’s innocence when the author asked readers to contemplate, “If you had a son at school, would you rather see him come home after classes and call for his pipe and his bowl like Old King Cole because there was no baseball, or come sprightly


in, snatch up a ball and glove and rush off to win honors for dear old Alma Mater? If your son was a daughter wouldn’t you prefer to see her in the stands after school rooting for a three base hit, than catch her in the parlor necking because there was no baseball?"  

Baseball’s mythical ability to move people carried over into the political world as well, usually through analogies politicians appropriated to connect with the common man. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt assured the American public he was the proper leader to get them out of the Great Depression, he tempered it by saying that although not every one of his programs was “a hit,” his goal was to aim for the “highest possible batting average.” During this same period, Dean Carle Wittke of Oberlin College declared baseball the new safety valve for the country (in the wake of Frederick Jackson Turner’s closing of the western frontier), and educated Americans about their great fortune to be yelling at umpires rather than “heiling to Hitler.”

Perhaps no singular event more effectively solidified baseball's place in American culture than World War II. While the game suffered along with many other industries, public expenditures on baseball between 1940 and 1945 were $112.1 million, compared to $93.1 million spent on all other sports combined. Baseball boosted the spirits of those laboring on the home front, as FDR called upon team owners to schedule more night games to provide entertainment for overworked factory hands. Baseball heroes like Ted


Williams and Bob Feller became war heroes, while newsreels showed soldiers designing makeshift fields overseas to provide themselves with reminders of home. The experience of women in the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) mirrored that of women across the country, as America drew upon its emergency reserve labor force to provide for the war effort.\textsuperscript{17}

The post-war years saw a boom in baseball attendance that reflected the economic prosperity of the times, while the game’s issues with race, drugs, and monopolies paralleled social issues facing the country. Baseball helped usher African Americans into mainstream society, and, according to Ohio Senator John Bricker, helped preserve democracy in America during the McCarthy era. American officials even sent baseball equipment to places like the Dominican Republican as part of a plan to check the spread of communism through Latin America.\textsuperscript{18}

When long-unaddressed problems within baseball of the 1950s erupted in labor disputes and charges of racism and sexism in the 1960s and 1970s, baseball once again proved itself a microcosm of American culture. The disruptive behavior of players “holding out” drew comparisons to the student protests occurring on the nation’s college campuses. The violence found on America’s streets carried over into ballparks. On June 4, 1974, a game between the Cleveland Indians and Texas Rangers ended in forfeit when fans ran onto the field throwing firecrackers and attacking players. In 1977, Lenny Randle assaulted his own manager, Frank Lucchesi, hospitalizing Lucchesi with a

\textsuperscript{17} Briley, \textit{Class at Bat}, 40; James M. Gould, “The President Says ‘Play Ball,’” \textit{Baseball Magazine}, March 1942, 436.

\textsuperscript{18} Briley, \textit{Class at Bat}, 50, 58, 65, 163.
concussion and broken jaw. Visiting players at Yankee Stadium regularly complained about a barrage of billiard balls, nails, and beer cans thrown at them during games. The loss of innocence felt by many in the country came through clearly in Simon and Garfunkel’s famous line, “Where have you gone Joe DiMaggio?”

The 1980s, and decades that followed, saw the game refashioned through the growing influence of giant corporations which took over family-owned teams, bought stadium naming rights, and secured premium seating at the expense of the average fan. Cable television contracts exacerbated inequalities in team revenue distribution, increasing the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots,” while also providing advertisers new markets with which to expand baseball’s long-standing influence on consumer culture. The growing presence of Latin American players not only reflected national demographic shifts, but also brought to light underlying racial tensions still present in America. Finally, tragic events, like those of September 11, 2001, showed how once again, Americans looked to baseball to help them cope with grief and regain a sense of normalcy.

The devotion with which Americans approach their national pastime takes on, at times, an almost religious quality. Citing the American baseball fan’s penchant for worshiping the game’s heroic figures, paying homage to the game’s sacred rituals, and exuding reverence for the game’s holiest relics, NYU humanities professor, Roberta

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19 The counter-culture movement eventually became so popular that America adopted it into the mainstream and turned it into a corporate product. The same held true for baseball as Oakland A’s owner Charles Finley began paying players $300 a piece to grow facial hair to make them more popular with fans.

20 Ibid., 157, 212–216.
Newman, concluded, “Baseball is so fundamentally American, so permanently etched into American speech, the American psyche, American culture, that it may even be defined, however broadly, as America’s secular religion, the American Church of Baseball.”\(^{21}\)

With the nation’s history so intricately linked to that of baseball, and the game’s fan base so fervent in its devotion to the game, any institution taking it upon themselves to be a steward of the game, to tell baseball’s story and preserve and display its most sacred objects, takes on a formidable task. Referred to intermittently as “the baseball Parthenon,” “baseball’s Vatican,” and the “Valhalla of the great American Game,” the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, is the institution shouldering this awesome responsibility.\(^{22}\)

Through its mission to preserve history, honor excellence, and connect generations, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum attempts to serve both the baseball-going public, as well as the baseball laymen, by presenting American history through the lens of baseball. Initially a mere shrine to the game’s greats (and the objects used to represent them), the Baseball Hall of Fame evolved into a history museum intent on earning a place alongside such renowned organizations as New York’s American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. It is a transformation that required a change in culture within the museum, a focus on hiring


staff professionally trained in museum studies and the principles of sound public history practice, and a willingness to enhance the quality of its scholarship through the application of shared authority and self-reflection. Unfortunately for the Hall of Fame and its staff, however, the scholarly community has taken little notice of the museum’s transition.

In *Representing the Sporting Past in Museums and Halls of Fame*, Kevin Moore argued that “historians have traditionally seen little value in sports museums,” largely due to “an academic view that sports museums present an uncritical, celebratory history.” Moore’s concern is that scholars unjustly view sports museums as institutions catering to a nostalgia market by perpetuating myths and incorporating errors into the final product to make it more marketable.

As opposed to Moore’s concern about perceptions of objectivity and factual accuracy, Mike Cronin worries more about content. He argues that “most sport museums are concerned solely with the happenings within the stadium—the players, the athletes, the ephemera and so on—they are not seeking to contextualize the sporting experience within the realm of a broader social history.” Cronin feels that in addition to sound academic practice, sports museums must make themselves responsible for exploring complex narratives and the stories of under-represented cultural groups. In order to meet

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24 Ibid.

the changing demands of its visitorship, the clean, celebratory chronicles of the past must be re-examined in order to provide a fuller understanding of their place within American history. Consequently, according to Cronin, until the narratives found within sports museums reflect more than just stories of social progress that meet with simple, happy endings, the sporting museum will continue to play a secondary role to institutions of greater perceived integrity.

Cronin is far from being alone in his assessment. Modern historians often criticize American museums for promoting outdated displays of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, capitalist history. The rise of cultural pluralism, however, means that today’s museums must find new and innovative ways to include the voices of a broader constituency. Consequently, museums must engage visitors in a process of rethinking their past. For many museums, this means addressing the conflicts and contradictions of history that represent a controversial challenge to many emotional and deeply cherished beliefs about American history.26

Museums traditionally fear controversy for the impact it might have on attendance, funding sources, and relationships with boards of trustees. Without this added element of complexity, however, museums risk condemning themselves to irrelevance.27


As James Gardner argued in 2004, “We cannot simply present a self-affirming, validating past, regardless of how politically popular that might be.” Museums have to resist the temptation to iron out the complexities that prove difficult to interpret and challenge beliefs about our national identity. It is here that sport museums traditionally fall short in their attempts to present American history.

The troubled relationship between academic historians and museums is not one-sided, however. For their part, museums often distrust historians. They resent the criticisms directed at their exhibits and accuse historians of having little understanding about the ways museums work. Museums face budgetary and spatial constraints—and sometimes social and political pressures—that limit their ability to convey narratives in the degree of detail for which historians and more progressive elements of the population clamor. In addition, new and innovative studies about the ways visitors learn in museums fly in the face of the classroom transmission-absorption model academics traditionally rely on to bestow knowledge upon their students. Finally, while some museums lack the funding or expertise to incorporate complexity and controversy into their exhibits, others believe it is a museum’s responsibility to remain “above the fray” altogether.

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Despite these obstacles to cooperation, however, recent years brought about a new and slowly emerging respect between academics and sports museums. This growing engagement produced greater degrees of trust and understanding and a recognition that a mutually beneficial relationship is possible. Academics can utilize a sports museum’s broad appeal to increase exposure for their research, while museums benefit from having historians transform their understanding of sports history through new and innovative engagement with their material culture resources. In short, sports museums present an opportunity for a public passionate about an institution’s subject matter to interact with a scholarly authority in need of reaching new audiences.\textsuperscript{30}

As for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, scholars largely ignore it. Though the museum is the steward of a game closely linked to our national identity, and in 2012 declared its intention to be “baseball’s Smithsonian, not baseball’s Disney World,” the history on display within the museum garners little attention from the academic community. The literature available sparks debates about who gets enshrined and which players get left out, but fails to examine what gets in, how it gets displayed, how its significance is interpreted, and what these decisions convey about society’s dominant cultural values. The National Baseball Hall of Fame is no longer the giant trophy case its founders envisioned; it is a full-fledged history museum intent on

conveying its interpretation of American history to a visitorship that regularly exceeds 300,000 annually.  

Theory and Methodology

The premise of this study hinges on the belief that while changes to accepted methods of historical practice influence museum displays, it is the evolution of cultural values that facilitates changes to historical practice. Whether it is the celebration of our colonial heritage at the start of the twentieth century, the emphasizing of contributions made by previously marginalized groups (that gained popularity decades later), or modern efforts made to place audiences at the center of history experiences, changing concepts of sound historical practice tell us much about what we value as a society. Museums then appropriate these values and practices as a means of remaining relevant.

Before beginning this analysis, it is necessary to provide some structure to a couple of overused and under-defined terms in this dissertation. Any discussion of American “values” relies on the premise that Americans held certain interests, ethics, and morals in high esteem and utilized them, in part, to help construct their identities. It was the representation and validation of these qualities that many then sought in museums. Additionally, the term “ideologies” (at least for use in this study) refers to a set of concepts and assertions that characterized the beliefs of a particular group or culture—in this case, the American public.

The historical framework of this study relies upon research presented by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan in *The Presence of Past*, in which the authors assert that to

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31 Craig Muder (Director of Communications, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum), email message to author, October 13, 2011.
understand the past is to understand the present. More importantly, Rosenzweig and Thelan point out that although the average person uses history as a regular part of their everyday lives, they often feel alienated or intimidated by its presentation due to the official, formal, and analytical way in which they see it conveyed. The relaxed, informal setting provided by the Baseball Hall of Fame plays an important role in addressing this concern for reasons discussed later in this dissertation.32

Additionally, this study relies on the premise that the examination of sport is an important way to learn more about ourselves. For example, in the *Journal of Social History*, Stephen Pope asserted that “since colonial times, sports participation was a major vehicle through which gender and racial divisions were reproduced,” and that “sports have regularly been used to dramatize ‘American’ ideals.” These assertions provide a foundation for much of the work conducted at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum and drive the impetus for its study.

This dissertation also reflects the theories of scholars like Patricia Davison (of the South African Museum in Cape Town), that museums mediate the past, present, and future by giving “material form to authorized versions of the past, which in time become institutionalized as public memory.” Additionally it promotes the idea that by looking at these museums, we will find them to be places of “flux” in which culture is made and


33 Pope, “Negotiating the ‘Folk Highway,’” 328, 331.

remade in different ways that tell us as much about the institutions and the times as they do about the objects and exhibits within them. Finally, like the work of historian Raymond Doswell in 2008 and numerous others who came before him, this dissertation moves past the antiquated notion that questioning the educational value and historiography of museum exhibits is an affront to curatorial scholarship. It instead embraces the opportunity to evaluate the cultural contributions of an institution so closely tied to our national identity.

The resources utilized to undertake this study took a variety of forms. Periodicals found online, in the library at the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) in Phoenix, Arizona, and in the archives at the A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center in Cooperstown proved invaluable for their coverage of exhibit openings, staff changes, renovations, and other major events occurring at the Baseball Hall of Fame. Scrapbooks and correspondence in the Cooperstown archives supplemented these materials and provided a rich contextual background for more in-depth portions of the study.

Key to an examination of the Hall of Fame’s exhibits over time was visual evidence of past exhibitry. For this, little newspaper or magazine evidence existed. The Photo Archives at the Giamatti Research Center, however, provided an abundance of stills tracing back to the earliest days of the museum’s operation. These photographs provided evidence of the objects on display over time, their arrangement, the text (or lack


of) associated with them, themes addressed in the exhibits, and the importance the Hall of Fame placed on displaying different objects during different periods in recent American history.

Perhaps the most indispensable research undertaken during this study was the series of personally conducted interviews with current and former museum staff. These staff members consisted of both curators and collections managers whose responsibilities at the Hall of Fame began in the 1960s and carry through to the present day—representing a period covering more than half of the Hall of Fame’s existence. These interviews, both formally and informally conducted, provided valuable insight into display decisions, collections practices, staff training, the emphasis placed on historical scholarship, and a general feel for the evolving culture within the museum over time.

The final indispensable portion of research completed for this study involved spending time “in” the exhibits themselves. This research took a variety of forms, the most typical being time spent making on-site observations by physically walking through the museum exhibits. This required numerous visits to Cooperstown documenting evidence over a number of years. Frequently augmenting these experiences were formal and informal tours taken through various exhibits with different members of the Hall of Fame staff.

This exhibit analysis also utilized online resources. The Hall of Fame’s website allows visitors to view digitized versions of a select few past and present exhibits. These exhibits often offered more detail about the subject matter than typically found in the physical museum space itself. In addition, the Hall of Fame conducts monthly podcasts.
that highlight events and exhibits at the museum, and posts video tours of exhibits on the social media site, YouTube.

**Historiography**

Author Stephen Weil traces the birth of museums back two hundred years in Europe and over one hundred years in the United States. He argues that early museum founders in America used these intimidating bastions of culture to uplift the taste of the common man and promote refinement. By the late nineteenth century, large urban centers like New York and Chicago appropriated the museum to house displays of their economic and cultural power and provided the profession with its conservative origins.³⁷

Early museums were also celebratory institutions. Exhibits evoked civic virtue through celebrations of success in business, art, war, politics, or whatever one chose as their profession. It was the focus on stories of success that helped give rise to the modern hall of fame.³⁸

Many museum historians, like Victor Danilov, consider Westminster Abbey to be the world’s first hall of fame. In America, the Hall of Fame of Great Americans founded in 1900 in the Bronx, New York, gave rise to the modern hall of fame movement—considered a largely American phenomenon born out of a national desire for hero worship. Initiated by New York University to recognize past contributions to the “American experience,” the Hall of Fame of Great Americans contained bronze busts of


such famous Americans as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Booker T. Washington, and Mark Twain. While the hall of fame movement reached into sports with the New York Yankees’ opening of their Memorial Park in the 1930s and the Helms Athletic Foundation opening a museum inspired by the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, in 1936 the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum became the first hall of fame dedicated to celebrating the champions of a single sport in its entirety.\(^{39}\)

Much of the existing literature written about the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum takes the form of a narrative detailing the museum’s origins and explaining just how the game became associated with the humble little village of Cooperstown. The best of these works includes Jim Reisler’s, *A Great Day in Cooperstown: The Improbable Birth of Baseball’s Hall of Fame*, and James Vlasich’s, *A Legend for the Legendary: The Origin of the Baseball Hall of Fame*. Some histories come from the perspective of insiders looking to celebrate the museum’s achievements, like Ken Smith’s, *Baseball’s Hall of Fame*, while others, like Zev Chafets’s, *Cooperstown Confidential: Heroes, Rogues, and the Inside Story of the Baseball Hall of Fame*, take the approach of an exposé discrediting the Hall of Fame’s operations and the men enshrined within its walls. Still other authors, like James Vail, prefer to debate the voting procedures and criteria used to evaluate players for enshrinement. This dissertation will only address these topics as they relate to their ability to influence exhibit materials within the museum.

Instead, the Hall of Fame discussions in this dissertation will be driven by principles of public history and new museum theory that enforce Leon and Rosenzweig’s

belief in the power of museums to both shape and reinforce the public’s understanding of the past.⁴⁰ Museums derive this power from the perception of them as neutral third parties in the construction of historical narratives. Recent theory suggests, however, that this is not the case. As Professor Janet Marstine argues, “though museum workers commonly naturalize their policies and procedures as professional practice, the decisions these workers make reflect underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives.”⁴¹ Furthermore, halls of fame often provide stories visitors expect to see and which the public accepts willingly and uncritically, without any regard for academic standards.⁴²

An analysis of where the exhibits in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum fall into discussions of public history practice and new museum theory (sometimes called “new museology”), requires at least some background in the criteria used to make this evaluation. Among the conceptual foundations of such an undertaking is Peter Liebhold’s notion that museum exhibits are about placing current debates in historical context, and Lonnie Bunch’s contention that this sometimes means finding the courage to embrace controversial subject matter as a way to foster dialogue and inject more diverse perspectives. At the height of the “culture wars” (discussed in more depth

⁴⁰ Leon and Rosenzweig, “Introduction,” xii.


⁴² Cronin, “Croke Park,” 97.
later), attempts by museums to challenge traditional celebratory narratives often met with disastrous results.43

In the case of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the incorporation of diverse perspectives and controversial subject matter into the exhibits was a matter of changing the culture within the museum. After decades of catering to the expectations of a patriotic, hero-worshipping clientele, the Hall of Fame took cues from the changing demands of the museum-going public and began altering their mission. For a conservative institution, this change did not come easily.

Catherine Lewis depicts the growing pains that come with change in her book, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum*. In numerous ways, the experiences of the Chicago Historical Society mirrored those occurring at the Hall of Fame. The expansion of the social history movement called into question old exhibits that focused on celebrating the achievements of white males. The historical society needed to overcome the antiquarian tendencies of its curators, develop a team approach to exhibit design, increase the visibility of its education department, and rethink the ways they conveyed information to the public.44 Many of these same challenges rang true in Cooperstown as well.

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One of the more significant obstacles the Hall of Fame faced during the start of their transition was the need to revise their collecting strategy. Its significance as part of the museum story comes from the theory that the very act of collecting provides meaningful commentary on the values and perceptions held by a society. How a museum collected objects, what they collected, and why they collected, actually forms a narrative within a narrative. The stories a history museum chooses to tell often reflect the objects it chooses to collect; thus changes made to the Hall of Fame’s collecting strategy directly influenced the history on display to visitors.

The most common way for museums to expand their collections is through donations. These donations often come with stipulations. While care, rights of ownership, and restrictions on the resale of items often enter into donation discussions, so too do display decisions. For the Hall of Fame, donations from retired players or family members of deceased players sometimes come with stipulations that influence the display of objects. More often than not, the decisions made about which objects to donate actually shape the narrative into a display of family pride. A good example comes from families of Hall of Famers who donate items related to a player’s military service.

The negotiation that often accompanies donations provides donors, in a very real sense, with a voice in the exhibit. This process represents a shift in power within the modern museum that demonstrates a growing emphasis on “shared authority.” The concept of shared authority, as defined by Michael Frisch, challenges the patronizing view that non-academics have nothing to offer to the process of historical narrative.

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In a museum, shared authority might take the form of stipulations attached to donations, the hiring of outside design or research consultants, the solicitation of visitor stories or photos for an exhibit, or any other form of contribution that calls into question the previously sacred and inviolable prowess of the museum curator. This change in philosophy plays a significant role in defining the modern museum and is present in a variety of forms at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

A focus on not just education, but on gaining a better understanding of how people actually learn in museums is another philosophy change challenging the staff of modern museums. Visitors who come to museums are not blank slates, but come with “historical baggage” in the form of subject-matter knowledge and expectations about what they will encounter during their visit. This baggage affects the visitor experience and influences what they learn. In addition, studies like the one John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking published in *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, demonstrate that visitors learn better in social situations, when they feel relaxed and not intimidated, and when museums actively engage them in activities that personalize their learning experiences. The degree to which the Baseball Hall of Fame recognizes this need to be less object focused and more visitor focused goes a long way toward determining its willingness to meet evolving constituent expectations and engage in currently accepted methods of public history practice.

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The significance of this new emphasis on social history, the politics of display, collecting strategies, shared authority, and museum learning in recent decades becomes clearer when one takes into account the power of memory and its relationship to identity formation. Our memories help shape who we are, and we in turn, use this identity and perception of ourselves when reconstructing memory. The Baseball Hall of Fame contributes to our national identity by the memories it fosters. As Marita Sturken noted in *Tangled Memories the Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, viewing an event, like the explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle, creates a shared cultural memory, even though everyone’s individual memory or experience of the event may be unique.\(^{48}\) The same is true when witnessing monumental moments in baseball, like Hank Aaron breaking Babe Ruth’s homerun record, or Bobby Thompson’s game-winning homerun to cap an improbable comeback by the New York Giants against the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1951. The Baseball Hall of Fame is the keeper of these memories and the institution’s displays and commemorations of these events help dictate the nature of our collective memories.

“Collective memory” is an ambiguous, often misunderstood term. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Michael Rothberg defines it as “the relationship that…groups establish between their past and their present circumstances.”\(^ {49}\) Historian Michael Schudson calls it “the ways in


which group, institutional, and cultural recollections of the past shape people’s actions in the present.”\textsuperscript{50} What IS clear is that collective memory studies date back to the early twentieth century and the work of sociologists like Maurice Halbwachs. For Halbwachs, memory was a matter of how peoples’ minds worked together in a society. He promoted the theory that even if it is individuals who do the remembering, they are doing so as part of a group. The social interactions of a group, according to Halbwachs, are what trigger individuals to recall some memories and forget others.\textsuperscript{51}

When forgetting occurs, the collective memory process breaks down. It is often then that silences emerge, and real-life experiences succumb to nostalgia. This nostalgia infuses the emotion into baseball storytelling and plays a critical role in baseball memory. Martin Manning once claimed, “the sport that evokes more nostalgia among Americans than any other is baseball.”\textsuperscript{52} This nostalgia can manifest itself in many forms. For some, it is reveling in the stories of former glories, for others it might be visiting an old ballpark or Little League field. Many enthusiasts actively reconnect with the game through the pursuit of “memorabilia.” The one thing these various forms have in common is a desire for establishing connections to a simpler, more secure and romantic past. Eviatar Zerubavel addresses the usefulness of nostalgia in his book \textit{Time Maps, Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past}. In it, Zerubavel speaks of the “decline”

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narrative, in which a movement forward on the age timeline results in a perceived
decrease in the quality of life. The result of this progression is a longing for the past.53

Nostalgia plays a critical role in the history on the display in the Baseball Hall of
Fame. It is partly an affinity for nostalgia that draws visitors to the quaint village of
Cooperstown and through the doors of the Hall of Fame. The staff at the Hall of Fame
Museum are very aware of the need to provide visitors with a certain degree of nostalgia
in their presentations if the museum is to meet with visitor expectations. But more than
just whitewashing displays with sentimentality, the Hall of Fame staffers utilize the
power of nostalgia to guide visitors into discussions of more serious social concerns. The
act of tempering nostalgia with well-documented scholarship is just one more challenge
the Hall of Fame faces as it plots a steady course through its transition.

Significance of This Study

The depth to which baseball permeates American culture allows the National
Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum to address a wide variety of social constructs.
Baseball has been tied to national battles over segregation, gender equality, and the
power of organized labor. It has reflected the growth of consumerism and leisure time in
United States, been incorporated into political debate, and evolved alongside trends in
popular culture. An examination of American vernacular finds a vocabulary ripe with
baseball analogies and terminology—demonstrating the degree to which the game is a
part of our daily lives. The museum exhibits at the Hall of Fame address all of these

aspects of American culture that help shape our identity but yet garner inadequate scholarly attention when viewed through the lens of baseball.

The significance of this study becomes clearer when considering a number of factors. The first of these is the perceived trustworthiness of museums. As Rosenzweig and Thelan uncovered, one of the aspects people like about museums is that they feel museums provide unmediated experiences. Consequently, the American public trusts the information they learn in museums more than they trust it from any other source—this includes parents or grandparents, television programs, high school teachers, and college professors. 54 The significance of this finding implies that the history learned in museums is the history Americans take to be “factual” and thus provides them with a basis for how they view themselves and how they assimilate related scholarship in the future.

The second important factor contributing to the significance of this dissertation is the atmosphere at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Because of the traditional association between museums and high culture, people often find their surroundings intimidating when visiting museums. This intimidation might come from feelings of inferiority regarding their knowledge of the subject matter or anxiety from a belief that they are intruders in a world not meant for them. 55 Baseball, however, does not recognize class distinctions. As John Drebingener noted the year the Hall of Fame officially opened, “Poise, dignity and all else commonly associated with the rich man sail right out the window when baseball fastens its tentacles on your otherwise suave man of millions.

54 Rosenzweig and Thelan, The Presence of the Past, 21–22.

He’ll quarrel with newspapermen like a longshoreman if they’ve called his second sacker a punk.”

In contrast to institutions of high culture, the Baseball Hall of Fame caters to the “everyman.” Its rustic location and blue-collar approach to a subject most visitors have at least a basic knowledge of, flies in the face of pretentiousness. It is a place where visitors can feel comfortable and relaxed in their surroundings while they absorb information produced in relatable and easily digestible forms. Traffic patterns within the museum do not herd visitors like cattle from one factoid to the next, but instead, allow them to meander through exhibits, learn at their own speed, and explore topics that interest them in greater depth.

In addition, the Hall of Fame Museum caters to families. In keeping with the museum’s mission to connect generations, the Hall of Fame promotes dialogue and interaction among family members. As sociologist Eldon Snyder observed, it is a place where the older generation typically socializes the young into a collective heritage.

Children make sense of national events by placing them in the context of familial stories. There are a number of kid-friendly exhibits mixed in with everything else the Hall of Fame offers, and placards placed throughout the museum encourage parents to talk to their children. It is a place where parents and children can feel safe and freed from burden and distraction.


To understand the implications of providing this type of environment it is necessary to return to the discussion of how people learn in museums. As Falk and Dierking contend, “Humans are highly motivated to learn when they are in supportive environments; when they are engaged in meaningful activities; when they are freed from anxiety, fear, and other negative mental states; [and] when they have choices and control over their learning.” By providing an experience in which visitors can socialize, make meaningful connections with their families, learn at their own pace, and be freed from negative mental states like fear and anxiety, the Hall of Fame constructs an environment conducive to learning.

When combining the faith people place in museums with the Hall of Fame’s conducive learning environment and mission to present authoritative American history, the need for an evaluation of practices within the museum and their relation to broader cultural trends becomes clearer. This, along with the fact that the museum hosts over three hundred thousand visitors every year means that over a quarter of a million people leave Cooperstown each year having learned American history from the Hall of Fame’s perspective and having provided validation for the values on display—and yet, no serious academic study on the museum exists.

This study will further research in numerous fields within the humanities. In addition to adding to the literature found on the variety of social movements associated with the game of baseball, the transition of the of the Hall of Fame from object shrine to research institution provides valuable insight into the growing influence of social history and new museology and the impact it had on an undervalued segment of the museum.

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59 Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 32.
community—the hall of fame. Unlike other hall of fame studies (which mostly focus on the qualifications of inductees and the processes that elected them), this study looks at changes in the museum exhibits over time and explores what these changes signify about the country’s evolving tastes.

While the growing pains the museum continues to experience during its transition are not unique, the Baseball Hall of Fame is far from a typical museum. The analysis of changes to its history displays over time fosters a greater understanding of the reciprocal relationship that exists between the Baseball Hall of Fame and American culture—each reflecting, reinforcing, and shaping the values found in the other.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 examines the myth that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown and how this myth shaped both the founding of the Hall of Fame and its early exhibits. The “Doubleday Myth” played an even more significant role in the years to come when, in order to be taken seriously as a history museum, the Hall of Fame needed to dispel the myth, even though doing so undermined the justification for its own existence. Consequently, establishing Cooperstown’s deep affinity for the Doubleday story and the commentary it provides on American cultural values at the time of the museum’s founding becomes paramount.

Most of chapter 3 examines the museum-going public’s fascination with objects and the power objects have to move people. Without utilizing text, early Hall of Fame exhibits relied on nostalgia and reverence for objects to draw visitors into the museum. This section also includes a discussion of the materials that made up the objects, as well as a look at staffing from the Hall of Fame’s earliest days up through the 1970s and how
these staffing decisions reflected attitudes towards professionalization in museums that influenced the exhibits.

Chapter 4 details the metamorphosis inside the museum during the 1980s and its relationship to the social history movement and changes in museum theory. It was a time when the museum began to reconceptualize exhibits and move in a new, more progressive direction. The addition of curator Ted Spencer, as well as the hiring of outside consultants, resulted in a shift away from objects and toward storytelling in the exhibits. The material in this chapter lends itself to discussions of collective memory and the struggles historians face in coming to terms with the lack of verifiable “truth” in the profession. The chapter ends with a look at some of the early social history exhibits and how they represent important steps in the Hall of Fame’s early transition.

The focus of chapter 5 is the culture wars in the 1990s and how their impact reached all the way to Cooperstown. Among the monumental impacts to the Hall of Fame’s exhibits was a new willingness to address controversial topics within baseball. This chapter also acknowledges this period in the museum’s history as one when ardent patriotism tempered the social history on display—symbolizing the degree to which the museum was in flux. The fiftieth anniversary of World War II again brought military conflict to the forefront of exhibit displays and this chapter discusses the unique connection existing between baseball and war and how it manifested itself throughout the Hall of Fame’s existence.

Included in chapter 6 are discussions of race, gender, and marginalized cultural groups that begin appearing in the museum’s narratives—representing a movement into the social history side of the culture wars. These previously taboo subjects filtered their
way through the exhibits in the years that followed and appear throughout the museum today. Issues of race and gender in particular, are still dominant themes in the museum today. Additionally, chapter 6 looks at some of the exhibits of this era, the degree to which the Hall of Fame proved willing to promote meaningful engagement with their subject matter, and how these exhibits shaped some of the modern ones still on display.

Chapter 7 addresses the Hall of Fame’s readiness to address the less glamorous side of baseball even at the risk of tarnishing the very product the museum sells. Included in this chapter are discussions of immoral behavior, gambling, performance-enhancing drugs, and the “big business” side of the game. This discussion includes the Hall’s tentative foray into addressing steroids and their impact on the game’s most cherished records. It also takes a look at advertisements, endorsements, and corporate sponsorship and the influence of consumer culture on both the game and the museum. A look at museum displays on baseball cards and the game today help drive this chapter. By, in a sense, biting the hand that feeds it, the Baseball Hall of Fame demonstrates the complex nature of the struggle to promote critical history within a traditionally celebratory institution.

In chapter 8, examining the Hall of Fame’s new focus on learning and education leads to an exploration of a number of exhibits, including displays meant to draw entire families (instead of just baseball fans) to Cooperstown. This exploration includes a discussion of how the desire to be family-friendly shapes the history on display. Also included in this chapter is an exploration of the tools the Hall of Fame utilizes to help visitors make the meaningful connections to the material that modern museum attendees demand. The museum looks to accomplish this by providing interactive experiences,
utilizing references to popular culture, and incorporating the public’s input into museum space through a process of shared authority.

Chapter 9 looks to broadening the appeal of the Hall of Fame, and in particular, how the museum reaches out to new audiences. This section addresses a number of different methods used in the past, like providing artifact loans and sponsoring traveling exhibits, and then transitions to current initiatives underway in the realm of interactive technology and digital history. Incorporated into this discussion are the Hall of Fame’s efforts at preservation and digitization, conversations about control and access to information, and the museum’s move into social media. It is through the discussion of these topics that the presence of trace amounts of transparency within the museum begin to emerge. Additionally, analysis regarding the challenges facing the Hall of Fame in the digital age provide insight into decisions facing a large portion of the museum population as American culture increasingly embraces a virtual existence. This analysis involves decisions about how much information to make available online, how to protect it, and how to make the digital presentation of this information more useful and engaging.

In the conclusion, I contemplate the future of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. By placing the museum’s current efforts within the context of the broader cultural trends influencing the museum community, a number of potential “next steps” become visible that offer the museum the opportunity to more fully meet the demands of its changing constituency. This involves addressing the silences within the current exhibits, focusing on keeping pace with the new and innovative ways the public accesses and shares information, and demonstrating a willingness to move into areas of complexity that engage with exhibit subject matter at a deeper and more meaningful
level. The conclusion acknowledges the changes made by the Hall of Fame over the last several decades but also suggests ways in which the Hall might proceed in order to remain relevant in the face of an increasingly diverse array of entertainment options available to the public.
CHAPTER 2

THE BIRTH OF AMERICA’S NATIONAL BASEBALL MUSEUM

To begin this study, it is necessary to acknowledge that the acts of commemoration at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum do more than just celebrate the people or events on display, they actually shape our understanding of history by reinforcing or deterring from our perceptions. In various subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways, the manipulation of past events alters the view we maintain about our history and identity. The placement of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, is itself evidence of this phenomenon. Cooperstown’s surroundings bring us in touch with our agrarian past, help us connect with simpler times, and in turn, influence our expectations as we enter the Hall.  

Throughout its history, the connection between Cooperstown and baseball’s origins came under intense scrutiny as more and more evidence suggested that the birth of the game occurred elsewhere. In fact, the only reason the Baseball Hall of Fame resides in Cooperstown, according to anthropologist and cultural historian Charles Springwood, is thanks to a “well-crafted, politically and patriotically motivated invention of tradition regarding the origin of baseball.”

As Mike Wallace argued in *Mickey Mouse History*, one cannot assess the history of a museum without considering the social and political state of the times in which it

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was created. The earliest years of the Hall of Fame coincided with the growing belief in American exceptionalism. The country’s maturation into a global power brought a revitalized sense of pride to the nation. A tourism boom, aided by a new proliferation of automobiles, focused on sites of Americana. During this time, Americans indulged in an obsession with sports, and no sport came close to matching the popularity, patriotism, or nostalgic power of baseball. In fact, in the 1920s, organized baseball approved a plan to build a $100,000 monument in the Potomac River to celebrate the game’s greats, but congressional funding fell through and the momentum for the project ground to a halt.

A decade later, however, thanks to a myth about Civil War hero, Abner Doubleday, a plan emerged to build a museum to memorialize the game in the sleepy little village of Cooperstown. As newspaper columnist Emma Span noted, once the project got off the ground, “it didn't take long for the [Hall] to take on the air of omniscient authority.”

Cooperstown lies approximately seventy miles west of Albany in upstate New York. Founded in 1800 by William Cooper (father of author James Fenimore Cooper), it is a community intent on preserving its small-town past. The local Chamber of Commerce designated Cooperstown, “America’s hometown.” It is a place where elms, maples, and oaks line narrow streets, providing shade for homes and brick-facade

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businesses that give the town an early Victorian feel. Cooperstown’s zoning regulations forbid the display of neon signs and there is only one streetlight in town. A little over two thousand residents meander through a “downtown” full of small, locally owned businesses and devoid of corporate mega-stores. Cooperstown is America before the ravages of industry and sprawl reshaped the landscape.65

In the 1930s, however, Cooperstown was a community suffering through hard times. In addition to the unemployment and economic stagnation brought on by the Great Depression, blight wiped out the hops Cooperstown exported to German breweries, robbing the area of its most vital source of income. On May 16, 1931, the Southern New York Railway suspended most of its service to Cooperstown. Four months later, the Otsego County Agricultural Fair closed—never to reopen. The following year, the Otsego Hotel failed to open for the usually prosperous summer season, and in 1933, all three banks in town closed, reimbursing the luckier citizens fifty cents for every dollar of savings lost. It was a time of great hardship and uncertainty for local residents. Luckily for Cooperstown, however, it was a town beloved by the Clark family.66

Stephen C. Clark, Sr., graduated from Yale and Columbia law schools before serving as a staff officer in World War I (where he earned the Distinguished Service Medal). After the war, Stephen went to work for the company his grandfather Edward

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66 Louis Edward Schroeder, “Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1989), 49–50; Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 29.
acquired from Isaac Singer. As was tradition in the Clark family, Stephen liked to summer in Cooperstown (his grandmother’s hometown), and the area benefited greatly from its association with the Clarks.⁶⁷

Born into wealth, Stephen Clark utilized the vast financial resources at his disposal to improve life in Cooperstown. He created the Clark Foundation, which financed construction of a local hospital, a recreation center, and created scholarships for Cooperstown’s high school graduates. During the Depression, Clark provided a permanent home in Cooperstown for the struggling New York State Historical Association and bolstered its collections by donating artwork, correspondence written between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, and the notes of Dr. Robert King Stone taken during the autopsy he performed on Abraham Lincoln. Clark’s work kept with the philanthropic tradition of his family, and with the expectations citizens of the era had regarding the civic responsibilities of the very wealthy.⁶⁸

In the early twentieth century, the rich used philanthropic causes to protect their images against the perceived evils of great wealth. Often this philanthropy took the form of funding shrines and memorials.⁶⁹ This benevolence, while philanthropic, also provided the wealthy with a forum for celebrating their own achievements and distilling their

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personal interpretation of “American values” to public audiences under the guise of historical display.\(^{70}\)

The most famous manifestation of this process was the restoration undertaken by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in Williamsburg, Virginia. In the 1920s, Rockefeller authorized the purchase and restoration of properties in Williamsburg to both promote his vision of colonial America and to soften the public’s perception of his father as one of the great robber barons in history. While John Jr. believed in the application of wealth for the improvement of society, he also devoted himself to rehabilitating his father’s image. By saving the “one remaining Colonial village” left in America, he hoped to achieve both.\(^{71}\)

Henry Ford took on a similar challenge after his testimony in a 1919 lawsuit against the Chicago Tribune went public. During the trial (in which Ford sued the paper for labeling him an anarchist), Ford came across as ignorant and illiterate—appearing ill-informed about such important historical events as the American Revolution. Soon after, Ford decided to build a museum to not only revitalize his image as an authority figure, but to construct displays that told the history he thought Americans needed to know.\(^{72}\)

Ford’s museum rapidly grew into an entire village. Refusing help from curators, Ford collected anything and everything he felt provided insight into American life. These items included plows, sewing machines, music boxes, rocking chairs, spinning wheels, typewriters, and barber chairs. Counteracting the image of himself as the man whose

\(^{70}\) Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, 7–9.

\(^{71}\) Handler and Gable, The New History in an Old Museum, 31–32.

products helped bring about the demise of small-town America, Ford promoted himself as its savior. In addition, his unchallenged control over the displays at Greenfield Village projected an image of an intelligent, fastidious historian, dedicated to disseminating knowledge for the betterment of his fellow man.\(^73\)

For his part, Stephen Clark oversaw the founding of an outdoor museum in Cooperstown as a way to increase tourism, but also, to promote his idealistic vision of the American worker.\(^74\) What eventually became the Farmer’s Museum in the 1940s, started out in town as a display of carpenter’s and blacksmith’s tools, weaving devices, and farm implements meant to glorify the labor of the working classes.\(^75\)

While most of the nation’s affluent cultural benefactors paid little attention to the workers who made their displays of wealth possible, Clark’s close ties to the Cooperstown community might very well have played an important role in his recognition of the common man’s contributions to America’s success. This proved significant in not only strengthening Clark’s ties to Cooperstown, but also for reinforcing the association between the town and the simple, agrarian lifestyle that permeates all things Cooperstown to this day. It is this same imagery Clark and his associates appropriated to promote his most successful local venture, the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The pastoral village of Cooperstown provided the perfect location for a museum

\(^{73}\) Grandin, *Fordlandia*, 253–255.

\(^{74}\) Clark further strengthened Cooperstown’s heritage tourism industry by integrating the Farmer’s Museum with the Fenimore House Museum (now the Fenimore Art Museum), and the research library at the New York State Historical Association. He also served as Chairman of the Board for the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

celebrating the All-American game. All the museum’s founders needed was to take
advantage of some decades-old research by sporting goods magnate Albert Spalding that
anointed Cooperstown as the birthplace of baseball.

*Baseball’s “Invention” in Cooperstown*

Albert Goodwill Spalding was professional baseball’s first twenty-game-winning
pitcher. He joined the National Association’s Boston Red Stockings in 1871, pitching
every game Boston played that year, and went on to lead the National Association in wins
for the next five years. In 1876 he joined Chicago of the newly formed National League,
leading the league in wins again. One year later, at the age of twenty-six, Spalding
retired, citing excessive physical wear on his body.76

Embarking on a new career, Spalding borrowed $800 from his mother and opened
a sporting goods store on Broadway in New York City. Ever the marketing mastermind,
Spalding paid the National League $1 for every dozen Spalding baseballs they used, and
in return, he earned the right to label his product the sport’s “official ball.” In 1878, he
added to his success by publishing *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide and Official
League Book,* a product enthusiastically devoured by an increasingly devoted baseball fan
base. For the better part of the next decade, the popularity of Spalding’s products
continued to grow, making him a household name in American recreation and leisure
pursuits.77

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76 The Sporting News, *Hall of Fame Factbook,* 1983 ed. (St. Louis, MO: The

77 Reisler, *A Great Day in Cooperstown,* 31; Chafets, *Cooperstown Confidential,*
25.
In 1888, Spalding took his marketing to new heights, hiring a team of baseball players to travel around the world in promotion of the game. Spalding’s team met with the Prince of Wales, attempted to throw baseballs over the pyramids in Egypt, and received a rousing welcome from author Mark Twain upon their return home. Spalding was now a full-blown celebrity. The *Boston Herald* labeled him the most famous American in history after George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.\(^7^8\)

While traveling around the world, however, host countries repeatedly criticized Spalding’s claims about baseball’s American origins. In India, New Zealand, Australia, and Great Britain, he heard his game was nothing more than an adaptation of the British game of rounders. Fiercely patriotic, Spalding believed baseball embodied everything good and wholesome about the American spirit, and did not take to anyone questioning its American roots. Spalding made it his personal mission to prove to the world that America invented baseball. For the good of his country, and for the sales of his products, Spalding took up the crusade to end the debate surrounding the invention of baseball.\(^7^9\)

Spalding proposed the formation of a special “independent” commission to determine baseball’s origins. The person he handpicked to lead the commission was Abraham G. Mills, a man who played baseball during the Civil War, was the third president of the National League, and a firm believer in the American origins of baseball. The much-publicized investigation of the Mills Commission played out in the pages of

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Spalding’s baseball guide, and drew the attention of fans across the country, who voiced their opinions in numerous letters addressed to Spalding and his cohorts. One of these letters, written by a man named Abner Graves, proved to be just what the Mills Commission needed to make their final determination.\(^{80}\)

Graves was a former resident of Cooperstown. At age fourteen, he moved to California to mine for gold, but failed miserably and ended up taking jobs as a pony express rider and railroad worker. He then moved to Iowa where he raised a family and tended cattle. Falling on hard times again, his marriage fell apart and Graves moved to Denver to make another attempt at mining. At the age of seventy-six he took a thirty-nine-year-old bride, but three years later, after accusing her of poisoning his coffee, he shot and killed her. The court found Graves criminally insane and sent him to the Colorado State Insane Asylum where he eventually died.\(^{81}\)

While living in Denver, however, and prior to the murder of his wife, Graves wrote a letter to Spalding claiming that he witnessed Cooperstown resident Abner Doubleday invent the game sometime during the successful presidential campaign of William Henry Harrison. Graves portrayed himself as a childhood friend of Doubleday’s, and claimed that sometime around 1839, Doubleday approached a group of youths playing marbles outside a tailor shop in Cooperstown, drew a baseball diamond in the sand, and began educating the children on the rules of the game.\(^{82}\)


\(^{82}\) Ibid., 50.
While both Graves and Doubleday were natives of Cooperstown, little else from Graves’s story made sense. Abner Doubleday was a general in the Union army during the Civil War. Although he spent his childhood in Cooperstown, his family left the area in 1837. Doubleday entered the military academy at West Point the following year. During his plebe year, in 1839, it is highly unlikely the academy granted him permission to leave. It is even more unlikely that had he been able to leave, Doubleday returned to Cooperstown to see a family that no longer resided there. Additionally, Graves being born in 1834, was five years old in 1839 when Doubleday was twenty, making it highly unlikely the two spent their childhood as friends. After his retirement, Doubleday wrote books on military affairs and aquatic engineering, and none of his associates recalled ever hearing him mention anything about baseball.\footnote{John Robertson, \textit{Baseball’s Greatest Controversies: Rhubarbs, Hoaxes, Blown Calls, Ruthian Myths, Managers’ Miscues and Front–Office Flops} (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1995), 6; Vlasich, \textit{A Legend for the Legendary}, 23, 133; Schroeder, \“Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame,\” 22.}

It seemed much more likely that baseball was never “invented,” but merely evolved from a number of different games over the centuries. Stick and ball games date all the way back to ancient Egypt, and British colonists who settled in Jamestown and Massachusetts played a variety of different versions of these contests. Historians often credit Alexander Cartwright with refining the game into its modern form by giving the field its more recognizable dimensions and taking out such crude practices as getting runners out by throwing the ball at them while they ran the bases. The first game played
under these rules took place in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1846, and provides the best
evidence of the origins of the modern game.\textsuperscript{84}

Still, despite evidence that undermined Graves’s story, Spalding forwarded the
letter to Mills asking that he give it “special attention.” Mills, as a personal friend of
Abner Doubleday’s and who served in the general’s funeral guard in 1893, was only too
happy to utilize this new “evidence” as justification for concluding that baseball was
indeed invented by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown back in 1839. As Mills once
claimed, it was a fact established through “patriotism and research.”\textsuperscript{85}

Of course, it did not hurt Spalding’s cause that many Americans still held grudges
against England dating back to the War of 1812, and proved unwilling to entertain the
thought that America’s national pastime might have roots in anything British. In addition,
as Richard Crepeau argued, the Doubleday myth was important because it gave the sport
a rural origin at a time when many feared that, in the face of industrialization, the game
was losing touch with its rural roots. Additionally, the myth appropriated images of youth
and solidified the game’s American origins at a time of growing nationalism. Finally, the
myth strengthened the patriotic underpinnings of the game by attributing its invention to
a genuine military hero who fought in such famous battles as Fredericksburg,
Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Antietam, and received honorary burial in Arlington.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{84} Grella, “The Hall of Fame and American Mythology,” 153; Robertson, *Baseball’s Greatest Controversies*, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Reisler, *A Great Day in Cooperstown*, 50; Schroeder, “Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame,” 12.
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Alexander Cleland: The Last Piece of the Puzzle

With the necessary financing for a museum available (in the form of the Clark family), and the justification for building a national baseball museum in Cooperstown now well established (thanks to Albert Spalding), all it took was for someone to come up with the idea. Much of the credit for this belongs to Alexander Cleland.

Cleland was a Scottish immigrant who worked to prevent the exploitation of newly arriving immigrants in New York and New Jersey. In 1931, he became director of the Clark House in New York City, an organization started by the Clark Foundation to provide housing for unemployed immigrants. Cleland met with Stephen Clark in Cooperstown on May 6, 1934, to discuss matters related to the Clark House. After the meeting, Cleland went for a stroll through Cooperstown and witnessed a number of workers busily preparing a baseball diamond named “Doubleday Field” for a celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of baseball.87

On his train ride back to the city, Cleland began mulling over plans for “an interesting museum” full of photographs and “funny old uniforms.” Cleland envisioned a nostalgic institution used to draw visitors to Cooperstown and its struggling shopping district. With the backing of Stephen Clark, Cleland set up a meeting with Ford Frick, president of baseball’s National League, in order to get support for the museum from professional baseball. In the wake of declining baseball attendance, Frick recognized that an opportunity to revitalize interest in the game existed in bringing Cleland’s idea to fruition. He knew there was a real market for baseball nostalgia and that a museum might

87 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 30–31.
be a great way to keep interest in baseball alive by connecting generations of fans. Having visited the Hall of Great Americans just days before his meeting with Cleland, Frick suggested combining the museum with a Hall of Fame for enshrining the game’s superstars. On August 16, 1935, the Associated Press announced the creation of the Baseball Hall of Fame. 88

The National Baseball Hall of Fame started out as a small exhibit displaying baseball artifacts at the Village Club in Cooperstown. By the summer of 1937, however, Cleland recognized the need for an independent building dedicated to baseball if the Hall of Fame were to succeed. He hired architect and Cooperstown native Frank Whiting to design a building capable of supporting the lofty vision he had for his museum. 89 As Janet Marstine argued in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, any successful shrine must have classic architecture to help provide the proper atmosphere for the entire performative experience. 90 Whiting delivered just such a building.

Unveiled in the summer of 1937, in the middle of the Great Depression, the two-story, fireproof building on Main Street consisted primarily of James River Colonial brick. It was no accident that this was the same material used in the renovations begun at Colonial Williamsburg a decade earlier. America was in the midst of a passionate Colonial Revival movement. The movement reflected American aversion to urbanization and assembly-line production, while simultaneously promoting nostalgia for the

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88 Ibid., 38; Reisler, *A Great Day in Cooperstown*, 23–25, 75; Chafets, *Cooperstown Confidential*, 30–32.

89 Whiting also designed the Singer Building in Manhatten.

country’s simpler, pre-industrial past—a sentiment that fit perfectly into the Cooperstown landscape.\(^9\) As Hall of Fame director Ken Smith wrote years later when observing the Hall of Fame building, “You can sense in the spiral lines of the original single edifice ever so slight a suggestion of an early American colonial church, just enough to provide the reverence called for by the nature of the foundation.”\(^9\)

With the building under construction, Cleland asked Harry Edwards to prepare bronze plaques for the first inductees. Each plaque contained a likeness of the player, and listed their positions played, years in the league, statistics, and a brief write-up of each player’s career. In order to avoid turning the election process into a popularity contest, voting for Hall of Fame inductees fell to the 226 members of the Baseball Writers Association of America.\(^9\) The first class of inductees (voted on in 1936) included what Ken Smith called, the five “Paul Bunyans” of baseball—men who would have played baseball even without the existence of any professional leagues “because of the depth to which [baseball] is rooted within the soul of the growing American boy.”\(^9\) These men were Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, and Walter Johnson.

**Filling the Displays**

As Cleland and company worked feverishly to get the museum ready for its grand opening in 1939, the Baseball Hall of Fame found itself in a peculiar position. Founded

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on a myth, masterminded by men (i.e. Clark and Cleland) who expressed little interest in baseball, given legitimacy by a former high school teacher turned baseball commissioner (Ford Frick), and born out of a desire to increase tourism in the hometown of a benefactor’s beloved grandmother, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum was hardly on its way to becoming “Baseball’s Smithsonian.” In fact, from the very beginning, it looked as if it might be a museum almost completely devoid of artifacts.

Despite all the support for his vision, Cleland initially struggled to acquire objects worthy of display at a national baseball museum. The centerpiece of the original collection came to the museum thanks to a genuine stroke of luck. Back in 1934, with the idea for the museum still in its infancy, demolition began on a house in nearby Fly Creek, New York. In the attic of the house lay a trunk unopened for generations. Both the house and the trunk once belonged to none other than Abner Graves. When a local farmer opened the trunk, he found a homemade baseball—small, misshapen, and stuffed with cloth. Thanks to Graves’s connection to the Doubleday myth, the managing editor of the Otsego Farmer, Walter Little, named the artifact the “Doubleday ball.” Stephen Clark purchased the ball for five dollars, put it on display at the Village Club, and the museum had its “holy grail.”

The jumpstart the Doubleday ball provided for Cleland’s collecting efforts was palpable, but Cleland still worried about having enough artifacts to make the new museum as grand as he envisioned. Much of the early collecting took place informally—often through word of mouth or through visitors providing artifact leads to museum

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95 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 35; Reisler, A Great Day in Cooperstown, 69; Smith, Baseball’s Hall of Fame, 52.
Through these efforts, the “every man” actually played a key early role in contributing to the founding of a museum built essentially for their enjoyment.

Additionally, the Hall’s founders solicited artifacts through advertisements in the *Sporting News*, helping provide the museum with more national exposure. Cleland also tried soliciting donations in person. He drove to Walter Johnson’s farm in Germantown, Maryland, met with Honus Wagner outside of Pittsburgh, and made the trek to visit Cy Young on his farm in Ohio. All of these efforts served two purposes. The first was to acquire enough artifacts to fill up the display spaces in a museum that relied heavily on objects to speak to visitors without the benefits of interpretation. The second, was to provide the type of object capable of evoking the awe and reverence patrons expected to feel when entering a holy shrine. It was a monumental task for Cleland, but one in which he succeeded by the time of the museum’s official dedication.  

*Opening Day*

On the morning of June 12, 1939, the first train to come through the area in five years brought baseball heroes and fans to Cooperstown. Red, white, and blue ribbons hung from the museum doors, the Hall of Fame proudly displayed its American-flag-inspired official logo on popular merchandise, and the red, white, and blue ceremonial program promoted Americana-themed tourism (particularly landmarks found in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper).

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96 Vlasich, *A Legend for the Legendary*, 60.


Annual elections added fourteen additional Hall of Fame inductees to the original five by the time of opening day. Among them was Alexander Cartwright, recognized by the baseball writers in 1938 as the founder of the modern game. Adding more than a little irony to the induction ceremony, Abner Doubleday did not garner the necessary votes for enshrinement.\(^9\) The very man the museum credited with inventing baseball and bringing about the founding of the museum in Cooperstown did not carry enough credibility in baseball circles to make it into the Hall of Fame.

The Doubleday ball, as well as a portrait of Doubleday himself, did make it into the museum, however, and illustrated the difference between enshrinement in the Hall of Fame and representation in the museum. It was a confusing paradox that played out in even more dramatic fashion later in the museum’s history.

Another ironic twist greeting visitors to Cooperstown on that June day occurred at Doubleday Field. After walking Cooperstown’s streets alongside such baseball legends as Babe Ruth, Walter Johnson, Connie Mack, and Ty Cobb, fans witnessed a demonstration of baseball’s evolution. Players participated in games meant to show fans how the rules changed from the game of “four-old-cat” to baseball in its modern form. This demonstration flew in the face of the “immaculate conception” theory promoted by the Doubleday myth and proved symbolic of the Hall’s inconsistent portrayal of baseball’s origins through much of its early history.

While the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum is an independent, non-profit organization, and thus not under the same pressures as museums like the Smithsonian (which partially rely on government funding), the patriotic and nationalistic

\(^9\) Ibid., 165; Reisler, *A Great Day in Cooperstown*, 166.
implications of events transpiring in Cooperstown still regularly catch the attention of government entities in Washington, D.C. This certainly proved true of the dedication ceremonies in June of 1939. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent a letter to the ceremony’s organizers expressing his delight “that the history of our perennially popular sport should be immortalized in the National Baseball Museum at Cooperstown”\(^\text{100}\) As a show of support, the U. S. government issued 65 million commemorative three-cent stamps for the occasion, sending one million of them to the Cooperstown post office. Cooperstown postmaster Melvin C. Bundy reported that 450,000 pieces of mail left his post office with the Cooperstown cancellation mark that day.\(^\text{101}\)

The mail volume flowing through Bundy’s operation came from a crowd of 15,000 people in Cooperstown—five times the town’s population. In 1939, Cooperstown had two police officers, one who worked during the day and one at night, so additional officers arrived from Utica to help monitor the crowds that overwhelmed the quiet little village. By the end of 1939, the Hall of Fame hosted nearly 28,000 visitors from every U.S. state (except Wyoming), and from thirty-one foreign countries, all coming through Cooperstown to view bits and pieces of history and pay homage to the sacred relics of America’s national pastime.\(^\text{102}\)


\(^\text{101}\) Smith, Baseball’s Hall of Fame, 12.

\(^\text{102}\) Reisler, A Great Day in Cooperstown, 25–26, 206.
CHAPTER 3
EARLY EXHIBITRY AND THE CULT OF THE OBJECT

An analysis of the first forty years in which the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum operated provides useful insight into understanding its exhibits in more recent decades. In order to evaluate the changes occurring at the Hall of Fame, it is necessary to first establish the state of the museum prior to these changes. From the late 1930s until the late 1970s, events transpired that shaped the culture of the museum in meaningful and lasting ways. An early reliance on objects and nostalgia, the hiring of baseball sportswriters as exhibit design staff, and the encroachment of national social movements, all shaped the early exhibits and defined the institution for decades to come. By examining these factors, a clearer picture emerges of the complex forces influencing the museum’s displays during its early history and why they proved such formidable obstacles to change in recent years.

The early manifestations of the Baseball Hall of Fame recall a time when museums were little more than object warehouses meant to provide feel-good experiences. People came to Cooperstown to reminisce and surround themselves in something that made them happy, and more often, to celebrate. By emphasizing on-field achievements, the Baseball Hall of Fame honored the game’s greats and provided a place for people to worship their heroes. It was a period that lasted the better part of four decades in the museum’s history.

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103 Erik Strohl (Senior Director of Exhibits and Collections), interview by author, September 13, 2012.
The Hall of Fame’s dedication in 1939 happened to coincide with the completion of a detailed study on museums in America by Laurence Vail Coleman. Exhibits relating to history, Coleman concluded, received little scholarly attention from the museum community. Consequently, the industry lacked standardized practices for displaying history in a museum setting. This resulted in history exhibits consisting of “little more than objects arrayed on view.”\footnote{Coleman, \textit{The Museum in America}, 264.} In this respect, the Baseball Hall of Fame reflected the trends occurring within larger museum culture in 1939.

When opened, the first exhibit displays consisted of rectangular glass-case tables made of wood and filled with artifacts, complimented by photographs and paintings hung along the walls, interspersed with the bronze plaques of enshrined players. Aligned much like church pews on either side of a long carpet running down the middle of the floor, the tables provide an aura of domesticity, but little connection to baseball. Huge windows let in plenty of natural light, accented by a large chandelier hanging in the middle of the room, sconces along the outer walls, and a large fireplace at the end adorned with the Doubleday ball and portrait. These early exhibits not only exemplified the lack of understanding about the damaging effects of light and temperature on artifacts, but also provide fitting examples of the unenlightening, object-centric displays Laurence Coleman lamented as being so prevalent during this period.\footnote{Wall panel, \textit{Cooperstown Room}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012.}
Early artifacts found homes in Cooperstown because of their association with specific players or people important to baseball, or perhaps because they represented historical antecedents to the tools of the current game. Some of the first artifacts highlighted throughout the 1,200 square foot museum space included a glove used by Christy Mathewson, the baseball from Cy Young’s 500th win, and a pair of shoes worn by Babe Ruth. These objects drew visitors to Cooperstown because their association with the heroes of America’s national pastime provided them with sociological value while their display within a museum setting affirmed their significance and authenticity.  

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Authors Rachel Maines and James J. Glynn argued, “The significance of these [types of] artifacts is psychological rather than material; it is as if they are, to borrow a term from Roman paganism, inhabited by a numen or spirit that calls forth in many of us a reaction of awe and reverence.”107 This awe and reverence played a vital role in drawing patrons to the Hall of Fame because the museum provided little else.

The early exhibits lacked text (other than labels), or storylines provided for the objects from which visitors might ascertain their significance. Like props in a play, objects in a museum are necessary, but insufficient for providing a multi-layered comprehension of the subject matter. Visual observation provides only a partial understanding of an object and its place in history.108 For example, by looking at the bat Hank Aaron used to break Babe Ruth’s all-time homerun record on April 8, 1974, a museum visitor cannot hear the sounds of the stadium from that night swirling around them. They cannot smell the popcorn, listen to the excitement in the announcer’s voice, comprehend the significance of the broken record within American sporting culture, or understand the implications Aaron’s pursuit of the record had on race relations in America. This degree of contextualization is something the modern visitor expects from their museum experience, but back in the 1930s and ‘40s, these experiences were not in high demand by the museum-going public. Curators of this era left artifacts to speak for themselves.


This is not to say, however, that without this modern emphasis on contextualization that these objects offered nothing to the museum experience. Artifacts are important primary sources of historical evidence and their presence in the museum gives them the power to generate a variety of meanings once viewed from below the surface. For example, after the Hall put on display an autographed baseball Stephen Clark obtained from Babe Ruth, the ball took on a newer and greater power in its museum life than it ever did during its functional days. A mass-produced ball may look indistinguishable from thousands of its counterparts, but a viewer knowing something about baseball transfers personal meaning to the ball. For someone who watched Babe Ruth play, the ball might take on an entirely different meaning than it did for a fan whose team repeatedly lost to the Yankees. Just viewing the object for what it is (a baseball), provides an opportunity for the object to take on an incredibly diverse array of meanings—varying in significance for someone whose job it is to produce baseballs, for a soldier stationed far from home, for an advertising executive looking for a way to connect with the American public, for a scholar pursuing leisure studies in the United States, or for a parent reliving childhood memories. This is the power objects have to help us extract any number of diverse, and often personal, meanings from them.\(^\text{109}\)

A derivative of this process is the part objects play in identity formation. According to sociologist Jean Baudrillard, people project identity on to objects as a way of ensuring some form of immortality—knowing that in most cases these objects survive us. The objects most relevant to the discussion of public history in museums are the ones

that symbolize group identity—these include revered objects such as flags or the Declaration of Independence. During the formative years of the Baseball Hall of Fame, these symbols of collective experience included a framed print of Union prisoners playing baseball in Salisbury, North Carolina, during the Civil War, a Currier and Ives print from 1866 showing a game being played in Hoboken, New Jersey, and photographs of De Wolf Hooper obtained by Alexander Cleland because of Hooper’s inspiring rendition of “Casey at the Bat.” All of these artifacts, despite their lack of contextualization, found display space in the museum and provided a way for visitors to engage in the process of group identity formation.  

Perhaps the most common way group identity formation actually occurred, however, was through the celebration of achievement. Artifacts like the china plate won by the 1889 National League champion New York Giants allowed people to feel pride and awe and to identify with the success of the team.  

As Maines and Glynn noted, “Typically, artifacts of achievement are exhibited by groups who identify, or who would like to identify, with the achiever(s).” Americans celebrate and honor achievement with an enthusiasm unmatched by most other cultures. The popularity of Halls of Fame in America speaks to this. By focusing on the artifacts of heroes and champions, the Baseball Hall of Fame, in some way, reflected values found in broader culture. The

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112 Maines and Glynn, “Numinous Objects,” 15.
natural (and often unconscious) compulsion to display identity through the exhibit process resulted in a display of objects that allowed Americans to indulge their passion for success.113

Nostalgia

Another useful function of objects at the Hall of Fame, one found even in the museum’s earliest days, is their ability to generate shared experiences by evoking nostalgia. During the era in which plans for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum came together, museum collection standards resembled that of an antiques market. Amateur collectors of Anglo-Saxon origins and from upper-middle-class and upper-class backgrounds felt a connection to the past based largely on nostalgia. Nostalgia was a major motivator during this time, as war and industrialization made Americans long to add some continuity to their lives by connecting with their roots. Curators, like the ones at the Hall of Fame, displayed the objects that helped Americans make these connections.114

Swiss doctor Johannes Hoffer actually coined the term “nostalgia” in 1688, labeling it a form of mental disorder that exacerbated both physical and mental maladies in soldiers campaigning far from home. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it


Today, thanks to pioneering research by doctors like Constantine Sedikides at the University of Southampton, professionals possess radically revised views on nostalgia. Psychologists now recognize that nostalgia serves an important sociological function—largely as a coping mechanism. It allows people to negotiate through difficult and confusing realities by softening the jolt of rapid change. In addition, researchers found that nostalgia counteracted loneliness and boredom, made subjects’ lives appear more meaningful, and in one study conducted by Xinyue Zhou of Sun Yat-Sen University, even made people feel physically warmer.\footnote{116 Ibid.}

A nostalgic feeling is typically one of joy, pleasure, and love tinged by sadness caused by the longing for times and places that no longer exist.\footnote{117 Kohe, “Civic Representations of Sports History,” 14; Snyder, “Sociology of Nostalgia,” 229–231.} Sociologist Eldon Snyder referred to nostalgia as “a retreat, a haven, an oasis from personal anxieties. It is often represented in a longing for simplicity and innocence.”\footnote{118 Snyder, “Sociology of Nostalgia,” 238.}

The use of nostalgia is often present in museums because of the personal connections people make with objects. Objects have the ability to connect across
generations and provide a place of respite from the emotional and psychological effects of aging. The most cherished of these objects are usually the ones that reflect earlier aspects about an individual, usually frozen in time at a particular stage of their development.\footnote{Rosenzweig and Thelan, \textit{The Presence of the Past}, 25; Elsner and Cardinal, “Introduction,” 1; Csikszentmihalyi, “Why We Need Things,” 26.}

At the Hall, two of the grandest purveyors of nostalgia (baseball and museums), come together to produce nostalgia on an epic scale. Museums produce nostalgia by helping people connect to their past through the processes of recollection and reminiscing, while baseball evokes nostalgia through childhood innocence and a broad appeal that creates collective experience on a national level. An article in the June 1939 issue of \textit{Baseball Magazine} demonstrated the degree to which nostalgia existed in the Hall of Fame museum dating back to its inception, when the author reflected on the great players of the past and how moving it was to “see them again, in memory, as they were when their gleaming spikes were burning up the big leagues in their flaming hey-day that left an unfading trail of baseball splendor in their wake.”\footnote{W. R. Hoefer, “Starlight at Cooperstown,” \textit{Baseball Magazine}, June 1939, 292.}

A small statue donated by the wife of John McGraw and a favorite mitt donated by the widow of Christy Mathewson helped evoke nostalgic memories in a generation of baseball fans who spent their childhoods in a perpetual state of reverence for these idols. Fan-donated scorecards from Johnny Vander Meer’s consecutive no-hit games, as artifacts of a record-breaking performance, proved particularly effective at providing the
type of “flashbulb memory” typically associated with nostalgia.\textsuperscript{121} Even the Hall of Fame building itself, built in the Colonial Revival style, made fans long for a simpler time.

The use of nostalgia in museums, however, sometimes proves more problematic than beneficial. The presence of nostalgia often undermines the history within the museum. It may make a historical narrative appear to be a parody of itself, compromised in the name of commodifying history.\textsuperscript{122} This is the reservation many academics have when assessing history in sports museums, and in the years to come, finding a way to temper the deeply entrenched nostalgia in the Hall of Fame’s exhibits proved one of the more difficult challenges to the institution’s transition from trophy case to history museum. But in its formative years, nostalgia proved particularly effective in drawing fans to Cooperstown and allowing the museum to find stable footing.

\textit{Material Studies}

Another angle from which it is possible to garner meaning from object-focused displays is through an examination of the materials that make up the objects. In \textit{History From Things: Essays on Material Culture}, Robert Friedel argued that an understanding of objects begins with a study of the materials that go into the objects. Whether it be for reasons of function, economics, availability, style, or tradition, there are reasons the makers of objects chose particular materials.\textsuperscript{123} It is possible to glean much information from a look at how objects change over time, the evolution of their manufacturing and

\textsuperscript{121} Snyder, “Sociology of Nostalgia,” 230–232.

\textsuperscript{122} Cronin, “Croke Park,” 101.

materials, the fluctuating emphasis placed on characteristics such as durability or aesthetics, and what all of these factors tell us about the times in which the objects existed.

For example, manufacturers produced the first baseball hats out of straw. What does that tell us about the availability of materials during this time? What message does that convey about baseball’s agrarian past? Does this fact evoke feelings of nostalgia in the baseball fan, and why? As baseball hat production moved into the latter part of the nineteenth century, manufacturers patterned baseball hats after those worn by train conductors and horse jockeys. If nothing else, this certainly hints at the prominence of each profession during the Reconstruction era.124

An even more poignant example comes from viewing baseball equipment produced during the Second World War. Baseball bats of the era came from American-grown ash trees, and cleats came primarily from readily available Australian kangaroo leather. This equipment remained largely unchanged during the war. The composition of baseballs, however, changed dramatically. An article appearing in a 1941 issue of *Baseball Magazine* lamented, “Now it appears that Nazi control of central and southern Europe will have a more damaging and far-reaching effect upon baseball than will the year’s loss of a few stars. For it is from the Balkans that one of the most important components of baseball equipment comes. It is horsehide, for which no adequate

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substitute has been found as a covering for the round object used in our national pastime.”¹²⁵

Baseball manufacturers obtained more horsehide from Europe during this period than they did from domestic sources. Producers believed horsehide from the Balkans to be of particularly high quality. The reliance on overseas sources for baseball manufacturing spoke to changes occurring across the American landscape. Thanks to growing urbanization and increased mechanization on the country’s farms, American horse populations fell from twenty-seven million during World War I to approximately fifteen million by World War II.¹²⁶ As a result, the War Production Board sent a letter to baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis asking professional baseball to “employ the utmost conservation measures in the use of baseballs.”¹²⁷ The baseball covering was so important to maintaining the integrity of the game that one New York Times writer even suggested an additional enshrineree be inducted into the Hall of Fame: “I refer, of course, to Horace Hyde—horse hide to most of us—who has died a million deaths in order that the great national game could have a suitable covering for its baseballs.”¹²⁸


¹²⁶ Ibid.


The flax for baseball stitching came from Russia and Belgium. While America produced its own yarn, the valuable cork that made up the center of the baseball came from cork trees grown in Nazi-held Portugal and Spain, and the Dutch East Indies produced the rubber used for balls, bases, pitching mounds, and bat-handle tape. The lack of available cork and rubber forced manufacturers to replace these materials with balata, a substance obtained from tropical trees that proved so problematic, one professional player compared it to hitting a piece of concrete.\textsuperscript{129}

*The Shrine*

A look at the materials that made up the Hall of Fame’s objects, how these objects evoked nostalgia, and what they tell us about how Americans celebrate achievement, provide just some of the ways it is possible to view history in the Baseball Hall of Fame in the years prior to the museum’s commitment to contextualizing objects through historical narrative. Of course, the most common way these objects told stories during the Hall of Fame’s early years was through association, usually with people or events. It was this connection with the game’s greats or epic milestones in the game’s history that brought visitors to the museum and gave birth to the perception of the museum as a shrine.

For the Hall of Fame to rely on association as a way to draw patrons into the museum implies that the museum vested visitors with a certain knowledge of the game prior to their arrival in Cooperstown, and thus with the ability to appreciate the significance of the objects on display even without panels provided to explain this significance. If visitor knowledge is implied, as is the ability to appreciate the

\textsuperscript{129} Bryson, “New Threat to Baseball,” 422; *Baseball Enlists*, online exhibit.
significance of the museum objects, than it must be inferred that the motivation for visitors to get in their cars and drive for hours into the middle of nowhere is their reverence for these objects and a desire to pay homage to them in person. This creates the impression that the museum is, in some form, a shrine. It is this perception of the Hall of Fame that has kept many scholars away and proved most difficult to overcome as the “history museum” phase of the Hall’s evolution began.

When the public views a museum as a shrine, an aura hangs over the objects that assigns them meaning completely unrelated to their original function. A baseball is just a tool of the game, but a baseball taken from the field and given a place of honor in a museum becomes an entirely different type of object altogether. Visitors stare in quiet contemplation and speak in hushed tones out of respect for these objects, which, as Susan Pearce described, seemed to be “the living dead among us . . . entering into present life.”

The museum structures themselves add to this shrine perception. The classical exteriors of these buildings imply they are places of ritual, while the interior spaces invite patrons to take time out for reflection. In addition, the placement of museums in locations of historical significance makes it all the more difficult for them “to overcome the powerful tendency to present themselves, and for audiences to perceive them, as


This is all certainly true of the Baseball Hall of Fame, whose Colonial Revival architecture and location at the birthplace of the country’s national pastime make it extremely difficult for visitors to move past the impulse to worship the game’s most holy relics, achievements, and personalities.

But it takes more than objects, buildings, and locations to make a museum into a shrine. To attribute the Hall of Fame’s perception as such solely to these factors unjustly diminishes the role of human influence. The first four decades of history at the Baseball Hall of Fame was a manifestation of the beliefs, values, and training of the frontline staff as well. The documents and objects in the museum told stories based on the preferences of directors and curators and the choices they made in selecting, arranging, and interpreting these artifacts—decisions driven primarily by the aesthetic characteristics of the object, their historical association with a player or accomplishment, and their availability within the museum’s collection.

These early staffers were baseball men, not historians or museum curators. This was the result of numerous factors, including the conservative values of the museum and its desire to protect and promote the game, a lack of demand for museums of the era to provide historical context within displays, and a lack of professional interest on the part of scholars of the era to engage in studies of material culture. In the early twentieth century, most academically trained historians saw little value in focusing on the needs of the community. Historians of the era largely saw themselves as scientists, gathering data, analyzing their findings, and publishing them for review by their peers. They

\[133\] Leon and Rosenzweig, “Introduction,” xxi.
demonstrated little desire to work collaboratively or to diminish their prestige by working in nonacademic environments.\textsuperscript{134}

Due, in part, to these factors, the Hall’s earliest decision makers provided a largely antiquarian model from which future Hall of Fame displays emerged. The Hall’s efforts were in keeping with the expectations of their constituency, and thus they manifested themselves in museum displays grouped together by category or by year, but demonstrating little further attempt at the type of interpretation museumgoers began demanding later in the century.

Mid-Century Antiquarianism

Bill Beattie was the first curator of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Born in Ireland in 1874, he served in the British Army in India before arriving in Cooperstown in 1898. Prior to working at the Hall of Fame, he was a sales manager for the U.S. Hoffman Machinery Company and worked for the retail grocery firm, G. M. Grant and Company. When Stephen Clark hired him for the Hall, Beattie was already a Clark employee, working at the gymnasium next door.\textsuperscript{135}

Beattie’s curatorial qualifications mirrored those of many staff members in the first decades of the museum’s existence. It was an era when the expectations of a curator


\textsuperscript{135} Ted Spencer (former Chief Curator and Vice President, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum), in discussion with the author, September 11, 2012.
involved little more than collecting anything and everything, and finding orderly and aesthetically pleasing ways to display collections. While Beattie did not bring a museum or baseball background to the museum’s displays, there are those associated with the Hall of Fame who consider him the hero of the early years for the work he did establishing a working relationship with Major League Baseball that allowed the Hall to dramatically expand its collections. The efforts Beattie made at cultivating the museum’s relationship with professional baseball addressed one of the museum’s earliest and most agonizing logistical dilemmas—access to a steady supply of new artifacts for display. In addition, baseball’s willingness to entrust its most sacred objects to the Hall of Fame’s care provided an added degree of legitimacy to the museum’s authority over all things baseball.136

Among Beattie’s successors were men like Ernest Lanigan, a former music critic, bank clerk, farmer, and baseball writer who took charge of the museum’s exhibits in 1946, and J. A. Robert Quinn, a former baseball manager, coach, ticket seller, and groundskeeper in the Indiana State League who went on to serve as president of the Boston Braves.137 Together, these and other Hall of Fame curators and directors—positions that sometimes overlapped—during the early years sought to put the museum on solid footing. They oversaw an initiative to have the bronze enshrinee plaques

136 The relationship between Major League Baseball and the Baseball Hall of Fame is explored in greater detail during a discussion of the museum’s operational structure and financing in chapter 7.

photographed and cleaned, developed the museum’s first accessioning process, displayed new artifacts, and initiated a project to solicit donations of sheet music for some of baseball’s most famous songs, including “Baseball Polka,” “Let’s Get the Umpire’s Goat,” “Jake (The Yiddish Ball Player),” and “They All Know Cobb.” Most importantly, however, the early management and curatorial staff’s ability to maintain public enthusiasm for their collections put the Hall of Fame in a position to take advantage of the explosion in popularity of museums during the post-war era.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, the United States maintained 7 percent of the world’s population while generating 42 percent of the world’s income and owning 75 percent of its gold. This post-war boom allowed car ownership to become a standard part of middle-class life; and Americans, driving on newly constructed highways and flush with spendable income, poured money into recreational and leisure pursuits. As a result, baseball prospered in the post-war years, hosting a record eleven million fans at ballgames in 1945, and nearly doubling that number by 1948.139

This rapid change in lifestyle brought with it more than financial prosperity, however, it also brought a sense of discontinuity. Anxiety about the pace of change across the country, coupled with fears about its implications for the future, led Americans to compensate for the disconnect they felt from their past with generous helpings of

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nostalgia. As a result, Americans attended museums and historic sites in record numbers. Halls of fame, in particular, exploded in popularity, with their numbers tripling in the decade following the war.\textsuperscript{140}

In Cooperstown, the architectural firm of Harry St. Clair Zogbaum put the finishing touches on a $175,000 expansion that doubled the size of the Hall of Fame. Dedicated on July 24, 1950, the addition of the West Wing helped the Hall evolve into a flourishing tourist attraction. Hosting just 8,266 visitors in 1945, by the early 1950s, tourists poured into the Hall of Fame at a rate of over 130,000 annually.\textsuperscript{141} The museum became so popular, a 1954 article in the \textit{Saturday Review} anointed the Baseball Hall of Fame, “New York State’s Williamsburg.”\textsuperscript{142}

While the Hall really began referring to itself as a museum during this period, in actuality, there was still not a great deal of modern curatorial work taking place. The presence or absence of artifacts in the museum’s collection drove exhibit decisions. Consequently, curators took a largely antiquarian approach to their jobs, focusing on assembling vast collections while largely ignoring interpretation. The result was displays of artifacts haphazardly arranged in overwhelming numbers without context or meaning other than what visitors extracted on their own. These artifacts included lockers belonging to Honus Wagner, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Joe DiMaggio (complete with

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\item \textsuperscript{140} Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, 533–535; Vlasich, \textit{A Legend for the Legendary}, 217.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Wall panel, \textit{Cooperstown Room}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012; Muder, email.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Cleveland Armory, “Trade Winds,” \textit{Saturday Review}, August 21, 1954.
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jerseys, cleats, etc.). A uniform worn by Walter Johnson during the 1925 World Series, Eddie Collins’s 1907 contract (paying him $400 a month), a bench used by manager Connie Mack, and the bat Babe Ruth used to hit his sixtieth homerun in 1927, all filled the display spaces with objects revered by the ardent baseball fan, but were perhaps of little significance to anyone unfamiliar with baseball history.143

With Americans feeling good about their new dominant position in the world hierarchy, and with a renewed sense of nationalism instilling pride during the Cold War, patriotism ran rampant through heritage displays across the country in the 1950s. In Cooperstown, the museum took this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to displaying publicly sanctioned values by developing exhibits about American Legion Junior Baseball and by hanging giant pictures of American presidents engaging in “first pitch” ceremonies at ballgames. On August 18, 1958, the United States government once again gave the museum its official endorsement when the Senate passed a resolution sponsored by Republican Senators Jacob K. Javits and Irving M. Ives recognizing the Hall of Fame for its contributions to preserving “our National Game.”144

The 1950s also brought an appreciation to Cooperstown for the growing influence of media and entertainment—both on the game of baseball and as a tool for reaching museum audiences. In April of 1956, the Hall of Fame hosted a filming of the popular television show, You Asked For It, and later that summer, proudly displayed exhibit highlights in a radio and television simulcast on WMGM, New York. The influence of

143 Spencer, discussion; Scrapbook, 1956–59, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.

144 Scrapbook, 1956–59, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
the media came into play again on June 29, 1956, when John F. Morrisey of Bronxville, New York, became the one-millionth visitor to the Baseball Hall of Fame, and Hall of Fame director, Sid Keener, immediately fired off a letter to Leo Peterson of the United Press Association in order to capitalize on the publicity. The summer of ’56 also witnessed the museum’s unveiling of a gold recording of the famous “Who’s On First?” comedy sketch first performed by Bud Abbott and Lou Costello at the Oriental Theater in Chicago in 1936. It was the first time the Hall of Fame honored performers from the entertainment industry with a permanent display (but not the last). The 1950s merely provided a preview of the utilization of media and popular culture references used by the Hall of Fame to connect audiences with baseball history in the decades to come.

\textit{Plaque Gallery}

Perhaps the most significant event to occur at the Hall of Fame in the 1950s redefined the institution itself. Since the announcement (back in August of 1935), that the national baseball museum in Cooperstown would also house a hall of fame, the plaques of hall of fame enshrinees hung on the museum’s walls interspersed with historic artifacts. In this way, the history displays in the museum and the celebration of the game’s heroes became indistinguishable from one another. The artifacts functioned less as storytellers than as evidence used to reaffirm the greatness of the players immortalized around them. This all changed as the 1950s came to a close.

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145 Sid C. Keener served as the sports editor of the \textit{St. Louis Star–Times} from 1929 until June of 1951, when the \textit{St. Louis Post–Dispatch} bought the paper. He came to the Hall of Fame as its new director in 1952.

146 Scrapbook, 1956–59, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown; Sid C. Keener to Leo Peterson, 29 June 1956. Scrapbook Collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
On April 4, 1958, the Hall of Fame dedicated a gallery built exclusively for displaying the plaques of enshrined players. Measuring 85 ½ feet long and 43 ½ feet wide, the plaque gallery’s exterior consisted of brick and steel supported by marble columns. Inside, the Hall displayed the flags of baseball-playing nations around the world, while reserving a special spot for “Old Glory.” This self-proclaimed “chapel-like structure” housed an interior of oak and marble, providing a place where “the plaques can be displayed with the dignity, reverence, and respect that they deserve.”

The significance of this new addition to the Baseball Hall of Fame comes into clearer focus upon reviewing the comments of later director, Howard Talbot. According to Talbot, “In the 1950s, we really began to realize that we were two institutions under one roof—a Hall of Fame, where we honored the all-time greats, and a Museum, where we told the history of baseball.” This differentiation proved critical in formulating the museum’s future identity. In a sense, going forward, the Hall of Fame served multiple purposes, one providing monuments to bring back the dead for veneration by future generations, and the other, providing opportunities to tell the history of those enshrined in the plaque gallery—but also the stories of those not enshrined. This separation freed future museum staff to approach displays from new and unique perspectives without the

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limitations of the plaque gallery’s celebratory aura. The completion of the gallery also proved beneficial by increasing public awareness that there was more to the Baseball Hall of Fame than just statistic-laden bronze plaques. After a visit to the Hall of Fame to view the new plaque gallery in 1959, *Saturday Evening Post* sports editor, Harry T. Paxton, declared, “I did not realize there were so many exhibits.”

*Changing of the Guard*

Historian Paul Johnson credits the Eisenhower years for being “the last of the century in which the traditional elements in American society held the cultural upper hand. Eisenhower's America was still recognizably derived from the republic of the Founding Fathers. There were still thousands of small towns in the United States where the world of Norman Rockwell was intact and unselfconsciously confident in itself and its values. Patriotism was esteemed. The flag was saluted. The melting-pot was still at work, turning out unhyphenated Americans.” But the 1960s brought tremendous change. Urban economic decay, a lack of opportunity and equality for women, the overwhelming population of minorities living in poverty, a decline in American economic power, and generational distrust promoted an environment of open hostility toward institutions of authority.

At the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, there was a changing of the guard. On September 17, 1960, Hall of Fame founder and president, Stephen C. Clark,  

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151 Scrapbook, 1956–59, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.  


passed away at the age of seventy-eight. Paul S. Kerr, a man who had worked at the Hall of Fame since its founding, became Clark’s successor in 1961. Two years earlier, the Hall of Fame hired a new historian, Lee Allen, a former publicity writer for the Cincinnati Reds and staff member at The Sporting News. Allen, considered one of the nation’s top baseball historians, took over a post vacated by Ernest Lanigan the previous year. Then, in 1963, the Hall hired a new director, Ken Smith, a former sports writer for the Hartford Courant and New York Daily Mirror.¹⁵⁴

The new leadership at the Hall of Fame reacted to the tremendous upheaval of the 1960s by remaining a rock of conservative stability. Little changed in terms of exhibitry. Exhibition tables, measuring approximately 40 inches high, 60-70 inches long, and 25-30 inches deep, were “purposely the opposite of ornate.”¹⁵⁵ Large, open windows (occasionally adorned with a houseplant), offered a great deal of natural light, while the museum relied on radiators and house fans to provide climate control. Square, blocky picture frames and display cases lined the walls, using shape and mass to reinforce the feel of a sturdy, unwavering institution.¹⁵⁶


¹⁵⁵ List of Display Cases For Sale, December 11, 1979, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown; Smith, Baseball’s Hall of Fame, 40.

¹⁵⁶ Wall panel, Cooperstown Room, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012; Falk and Dierking, Learning from Museums, 124.
The focus of the museum’s displays turned to some of the traditional icons of the game. The Doubleday ball and portrait remained a fixture of the museum collections. Exhibits featured a baseball contract signed by Mickey Mantle, turnstiles from the old Polo Grounds, a recording of Jackie Gleason performing “Casey at the Bat,” and the last baseball used at Ebbets Field. The Hall remodeled the Babe Ruth exhibit and installed a Connie Mack collection on the second floor. All of these iconic figures utilized by the Hall of Fame provided visitors with some reassuring continuity to the America of their past. The Hall even took the opportunity to reaffirm its connection to official sources of institutional memory by installing a revolving mount in 1969 for showing off a baseball.

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157 Despite the increasingly apparent holes in the Doubleday myth, Ken Smith viewed Cooperstown as a “shrine to the pioneering spirit of one Abner Doubleday, whose ingenuity conceived the first game of baseball.”
signed by Presidents Taft, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.158

More than anything, however, the 60s were about race, and in that respect, the Baseball Hall of Fame was lagging behind the times. The first obvious sign of trouble came in 1962 when Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller wrote an article for the Saturday Evening Post calling for the Hall to enshrine Satchel Paige, the great Negro Leagues pitcher who was in his 40s by the time Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball. In 1966, as part of his induction speech, Ted Williams brought the issue back to the forefront when he lobbied for the Hall of Fame to open its doors to all members of the Negro Leagues.159

The argument against allowing players from the Negro Leagues into the Hall of Fame, one vocalized by Ford Frick, was that it watered down the Hall of Fame’s standards (as Negro Leagues players did not have ten years of major league experience and there existed little statistical evidence of their on-field achievements). It was an argument that infuriated civil rights leaders, especially those that witnessed the same logic used to deny blacks employment throughout the country, not (supposedly) because of their race, but because of their lack of experience.160

158 Scrapbook, 1965, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown; Scrapbook, 1965–69, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.


160 Ibid., 186–187.
By the 1970s, the Hall of Fame had two African American players in its plaque gallery—Jackie Robinson being awarded induction in 1962 and Roy Campanella in 1969—but no Negro Leagues players. Mounting pressure on professional baseball and the Hall of Fame to atone for this injustice prompted Major League Baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn to promote a compromise, calling on the Hall of Fame to create a separate museum exhibit dedicated to honoring stars of the Negro Leagues. This “separate but equal” approach in the Hall of Fame only lent greater volume to the outcries of a public that began accusing the Hall of Fame of being a racist institution.\textsuperscript{161}

In an attempt to settle the controversy, the Hall of Fame flew Satchel Paige to Cooperstown and made him a full-fledged inductee on July 6, 1971. Bowie Kuhn then set up a special committee to review the careers of Negro Leaguers for induction into the Hall of Fame and the committee elected a number of players throughout the 1970s, including Buck Leonard and Josh Gibson in 1972, Monte Irvin in 1973, Cool Papa Bell in 1974, Judy Johnson in 1975, Oscar Charleston in 1976, and Pop Lloyd and Martin Dihigo in 1977. In 1977, the committee disbanded and handed their responsibilities over to the Veterans Committee.\textsuperscript{162}

The handling of the Satchel Paige induction had lasting impacts on the museum in the years to come. To rid itself of any allegations of insensitivity, as well as to embrace changes occurring within the museum community that called for greater representation of

\textsuperscript{161} Dick Young, “What’s Going On Here?,” unlabelled undated source, scrapbook, 1971, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown; James, Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?, 187–188.

\textsuperscript{162} James, Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?, 188.
historically marginalized groups, issues of race began appearing regularly throughout the museum’s exhibits in the decades that followed.

As for the remainder of the 70s, signs began emerging throughout the decade that hinted at a change in direction for the museum’s exhibits. A new appreciation for diversity within the museum’s visitorship became apparent, especially in regards to African Americans and women, but also through a growing awareness of the needs of people with different abilities. In 1973, the Hall of Fame accepted sound-equipped baseballs and bases donated by the Telephone Pioneer organization to promote baseball for the blind. Hall of Fame President Paul S. Kerr (subtly reflecting the museum’s approach to exhibitry), announced, “I am more than happy to accept this display. It will be a wonderful addition to our collection of mementoes depicting the history and progress of baseball in America.”

In 1974, the Hall of Fame opened its first room ever dedicated to recognizing the game’s contemporary stars. Home uniforms of each team, along with pennants, press guides, team photos, and yearbooks arranged in “glass-enclosed shadowboxes” rested on a floor lined with Astroturf. The Hall made a commitment upon its unveiling to update the exhibit as events within the game transpired. It was the first time the Hall of Fame Museum ever publicly recognized the connection between history and events transpiring on a daily basis.


The 1970s also brought a greater emphasis on preservation. The Hall of Fame traditionally sent out paintings each year for cleaning or varnishing, but the recently hired Curator of Collections, Peter Clark, helped expand care for the museum’s three-dimensional objects. Each year a process took place in which the staff triaged items in greatest need of restoration and used budgeted funds to ensure the artifacts survived for enjoyment by future generations. This expanded conservation process symbolized a growing awareness among the staff of their obligations as museum professionals to do more than just collect and arrange objects for display. The Hall of Fame staff slowly began to recognize the importance of providing a rewarding experience for patrons, and that this responsibility meant taking greater care of the objects that provided this experience.165

Finally, perhaps the greatest stride the Hall of Fame made toward revamping its image during this era was the establishment of a full-fledged research library on its campus. Dedicated on July 22, 1968, the two story-structure housed an exhibit area on the first floor, and provided a second floor “for independent research.” The library contained bound issues of *Sports Illustrated* and *Baseball Digest*, scrapbooks donated by players’ families, baseball guides, newspapers on microfilm, and player interviews and voice recordings kept under the protection of the museum’s historian and library staff.166 The library’s growth throughout the 1960s and 70s helped promote the Hall of Fame as a

165 Peter Clark (former Curator of Collections, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum), interview by author, August 30, 2012.

serious research institution and proved a vital asset in providing research materials for the transformation of the museum’s exhibits in the years to come.

Despite all this progress, however, as the 1970s came to a close, the Hall of Fame remained a largely statistic- and achievement-focused museum. The people running the museum were essentially baseball people, except for the Clarks, whose acumen was philanthropy and business. The bare-bones staff wore numerous simultaneous hats, sometimes designing exhibits, but other times arranging for storage space, showing movies, storing artifacts, or cashing out the registers in the gift shop.167

The staff proved so overworked that it left little time to initiate new programs or exhibits, or even develop a collections strategy. There was no accessions committee during this time and the Hall’s librarian, director, and treasurer all accepted artifacts independently of one another. The lack of a collections strategy meant the museum collected just about everything, from Roger Maris’s sixty-first homerun ball, to items of peripheral importance, such as a small rock from Ireland donated as “a petrified catcher’s mitt.”168

Exhibits within the museum in 1979 included the Great Moments room, which celebrated such monumental achievements as Lou Gehrig’s consecutive-games-played record, Lou Brock’s 118 stolen bases in a season, and Sandy Koufax’s 1965 perfect game. The Hall also had a World Series room, showing off a collection of programs, press pins, game tickets, and championship rings, as well as a General History exhibit

167 Strohl, interview; Clark, interview.

168 Clark, interview.
covering the evolution of the professional game. The *Ballparks* room celebrated legendary stadiums like Ebbets Field, Forbes Field, Shibe Park, and Crosley Field, and was complete with original turnstiles, lockers, dugout benches, and grandstand seats. From these seats visitors gazed upon large cutouts of stadium facades, and wall-sized photos of the field taken from the perspective of fans sitting in the stands.\(^\text{169}\)

Without a staff dedicated solely to, and trained in, exhibit design and interpretation, however, the museum remained very much a reliquary during this period. Exhibits still consisted primarily of objects accompanied by short, identifying labels. Any changes to the exhibits occurred largely through a change in the artifacts themselves.

During the 1970s, with the academic job market drying up, professionally trained historians began moving into new fields, like museum work, in an attempt to find innovative ways of engaging the public in history. While some museums readily embraced this new professionalizing trend, others proved slower to respond—perhaps due to a lack of uniformity in professional standards for curators, or due to museums’ hesitancy to welcome the influence of outsiders (academic historians) into their interpretive processes. This left many museums without trained professionals and with exhibits that lacked context, interpretation, and professional organization.\(^\text{170}\) The National Baseball Hall of Fame was one of these institutions that lagged behind the times. The Hall’s approach to exhibitry at the end of the 1970s only reinforced the public’s perception of the museum as a celebratory shrine to the national pastime, rather than as a


trustworthy source for sound scholarship embracing the cultural values of its constituency. In the decades that followed, however, the Hall of Fame launched an all-out effort to overhaul its image.
CHAPTER 4

RENOVATING AND RECONCEPTUALIZING

So why is all of this important? What is the significance of competing interpretations of history and the evolution of museum practices on displays of bats, balls, and gloves in Cooperstown? Why should anyone care? The answer is that the history on display at the Hall of Fame is significant because many scholars believe history museums actually shape our national identity by creating communities of “collective memory.”

As a museum founded on the promotion of a game inextricably linked to American identity, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum plays a critical role in this process. By influencing the collective memory process, the Baseball Hall of Fame can do more than reflect the changing preferences found in American culture, it can actually shape and reinforce our ideas about who we are as a nation.

The study of memory can be an elusive and somewhat arbitrary endeavor, as memory formation remains a constantly evolving process. In recent times, however, memory has been given increasing agency in history and identity formation. The past that we celebrate is often one created through both the selection and appropriation of memory. These processes are highly emotional and subject to power struggles, cultural influences, and individual biases. What is at stake is a determination of what we will remember and what we forget. Once these determinations emerge (through the collective memory process), we look to our sacred institutional keepers of memory to preserve them. As the people and events of our past move out of our living experience, we turn to museums and

171 Gable, “How We Study History Museums,” 110.
other places of memory to commemorate our past and relieve of us of the burden of remembering everything for ourselves. The collective memories preserved within these institutions provide the foundation for our identity.\textsuperscript{172}

The term “collective memory” is not an easy one to define. In \textit{Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization}, Michael Rothberg refers to it as “the relationship that…groups establish between their past and their present circumstances.”\textsuperscript{173} Historian Michael Schudson called it “the ways in which group, institutional, and cultural recollections of the past shape people’s actions in the present.”\textsuperscript{174} The ambiguous nature of the term leaves it open for application to studies of history, myth, tradition, language, identity, commemoration, popular culture, and collective representation, and is an area of study with a long history. What is clear, however, is that memory formation involves some form of social component.\textsuperscript{175}

Studies of collective memory date back to the early twentieth century and the works of Emile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs. For Halbwachs, memory was a matter of how peoples’ minds worked together in a society. He promoted the theory that even if it is individuals who do the remembering, they are doing so as part of a group.

\textsuperscript{172} Geoffrey Cubitt, \textit{History and Memory: Historical Approaches} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 8, 200, 213.


The social interactions of a group, according to Halbwachs, are what trigger individuals to recall some memories and forget others.\footnote{Ibid., 334–335.}

While men like Sigmund Freud postulated that the individual was the center of all memory generation, and that an individual’s brain generated memories that, once shared with others, drove the formation of public, or collective memory, it is difficult to discount the role of social interaction in memory formation. When comparing individualist and collectivist understandings of memory against one another, sociologist and historian Jeffrey Olick argued that “the former are open to psychological considerations, including neurological and cognitive factors, but neglect technologies of memory other than the brain and the ways in which cognitive and even neurological patterns are constituted in part by genuinely social processes. The latter emphasize the social and cultural patterning of public and personal memory, but neglect the ways in which those processes are constituted in part by psychological dynamics.”\footnote{Ibid., 333.} Olick’s solution to this problem is to avoid generating a universal working model of memory generation based on any one school of thought and instead merely ensure we understand the different phenomena memory shapes, and is shaped by, and conclude that individual memory cannot be isolated from social experience and that communal understanding is impossible without the contribution of individuals.\footnote{Ibid., 346.}
Memory theory carries over into sports in the work of Stephen G. Wieting and Judy Polumbaum who argue that whenever sport is appropriated as a vehicle for fostering memory in a group, numerous factors affect its construction—such as the homogeneity of the group, the presence of competing interests, and the strengths of individuals’ collective priorities. All of these factors contribute to the formation of shared cultural memories, like Bobby Thompson’s “Shot Heard ‘Round the World” or Lou Gehrig’s memorable speech at Yankee Stadium weeks after being diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). How we as a society remember these events becomes an integral part of national identity formation.179

As the “Mecca” of baseball history, where the game’s enthusiasts come together to share their stories, relive past experiences, and gaze upon the objects responsible for triggering these and other informal social exchanges, the Baseball Hall of Fame is central to the process of American memory. Consequently, it became imperative that the Hall of Fame dedicate itself to presenting history in all its complexity once the museum began transitioning away from its symbolic role as an object shrine. For the Baseball Hall of Fame, this meant embracing the fundamentals of social history by incorporating more diverse perspectives into their historical narratives. This complimented a need to recognize that stories of social progress were important, but were not always as happy and clean-cut as people liked them to be. In addition, for the museum to meet the evolving needs of its constituency, the Hall needed to provide greater transparency in its processes, share authority with those outside their profession, recognize the limitations

imposed on any effort to provide “truth” in their historical narratives, and acknowledge
the inherent biases present in exhibit displays which might influence how and what
visitors learn in the museum.

*Changing with the Times*

A slow ebbing of patriotic enthusiasm in the United States began shortly after the
country celebrated its bicentennial. An economic crisis, combined with gasoline
shortages, and a loss of American prestige abroad slowly chipped away at the
groundswell of American pride that arose during the 1976 celebrations. The Iran hostage
crisis, a problem the Carter administration seemed powerless to resolve, only furthered a
growing disillusionment the public felt toward their government and America’s prospects
for the future. Not coincidentally, it was also a time of lower attendance at museums, as
financial strains and waning patriotism lessened the desire among Americans to celebrate
their culture. At the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, annual attendance fell
from 220,129 visitors during America’s bicentennial, to just 171,202 by 1979.¹⁸⁰

In addition to the economic and nationalistic challenges museums faced during
this period, there were changes occurring within museums themselves that required these
institutions to rethink their approaches to attracting audiences. Moving away from the
traditional image of the museum as an object shrine, historians, anthropologists, and
sociologists began viewing museums as centers of cultural production and consumption.
A new emphasis on recognizing the needs of diverse constituencies challenged museums
to adapt their exhibit design processes. In many cases this meant recognizing that

¹⁸⁰ Livermore, “Revisiting ‘The Cooperstown Idea,’” 80; Muder, email.
seasoned curators, with their traditional lack of public interaction, lacked sufficient training to address the needs of modern audiences. The solution for many museums was the hiring of outside consultants in the role of designers, educators, and public relations specialists to help museums reach these new, culturally diverse audiences.  

In 1977, the Baseball Hall of Fame hired Kissiloff Associates, an industrial design company from New York City, to help the museum meet the expectations of the modern museum visitor. The Kissiloffs were not baseball people, but rather planning and design experts who looked at the museum from a new and different perspective than the baseball insiders usually hired to design the exhibits. Upon completing an initial evaluation of the museum, Bill Kissiloff later remembered concluding, “The Hall of Fame has a shrine-like quality. It acquired its representation without much structuring to the exhibits. There were no time frames or interrelations between displays.”

The year 1977 was also when the Baseball Hall of Fame began a three-year, $3 million expansion and renovation. Builders completed a new west wing for the museum and the Kissiloffs directed the utilization of this space, along with the transformation of all the existing interior spaces. It brought an end to the “glass table era” and ushered in an entirely new, more modern look for the museum. Peter Clark recalled, “We really

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183 Ibid.; Spencer, discussion.
joined other contemporary museums by taking on more modern methods of presentation.”

To fill these new spaces, collaborative meetings in which participants tossed around ideas for new exhibits, their layouts, the artifacts to use, the text required, appropriate color schemes, paints, and anything else needed to convey the history of the objects or players in the Hall of Fame took place regularly between the Kissiloffs and the museum staff. Once the two sides reached an agreement, they passed their decisions up to the Chairman of the Board at the Clark Estates for final review. The Kissiloffs then provided foam models of new exhibits, conceptualizing the content to appear in each display case.

As part of the process of conceptualizing the new exhibits, however, it became apparent that the museum lacked a concise breakdown of all the artifacts under its care. As a result, the Hall of Fame staff, along with help from the Kissiloffs, placed a new emphasis on familiarizing themselves with the museum’s collections and developing the meta-data necessary to work with the collection in its entirety. This involved developing charts, graphs, and layouts to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the collection, as well as to analyze the collections for thematic trends that might work well as new exhibits. The intention was to create a museum with “some logic to it,” rather than appearing to be a collection of random objects. Hall of Fame president Ed Stack spoke of the process to the Washington Post, announcing, “We're getting things more organized so

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184 Clark, interview.

185 Ibid.
you don't just wander around inside but go from one theme to another, one era, to another.”

Part of getting its arms around the museum’s collections involved finally sitting down and developing a uniform collecting strategy. Leading up to the museum’s 1977 renovation, the Baseball Hall of Fame did little active collecting. For the most part, the Hall waited for people to come to them with donations rather than the museum researching and pursuing potential artifacts. These donations came in through a variety of channels and little cooperation or communication existed between these channels to regulate the collections process. The formation of an accessions committee in the early 1980s and the development of a uniform collecting strategy provided some much-needed direction for the curatorial staff. It was a monumental undertaking, but once the museum established what it was equipped to deal with from an artifacts standpoint, the exhibit process led the museum in a very different direction.

The result of all of these efforts were new, “well-designed thematic exhibits,” meant to supply the visitor with some history and context for the objects they saw. Exhibit themes included ballparks, the World Series, the minor leagues, and the evolution of baseball equipment. While the exhibits still lacked much of the diversity and complexity associated with historical narratives found in more contemporary exhibits, this change in direction still represented “a watershed moment” for the Hall of Fame as a

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186 “Baseball Hall Getting Facelift.”

187 Clark, interview.

188 Spencer, discussion.
museum. It helped initiate a process by which the staff attempted to change the public’s touristy perception of the museum. A new look, new direction, and new mission began to change the culture inside the museum. The hiring of Ted Spencer in 1982 went a long way toward building on this momentum.

Ted Spencer

With new emphasis placed on exhibit design and developing effective ways to communicate information to visitors, the Hall of Fame recognized the need to hire someone capable of taking charge of this process internally. In 1982, they brought in Ted Spencer to fill this role. Spencer came from a corporate communications background with an eye for design and a flair for conveying information in a concise and effective manner. He lacked a museum background, however, and this made it difficult to make an immediate impact as the new curator at the Hall of Fame. In fact, Spencer was so unsure of what exactly his new role entailed, he needed to look the term “curator” up in the dictionary, and found that it was “someone who takes care of museums,” something he initially thought sounded janitorial in nature.  

Spencer worked briefly with the Kissiloffs in order to acclimate himself with his new surroundings before taking over much of the exhibit planning. He dedicated himself to learning the history of the game, then fell back on his corporate communications background to take the information and translate it into something capable of visual conveyance. Before any of this was possible, however, he wanted to understand the Hall

189 Ibid.

190 Spencer, interview.
of Fame’s mission and the type of approach he needed to utilize in designing new exhibits. Seeking additional guidance, Spencer approached director Howard Talbot in 1982 and asked, “Are we a museum or a tourist attraction?”—to which Talbot replied, “That’s what we are trying to figure out.”

Spencer traveled to a number of different museums during this period to further his understanding of changes taking place within the museum community and to help formulate his plan for the new-look Baseball Hall of Fame. While Spencer educated himself on museum operations, the emphasis within the Hall of Fame continued to be on organizing and modernizing the exhibitry in order “to reflect the social/cultural aspects of America.”

One of the ways the museum accomplished this was through an overhaul of many of the visual elements within the displays through the incorporation of new technologies. Looking at times like the set of the popular early 1980s television series, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, the Hall of Fame proudly unveiled new digital displays of baseball statistics and even began a foray into touch-screen technology with the *IBM Sports Gallery*. The *Sports Gallery* consisted of an electronic kiosk that invited patrons to select a player and view statistical and biographical information, watch film clips, and listen to a brief narration about the selected player. The Hall stored the information on a laser disc (which staff members reburned annually due to excessive wear).

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191 Spencer, discussion.
192 Clark, interview.
193 Lenny DiFranza (Assistant Curator of New Media, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum), in discussion with author, March 13, 2012; Marc Onigman, review
computer screen where users personalized their searches, with a larger screen above that allowed others to view the information along with the user. The exhibit drew visitors by advertising, “The outstanding plays and career highlights of the greats are captured for you here.”

The idea for the exhibit came about in the summer of 1982 when IBM executive Jeff McMahon approached Ted Spencer about a collaborative effort to both promote IBM products and allow the Hall of Fame to fulfill its desire to incorporate interactive technology into its exhibits. Representatives from IBM worked collaboratively with Major League Baseball (to acquire the rights to the necessary video footage), the Baseball Hall of Fame, and Albert Woods Design Associates to create an exhibit that met with the needs of a visitorship just entering into the digital age.

Funded through IBM’s corporate sponsorship, the Sports Gallery was a breakthrough exhibit at the Hall for its time, introducing computers into the Hall of Fame’s exhibits, acknowledging the period’s industry leader in digital technology (IBM), and portending the forthcoming challenges facing all museums in their struggles to stay current in the rapidly evolving digital world. It was also a manifestation of the Hall’s new commitment to storytelling and to delve into the history of the game, as well as the museum’s new focus on visitors and providing them with the type of customizable experience expected of museum exhibits in the decades that followed.

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194 “Hall of Fame Exhibits: Outdated Photos,” Photo Archives, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
Image 3. The *IBM Sports Gallery*. Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

*Social History and New Museology*

While changes within the Hall of Fame Museum in the 1980s helped refocus curatorial energies in a new and more progressive direction, there were changes well underway in the history and museum communities at large that highlighted just how far the museum still had to go. The Hall of Fame’s effort to transform itself from an object shrine into a history museum was still in its infancy when scholars were already changing ideas about what constituted historical scholarship. In the past, for a museum to be considered “historical” in nature, it needed to provide little more than an acknowledgement of a person or object’s contribution to progress along the historical
timeline. Challenges to traditionally hegemonic portrayals of American history, however, brought about an explosion in the social history movement in the 1970s and 80s.

Social history is a multi-faceted movement that, among other things, calls for the inclusion of previously marginalized stories within historical narratives. Most often, this involves telling the stories or ordinary people, as opposed to just those of great leaders and heroes. Social history argues that traditional historical narratives are unbalanced and uncritical celebrations of people and provide sanitized versions of history—ones that ignore conflict, oppression, exploitation, and injustice. In doing so, traditional narratives eschew the perspectives of different races, classes, ethnicities, and genders for history from a white, Anglo-Saxon, male point of view. The exclusion of diversity and complexity, according to historian Michael Frisch, leads to tremendous distortion within historical narratives.¹⁹⁵

At the time the Baseball Hall of Fame first opened its doors, historical scholarship largely focused on venerating the men responsible for leading America to its preeminent position in the world. McCarthyism and the Cold War kept more radical national criticisms in check in the decades that followed, allowing history texts to ignore labor strife, racial hegemony, and poverty, while focusing on nostalgic interpretations of history that promoted the inevitability of American dominance on the world stage. In the 1960s and 70s, however, the All-American narrative fell apart under the weight of Vietnam, Watergate, clashes over civil rights, gender inequalities, and an alienated

generation of youths hostile toward authority. Social historians, themselves largely members of this disillusioned population, began promoting the idea of traditional history as myth used to enforce more conservative notions of moral behavior. They challenged the hegemonic patriotism of elitist narratives. During this period, cultural groups like blacks, women, and Native Americans began producing histories to expose the power structures used to enforce the status quo. History began telling stories from “the bottom up,” as factory workers, racial and cultural minorities, and the exploited classes shared tales that tore at the image of America as a flawless and harmonious democracy.196

Critics of social history viewed it as a revisionist practice. They accused social historians of taking what we know now and using it to attack those who are no longer around to defend themselves. Proponents of more traditional history often accused social historians of being unpatriotic and portraying the United States as a corrupt, genocidal, and inherently evil country. In a speech before the American Association of Museums, Richard Nixon once claimed that he much preferred having a quiet, meditative experience in front of a museum object than to be confronted with the interpretations of social history—narratives he equated with Soviet-style propaganda.197

Despite the objections of some members of the history profession, social history is, as Michael Frisch called it, “the dominant intellectual reality of our time,” as it continues to challenge traditionally conservative narratives as oversimplified and

196 Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, xii, 21, 137, 294; Handler and Gable, The New History in an Old Museum, 5.

celebratory. In addition, social history recognizes the inherent biases historians bring to their work and how these biases often unconsciously manifest themselves in the histories they produce. Historians select, order, and evaluate sources of information, choosing to emphasize some and ignore others, and this process shapes the tone of their narratives. Consequently, social historians encourage readers to think critically about the information they read and consider factors, like cultural and political climates, that potentially influence the information presented.

These aspects of social history carry over particularly well into the museum profession. Dating back to the mid-1800s in America, persons of wealth constructed museums meant to reinforce their privileged position in society. By the time the National Baseball Hall of Fame opened, museums were effective tools in “Americanizing” large populations of the immigrant working class. Members of the dominant class acquired artifacts meant to instill refinement and culture and put them on display to educate new Americans about the dominant values expected of a good and compliant American citizen.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, museums around the world began moving from merely caring for objects to using objects to tell important stories. Museum professionals recognized the need to spend less time examining practice and

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198 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xviii.


more time thinking about purpose. What became “New Museology,” altered the relationship between museums and their constituencies by opening up a museum’s policies and goals to public scrutiny. New Museology brought to light the social, political, and educational roles of museums, adding a deeper layer to the understanding of their exhibits. The interest in examining the part museums played in reflecting cultural values, combined with the revival of social history, brought about an influx of historians into museums. These historians challenged patriarchal authority and traditional narratives in museums, often through the display of everyday objects capable of making meaningful connections with an increasingly diverse visitorship. 201

Social history recognizes the need to present diverse groups as shapers of history, and that the failure to do so manifests itself in many forms, including the exclusion, underrepresentation, stereotyping, and isolation of stories from larger historical narratives. The presence of these biases in a museum falsifies reality by silencing controversial components of narratives, such as racism, sexism, and class struggle. 202

Despite public perception to the contrary, museums are largely political institutions. What goes on display at a museum is the result of variations in funding, levels of research, approaches to management, and decisions made by curatorial staff. Museum staff decide which stories to tell and the evidence to display in support of those stories. Every choice they make ends up telling us about present-day beliefs and values as


much as it does about the past. In addition, by choosing some objects for display over others, the stories of the “left out” objects become silences that distort the reality of the final presentation. The objects chosen end up shaping perceptions through the order of their arrangement or through their association with museum labels that inevitably invite patrons to perceive information in a particular way. Modern museum scholarship calls on institutions to be more transparent in their processes and inform visitors about all of these “landmines” that politicize the museum learning experience. 203

Today, the evolution of history and museum practice manifests itself in the post-modern museum. Dedicated to displaying complex histories and acknowledging the presence of ambiguities within historical narratives, the “post-museum” recognizes that the meaning of objects actually change over time, reflecting shifts in cultural values. The resulting modification to acquisition strategies fostered a realignment of priorities away from collecting objects merely for financial or aesthetic value, and toward objects with an ability to aid in the interpretive process. 204

While reconceptualizing their exhibits in the early 1980s “explored broader issues than previous ones and marked a turning point in the Museum’s presentation and philosophy,” the Hall of Fame’s transition into a full-fledged “post museum” is still


ongoing. Despite making tremendous strides in its presentations, the museum is still working on changing its image in the eyes of more liberal elements within the history and museum communities. In this regard, its efforts have been numerous, however, and noteworthy for their willingness to explore previously taboo subject matter. The museum’s two most dominant forays into the realm of social history have been attempts to incorporate the stories of African Americans and women into their exhibits. Today, many of the displays in the Hall’s exhibits make connections to the plight of these two previously underrepresented cultural groups and explore how their story within the game was symbolic of broader social trends occurring in the nation. These efforts have their roots in two exhibits designed in the 1980s, one focusing on the Negro Leagues, and the other on women in baseball.

*The Negro Leagues Exhibit*

Amidst the turmoil of the 1960s, museums faced increased pressure from civic leaders for a greater acknowledgement of black contributions to history. The resulting renaissance in black history forced institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art to reevaluate how its practices met the needs of the black community. Consequently, during the 1970s, the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution opened an exhibit on diversity entitled, *The Right to Vote*, and popular heritage tourism sites like Colonial Williamsburg began examining racial issues such as slavery. Other

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institutions, however, were slower to act. In a 2009 book that criticized much of the Hall of Fame’s operations and induction processes, author Zev Chafets argued, “Playing racial catch-up has always been a problem in Cooperstown,” claiming the Hall of Fame “generally lags a generation or so behind the norms of American society.”

The Hall of Fame Museum’s first real attempt at addressing the black baseball experience came in the mid-1980s with an exhibit dedicated to telling the story of the Negro Leagues. The exhibit consisted primarily of one long, rectangular, wall-sized case filled with artifacts from both the Hall of Fame’s own collection and a collection from the Negro League Hall of History in Ashland, Kentucky. Inside the case were numerous pictures, uniform jerseys, and newspaper articles. Souvenir pennants from various teams ran along the bottom, while a giant “Newark Eagles Baseball Club” banner dominated the middle of the display. The backdrop of the right half of the case was dark and blank, while the left half used a blown-up team picture of the Kansas City Monarchs—the team for which Jackie Robinson played.

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207 Chafets, *Cooperstown Confidential*, 128, 192.
While the display represented a step forward in the Hall’s willingness to present new and potentially controversial subject matter, it did little to engage the visitor with that material—providing little insight into the social conditions that facilitated the creation of the Negro Leagues, the impact of baseball on the Civil Rights Movement, or how these issues played out in modern racial dialogue. The promotional materials created for the exhibit claimed that it told “the dramatic and fascinating story of Negro League baseball from 1920–1950, when blacks honed their marvelous baseball skills in relative obscurity with little hope of major league recognition.”

During the era of Reconstruction, and into the early twentieth century, African Americans played professional baseball both with and against whites. Though discriminated against on and off the field, these players did not face banishment from the professional game. In fact, there were several professional baseball teams that were all black, such as the Philadelphia Orions, the Lord Baltimores, and the Cuban Giants.\(^{209}\)

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, however, the baseball establishment slowly pushed African Americans out of professional baseball. In 1867, the National Association of Base Ball Players voted to bar any club fielding African American players. Twenty years later, the International League owners agreed not to sign any new contracts with African Americans. Facing insults, threats of violence, and harassment on the field, African Americans increasingly left professional baseball and began forming their own teams and embarking on barnstorming tours across the United States. By the early twentieth century, major league baseball was completely devoid of African Americans, mirroring other aspects of American life where blacks increasingly found themselves excluded from white-controlled institutions.\(^{210}\)

Black owner-managers Rube Foster and C.I. Taylor formed the first Negro League (the Negro National League), in 1920, with the intention of increasing opportunities for black baseball players. A second league (the Eastern Colored League), formed in 1923.


These leagues became very important cultural institutions in black communities, fostering a sense of pride and cohesion and helping forge a connection to white culture.\(^{211}\)

Despite the Depression causing the two original Negro Leagues to fold, new leagues formed in the 1930s that prospered all the way into an era of integration initiated by the arrival of Jackie Robinson.\(^{212}\) According to the Hall’s exhibit, “with the Brooklyn Dodgers signing of Robinson, a barrier that had existed for half a century was broken and ever since, organized baseball has accepted blacks in a way that has been a model to end all segregation.”\(^{213}\)

In reality, while baseball integrated before most of America—seven years before Brown v. Board of Ed and eight years before the country knew the name Rosa Parks—it did so very reluctantly. Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947—however, by 1956 there were only forty African American players in the major leagues, and most had to find their own housing and places to eat when their team stayed in segregated areas of the country.\(^{214}\) That same year, the Louisiana state legislature passed a bill prohibiting blacks and whites from competing in sports together, forcing Major League Baseball to cancel a number of exhibition games scheduled in Louisiana the following spring. It took until


\(^{213}\) Onigman, review of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 114.

\(^{214}\) Briley, Class at Bat, 94–102.
1959 for every team in baseball to integrate, and that was just on the field.\footnote{Wall panel, \textit{Pride & Passion: The African American Baseball Experience}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, July 11, 2011.} The battle for greater access to front office jobs within the game is still ongoing.

While Robinson’s arrival did not solve baseball’s racial problems in a neat and tidy fashion, the upbeat ending to an exhibit promoting social progress speaks to the era in which the Hall of Fame designed it. In the 1980s, museums struggled to take full advantage of all the subtle nuances the burgeoning social history movement had to offer. While the movement provided new subject matter with which museums wrangled, curators failed to realize the full range of possibilities available for exploring these topics.

In the Baseball Hall of Fame Museum, though small blurbs of text began appearing in the museum’s exhibits, they only appeared in a very limited fashion and did not convey the detail and complexity the stories deserved. While addressing the plight of African Americans was a monumental step forward in the evolution of the Hall of Fame Museum in the 1980s, a visitor to this exhibit learned little more than a story of triumph in the face of exclusion.

\textit{Bringing Women into the Narrative}

The \textit{Women in Baseball} exhibit—unveiled in 1988—is another example of the type of history in which the Hall of Fame engaged as a manifestation of its growing awareness of the changes occurring within the larger museum community. Like the Negro Leagues exhibit, \textit{Women in Baseball} broke new ground in recognizing a marginalized cultural group, but \textit{Women in Baseball} took the museum’s evolution a step farther. The exhibit actually helped to revolutionize the Hall’s collecting strategy for
future exhibits, thus permitting the museum to focus more on the stories they wanted to tell instead of relegating themselves to the stories their collections allowed them to tell.

Traditionally, baseball’s strongest associations have been with images of healthy masculinity. The game’s enthusiasts always applauded baseball’s ability to prepare young boys for manhood by enhancing both their mental and physical abilities. Albert Spalding reinforced this perception in his 1905 baseball guide, declaring, “every American boy is born with a base ball and bat in his grasp. He understands the rudiments of the game before he knows his A B C's, and grows into youth and manhood with a natural affection for the sport. The mental and physical activity of base ball makes it an excellent educator and training school for the boys of our nation . . . and especially fits a boy for the rough and tumble commercial life of to-day.”

Despite their exclusion on the public stage, women actually began playing baseball at the same time as men. Records document women taking to the game as early as 1860, and travelling on barnstorming tours by 1890. Team names like Barney Ross’ Adorables and Slapsie Maxie’s Curvaceous Cuties demonstrated that American society did not readily embrace the prospect of women as serious athletes, but by World War II, Time magazine counted approximately forty thousand women’s softball teams in America.

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Perhaps the most famous contribution women made to baseball came as members of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Chicago Cubs owner (and chewing gum magnate) Philip Wrigley founded the AAGPBL in 1942 out of a fear of lost baseball revenues caused by America’s entry into World War II. Sixty-five girls, most of them just out of high school, made up four teams based in Rockford, Illinois, South Bend, Indiana, and Kenosha and Racine, Wisconsin. The girls made between forty and one hundred dollars per week for playing a 110-game schedule, six nights a week, with doubleheaders on Sundays. Each team received only five days off per season.  

Despite breaking into the male-dominated world of professional baseball, the AAGPBL made sure no one forgot these players were women. AAGPBL leadership mandated that each player wore their hair long and went to Helena Rubenstein’s charm school to receive lessons on proper feminine behavior. They wore skirts (designed by Philip Wrigley’s wife) as a uniform and often applied makeup before taking the field. Once in the public eye, the league marketed its stars as female versions of famous male ballplayers, calling Racine Belles second baseman Sophie Kury the “Tina Cobb of the league,” and nicknaming South Bend shortstop Dorothy Shroeder, “Honey Wagner.”

The league lasted twelve years and proved very successful. It expanded to eight teams in 1946, and with the addition of two more teams (in Chicago and Springfield, Illinois), in 1948, attendance peaked at 910,000 fans. Unfortunately, greater access to the

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219 Berler, “Oh, How They Played the Game.”
men’s professional game in the 1950s (thanks to automobiles and television) and a return to pre-war notions of accepted gender roles brought about an unceremonious end to the AAGPBL in 1954.\textsuperscript{220}

Though the popularity of the women’s game declined, in the decades that followed, a resurgence in the women’s movement inspired new research in women’s history. In the 1960s and 70s, Women’s Studies departments emerged at universities across the country, and women like Dorothy Parker, founder of \textit{Cosmopolitan} magazine, and Betty Friedan, author of \textit{Feminine Mystique}, condemned the relegating of women to subordinate roles in history and society. Still, the museum world did not let go of its traditionally gendered hierarchies during this period. Museums continued to treat women’s history as a story of secondary importance. Museum space was still largely patriarchal and the appropriation of memory as a method for establishing power was still a male-dominated practice.\textsuperscript{221}

In Cooperstown, the role of women in baseball was on the mind of Hall of Fame Historian, Lee Allen. In his “Cooperstown Corner” segment published in \textit{The Sporting News}, Allen celebrated the achievements of women in the game. He wrote about Eleanor Engle of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a “shapely shortstop” for the Harrisburg team of the Inter-State League; Amanda Clement, a semi-pro umpire throughout the Dakotas, Iowa, and Minnesota at the turn of the century; and Joan Payson, who took over ownership of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Carbone, “Hall to Honor Women.”; Berler, “Oh, How They Played the Game.”
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the New York Mets in 1968. Allen attempted to demonstrate that “women have served
the game in almost every known capacity,” yet this did not earn them a place of honor in
the Cooperstown museum.  

It took a combination of factors coming together in 1986 and 1987 to bring an exhibit about women in baseball to fruition. The first was a 1986 article in the Los Angeles Times that retold the story of the AAGPBL. It just so happened that this story gained national attention at a time when the Hall of Fame was looking for new exhibit subjects, and at a time when they hoped to attract more women to Cooperstown. The celebration of women in baseball gained more momentum the following spring when PBS aired a half-hour remembrance of the women’s league. Months later, Dr. Janis Taylor, an assistant professor of film at Northwestern University, completed a half-hour documentary about the AAGPBL titled, When Diamonds Were a Girl’s Best Friend.

Taking advantage of the suddenly reinvigorated national interest in the women’s game, the New York-based Women’s Sports Foundation began demanding some form of permanent representation for women at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Ted Spencer and his staff were very happy to oblige, but the Hall suffered from a significant shortage of artifacts related to the women’s game. The only relevant artifacts Spencer had at the time the Hall decided to put together the Women in Baseball exhibit consisted of little more than a set of girls professional baseball cards and a female umpire’s brush and pitch


223 Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 81; Berler, “Oh, How They Played the Game.”
counter from the turn of the century. Spencer made a plea to the American public to come forward with any materials they had to help the Hall develop the exhibit.224

This move, from passive to active collecting, represented a “watershed” moment in the Hall of Fame Museum’s collecting strategy and opened up a whole new world of possibilities when it came to the subjects the Hall looked to display. In the past, any subject the Hall considered exploring required an adequate supply of relevant artifacts from the museum’s collections in order for the design process to begin. The decision to design the Women in Baseball exhibit, however, came from the notion that, first and foremost, “the story needed to be told.” 225 This revised direction also benefited from a new initiative started in the late 1980s to move the museum’s collections records from index cards and loose-leaf notebook paper to digitized records, allowing designers a more comprehensive look at what the collections had to offer.226

The first Women in Baseball exhibit opened on November 8, 1988. It consisted of a single display case focused largely on the achievements of the AAGPBL, as well as some female umpires and major league executives like Jean Yawkey and Marge Schott.

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225 Spencer, discussion; Clark, interview.

226 This project took on greater momentum in 1994 when the Hall of Fame hired Susan McKay as an associate registrar to oversee the automation of the collections. She took over for Peter Clark upon his retirement in 2009 and is currently the museum’s Director of Collections.
In the display were biographies of individual women, along with uniforms, bats, gloves, trophies, posters, scorecards, and game tickets.\(^\text{227}\)

While it was a new and groundbreaking display in that it covered a subject never before explored at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, the physical presentation of the material was still very much in keeping with the style of the times—offering little interpretation or critical engagement with the subject matter. There was no recognition of the sacrifices made by those who played the game, the toll it took on their bodies or their family lives, or the open hostility they faced from their challenge to the male-dominated world of professional sports. As Barbara Melosh argued in 1989, “A fully realized history of women . . . must convey women’s simultaneous participation in and alienation from a dominant culture that defines them as other,” pointing out that museums tended to practice “compensatory history” consisting of “a revision of the record that adds women without fundamentally reordering the categories or questions of historical analysis.”\(^\text{228}\)

Still, the *Women in Baseball* exhibit proved significant for the fundamental change it brought to the direction of the museum’s exhibits. Not only did it revolutionize the museum’s collecting strategy (freeing up designers to explore new subject matter), it also represented a move away from focusing exclusively on men’s professional baseball. As Spencer declared, “We're not just showing the major leagues. We should be showing *baseball*.”\(^\text{229}\)

\(^{227}\) Odell, “Curator Spotlight,” March 16, 2012; Carbone, “Hall to Honor Women”; Onigman, review of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 114.


\(^{229}\) Berler, “Oh, How They Played the Game.”
museum staff and the public responded to it with overwhelming approval. Spencer recalled receiving literally hundreds of letters in response to the *Women in Baseball* exhibit, compared to the five or six letters he routinely received upon opening a new exhibit. Concerning the Hall of Fame’s desire to produce exhibits more closely aligned with the standards and expectations of the larger museum community, Spencer later declared, “I feel in retrospect that that was the moment in which things became different, slowly, but they did.”


One additional contribution *Women in Baseball* made to the shaping of future Hall of Fame exhibits came from its contribution to popular culture. Coinciding with the exhibit opening was a reunion of AAGPBL players hosted by National Baseball Hall of Fame. Approximately 150 former players spent the weekend in Cooperstown reliving

\[230\] Spencer, interview.
their baseball experiences and sharing stories with over one thousand visitors. Among these visitors was actor and director Penny Marshall, who used the weekend as the inspiration for her 1992 film, *A League of Their Own.* The blockbuster film sent the popularity of the AAGPBL story soaring, eventually requiring the Hall of Fame to recurate and expand their women’s exhibit.

*Closing Out the Decade*

As the 1980s came to a close, the exhibits at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum were very much a mix of the “old” and the “new.” With the exception of *Women in Baseball,* most of the Hall of Fame’s efforts at the end of the decade focused on updating the look of its exhibits more than the content. The exhibits needed to be more visually appealing, according to Spencer, and more in tune with the multi-image, mixed media presentations used by corporations of the era for communicating information to their employees. The Hall of Fame made Spencer’s efforts significantly easier by completing a $7 million expansion and renovation.

In 1989, the National Baseball added a new wing to the museum by taking over the Alfred Corning Clark Gymnasium next door and turning it into usable museum space. The focal point of this new museum space was the creation of the Hall of Fame’s

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232 Spencer, interview.

Grandstand Theater—a multi media facility designed to look like a nostalgic old stadium (akin to Comiskey Park in Chicago). According to the Hall of Fame in later years, the theater’s show “highlighted the history and nostalgia surrounding our National Pastime.”

The new innovations at the museum accompanied the perpetuation of many traditional elements within the exhibits. Artifacts behind floor-to-ceiling glass displayed the evolution of catcher’s equipment, baseball bats, and modern gloves. The Great Moments Room celebrated memorable achievements in the game’s history, while the Ballparks room provided patrons with an immersive experience dripping with nostalgia. Other exhibits explored the story of baseball’s minor leagues, youth leagues, and umpires. These were exhibits still largely lacking in context, however, and they relied on visitors to draw their own conclusions about the significance of each object and its place within baseball history.

These exhibits did benefit, however, from the new emphasis the Hall placed on modernizing its look. For example, the display of baseballs associated with no-hit games (a feature of the museum since it opened in 1939), evolved from the corkboard look of the 1970s to a display of brightly colored red, yellow, green, blue, and orange columns.

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234 Ibid.

internally lit. The color scheme, from the bright green floors to the bright yellow crowd control barriers, truly reflected American culture’s fascination with color in the 1980s.\footnote{236}{\textit{Outdated Exhibit Negatives 1978–1989”}; Wall panel, \textit{Cooperstown Room}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012.}

In addition to its place within popular culture, the colorful displays helped counteract the effects of another momentous change within the Hall during the previous decade. The 1980s were the years in which the hall went “dark.” Recognizing the harmful effects natural light had on the museum’s artifacts, the Hall of Fame blacked out its windows. Artificial light replaced natural sources as a way of helping to preserve the museum’s precious artifacts. In an ironic twist, the poorly understood effects of artificial lighting during this period initially did as much damage to the artifacts as natural light. In particular, the installation of fluorescent lighting, once sealed in new exhibit tables lined with natural wool felt, damaged artifacts as the felt released gases caused by its degradation over time and the lights faded signatures and uniform materials—ultimately resulting in the removal of the lighting and the replacement of the natural felt with a synthetic substitute.\footnote{237}{Onigman, review of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 113; DiFranza, discussion; Spencer, discussion.}

What helped facilitate the museum’s transition in the eyes of the public, perhaps more than any event occurring inside the museum, were events transpiring outside of Cooperstown at the office of Major League Baseball Commissioner, Bart Giamatti. In 1989, Giamatti banished Pete Rose from baseball for betting on baseball games while serving as the manager of the Cincinnati Reds. This banishment kept Rose ineligible for enshrinement in the National Baseball Hall of Fame’s plaque gallery. It did not, however, mean that Rose’s achievements disappeared from the Hall of Fame Museum’s exhibits. Rose’s banishment promoted a growing awareness of the difference between the museum and the Hall of Fame plaque gallery. The gallery celebrated heroes, while the museum focused on the game’s history.238

Inside the Hall of Fame, Ted Spencer and his staff came to the realization that they only spent about 5 percent of their time working on information for the gallery plaques and “the rest of [our time] dealing with American history.”239 Their role as a museum suddenly seemed to take on increased importance as the institution in charge of preserving and presenting all aspects of the game, whether they be celebratory or otherwise. When angry patrons complained about Rose’s presence in the museum’s displays of baseball records or in its tribute to the powerhouse Cincinnati Reds teams of the 1970s, Spencer fell back on his responsibility to tell the history of the game as a way to help fans understand the museum’s mission. Rose’s banishment in 1989 actually helped facilitate the symbolic separation of the museum from the plaque gallery in the

238 Spencer, interview.

239 Ibid.
minds of visitors and allowed the museum to move more emphatically in the direction of an emerging scholarly institution and away from its reputation as a place designated solely for honoring heroes.240

240 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5

“WE’RE A HISTORY MUSEUM”

The 1980s and ‘90s witnessed a backlash against the inroads made by social historians in prior decades. America, slowly emerging from the Cold War, found itself enmeshed in an entirely different type of conflict, a battle for control over the country’s past. The “culture wars” (sometimes referred to as the “history wars”), politicized history—culminating in a struggle for authority between institutions accustomed to a celebratory-style of history and those who viewed past events more critically.

In Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century, John Bodnar described the culture wars as a battle between “official” and “vernacular” culture. According to Bodnar, “Official culture promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture” by relying on “‘dogmatic formalism’ and the restatement of reality in ideal rather than complex or ambiguous terms.” The traditionally conservative elements within official culture viewed the multiculturalism and historical revisionism of the ‘60s and ‘70s as anti-American propaganda and an attack on some of the country’s most sacred values and institutions.

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242 Bodnar, Remaking America, 13–14.

By way of contrast, Bodnar saw vernacular culture as conveying “what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.” Proponents of vernacular culture felt official culture promoted oversimplified and celebratory narratives at the expense of diversity and complexity—distorting historical narratives for the purposes of social control and conformity. In short, vernacularists thought official culture ignored the more troubling, ambiguous, or confusing parts of history and deemed “unpatriotic” those who dared to contend that America had not always lived up to its lofty national ideals.

The conflict created by the culture wars played out in museums, where each side battled for control over historical representations. Vernacularists challenged museums to abandon their role as temples where obedient citizens paid homage to symbols of institutional control, and instead become spaces of confrontation, experimentation, and debate. They asked museums to become forums for discussion and to promote diverse perspectives, even if it meant occasionally having to present material of a disturbing or offensive nature. The hope was that this material, rather than being embarrassing or unpatriotic, might instead help promote a fuller understanding of history by examining complexities and acknowledging ambiguities more conservative narratives omitted.

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Conservatives fought back by arguing that visitors attended museums for recreation, not to face disturbing content or to have their belief systems challenged. They saw museums as places of celebration and veneration, not conflict.  

Throughout the 1990s, battles over “controversial” exhibits plagued the museum community. In 1991, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American Art exhibited *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*. While the exhibit displayed traditionally romantic images of the American West, its labels drew the ire of conservatives (with senators from Alaska and Washington threatening to cut the Smithsonian’s funding) for educating visitors about a less romantic, often radically racist mentality that existed during this period. Similar firestorms erupted with the opening of a Library of Congress exhibit on slavery in 1995 and a Smithsonian exhibit on the history of American sweatshops in 1997—with proponents of official culture lambasting public institutions for smearing the country’s reputation.  

Perhaps the most famous example of the culture wars’ intrusion into museum space was the Smithsonian’s attempt to display the *Enola Gay* and discuss the legacy of the atomic bomb. Original exhibit designs called for depictions of the horrific damage and loss of life caused by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Outraged politicians and war veterans called on the Smithsonian to scrap these plans and instead depict the atomic bomb as a weapon used to save countless American lives and

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restore peace in the Pacific. Rather than forcefully defending its position, the Smithsonian caved to pressure from both sides. The resulting compromise produced an exhibit famous for its banality.  

Significant debate about the influence of the culture wars on museums centered around the willingness of museums to introduce controversy into their exhibits. Controversy typically arises in museums when the material on display conflicts with what a visitor expects to see. This is something museums traditionally tend to shy away from out of fear of alienating visitors, donors, or entire communities. This avoidance takes the form of what Barbara Melosh called “museum speak,” a bland authoritative voice in exhibits that helps to “smother controversy.”

In Cooperstown, the 1990s witnessed the Baseball Hall of Fame straddle both sides of the symbolic fence during the culture wars. It was a time when the Hall of Fame broke new ground in its treatment of women, blacks, and other culturally underrepresented groups, while at the same time, producing one of the most patriotic displays of official culture in the museum’s history. The former manifested itself in the re-curating of the museum’s exhibits on women and African Americans, and also brought about representation of previously unaddressed cultural influences from the Far East and Latin America. The latter helped produce the wildly successful Baseball Enlists exhibit, exploring the variety of contributions baseball made to American efforts during World War II. 

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249 For more on this story, see Martin Harwitt’s An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay (New York: Springer Verlag, 1996).

War II. A look inside these exhibits in the next two chapters helps illustrate the Hall of Fame’s position within the culture wars.

Baseball Goes to War

In 1993, Ted Spencer and his staff were still riding a wave of euphoria from their achievements of the late ‘80s. The Women in Baseball exhibit was a tremendous success, and the addition of the west wing of the museum and the Grandstand Theater opened a new world of possibilities for the exhibit design staff. The Hall of Fame had all the tools required to fashion its next substantial exhibit—all it needed was an interesting topic.

While attending Major League Baseball’s All-Star Game in Baltimore that summer, Spencer (a former third-class petty officer of naval aviation) received a call from the Pentagon. A congressional commission established to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of World War II wanted the Baseball Hall of Fame to erect a plaque in the museum displaying the names of ball players who served during the war. Spencer’s response was indicative of the process of identity transformation slowly gaining a foothold inside the museum. He explained to the nation’s military leaders, “We’re not in the business of putting up plaques. . . . We’re a history museum.” The only acceptable solution was to build an entire exhibit around the story of baseball during World War II.

Baseball and war have a long and sometimes surprisingly intimate affiliation. Erik Strohl (the Hall of Fame’s Vice President of Exhibitions & Collections) theorizes it comes, in part, from the game’s longevity (dating back to the Civil War) and its ability to serve a broad range of constituencies, including the fan in need of a morale boost, the

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251 Spencer, interview.
over-tired factory worker seeking out recreation, and the forlorn soldier longing for a
taste of home.\textsuperscript{252}

Other theories draw on perceived similarities between competition within the
game and actual military combat. In a 1941 \textit{Baseball Magazine} article ripe with
oversimplified analogies, James Gould asked readers to ponder, “What is baseball but a
sort of war in miniature? The same strategy, on different lines of course, is used in each. .
. . In the game, you steal bases, don’t you, or try to? Guess some of the present warring
powers wouldn’t like to steal some of the enemy’s bases right now.”\textsuperscript{253} A 1989
dissertation by Louis Schroeder compared the game to the strategies found in Antoine-
Henri Jomini’s, the \textit{Art of War}. More specifically, Schroeder credited the placement of
infielders on a baseball diamond with fulfilling Jomini’s requirement that lines of defense
be as short as possible, and then went on to assert that baseball’s positioning of
outfielders behind the infielders matched Jomini’s description of effective cavalry
placement.\textsuperscript{254}

Regardless of the theory behind it, professional baseball and war appear
intricately linked throughout their histories. When America entered the First World War,
roughly 50 percent of professional baseball players joined the armed forces. With stars
like Eddie Collins and Ty Cobb missing from the game, and many fans too preoccupied
with military affairs to care about baseball, there were many in baseball’s inner circle

\textsuperscript{252} Strohl, interview.

\textsuperscript{253} James M. Gould, “Baseball and War—An Analogy,” \textit{Baseball Magazine},
January 1941, 341.

\textsuperscript{254} Schroeder, “Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame,” 34.
who contemplated shutting down the game. When controversial evangelist Billy Sunday learned of this, he opined, “No greater mistake could be made. What are soldiers worth if they’re not good athletes? What is a battle anyway but a showdown of athletic skill of a terrible intensity but athletic skill just the same? Baseball and all other wholesome athletic sports should be encouraged nowadays. . . . Baseball is A WAR GAME. We need it now more than ever.”

This sentiment carried into the Second World War as well. Democratic Representative James Shanely credited the game with building “Americanism” while simultaneously saving the country from the “excess prevalent among nations abroad.” Domestic newspapers assured readers of an inevitable Allied victory thanks to American youths growing up immersed in the spirit of competitive baseball. On the home front, charity baseball games helped sell millions of dollars worth of war bonds, and the Baseball Writers of America even established a fund designated for sending bats and balls to soldiers overseas.

For baseball fans, the war’s ultimate act of betrayal came via a surprise attack from a fellow baseball-loving nation. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the *Sporting News* declared, “No nation which has had an intimate contact with baseball as


256 Vlasich, *A Legend for the Legendary*, 156.

257 *Baseball Enlists*, online exhibit; Gould, “The President Says ‘Play Ball,’” 436.
the Japanese, could have committed the vicious, infamous deed of the early morning of December 7, 1941, if the spirit of the game ever had penetrated their yellow hides.”

For its own part, the Hall of Fame regularly tapped into the game’s association with war as a way of connecting with visitors through a sense of nationalism. The Doubleday myth is significant evidence of this. Additionally, when the Hall’s founders formed the National Baseball Centennial Commission as a way to promote the museum’s opening, numerous military figures made up its list of honorary members, and its executive committee included World War I hero, General John J. Pershing. For years, the Hall even displayed a marble shaft erected as a tribute to players who served in the armed forces—so it only seemed natural that the Hall of Fame acknowledge baseball’s role in World War II as part of the conflict’s fiftieth anniversary celebration.

_The Exhibit Commemorating World War II_

Putting together an exhibit on baseball and the Second World War was something the Hall of Fame staff discussed doing for years prior to the Pentagon’s request because, as Ted Spencer noted, it was a story with “so much meat in it.”

Eighteen million Americans served in the armed forces during World War II, with another twenty-five million Americans regularly purchasing war bonds out of their paychecks. Between stories from the home front, the battles and sacrifices taking place overseas, the changing economic conditions, new roles of women, and a plethora of other angles from which to

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258 “It’s Not the Same Game in Japan,” _Sporting News_, Dec 18, 1941.

259 Vlasich, _A Legend for the Legendary_, 105, 155; Schroeder, “Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame,” 96.

260 Spencer, interview.
approach baseball during World War II, telling the story of the war through the game became an opportunity for the museum to represent the story of the nation.\textsuperscript{261} It was a daunting task. As Susan Crane acknowledged in the December 1997 issue of \textit{History and Theory}, “Given sensitivities to representations of World War II, museum exhibits about this period carry an extraordinary burden of responsibility.”\textsuperscript{262} The Hall of Fame approached the subject by breaking the exhibit into four sections, discussing baseball players who became soldiers, the home front, the troops overseas playing and following baseball, and how the war affected the game.\textsuperscript{263}

One artifact in particular, used as part of the discussion of the home front, helps demonstrate where the Hall of Fame was in its focus on producing the type of quality scholarship museum patrons looked for their institutions to provide. Part of the Hall of Fame’s collection included a piece of paper from 1943 or 1944 labeled as a “tax ticket.” For years it lay in the collection without anyone having the time, interest, or expertise to derive its significance. Ted Spencer hired a freelance curator and historian for \textit{Baseball Enlists}, because, as he admitted, “I knew I was going to need somebody who was professionally trained in digging this stuff up.”\textsuperscript{264} It turned out the tax ticket proved to be a unique and very telling artifact. During the 1940s, American war industries used kitchen fat to make gunpowder. Consequently, any baseball fan donating five pounds of

\textsuperscript{261} Clark, interview; Spencer, interview; Howard Zinn, \textit{The Twentieth Century} (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 137.

\textsuperscript{262} Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,” 58.


\textsuperscript{264} Spencer, interview.
kitchen fat at a ballgame received free admission. The only catch, however, was that the government required the fan to pay tax on his or her free admission, and so the fan received a tax ticket upon entering the stadium.\footnote{When asked about the ticket during his interview, Spencer claimed that if he gave the ticket to the curatorial department today, they would be gone for weeks researching every last detail about the artifact—determining not only what it was, but even who made the paper used to print it.} The additional research Spencer put into determining the nature and origin of the ticket not only demonstrated the Hall’s willingness to share authority with outside historians, but also produced the type of artifact Spencer liked to use in his exhibits—ones that proved baseball was not played in a vacuum, but instead actually reflected the way people lived.\footnote{Clark, interview.}

*Baseball Enlists* opened to the public in 1995. Artifacts like Bob Feller’s anti-aircraft goggles, Pete Gray’s glove, and baseballs used by the Japanese, German, and American armies filled the exhibit cases. Photographs of players in military uniforms, posters of Uncle Sam, and an advertisement from Louisville Slugger with the tag line, “Winning New Friends the World Over,” hung from walls decorated to look like the interior of a navy vessel. Complementing these artifacts were stories such as Joe Garagiola playing baseball at Racil Stadium in the Philippines where the right field wall had missing sections to allow tanks to get to the front, and Bob Feller’s story about military brass in the Pacific ordering newly arrived Seabees to prioritize their efforts by first constructing an airstrip and then constructing a baseball diamond.\footnote{Hall of Fame Exhibits Baseball Enlists, Photo # BL-11395.95, Photo Archives, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown; Rodgers, “G.I. Ball.”} All of this did
much to promote an idealized and patriotic vision of America as romantic and enthusiastic defenders of freedom, but this did not mean the exhibit was without its controversies.

Among the artifacts compiled for the exhibit were a Nazi armband and dagger, along with a number of photographs taken by former major leaguer and amateur photographer Murry Dickson in Europe. Dickson captured numerous telling and disturbing images from the war, including one photograph of railway boxcars packed with charred bodies. Like designers at numerous other museums who work with graphic materials, Spencer needed to determine just how much violence and horror was too much for visitors to encounter. In *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, Edward Linenthal argued that museums must strike a delicate balance “between the tolerable and the intolerable.” Sensitive subjects must not be presented in such graphic detail as to send patrons away shocked and nauseated, but must also not be hidden to the point of softening the story.

In the end, Spencer chose to display the armband and dagger, but mounted a photograph of bodies covered in shrouds rather than the more disturbing option. Despite using this more toned-down imagery, the inclusion of these materials still drew numerous complaints from museum visitors. The Hall of Fame responded by taking a stand, citing these artifacts as unfortunate and disturbing parts of a story which was their responsibility to tell.

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269 Spencer, interview.
This approach to exhibit design represented a departure from traditional ones utilized throughout the museum’s history, though only a limited one. The exhibit’s message, while incorporating controversial elements, still embraced the values of typical official narratives. Any controversy introduced into the exhibit came from exploring the brutality of the enemy, not confronting complexities and ambiguities such as America’s use of the atomic bomb, the deaths of former ballplayers overseas, or players who were among the 350,000 draft evasion cases during World War II.\textsuperscript{270} The American war effort came across as a singular, patriotic movement, unified for a just cause, without fracture or dissenting voice. This typified official narratives of the era.

\textsuperscript{270} Zinn, \textit{The Twentieth Century}, 151.
Where the Hall of Fame’s process differed from exhibits of the past was in the museum’s commitment to research and storytelling. *Baseball Enlists* represented a conscious effort to show the role baseball played within the larger context of American history.\(^{271}\) The Hall attempted to highlight the relationship between the game and the country. The academic research utilized to populate the exhibit text came from outside the museum and exemplified a burgeoning dedication to ensure exhibit designers explored subject matter at deeper levels than previously attempted. Researchers at the Hall of Fame dug as deep as they determined to be justified, and then reflecting upon the limits of their expertise, took the necessary steps to fill in the knowledge gaps they encountered through a process of shared authority. This represented an important step toward constructing richer and more inclusive narratives. At the end of the process, Ted Spencer recalled thinking, “from now on, this is the way we have to work.”\(^{272}\)

*Patriotism*

An examination of the Baseball Hall of Fame’s take on the American war effort leads into a discussion of patriotic displays found in the museum. Along with race, gender, and consumerism, patriotism is perhaps the most pervasive theme running throughout the Hall of Fame’s exhibits. At first glance, this patriotism appears to be a natural by-product of baseball’s association with American identity. As Daniel M. Daniel declared back in 1941, “For Americans, Baseball and the Flag are synonymous.”\(^{273}\) But

\(^{271}\) Clark, interview.

\(^{272}\) Spencer, interview.

the story of just how patriotism became so thoroughly rooted in the museum’s culture runs deeper than just its connection to baseball. Stephen Clark and his associates founded the museum, in part, to serve a patriotic purpose. The culture of the 1930s, combined with patriotism’s relationship to collective memory, dictated the direction of early museum displays and set precedents for future displays, many of which built on the patriotic momentum of their predecessors.

In 1924, fifteen years before the Baseball Hall of Fame’s official dedication, the United States Congress passed some of the most restrictive and racist immigration laws in American history. Their goal was to limit the influx of southern- and eastern-European immigrants—thought to carry with them anti-American ideals. That same year, New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its American Wing as a “patriotic antidote” meant to mitigate the fracturing of society caused by the introduction of an increasingly non-English-speaking population.274

During the 1930s, the United States hosted elaborate commemorative displays designed to promote “patriotic renewal” within its citizenry. The promotion of Colonial Williamsburg, the tercentenary celebration of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the formation of the George Washington Bicentennial Commission all gave Americans reasons to feel pride in their country. The Baseball Hall of Fame’s organizers capitalized on this patriotic fervor by commissioning posters of Uncle Sam swinging a baseball bat and by mass-producing red, white, and blue baseball merchandise. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave the museum a presidential pat on the back, calling baseball “the

274 Kulik, “Designing the Past,” 16.
great American sport.” In return for all of FDR’s support of baseball, Sporting News
publisher, J. G. Taylor Spink, lobbied (unsuccessfully) to have Roosevelt inducted into
the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1945.  

In addition to the effusive nationalism present during the museum’s founding, a
cornerstone of the Hall of Fame’s propensity for flag waving lies in patriotism’s
connection to public memory. As John Bodnar emphasized in Remaking America, “the
symbolic language of patriotism is central to public memory in the United States because
it has the capacity to mediate both vernacular loyalties to local and familiar places and
official loyalties to national and imagined structures.” This broad appeal helped affirm
the personal agendas of many of the museum’s early visitors who entered the Hall of
Fame expecting the red, white, and blue displays to evoke an elevated sense of pride in
their country. Such was the case with legendary baseball manager Connie Mack, who
once declared, “every time I go to Cooperstown I am filled with patriotic fervor, for here
is enshrined the American spirit which has made us a great nation.”

In the decades that followed, fluctuations in Hall of Fame attendance seemed
somewhat loosely to mirror similar rises and declines in feelings of nationalism
throughout the country—culminating in a rampant surge of American pride during the


276 Bodnar, Remaking America, 14–15.

political gain, making Americans feel good about themselves and their country in the
wake of Watergate, Vietnam, and a devastating economic recession.\textsuperscript{278} The ‘80s were an
era when \textit{Time} magazine declared, “some delirious need to wave American flags has
surfaced, fanning a passion previously associated with burning them.”\textsuperscript{279} At the Hall of
Fame, photographs of presidential first pitches and exhibits on Olympic baseball fueled a
resurgence in museum visitorship. After attendance fell throughout the late ‘70s to a
fourteen-year-low of 171,202 in 1979, an economic recovery and the abundant patriotism
of the Reagan years helped to more than double that figure (to 410,070) by 1989.\textsuperscript{280}

The utilization of patriotic sentiment as part of historical display does not,
however, come without formidable challenges. As discussed previously, patriotic
sentiment infused into a museum’s exhibits leaves the institution and its staff open to
allegations of promoting sanitized and idealistic displays of history. Additionally, often
large political forces appropriate personal associations with commemorative experiences
for nationalistic purposes.\textsuperscript{281} The backlash from such interpretations contributed to the
growth of the social history movement and the emotion-filled clashes of the culture wars.

The celebrated \textit{Baseball Enlists} exhibit shed significant light on the variety of
meanings Americans attributed to baseball during time of war. The backdrop for this
exploration was a very popular, romanticized, and patriotic war, however, in which media

\textsuperscript{278} Snyder, “Sociology of Nostalgia,” 234.

\textsuperscript{279} Tom Callahan, “One Last U.S. Victory Lap,” \textit{Time}, August 27, 1984,
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,926828,00.html.

\textsuperscript{280} Muder, email.

\textsuperscript{281} Bodnar, \textit{Remaking America}, 18.
outlets divided right from wrong by simply separating Allied from Axis. Less popular and more divisive military campaigns, like the Vietnam War, have yet to garner the same type of attention from exhibit designers, including those at the Hall of Fame. Certainly the argument that baseball’s participation in World War II was significantly larger and more multi-faceted than it was during Vietnam holds some validity, but the fact remains that the military service of Ted Williams during World War II and Korea is openly celebrated, while the service of Jim Bibby, Al Bumbry, and numerous others during the Vietnam era remain largely ignored. This is just one example of the way the unapologetically patriotic culture at the Hall of Fame sometimes leaves the museum open to criticism.

A second, more concrete example of the backlash created by the Hall of Fame’s patriotism occurred in 2003. That year, Hall of Fame President, Dale Petrosky (a former press secretary to Ronald Reagan), cancelled a fifteenth-anniversary celebration of the popular 1988 baseball film, Bull Durham, scheduled to take place at the museum. Petrosky’s reason for cancelling the celebration was the criticism leveled at then President George Bush for his handling of the Iraq war by one of the film’s stars, Tim Robbins. When Petrosky cancelled the celebration it ignited a firestorm of controversy surrounding the Hall of Fame and its politics. The New York Times accused Petrosky of undermining the fundamentally democratic ideal of free speech. For his part, Robbins publicly criticized Petrosky for politicizing baseball when he quipped, “I had been unaware that baseball was a Republican sport.”

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“everyman” and making it politically divisive, Petrosky’s patriotism risked alienating a significant portion of the Hall of Fame’s visitorship. It was a mistake the Hall has yet to repeat. Today, the Hall of Fame allots significant space in the museum for photos of Tim Robbins, Susan Sarandon, and other stars of *Bull Durham* in the Hall of Fame’s *Baseball at the Movies* exhibit.

*September 11, 2001*

In June of 1941, just months before America’s official entry into World War II, author Daniel M. Daniel reflected on the importance of baseball in healing the nation’s wounds during difficult times. He claimed, “The flag brought baseball out of the [Civil War] into tremendous prominence as our national game. And since then, whenever troubles clamp down on us harder than ever, we turn to baseball for solace, for recreation, for relaxation, for hours to forget.”

More than seventy years later, Erik Strohl echoed these same sentiments when discussing the nation’s recovery from the attacks of September 11, 2001, acknowledging that during these difficult times baseball becomes, in some form, a symbol of the American way of life.

In the days immediately following the attacks, the baseball scoreboard out in front of the museum read, “Due to the tragic events in America, Major League Baseball has canceled all games until further notice.” Rather than stopping there, however, the Hall went on to ensure they provided some context in order that visitors might understand the magnitude of these events within our nation’s history, by explaining, “This rare

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284 Strohl, interview.
occurrence last happened on D-Day, June 6, 1944.” Following the resumption of baseball, the Hall of Fame began collecting artifacts to document the attacks and what baseball meant to the country during this time. Some of these objects included the baseball thrown by President George W. Bush at Yankee Stadium to open the 2001 World Series, the NYPD hat worn by Mets manager Bobby Valentine upon resumption of the baseball season, and a baseball donated to the Hall of Fame by a New York City firefighter who found it buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center.

In the wake of 9/11, popular sentiment called on museums to be more patriotic “democracy building and democracy sustaining institutions.” The Hall of Fame responded by adding medallions under hall of fame plaques detailing the military service of Hall of Fame veterans. They also promoted a patriotic exhibit entitled, Presidential Pastime, featuring FDR’s picture on an All-Star Game program, a photo of Richard Nixon throwing out a first pitch, and a cartoon of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglass competing in a game of baseball. This more modern take on patriotism, however, tempered the celebration with contextual analysis intended to promote a


288 Lenny DiFranza, email message to author, March 13, 2012; Hall of Fame Exhibits Presidential Pastime, Photo Archives, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
growing awareness of baseball’s place in American history. The museum now drew patrons through the door by providing the patriotism they expected to see, but then utilized richer, more complex narratives around patriotic events to provide viewers with a fuller understanding of American history. The Hall of Fame still employs this strategy today, attempting to ensure the museum experience meets with visitor expectations, while simultaneously educating visitors about aspects of the story they may not have anticipated confronting in a shrine to the All-American Game.
CHAPTER 6

UNDERREPRESENTED CULTURAL GROUPS

Counter-balancing the official patriotic narratives of the 1990s was an increasing emphasis on exploring the stories of marginalized cultural groups in greater detail. As Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig argued, legitimizing the histories of these groups often meant celebrating them to the same degree American culture did more traditional groups. Unfortunately for many cultural groups struggling for recognition, however, when they looked to museums to tell their stories, they found a lack of representation in the exhibitry and institutions hesitant to appeal to diverse constituencies out of fear of alienating their traditional customer base.\textsuperscript{289}

At the Baseball Hall of Fame, there existed a broader awareness that even though the focus of the museum needed to remain the game’s great players, moments, and achievements, there was a back-story present within baseball capable of producing more meaningful connections for visitors.\textsuperscript{290} When Ted Spencer came to the Hall of Fame, his goal was to change the public’s perception of the museum by addressing gaps in the country’s historical knowledge base. To Spencer, one of the most obvious but challenging undertakings was “to find ways of making black baseball fit into the story of America without alienating fans who didn't think the game's history needed tweaking.”\textsuperscript{291}


\textsuperscript{290} Strohl, interview.

\textsuperscript{291} Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 131.
In 1993, Spencer saw an opportunity to utilize some newly created exhibit space to expand on the story of African Americans in baseball in time for 1997’s fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson’s introduction into the major leagues.

Building on the process begun by *Women in Baseball*, and strengthened by *Baseball Enlists*, the Hall of Fame commissioned an “academic study” of black baseball, not just to gather more statistics, but also to contextualize baseball within the story of the changing African American community. As Spencer recalled, “This was an honest effort to get it right,” in order to strengthen the credibility of the museum for what promised to be a high-profile exhibit.\(^{292}\)

The study produced a seven-hundred-page report utilized as the backbone of the new exhibit, entitled, *Pride & Passion: The African American Baseball Experience*. Jackie Robinson’s widow, Rachel, along with *AFRO* sports editor Sam Lacy, and numerous surviving Negro League players officially opened the exhibit on June 12, 1997.\(^{293}\) During the ceremonies, Hall of Famer Joe Morgan lauded the exhibit as “the final link between Ty Cobb and Ken Griffey Jr.”\(^ {294}\) Spencer applauded the efforts of the museum staff and used the exhibit’s unveiling to reassert the Hall of Fame’s position within the museum community. “We are a history museum,” Spencer declared, “and the story of how black ballplayers got to where they are today is important . . . I think what

\(^{292}\) Spencer, interview.

\(^{293}\) “New exhibit hopes to capture triumph of black baseball story,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York; Spencer, discussion.

\(^{294}\) “‘Lost Era’ restored to Baseball Hall of Fame,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.
we are trying to show people is that this isn’t just about the Negro Leagues and about Jackie Robinson, but about at least 130 years of American history.”

In support of this new exhibit, the Hall of Fame hosted a symposium on African Americans in baseball. The symposium was the ninth in a series of similar events hosted by the Hall meant to bring together “scholars, historians, and serious baseball fans,” to discuss the role of baseball in American culture. The symposium consisted of papers presented by Richard F. Peterson of Southern Illinois University, Karl Lindholm of Middlebury College, Charles Lamb of Old Dominion University, and a keynote address by Jules Tygiel, author of *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and his Legacy.*

*The African American Experience*

The *Pride & Passion* exhibit (which the Hall of Fame staff re-curated in 2003 and is still on display today), tells the story of African Americans in both baseball and American life from the latter-half of the nineteenth century to the present. The exhibit breaks the narrative into six parts:

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2. “Barnstorming on the Open Road 1887–1919” (originally titled “Barnstormers 1887-1919”), discusses how an unspoken agreement between baseball owners eventually excluded blacks from baseball and forced them to form their own professional teams that travelled the country in search of competition.

3. “Separate Leagues, Parallel Lives 1920–1932” (originally titled “Separate Leagues, Parallel Lives 1920–33”), details the formation of the Negro Leagues and the migration of southern African Americans to industrial cities in the Midwest.

4. “Paving the Way 1943–1946” (originally titled “Rebirth 1933–45”), while formerly discussing the Depression, night baseball, and the Latin American winter leagues, now focuses on the recovery from the Great Depression and the success of the Negro Leagues as a business enterprise.

5. “Signposts for Opportunity 1947–1959” (originally titled “Changing Opportunities 1946–59”), details the impact World War II made on the belief in “separate but equal,” and how the death of Kenesaw Mountain Landis helped bring about the slow transition to integrated baseball.
6. “Post-Integration Era 1959–present” (its title unchanged), while talking about achievements of African Americans in the game, points out that issues of true equality of opportunity in the United States still remains a contested issue.

*Pride & Passion* contains many of the photos, artifacts, and multimedia segments a visitor expects to find at a museum about baseball. What made the 1997 release of *Pride & Passion* so groundbreaking for the Hall of Fame, however, was that in addition to taking on the controversial subject matter in a more socially conscious manner, the Hall did so through the use of one of its first interactive displays. In a nod to the museum of the future (in which institutions grant visitors more authority to customize their individual learning experiences) the Hall of Fame Museum provided visitors with three interactive kiosks with which to navigate through their particular topic of interest. This innovation acknowledged, to some degree, a rechanneling of the museum’s efforts toward providing the visitor with a more fully integrated experience. As Ted Spencer commented, “To me this exhibit is not about artifacts. If the exhibit was about artifacts, then the old exhibit would have been fine, but the real focus of this is on the story.”

The backbone of *Pride & Passion* is a timeline that weaves visitors through the exhibit from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. What is particularly effective about this display is that it is really two timelines running parallel to each other. The first timeline depicts pivotal events in the history of baseball. The second timeline, labeled “General History,” allows for the viewing of events within the larger context of

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concurrent American history. Both timelines focus primarily on events involving African Americans.

The era in which the timeline begins is significant in that it goes back to baseball’s origins. By discussing black baseball during the mid-nineteenth century (when the modern game was supposedly “invented”), Hall of Fame curators demonstrate that blacks have been playing the game as long as whites, and that despite long-held perceptions, whites have no more right to claim ownership over the game than any other cultural group.\textsuperscript{299} Movement along the timeline allows visitors to connect the 1857 founding of the National Association of Base Ball Players with the 1857 \textit{Dred Scott v. Sandford} Supreme Court decision that allowed slave owners to reclaim slaves who escaped to free states. Visitors can then move on to view a series of events that includes the release of publications by activist W.E.B. Du Bois, the founding of the NAACP, and the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first black Supreme Court justice—all within the context of baseball history.\textsuperscript{300}

\textit{Personal Stories}

Personal stories are a very effective way for museums to connect with visitors. Through the conveyance of personal narratives, visitors often draw parallels to events in their own lives and identify with the subject matter on a more emotional level. \textit{Pride & Passion} follows the stories of several individuals whose contributions to the story of baseball also teach visitors something about American culture. The museum presents a

\textsuperscript{299} This comparison also appears in the \textit{Diamond Dreams} exhibit, demonstrating that women have been playing baseball just as long as men.

\textsuperscript{300} \textit{Pride & Passion}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 12, 2012.
poignant commentary on the state of cultural biases in the early twentieth century through the use of one of these stories.

At the start of the twentieth century, Baltimore Orioles manager John McGraw discovered a talented African American ballplayer named Charlie Grant. Grant played ball in Hot Springs, Arkansas, during the “gentleman’s agreement” era of baseball when owners denied African Americans access to the professional game. In order to bypass the agreement, McGraw tried to pass Grant off as a Cherokee Indian and gave him the name “Chief Tokohama.” It was not long before baseball owners caught on to McGraw’s ruse and forced Grant to return to playing segregated baseball. By bringing this story to light, the museum is asking visitors to contemplate the state of race relations that existed which made it acceptable for Grant to be a Native American, but not an African American. In addition, that McGraw thought the name Chief Tokohama did not sound fictional, transparent, or offensive, also speaks to the naive and paternalistic attitudes still held toward Native Americans during this era. It is these types of stories that the Hall of Fame used to help foster discussions of race in the *Pride & Passion* exhibit.

Of course, the most well-known and well-documented story the Hall utilizes is that of Jackie Robinson. Robinson appears in numerous exhibits throughout the museum, but never with greater effectiveness than in *Pride & Passion*. Here the exhibit cements Robinson’s groundbreaking legacy through bats, balls, gloves, photographs, film, correspondence, and written narratives.

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Gauging the proper tone for the Robinson story, however, was no easy task for Ted Spencer and his staff. Balancing competing sides of a narrative that deals with such an emotionally charged figure meant choosing wording and imagery carefully and deliberately, and often required a significant amount of compromise. When designing *Pride & Passion*, Spencer started by focusing on themes of tragedy and oppression that he felt played an important role in the story. Seeking additional input, he consulted with Rachel Robinson. Rachel thought the exhibit worked better as a story of triumph and perseverance. In the end, the tone of the exhibit was one forged through compromise.

A picture of Robinson in his military uniform not only provides the patriotic war hero connection that the Hall of Fame used to promote its founding, it also speaks to the image of the complacent, self-sacrificing American that Robinson needed to be in order to gain acceptance by the American public in the 1940s. Photocopies of hate mail Robinson received appear with the racial slurs left uncensored—displaying the depths of emotion that accompanied the issue of race during Robinson’s career, as well as documenting the challenges Robinson had to overcome. The exhibit does not mention, however, the increasingly militant attitude Robinson embraced later in his career in an effort to further the cause of civil rights. It does not talk of Robinson throwing a baseball at the head of Braves pitcher Lew Burdette after Burdette called him a “watermelon head.”[^302] Robinson’s story is one of poise and integrity, not retaliation. So in this case, the Hall of Fame omits complexity in the name of forming a more coherent narrative. In

[^302]: Briley, *Class at Bat*, 95.
other sections of the exhibit, however, curators left this complexity unsanitized, even at the risk of alienating visitors.

**Violence and Graphic Imagery**

In 1869, citing a baseball game between black and white teams in Philadelphia, a journalist for the *New York Clipper* wrote, “The prejudices of race are rapidly disappearing.” While impactful for its irony, the display of this quote in the Hall of Fame’s *Pride & Passion* exhibit demonstrates the connection the game of baseball had with issues of race during the Reconstruction era. In a further bit of irony, the Hall of Fame also points out that on October 10, 1871, the first day that black men were legally allowed to vote in the United States, the captain of the African American baseball team that played that day in Philadelphia was murdered in the riots that ensued over black suffrage.

In discussing prejudice, detailing acts of violence, and presenting disturbing or potentially offensive imagery in the *Pride & Passion* exhibit, the Baseball Hall of Fame continues its mission to become a forum for dialogue on difficult but culturally important subjects. While the Hall of Fame works diligently to present visitors with a pleasant experience and to protect the museum’s family friendly image, it increasingly finds itself drawn into the post-modern museum world that requires the presentation of more than just “happy history.” As Erik Strohl argued, “What kind of historian would you be if you chose what parts of history you liked and which ones you didn’t and you didn't touch on

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304 Ibid.
those things which were not pleasant.” The story of a racially motivated murder is just one example of the disturbing content on display in *Pride & Passion*.

The exhibit takes on some of the most graphic manifestations of racial bigotry in late nineteenth-century depictions of white attitudes toward blacks. Posted on the wall of the exhibit is a letter to the editor of *Sporting Life* in which the writer refers to the search for “colored players” as “a grand coon-hunt.” Alongside this letter are racially insensitive cartoons ridiculing black players’ attempts at playing baseball. These racist cartoons are the work of the iconic American culture artists, Currier & Ives. In addition, the Hall displays a transcript of a letter that threatens violence to an African American player if he steps on the field in Richmond, Virginia.

Continuing this theme are particularly moving photocopies of actual hate mail received by Jackie Robinson. One of the letters threatens to kill Robinson and brags that the writer had “already got rid of several like you. One was found in [the] river just recently.” The museum, in allowing visitors to read the actual letters as if they were holding them in their hands, effectively prevents visitors from being mere bystanders to the hate crimes on display. Additionally, curators allow the perpetrators to speak in a manner that allows visitors a glimpse into their mindset without eliciting feelings of

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307 Ibid.
reverence for their cause.\textsuperscript{308} It is another example of where the Hall of Fame is asking visitors to understand that its mission is not to condone the behavior of those they display, but neither is it to ignore it. More importantly, for the exhibit’s designers, it is to raise awareness about the history of race in America. As Ted Spencer said when the exhibit opened, “We want people to come out of the exhibit shaking their heads, ‘Wow! We didn't realize.’”\textsuperscript{309}

![Image 9. Facsimile of Hate Mail Received by Jackie Robinson (2012). Photo by Author](image)

Adding Depth

For all the progress \textit{Pride & Passion} takes in moving the Hall of Fame’s exhibits into the twenty-first century, there are quite a few aspects of prejudice in America that are

\textsuperscript{308} Linenthal, \textit{Preserving Memory}, 198–199.

\textsuperscript{309} “New baseball exhibit on blacks in the game offers life lessons for everyone,” \textit{Gadsen Times} (Gadsen, AL), June 6, 1997.
only addressed at very high levels—without the type of critical engagement modern museum visitors increasingly demand. These represent opportunities to convey a more well rounded narrative in future renderings of the exhibit and to foster dialogue about critical aspects of African Americans in baseball that go unexplored.

One of the most obvious opportunities is the story of divisions within the African American community. As Stephen Pope assesses when referring to research on African Americans in sports, “The general literature documents African-American exclusion from white organized sport, but as yet, fails to sufficiently analyze the negotiated outcomes between blacks and whites in sport, as well as the ways in which black athletes were differentiated among themselves by color, class, religion, and political orientations.”

For blacks to gain access into white American sports often meant compromising their African American identities. This created divisions within the African American community that requires acknowledgement—as does the variety of ways African Americans combated prejudice (which included varying degrees of militancy). In addition, the chance to add even greater diversity to the exhibit resides in the stories of the challenges faced by players of mixed race, like Roy Campanella, and the cultural implications of the bi-racial insults directed at Babe Ruth during his career.

Of even greater significance is the opportunity to draw stronger connections to modern challenges still faced by the African American community. When *Pride & Passion* opened in 1997, many envisioned this as the exhibit’s primary function. Negro

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310 Pope, “Negotiating the ‘Folk Highway,’” 332.

311 Ibid.
league star Larry Doby expressed this sentiment prior to the exhibit’s opening when he said, “Thursday is a day to look at how far we’ve come as a nation . . . It’s an opportunity to look at the country and see what we still need to work on.”\textsuperscript{312} Rachel Robinson also saw this potential in \textit{Pride & Passion}, declaring, “This exhibit talks about the African-American experience, but we know that the African-American experience is rooted in the American experience and we have to think broadly if we’re going to be able to address the challenges of the present.”\textsuperscript{313} Unfortunately, the narrative of \textit{Pride & Passion} largely comes to an end before making connections to modern issues facing blacks in baseball.

Among these modern issues are the alarming lack of African Americans in front-office positions. At the opening of \textit{Pride & Passion}, Hall of Famer Joe Morgan called on baseball to “fulfill the promise it made to Jackie Robinson 50 years ago.”\textsuperscript{314} Morgan called for more black ownership and front-office advancement for African Americans. \textit{Pride & Passion} addresses this only by acknowledging that it remains an issue.

In discussing connections to modern racism, the Hall of Fame educates visitors about the history of Jim Crow and asks them to contemplate if this form of segregation is still present today. What visitors may not be aware of, however, is the modern presence

\textsuperscript{312} “Proud Doby will attend exhibit opening day,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

\textsuperscript{313} “Continuation of Jackie’s legacy discussed,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

\textsuperscript{314} “‘Lost Era’ restored to Baseball Hall of Fame,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.
of racism in its more subtle forms. One of the manifestations of this new subtle prejudice is a staggering decline in the number of African American baseball players in recent decades. In the 1980s, one-third of all major league players were black. By 2009, that number had fallen to less than one-tenth.\(^{315}\) Some African American advocates believe this to be an issue of race. In a 2007 interview with \textit{GQ} magazine (that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter) former major leaguer Gary Sheffield attributed this decline in African American players to racism within the baseball establishment.\(^{316}\)

Racism within the game of baseball can also take on even more subtle forms. In 2011, author David Sirota published an article on racism in baseball in which he argued that “persistent racial wage and unemployment gaps show that prejudice is alive and well in America,” but that “American bigotry is now more often an unseen crime of the subtle and the reflexive.”\(^{317}\) To demonstrate his point, Sirota utilized a study conducted by Southern Methodist University in which researches used Major League Baseball’s QuesTec computerized pitch-monitoring system to analyze 3.5 million pitches thrown in major league baseball games between 2004 and 2008, and then compared that data to how home-plate umpires actually called the pitches. What the study found was that umpires called “disproportionately more strikes for pitchers in their same ethnic

\(^{315}\) Chafets, \textit{Cooperstown Confidential}, 127.


group." This meant that the game’s largely white, American, English-speaking umpiring crews gave white, American, English-speaking pitchers the benefit of the doubt on close calls more often than other pitchers. As Sirota concluded, this is bias operating on a subconscious level, where the umpires do not even realize it, and so it is possible that the same subconscious bias still operates in other facets of American society today.

Still others take modern allegations of prejudice a step further. Baseball’s conservative roots still manifest themselves in a general distaste for players with tattoos and dreadlocks that many feel is culturally biased. Authors like David Ogden have gone as far as to challenge Major League Baseball’s celebration of Jackie Robinson Day, claiming that it is nothing more than a disingenuous overture made to mask the gulf between baseball and the African American community. The Baseball Writers Association of America even faced charges of racism from fans citing the Hall of Fame inductions of white players like Gary Carter and Wade Boggs, while black players with similar statistics, like Dave Parker and Dick Allen, remain excluded.

Despite the plethora of bias-related issues that challenge the baseball fan to rethink the game and its role in racial dialogue, there is the potential of the Pride & Passion exhibit to make more meaningful connections to the role these issues play in

318 Ibid.
319 Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 127.
321 Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 118.
forming modern-American identity. As the visitor exits the *Pride & Passion* exhibit, the only connections made to modern issues of race are those inferred from a plaque that reads, “By 1959, every major league team’s roster was integrated, but in baseball, as in all parts of American life, questions concerning true equality of opportunity remained unresolved . . . Despite progress on many fronts in baseball, such issues continue to be discussed today.”

The potential remains to make the *Pride & Passion* exhibit experience more poignant and relevant for visitors by forging some of the connections to modern racial issues mentioned above and by introducing an element of complexity to the narrative of progress made by the African American community in the last century and a half. Energies directed toward these types of efforts help bring the museum’s values more in-line with those of the modern museum-going community.

*Women Re-curated*

In 2003, the *New York Times* lauded Ted Spencer as a man who had “consistently embraced innovation” since coming to the Hall of Fame in 1982. While much of this innovation came through in the way the museum presented information (thanks in part to Spencer’s corporate communications background), even greater change came from a growing focus on the history of the game and from a concerted effort to acquire the artifacts necessary for presenting this history. Between 1982 and 2003, the Hall doubled its collection of artifacts (up to 6,200 baseballs, 1,760 bats, 450 gloves, 816 jerseys, and 577 hats). These objects now came through a full-fledged, eight-person accessioning

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committee, who looked not just at an object’s aesthetic value, but also numerous other qualities including its potential to compliment the museum’s existing collections strategy and research interests. In 2006, this changing culture within the museum contributed to the re-curating of the Women in Baseball exhibit. 323

According to Robert Sullivan in Reinventing the Museum, exhibits last for about one generation before the public considers them old-fashioned, irrelevant, unethical, or just out-of-touch with a community’s expectations. 324 By 1995, just seven years after the opening of Women in Baseball, additional research taking place at the Hall of Fame already pointed to inadequacies in the museum’s story of women in the game. That year, Ted Spencer confessed to the Sporting News that “women have been playing baseball since 1860; we didn't know that. We had only gone back to the turn of the century. . . . We sort of picked it up somewhere in the middle. We will fix it.” 325 In 2006, roughly a generation after the opening of Women in Baseball, the Hall of Fame unveiled a new, more complex exhibit focusing on women, entitled, Diamond Dreams.

The Diamond Dreams exhibit tells the story of women in baseball in three parts—in the front office, on the field, and in the stands. Part I moves from front office pioneers to executives of the modern era. Part II looks at baseball in the 1800s, moves through the contributions of the AAGPBL, and then addresses Title IX and more recent attempts by


women to gain equality on the playing field. Finally, Part III addresses women as fans, ball girls, organists, and reporters, and looks at images of female ballplayers found in popular culture. The exhibit’s Art Deco feel comes directly from the emphasis placed on era of the 1940s and ‘50s within the women’s game, and from Ted Spencer’s affinity for the period displays found in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.  

In meeting with the expectations of visitors, the exhibit contains a healthy dose of “firsts.” *Diamond Dreams* acknowledges Nellie Twardzik, the first girl to start on a high school boys’ baseball team, Judy Walden Scarafile, the first woman president of a men’s league (the Cape Cod League in 1991), and Joan Payson, the first woman to purchase a major league franchise. Also included in the exhibit are the first women to start in a college game, to umpire a professional game, to play in a minor league game, and to pitch and win a minor league game.  

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Unlike *Women in Baseball*, the *Diamond Dreams* exhibit goes to greater lengths to explore social issues within the game. Here again, African American contributions to baseball reappear in the form of Effa Manley, co-owner of the Negro League Newark Eagles, Elaine Weddington Steward, the first African American female executive in Major League Baseball, and Toni Stone, Peanut Johnson, and Connie Morgan, three women who actually played in the Negro Leagues. While acknowledging the groundbreaking contributions of these women, the exhibit avoids any real exploration of race. For example, a photo of former Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott presenting a baseball jacket to Pope John Paul II does not mention anything about Major League Baseball pressuring Schott to leave the game due to her outward displays of racism. Issues like these remain reserved for discussion in the *Pride & Passion* exhibit.
Instead, where the *Diamond Dreams* exhibit breaks new ground for the Hall of Fame is in exploring challenges faced by women as a collective group. Nowhere is this more evident than in the displays of objectification and exploitation found in pop culture portrayals of women in baseball. Early twentieth century “cheese cake” photos of women playing the game compliment more modern takes on sexism depicting the Philadelphia Phillies’ “Hot Pants Patrol”—a group of young cheerleaders/waitresses dressed in hot pants and knee-high boots formed in 1971 by Phillies executive, Bill Giles, “to create a fresher, more attractive atmosphere” at the ballpark.\(^{328}\) Owners of teams like the Kansas City Royals and Oakland A’s tried to attract more women (and men) to the ballpark by offering women tube-top promotions, pregame beauty contests, and free admission for wearing short-shorts. It is this type of objectification that *Diamond Dreams* attempts to portray in the exhibit.\(^{329}\)

The radically sexist promotions (representing one of the few sexual references found in the museum), were not only indicative of the culture of exploitation that existed in opposition to the progress of the women’s movement, but also undermined the image of the serious female baseball fan. Baseball actually welcomed women as fans long before allowing them into any other aspects of the game. In the 1880s, professional baseball began its Ladies’ Day promotions. Any woman escorted by a man received free admission. While on the surface it appeared to be a way for baseball to attract more female fans, part of the actual motivation behind Ladies’ Day was to appeal to baseball’s

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\(^{328}\) Wall panel, *Diamond Dreams*, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, November 6, 2012.

large female fan base in hopes that they might actually interest their male companions in coming to the games.  

Magazine stories portrayed the typical female fan as a naive but moralizing influence on baseball. One story, written by John A. Cooper in 1937, told of a wife referring to an umpire as “the man at the plate with a pillow on his stomach and the birdcage on his face,” confusing a “foul” with a “fowl,” and admonishing her husband when he referred to the umpire as a “crooked porch climber.”  

An entirely different story emerged, however, when author Harold Winerip attended Ladies’ Day in Pittsburgh in 1939. Far from being passive, demur, and naive in the way of sports, Winerip applauded the 14,000 female fans for their knowledge of the game and the conviction with which they displayed their allegiances. At one point, a fight broke out between two feuding female fans who began to push, shove, and yell at one another. As Winerip recalled, “Why one woman took another’s hat off and threw it to the field. The second woman turned around and grabbed the other’s shoe and threw it out. Two more joined them before they all landed in the police station.”  

Societal pressures in the 1970s brought an end to gender-specific promotions like Ladies’ Day, but that did not equate to victory for the equal rights movement in baseball. As the Hall of Fame chronicles in its move from exploring women as fans to women as

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employers and employees, despite the fact that women make up almost 50 percent of Major League Baseball’s attendance, “It has been harder for women to translate their love of the game into employment.”

Here the Hall of Fame ventures into a discussion of the professional opportunities for women in baseball, covering, among other topics, the 1978 court victory that guaranteed female reporters equal access to players in the locker room. Also represented are the variety of other professional roles women play within the game, from organists and front office staff, to umpires, ball girls, and public address announcers. The discussion provides a fitting ending for an exhibit that focuses on the upward mobility of women through the professional realms of baseball.

At the risk of falling into the trap—identified by Murray G. Phillips—of historians expecting too much from the limited space available inside museums, prevailing scholarship on representations of women’s history in museums calls on these institutions to explore narratives at a deeper level than just acknowledging progress within a chosen profession. Janet Marstine argues that museums fail to take into account the full experience of women, both public and private. Barbara Melosh echoed these sentiments in History Museums in the United States, when she noted that museums tend to focus on the professional lives of women (work in factories, etc.), without critically examining issues of domesticity, family, or sexuality. This is where the potential “next

333 Wall panel, Diamond Dreams, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, November 6, 2012.
step” for future explorations of the subject matter exists if the Hall of Fame Museum is to keep pace with the ever-evolving values and priorities of the American public.\footnote{Marstine, “Introduction,” 19; Melosh, “Speaking of Women,” 187.}

Overcoming exclusion and forging opportunities for future generations of women to pursue their love of baseball is a critical part of the story of women in baseball and the Hall of Fame addresses these aspects thoroughly, but the story takes on even greater resonance with added context and complexity. Certainly breaking down gender-specific cultural barriers mandated sacrifices to the domestic identities of baseball’s female pioneers that go largely unaddressed in modern scholarship. In addition, silencing the sexually demeaning encounters with managers, owners, or even loud-mouthed fans in the male-dominated world of baseball detracts from the intensity of the struggle for equality. Little scholarship offers details about the additional strain homosexual identity added to society’s apprehensions about women in sports as well, especially regarding the challenges made to existing gender roles posed by women entering into a traditionally patriarchal landscape. The reactions to these threats manifested themselves in a variety of easily overlooked forms that add depth and complexity to the narrative.

For an example of these manifestations, one does not need to look any further than the uniform skirts worn by players in the AAGPBL. In \textit{Representing the Sporting Past}, Thierry Terret argued that just looking at a garment, or the evolution of one, does not necessarily convey all it represents, and that visitors to museums often display more interest in the color, form, and texture of clothing than its social uses and symbolic
functions. So why did the AAGPBL’s players wear a skirt and not the traditional baseball pant? According to Terret, the skirt helped “strengthen the female stereotype of a receptive and reproduction-oriented nature,” whereas trousers, throughout much of the twentieth century, “remained a strong component of hegemonic masculinity.” The symbolic value of the skirt made female baseball more palatable by appearing to avoid compromising a woman’s willingness to procreate despite engaging in an activity of a traditionally masculine nature. This proved particularly important in an era when opponents of women’s baseball resorted to citing medical reports warning that exertions on the field could potentially destroy female energy vital for reproduction.

The skirts also proved critical in maintaining feminine identity by helping mask the fact that these women, according to the Los Angeles Times, played “good old country hardball. They threw knockdown pitches and low-bridged the shortstop on the double play. They jawed with umpires, played hurt and were tossed out of games. They gambled and drank.” Former player Lil Jackson remembered passing the travel time between games by playing cards and shooting craps in the aisle of the bus. These were not images the AAGPBL’s founders wanted associated with their league.

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335 Thierry Terret, “‘Beyond Sport Heroes' Celebration: On the Use of Sportswear for Sport History,” in Phillips, Representing the Sporting Past, 49–51.

336 Ibid., 58.


338 Berler, “Oh, How They Played the Game.”

339 Ibid.
An examination of the symbolic value of the AAGPBL uniform provides just one avenue for introducing complexity and ambiguity into the story of women in baseball—in this case, by facilitating discussions pertaining to cultural views on domesticity and sexuality. There are numerous other avenues as well, including—but certainly not limited to—examining the relegation of women to traditionally secondary roles as “an emergency labor force” during wartime (e.g., the AAGPBL), and the forgotten stories of the women who did not make it into the league or the difficult transitions players faced when the league folded. Additionally, there are the stories of how playing baseball affected the lives of players after baseball. As one former player recalled, after playing catcher and having a base runner barreling down on her while a relay throw from the outfield arrived at the same time, working in an office with men suddenly seemed significantly less intimidating.\textsuperscript{340}

The above critique illustrates, through example, the depth to which the Hall of Fame subscribed to prevailing standards of public history practice in the early 2000s. For instance, by looking at the museum’s willingness to incorporate the narratives of underrepresented cultural groups, it becomes clear that the Hall of Fame has taken a giant step forward in its recognition of one of the key components of social history. Promoting meaningful engagement with the subject matter by establishing connections to modern social movements and by acknowledging internal conflicts and ambiguities within those movements, however, represents a stage of transition the Hall of Fame is still working toward in its evolution.

One final example, utilized to conclude this chapter’s focus on the inclusion of silenced or underrepresented cultural groups, examines the museum’s recognition of international cultures and their place within the story of the All-American game. While the Hall of Fame’s founders fought desperately to purify American claims to baseball ownership, modern scholarship demonstrates that the game’s international manifestations play an equally important role in shaping the history of baseball—a role largely ignored until recently.

As previously noted, Victorian America viewed baseball as a tool for socializing millions of immigrants arriving in the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By playing baseball, foreign athletes helped assure themselves a place within American society and made baseball, according to FDR, “the symbol of America as a melting pot.” But the true impact of international baseball reaches outside American borders. To comprehend the importance of the game to world—not just American—history, one has to acknowledge the implications of baseball’s global expansion and its shaping of, and by, a variety of cultures.

Back in the early twentieth century, the Americanized version of baseball spread beyond the North American continent thanks to U.S. territorial acquisitions resulting from the Spanish-American War. This coincided with efforts by the U.S. Department of Commerce to open new markets for American products by introducing baseball into burgeoning overseas economies. In addition, numerous “goodwill” tours around the

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341 Pope, “Negotiating the ‘Folk Highway,’” 331; Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 175.
world increased the game’s popularity in the Far East, England, South Africa, Germany, and Australia. After a successful baseball demonstration at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and the creation of a world baseball tournament in Japan in 1940, many Americans invested the camaraderie forged by competitive baseball with the power to transform international relations.342

In the post-war era, the game became a potent weapon in America’s international “arsenal of democracy.” Not only did the U.S. government use the game (spread around the world by American G.I.s) as an instrument of detente, but promoted the expansion of baseball in countries (such as Venezuela) as a way to halt the spread of communism. In the late 1960s, entrepreneurs even attempted the formation of a Global Baseball League, placing franchises in the United States, Japan, and Latin America; but the logistics of travel and financing, along with the competition from Major League Baseball, proved too much and the league went bankrupt. Despite the setback, however, by the end of the twentieth century, the love of baseball was, perhaps more than ever, an international affair.343

The promotion of international claims to baseball are elements of the game’s history originally silenced within the patriotic displays at the Hall of Fame. The “feel-good” nationalism that permeated the museum’s exhibits throughout much of its early


343 Briley, Class at Bat, 59; Manning, “Globalization of Baseball in Popular Culture,” 117.
history proved critical in reinforcing the values of its visitorship and in convincing fans to trek out to Cooperstown. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the challenge undertaken by the Hall of Fame to stay current and relevant placed new emphasis on telling the story of the international game.344

A Focus on Similarities Helps Visitors Make Connections

Many of the museum’s early efforts at addressing diversity and international influences on the game took the form of efforts to bridge cultural gaps. By demonstrating the similarities between baseball’s place in American culture and the game’s place within numerous international cultures, the Hall of Fame promoted a message of international unity by focusing on baseball’s ability to bring people together through the process of shared experience. This is never more evident than in the Hall of Fame’s approach to Japan’s passion for baseball.

American schoolteachers introduced baseball to the Japanese back in 1870, during an era of modernization and Westernization in parts of the Far East. In the decades that followed, America utilized this common interest in baseball to help further its imperial ambitions and to promote democracy across the Asian continent. The goodwill baseball fostered between Japan and the United States came to an abrupt end during the Second World War, but in the years that followed, the two sides engaged in a variety of cultural

exchanges, including a visit to the Baseball Hall of Fame by four members of the Japanese government intended to “heal old wounds.”

In 1993, Japanese television representatives putting together a festival on American culture approached the Hall of Fame about donating artifacts for an exhibit on baseball. Planned in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institute and placed under the direction of lead curator, Lonnie Bunch, the exhibit enticed Ted Spencer to travel to Japan to assist. Overwhelmed by the Japanese passion for the game, Spencer came back to Cooperstown inspired to tie his experience to efforts to broaden the topics on display within the Hall of Fame museum. The result was 1998’s, *Diamonds in the Rough: Japanese Americans in Baseball*, an exhibit dedicated to placing the experiences of Japanese American ballplayers within the context of broader American history. It was an exhibit that presented visitors with a different perspective from which to approach their understanding of the game, as well as provided a contextual framework for viewing Japanese artifacts that remain on display in the museum today.

Among these artifacts are a baseball hit for a homerun by Japan’s all-time homerun leader Sadaharu Oh, and an early twentieth-century program written in Japanese printed for Babe Ruth’s tour of Asia. These artifacts educate visitors about the history of international baseball, international relations, and in the case of the Babe Ruth program, tell us something about international travel in the early 1900s. Additionally, the

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346 DiFranza, discussion.
willingness (in 1997) to acquire a cap worn by Japanese pitcher Shigetoshi Hasegawa, with the Japanese words “powerful” and “aggression” written inside, demonstrates the degree to which tensions between the United States and Japan dissipated in the decades following World War II.347

Other recent forays into international aspects of the game utilized approaches meant to help visitors draw meaningful connections to their own experiences by way of comparison. In 2006, the Hall of Fame unveiled Planet Baseball, an exhibit focused on the international game. A patriotic exhibit on Olympic baseball came in 2009, with the Hall of Fame displaying artifacts from Australia, Japan, and Italy alongside those of American athletes like Doug Mientkiewicz and Jim Abbott—highlighting the equipment’s similarities. Two years later, the museum unveiled Swinging Away: How Cricket and Baseball Connect. After working in conjunction with the Marylebone Cricket Club of London, Hall of Fame President Jeff Idelson noted, “Just as baseball fans make the pilgrimage to Cooperstown to experience the spiritual journey in tracing baseball’s past, so too do cricket fans in making their way to Lord's in London, to experience the home of cricket.”348

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Exploring the Latin American Influence

By far the Hall of Fame’s most auspicious undertaking in the exploration of international baseball was 2009’s ¡Viva Baseball! exhibit—an examination of Latin American culture and the passion it demonstrates for the game. Between the years 2000 and 2010, the Latino population in the United States increased by 43 percent, from 35.3 million to 50.5 million. During a roughly fifteen-year period leading up to the unveiling of ¡Viva Baseball!, the professional game once again demonstrated its ability to act as a microcosm of American culture, witnessing an increase in the percentage of Latin American players from 13 to 30 percent.\(^{349}\) The unveiling of ¡Viva Baseball! in the spring of 2009 represented an attempt by the Hall of Fame to move itself into the post-museum world by addressing the needs of its increasingly diverse constituency.

Baseball first came to Latin America in 1866, when Cuban students studying in America returned home and founded a team in Havana. The game soon spread from Cuba to its trading partners, as well as into areas occupied by American troops in the early twentieth century. Additionally, U.S. corporate interests helped facilitate expansion of the game—the most famous example being U.S. oil workers introducing baseball to Venezuelans in the 1920s.\(^{350}\)


Cuba remained the primary source for Latin baseball talent, however, until the rise of Fidel Castro in 1959, when Cuban players became largely unavailable and baseball turned to Puerto Rico, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic in search of young talent. The 1960s witnessed a massive influx of Latin players, thanks in part to Major League Baseball expanding from sixteen to twenty-four teams. In 1973, Roberto Clemente became the first Latino elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame, and over the following decade, thanks to the success of players like Martín Dihigo, José Méndez, Juan Marichal, and Rod Carew, major league franchises began establishing permanent scouting and player development camps in Latin American countries. Today, baseball and tourism are the two leading industries in many Latin America countries, and the Latin passion for the game challenges that of any following in the world.\footnote{Chafets, \textit{Cooperstown Confidential}, 155; \textit{¡Viva Baseball!}, online exhibit, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, accessed March 29, 2012, http://baseballhall.org/museum/exhibits/viva-baseball; Wall panel, \textit{¡Viva Baseball!}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.} As a result, the Hall of Fame acknowledges that today “baseball . . . is as much Latin as it is American.”\footnote{Wall panel, \textit{¡Viva Baseball!}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.}

According to their website, the Hall of Fame unveiled \textit{¡Viva Baseball!} as a way of “honoring the Latin American impact on baseball through a celebration of Caribbean Basin countries and players,” but also as a way of “celebrating the passion of the Latin love affair with baseball, spanning nearly 150 years of history.”\footnote{\textit{¡Viva Baseball!}, online exhibit.} These dual purposes,
while still openly celebratory, allow the Hall of Fame to accomplish two goals: the first being a presentation of the history of baseball in Latin America, and the second being an exploration of just why the game is so important in Latin countries, and then by way of comparison, in the United States. 354

The exhibit begins with a breakdown of each area on which the exhibit focuses (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Venezuela). A placard associated with each one details its capital city, geography, population, currency, and the names of any Hall of Famers originally from those areas. The exhibit then moves on to present the challenges Latin American players overcame in coming to the United States (including linguistic, cultural, racial, and political), the professional baseball academies used to develop (and sometimes exploit) these players, and finishes with a look at players in the major leagues, their stories, and their appropriation as cross-cultural marketing tools. 355

Some of the artifacts on display in the exhibit include a jersey worn by Roberto Clemente, a ball used in a game featuring the first Latin American major leaguer, Esteban Bellán, and a glove and cap used by Hall of Fame pitcher Juan Marichal. Displays of jerseys worn by Albert Pujols, David Ortiz, and Johan Santana remain consistent with the Hall of Fame’s approach of displaying the artifacts visitors expect to see, but then using that draw to educate visitors about something they might not have expected to see—in this case, a discussion of multiculturalism and how a society uses sport to promote

354 Strohl, interview.

355 Wall panel, ¡Viva Baseball!, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
integration. In keeping with the museum’s unofficial mission to look at history through the lens of baseball, the exhibit examines the way “baseball reflects the different ways these lands have wrestled with their own economic, political and social issues, providing a special view into the cultural elements that make each place unique.”

Image 11. ¡Viva Baseball! Exhibit (2012). Photo by Author

While the exhibit does touch on issues of cultural bias and race (examining the different experiences of light-skinned and dark-skinned Latinos), the real focus of the exhibit is language. The labels in the exhibit are bilingual and the Hall of Fame portrays language as a basis for discrimination in baseball, a barrier players needed to overcome, and a source of cultural unity within the Latino baseball community. One particularly powerful observation regarding language made by the Hall of Fame staff was the use of Spanish by bilingual visitors while in the ¡Viva Baseball! exhibit and then English while

356 Strohl, interview; Wall panel, ¡Viva Baseball!, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
viewing the museum’s other exhibits—an indication, that on some level, the Hall was making a connection with some of the more diverse elements of its visitorship.357

Another interesting use of language within the exhibit reflects the museum’s engagement with the practice of shared authority and a desire to immerse visitors in the experiences on display in the exhibit. In ¡Viva Baseball!, the museum replaces the institutional voice with those of participants in the actual historical events, utilizing artifacts to support the various vignettes provided for visitors to explore. This most often takes the form of Spanish and English audio recordings in which players discuss their journeys to the major leagues and the unique challenges they faced in becoming professional ballplayers. Numerous interactive features then supplement these recordings by placing the visitor in a situation where they must make important career decisions based on what they comprehend of a potentially unfamiliar language. Here, the Hall of Fame moves beyond the traditional transmission-absorption model in which museums dictate information for visitors to absorb, and instead, attempts to reach museum visitors at a more meaningful level through immersive experiences—a technique praised by proponents of the post-modern museum.

At the entrance to the exhibit, a giant map on the floor provides geographic context for the exhibit—just one more way the Hall of Fame focuses on the needs of its audience (during a time when a Gallup/Harris poll showed 37 percent of Americans cannot find the United States on a map).358 Additional post-modern characteristics of the

357 “Baseball Hall of Fame-Exhibit Talk: Viva Baseball.”

358 Steven Shehori, “Poll: 37% of Americans Unable to Locate America on Map of America,” Huffington Post, December 15, 2008.
exhibit include a demonstration of transparency when informing visitors about the museum’s thought process in not including countries like Nicaragua, Panama, and Columbia in the exhibit, and a rare step back from the patriotic in presenting Felipe Alou’s 1964 criticism of United States as country possessing an “insensitivity to other cultures.” The inclusion of these elements seem to indicate a break from the museum’s traditional practices and a movement toward becoming the more open and diverse cultural institution much of its leadership envisions.

Alternatively, although ¡Viva Baseball! focuses on baseball’s expansion throughout Latin America by emphasizing the game as a tool of diplomacy (and in some ways, it certainly was useful in this capacity), what begs to be explored is the fact that baseball made its way into much of Latin America thanks to American imperialism—a fact many might find distasteful. ¡Viva Baseball! acknowledges that the proliferation of the game throughout Latin America had ties to the rejection of Spanish colonial rule, but fails to address the role of American colonialism in this process. For example, in the decades leading up to the Hall of Fame’s opening, the United States intervened in Cuba four times, Nicaragua twice, Panama six times, Guatemala once, and Honduras seven times, opening up new markets for U.S. steel and cotton exports in these areas, as well as

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359 Wall panel, ¡Viva Baseball!, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. So in some respects, without ever saying it, the exhibit actually becomes a testament to American economic and military expansionism.

The other opportunity for future stories of Latin baseball in the museum is an exploration of the controversy surrounding professional baseball’s alleged exploitation of young, impoverished players from the areas the Hall of Fame includes in its ¡Viva Baseball! exhibit. In recent years, Major League Baseball witnessed an explosion in the growth of its Latino population. During this time Latinos actually surpassed African Americans as the dominant minority group in the game. A 2006 study by the University of Central Florida’s Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports found that only 8.4 percent of major leaguers were African American—the lowest number in twenty years—while 29.4 percent were Latino.

In 2007, outspoken former major leaguer Gary Sheffield claimed that Major League Baseball used Latinos as cheap replacement players, in part, because they were easier to manage than African Americans. According to Sheffield, “(It’s all about) being able to tell (Latino players) what to do—being able to control them. Where I’m from, you can’t control us. . . . These are the things my race demands. So if you’re equally good as this Latin player, guess who’s going to get sent home?”

Professional sports agent Scott Boras believes the problem lies at the collegiate level, with colleges and universities offering inner-city kids more lucrative scholarships

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360 Zinn, The Twentieth Century, 139.

361 Doswell, “Evaluating Educational Value in Museum Exhibitions,” 46; Bodley, “Sheffield Urged to Do Homework.”

362 Bodley, “Sheffield Urged to Do Homework.”
to larger revenue-generating sports like football and basketball—leaving fewer free rides available for baseball players. Sheffield believed it had everything to do with the large baseball academies professional clubs organized in many impoverished areas of Latin America, while ignoring the development of players in the United States. In response to the crisis, Major League Baseball organized its RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) program. In 2007, Major League Baseball’s executive vice president for baseball operations, Jimmie Lee Solomon, addressed the problem of declining numbers of African Americans in the game, acknowledging, “Are we where we want to be? Absolutely not. Have the numbers dropped very badly? Yes.”

The Hall of Fame addresses exploitation in the ¡Viva Baseball! exhibit, but in a very subtle fashion. It presents reproduced newspaper headlines about stories of exploitation and acknowledges that the Latin players developed in baseball academies “came at bargain prices, with little to no signing bonuses and a surplus of hungry talent.” The exhibit displays green cards and mentions that organizations needed to sign contracts with prospects within thirty days for player “protection,” but provides no specifics regarding why these players required protection. Additionally, the presence of radar guns and stopwatches symbolizes the reduction of human value to little more than numbers on a stat sheet, but does not address the silences of the forgotten that remain overshadowed by the stories of triumph in the face of adversity and exclusion. So, much as in Pride & Passion and Diamond Dreams, the Hall of Fame still has an opportunity to

363 Ibid.

364 Wall panel, ¡Viva Baseball!, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
take a powerful, ground-breaking, and well-orchestrated exhibit and enhance it even further by addressing some of the subject matter’s complex and controversial aspects in a more direct and meaningful fashion.

In Summary

While liberal and conservative elements fought hotly contested battles for control over American history during the culture wars, the Hall of Fame Museum existed as a mixture of the old and the new. Its combining of more “vernacular” social history elements with more “official” patriotic narratives illustrates the complex forces at play during the early stages of its transition. An examination of this particular stage of the museum’s evolution gauges the Hall’s commitment to change over time but also places these changes within the context of cultural debates occurring at the national level.

In an issue of The Public Historian, Thomas A. Woods once commented that “museum historians have a tough job. They must constantly walk the thin line between their need to be popular with the public and their desire to make significant contributions to the popular audience's understanding of history.” The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum walks this line in its approach to heterogeneity within the game. While in the past the museum focused on patriotic celebrations of the national pastime, in recent years the Hall of Fame committed itself to exploring increasingly diverse elements within American culture.

The museum addresses these issues through an examination of the international affinity for baseball and what its foreign influence tells us about the evolution of life in


366 Strohl, interview by Bob Fescoe.
the United States. The same holds true for the museum’s approach to race and gender equality. These stories tell visitors a great deal about hardships faced by diverse cultural groups that perhaps the baseball-going public takes for granted. What the Hall of Fame generally misses in these displays, however, is an opportunity to take more direct approaches to some of each story’s more troubling aspects, and for visitors to make connections to modern issues of race, gender, and cultural hegemony that remain ongoing. It is these connections that foster dialogue and promote the revitalization of museums as forums for debate. Curators too readily dismiss events that happened in the past as events with little influence on our lives today, and bridging that gap remains one of the most significant challenges faced by the museum community at-large.
CHAPTER 7

BITING THE HAND

The struggle to promote critical history within a largely celebratory institution presented a multi-faceted challenge for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum as it moved into the twenty-first century. In addition to incorporating previously marginalized cultural groups and more diverse and complex perspectives into the history of baseball, the Hall of Fame needed to take a critical look at itself and its stewardship of the game. This entailed great risk. The Hall of Fame looked to address two topics that potentially undermined the efforts of the institution’s founders. The first required an examination of some of the uglier aspects of a game the museum and its staff cherished and protected for decades. This required the Hall of Fame to dismantle the romanticized vision of baseball by looking at the ills of gambling, drug abuse, and the big business nature of baseball—an activity paramount to biting the hand of professional baseball despite the museum’s reliance on the game’s popularity for bringing people to Cooperstown. The second involved an exploration of the Hall of Fame’s own role in influencing the historical narratives within the museum. This required a self-reflective evaluation of operations within the Hall and a look at the degree to which these processes challenged current views regarding sound historical practice.

Before launching any of these efforts, however, the museum first needed to explore the myth at the heart of its own origins. Among the biggest challenges to the Hall’s credibility was the adherence it initially displayed to the Doubleday myth. The Hall of Fame perpetuated the myth throughout much of its early history despite the museum’s ironic endorsement of Alexander Cartwright during its official dedication, and
despite the fact that numerous vocal detractors of the myth existed even as the Hall first opened its doors. In June of 1939, author Daniel M. Daniel wrote, “Baseball has proclaimed General Doubleday its Patron Saint, and in recognizing him as the inventor of baseball has, unwittingly, spread a belief which is not entirely founded on fact. . . . Much as we admire the ambition, acumen and patriotic fervor of Mr. Spalding and others who insisted baseball was 100 per cent American, there is no doubt at this time that we got the game from England.”

Still, the Doubleday myth served so many important purposes (to the game, to the country, and to the museum) that questioning its validity within the Hall of Fame’s walls seemed both sacrilegious and potentially suicidal to an institution appropriating its nostalgic roots to boost attendance during the museum’s formative years. As the decades passed, the evidence against Cooperstown’s claim to being the birthplace of baseball continued to mount, but many in baseball’s inner circle refused to accept it. In his 1952 book, (revised in 1966 while he served as Director of the Hall of Fame), Ken Smith argued that there were other examples of baseball games being played in different forms prior to 1839, but none capable of challenging the Mills Commission’s claim—as far as Smith was concerned, “Abner was Adam.” As strict adherence to the myth seemed increasingly counter-productive and actually began eroding the Hall of Fame’s credibility, however, even Stephen Clark admitted, shortly before his death in 1960, that

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368 Smith, Baseball’s Hall of Fame, 47.
the evidence against Doubleday was just too overwhelming to confidently proclaim him the “inventor of baseball.”

Today, the Hall of Fame makes no attempt to promote Cooperstown hero Abner Doubleday as baseball’s inventor. The staff informally refers to the myth as “the Santa Claus Theory of Cooperstown,” and likes to paraphrase sociologist Harold Seymour’s assessment that trying to figure out who invented baseball is like trying to figure out who invented fire. This does not mean that the Doubleday myth has no place within the Hall of Fame Museum, however. Quite to the contrary, the museum still prominently displays the Doubleday portrait and Doubleday ball that graced the fireplace mantel back in 1939—but in addition to the role they played in establishing a baseball museum in Cooperstown, the Hall displays the artifacts for the important part they play in telling the history of baseball. Even if a substantial part of that history is fictional, it is still an important part of the story.

Within the museum, the Hall of Fame addresses the origins of baseball in both its Cooperstown Room and in its Taking the Field exhibit. The museum displays the Doubleday ball (still on its original stand, but now surrounded by an acrylic case), along with the Doubleday portrait, in its Cooperstown Room. Here curators identify Doubleday as “the supposed inventor of baseball,” acknowledging that “Doubleday didn’t invent baseball . . . baseball ‘invented’ Doubleday, a thriving legend that reflects Americans’ desire to make the game our own.” In addressing the letter Spalding received from

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369 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 224.

Abner Graves crediting Doubleday with inventing the game, the Hall of Fame informs visitors that “many historians disputed Graves’ account, noting that innovations attributed to Doubleday were already being practiced in the 1830s.”

In its Taking the Field exhibit, the Hall of Fame goes into greater depth regarding the origins of modern baseball. On the wall is a relief from 1460 BCE of Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III playing the stick and ball game of sekar-hemat. In addition, there are displays of Spanish boys playing a similar game in 1251, and evidence of the first use of the term “base-ball”—found in A Little Pretty Pocket Book, printed in England in 1744. The earliest reference to an American game comes from a 1791 by-law enacted in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, prohibiting the playing of “base ball” near the town meeting house. The Hall of Fame then goes on to take its official stance on the origins of baseball by declaring, “The modern game of baseball evolved over time, shaped by various games brought to this country by immigrants from many cultures.”

This statement carries with it a variety of implications. First, it represents an admission by the Hall of Fame that undermines the marketing of the very product they depend on selling to the public. The Doubleday myth and its romanticized roots supplied the justification for building the Baseball Hall of Fame in the first place. While adhering to the Doubleday myth in the face of overwhelming evidence against it might do even more damage to attendance than outwardly acknowledging it, openly exposing Cooperstown’s unjustified claim to being baseball’s birthplace still constitutes a break...

371 Ibid.

372 Wall panel, Taking the Field, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
from the celebratory mythology that characterized the museum throughout its early
history. This admission signifies an important step in the Hall of Fame’s transition in that
it clearly represents a commitment to prevailing scholarship over selling more popular
and marketable versions of history.

*Searching for “Truth”*

The Hall of Fame’s admission facilitates an examination of “truth” and the desire
to obtain it (both at the Hall of Fame and in the broader context of the history profession).
As part of the Hall of Fame’s commitment to becoming a more professionally accepted
institution for conveying historical scholarship, the museum continues to make honest
efforts to tell history in more complex terms, to broaden their narratives, and in
particular, to get their facts right. Here, the Hall of Fame is striving for “truth.” In
discussions with numerous Hall of Fame staffers, the word “truth” was a term that
surfaced repeatedly. The Hall of Fame feels it is their duty to tell the truth, that they can
use truth to temper some of their subject matter’s inherent nostalgia, and that sticking to
portrayals of the truth provides a form of moral compass for directing exhibit efforts.
While the Hall of Fame utilizes the term “truth” primarily to represent research-based
efforts made to counteract the effects of myth, legend, and nostalgia, there remains an
opportunity within the exhibit process to take a step back and educate visitors as to the
factors that limit a historian’s ability to ascertain truth and how these factors influence the
information on display inside the museum.

According to historian Mike Wallace, most Americans believe museums dedicate
themselves to delivering truth in their displays. Traditionally visitors view what they see
in museums as truth, and fail to comprehend that historical narratives constitute one
possible perspective in a debate that is constantly evolving—alongside the values and ideologies of a culture and the people who record its history. In *Reinventing the Museum*, Lois Silverman described history as “an interpretation—a story or perspective that is crafted, albeit with expert documentation, by certain people for certain ends. And even though the historian might communicate his or her particular interpretation with authority, another person who encounters it may yet make very different meaning of it from that which the historian intended.”

The idea of the past as a “fixed reality” and of knowledge as “fixed content” is an illusion. Expanding on Silverman’s assertions, it is possible (even probable) that witnesses to the same event may record entirely different or even conflicting accounts based on which aspects of the event each deemed important enough to document. The witnesses make these determinations based on the unique set of cultural influences that shaped their personal development. For example, a northern newspaper columnist believing himself to be fighting on the side of God, righteousness, and freedom may record an entirely different version of a battle fought during the American Civil War than a southern newspaperman witnessing the same battle—one perhaps viewed as fought in the name of state’s rights and the “Lost Cause” of throwing off the challenge to traditional Southern life posed by the oppressive northern industrial complex.

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375 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 147.
In addition, knowing the outcome of past events, historians often unconsciously shape their accounts to provide the evidence that makes the conclusion seem inevitable, thus ignoring evidence that undermines the eventual outcome due to the confusion and ambiguity it adds to the narrative. This results in oversimplified histories constructed for easy comprehension, but at the cost of understating the complex nature of the actual experience.

What gives museums their authority is the perception of them as neutral conveyors of factual information. The aura of objects exhibited and of the institutions that house them often results in visitors conferring authority upon curators without really knowing what goes on behind the scenes. Museums do more than report facts; they argue and persuade, utilizing one very specific perspective from which to view history. Curators have perspectives, make choices, and present arguments just like authors of books. Steven Lavine and Ivan Karp reinforced this by contending, “Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others. . . . The assumptions underpinning these decisions vary according to culture and over time, place, and type of museum or exhibit.”

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376 Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 218.


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So if post-modern influences within the history profession are correct, and truth is, in reality, unattainable, then it falls upon the museum community to make visitors aware of the factual limitations and biases inherent in museum displays. It is this “behind the scenes” look at the research, decisions, and authorship of museum exhibits that historians now clamor for as a way for museums to provide some “transparency” into the production of their museum exhibits. Curators need to become more open about what they do and how and why they do it if the public is to acquire a greater appreciation for just how museums construct historical narratives.\textsuperscript{379} As Michel-Rolph Trouillot so succinctly put it, “historical authenticity resides not in the fidelity to an alleged past but in an honesty vis-a-vis the present as it re-presents that past.”\textsuperscript{380}

Transparency is an area in which the Hall of Fame is just now beginning to make inroads. While visitors find little information regarding internal processes or exhibit authorship made available to them in the exhibits, there exists a number of minute cracks in the museum’s infallibility that intentionally allow visitors a small glimpse at some of the behind-the-scenes workings. The most visible examples are the Hall’s acknowledgement of factual inaccuracies and the fallibility of numbers. Here the Hall of Fame addresses, among other things, the controversy surrounding Ty Cobb’s career statistics and the errors found on his original Hall of Fame plaque. Explaining from where these numbers originate and how the museum deals with updating the displays as the information changes is just one of the ways of exposing the work that remains invisible to most visitors. The next step might very well be discussions of the decisions

\textsuperscript{379} Gardner, “Contested Terrain,” 16.

\textsuperscript{380} Trouillot, Silencing the Past, 148.
that went into designing the displays and an acknowledgement of the people behind the scenes who made those decisions. This type of information, not widely available in most museums, would help visitors understand the construction of a narrative and the variety of factors that influence its tone, form, and content.

*Tearing Away the Wholesome, All-American Façade*

As alluded to on numerous occasions in this dissertation, a large part of the performative experience at the Hall of Fame comes from a belief in baseball’s piety and from the museum’s idyllic setting in the village of Cooperstown. Here the artificially stunted “small-town America” community meets the agrarian, All-American image crafted by professional baseball to mask the game’s big business realities. It was an image intended to promote nostalgia for a time when the game was just a game, and it played an important role in fostering America’s passion for baseball and in promoting a healthy tourism industry in Cooperstown.

If the Hall of Fame was to move forward with plans to enhance its credibility and move beyond the uncritically celebratory values of the past, however, curators eventually needed to expose the less-glamorous side of baseball, even if it meant potentially undermining the museum’s own success by bringing into question the sacred purity of the game. This meant addressing, not only baseball as big business, but some of the controversial issues that provided baseball with numerous “black eyes” over the years—issues like gambling and the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

These issues, it turns out, are nothing new to baseball. As the Hall of Fame’s Vice President of Exhibitions and Collections, Erik Strohl, asserted, “Almost anything you’d see anybody . . . say about baseball today, I can find you an example of somebody saying
the same thing in the nineteenth century. Whether it’s ‘money is ruining the game,’ to
baseball players organizing to protect their rights, [to] struggles with equipment and [the] evolution [of] technology.” This assertion lays waste to the cherished belief that there once was a simpler time for baseball and exposes much of the museum’s past celebratory culture to criticism, but also demonstrates the degree to which the Hall of Fame is ready to move past its years of clinging to baseball’s increasingly tarnished mythology.

Professional baseball games started out as amateur events. In the nineteenth century, games consisted of contests between social clubs and usually included picnics or dinners and dancing as part of the festivities. These clubs came together as a result of mutual interests. The members of New York’s Beethoven Club all enjoyed music, the Greek Club of New York all shared a common language, and the Lotos Club embraced a passion for literature and the arts. These clubs regularly engaged one another in friendly games of baseball—but it was not long before the pressure to win introduced money into the game.

In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings paid players between $600 and $1,400 to play baseball—roughly four times the average worker’s salary. After Cincinnati went undefeated that year, numerous other clubs began paying players. In the years that followed, teams became corporations, hiring labor, issuing stock, and designing promotions meant to sell their product. In addition, America’s continued maturation

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381 Strohl, interview.

382 Wall panel, Taking the Field, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.

383 Ibid.
into a global industrial power brought with it economic prosperity on an unprecedented scale. The resulting standard of living increase provided Americans with spendable income they poured into recreation and leisure pursuits, like professional baseball. The partnership between baseball, television, and Madison Avenue in the twentieth century ultimately produced a multi-billion dollar industry so monstrous as to overshadow its outdated veil of small-town, recreational innocence.

The Hall of Fame takes the business side of baseball head-on in its Taking the Field exhibit. Documents found in the display cases include stock certificates, game tickets, season passes, and contracts with concessionaires, which, when placed on a money-green background, make a strong statement about the influence of business on the early game. In addition, the exhibit addresses the historical connection between baseball and advertising, a relationship that only grew stronger over time. Early manifestations of this relationship included advertising space in baseball scorecards and stadium signage sold to restaurants and railway companies. During an exhibition game between the Dodgers and White Sox in 1943, umpire Ed Hinko even wore a taxicab advertisement on his chest protector.384

The most effective incarnations of baseball advertising over the centuries have unquestionably been the use of player endorsements. Long before Joe DiMaggio was Mr. Coffee and Mickey Mantle got fans declaring, “I want my Maypo,” players like Napoleon Lajoie and Cap Anson took advantage of lucrative opportunities to promote products by associating their names with them. Even the rather gruff and surly Ty Cobb

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(who earned millions investing in the Coca-Cola company) supplemented his financial holdings by endorsing everything from underwear to cigars.\textsuperscript{385}

In *Baseball and American Culture*, Roberta Newman argued that endorsements act as effective marketing tools for a variety of reasons. First, baseball partly defines what it is to be an American, and the imagery adopted by baseball advertisers focuses on a desire to be home and all the emotionally fulfilling aspects of life that “home” represents. Additionally, by utilizing a product endorsed by a celebrity, Newman asserted that we assume the tastes and knowledge of someone we view as superior to ourselves.\textsuperscript{386}

In *Taking the Field*, the Hall of Fame exposes the relationship between baseball, advertising, and endorsements that lay beneath the game’s wholesome veneer, even in its earliest days. Among the objects on display are an 1893 board game endorsed by Cleveland Spiders catcher Charles “Chief” Zimmerman and an 1889 beer advertisement featuring Cap Anson and Buck Ewing. These are artifacts that demonstrate how the commercialism so many baseball purists find abhorrent in the modern era actually existed as far back as the game’s formative years. Consequently, the display allows visitors to make connections to their current lives and understand that what we are experiencing as a culture is not something unique to our time, but is instead merely a different iteration of past events.

In adhering to a post-museum philosophy (now in vogue in the history community), the exhibit makes attempts to both promote dialogue about consumerism


\textsuperscript{386} Newman, “Here’s the Pitch,” 123–134.
and engage visitors in new ways of active learning. Placards placed around the exhibit prompt visitors to contemplate the products players endorse today and if those endorsements influence the visitor’s personal choices as a consumer. Another panel, entitled “Money Makers,” actually goes as far as to risk alienating fans from the game by addressing differentials in wealth distribution—pointing out that a baseball player made four times the salary of an average American worker in 1880, but now makes over sixty times what the average American earns in a year. The Hall even asks visitors to think about player salaries in comparison to that of a Nobel Prize winner and contemplate what that disparity communicates about our cultural values. These are the types of issues that spark debate, allow visitors to make personal connections to their lives, and promote the museum as a forum for dialogue in a fashion favored by modern post-museum proponents.

The museum really drives home the “loss of innocence” message by displaying artifacts against a backdrop of rural imagery and red, white, and blue bunting—providing dramatic contrast between the myth and the reality of the subject matter. The exhibit then goes on to discuss nineteenth-century labor negotiations, profits made from souvenirs and concessions, and the dramatic impact the industrial revolution had in reshaping the game—especially in spreading interest in baseball through the burgeoning network of media outlets, the invention of new communications devices (such as the telegraph), and the expansion of national transportation systems. All of these portrayals do much to disrupt the fallacy of baseball as a modest, small-town game.

387 Wall panel, Taking the Field, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.
The presentation of this information takes two very important and useful forms that directly oppose traditional museum education models that required visitors to stand in front of panels and quietly absorb facts. The first form involves the introduction of interactive museum components. In one example, the Hall educates visitors on nineteenth-century rules of baseball through video screens and push buttons that allow patrons to view re-created films demonstrating the various rules. Other examples include discussions of topics like Spalding’s world tour in 1888 that asks visitors to make connections between steamship travel and more modern modes of transportation, and an exercise in evaluating nineteenth-century ball clubs by asking visitors to contemplate modern clubs to which they belong and any membership restrictions promoted by those clubs. These types of exercises are vital for engaging visitors in thought-provoking ways.

The other tool the Hall of Fame uses to connect with visitors in *Taking the Field* is the immersion experience. Rather than just displaying popular baseball artifacts of the Victorian period, the Hall of Fame re-creates the feeling of a Victorian parlor, immersing the visitor in the history. The exhibit cabinetry consists of a deep, rich cherry wood—providing a degree of authenticity that sets the tone for the exhibit. Popular Victorian accents, like a stereoscope, a cast-iron bank, playing cards, and fine china, are crowded together in the Victorian style and surround the visitor at every turn. The feeling of strolling through a Victorian parlor allows visitors to place the objects within the context of the era in which they existed. Simulating the late-nineteenth-century experience provides a richer, more fulfilling experience and reflects the modern visitor’s desire to be at the center of the action. Consequently, the *Taking the Field* exhibit does more than illustrate progress made in addressing volatile subject matter, it illustrates innovation in the methods used to present the subject matter. This innovation adds a level of complexity to the exhibit through the introduction of experiential elements—a giant step forward in transforming the museum into an active and engaging educational forum.

*Looking Inside*

An exploration of the museum’s approach to presenting commercialism within the game is incomplete without examining the role the Hall of Fame itself plays in bolstering consumerism. Since the 1920s and 30s, heritage tourism and entrepreneurialism have existed side-by-side. When the Hall of Fame’s promoters started a nationwide campaign to publicize the opening of the museum, they felt their success depended upon effective
advertising for selling their product to the American people. The National Baseball Centennial Commission wanted clothing designers to create centennial baseball dresses and hats, department stores to display baseball uniforms, and school suppliers to design centennial book bags and pencil boxes. When Earl Stalker (president of the Cooperstown Chamber of Commerce) claimed the rights to all Hall of Fame-related merchandise, the museum began the process of trade marking its products.

The resulting commercial revenues generated by the museum often brought about accusations that the Hall of Fame exploited the Doubleday myth and the aura of Cooperstown for means of making a profit. As historian Roberta Newman noted, the Hall of Fame’s history often ties itself to commercialism. At times, the accusations of placing the importance of dollars over history have gone so far as to make some question the museum’s relevance, as Washington Post reporter Shirley Povich inferred when he quipped, “Cooperstown long has been selling history like Florida has been selling citrus and arthritis cures.”

One of the most overt signs of commercialism within the museum is its gift shop. Upon engaging in casual conversation (on multiple occasions) with fans who attended the museum back in the 1960s and 70s, an interesting and conspicuous phenomenon emerged. Much as visitors attend the museum to bathe themselves in nostalgia for a

388 Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 13; Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 74.

389 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 83–84, 107.


simpler time that never existed (a time before baseball was big business), many visitors fondly remember their visit to Hall of Fame before it, too, went commercial—a time before the Hall of Fame had a gift shop. Many were surprised to find out that the Hall of Fame has actually always had some form of gift shop on the premises—seemingly supporting David Lowenthal’s theory that we really do change the past to suit our own needs and validate our realities. Not only does the Hall of Fame have its own gift shop, it also has its own line of merchandise, generating millions of dollars in revenue.392

While the gift shop generates significant income for the museum, it does not represent the Hall of Fame’s most important source of revenue—which are donations from wealthy patrons, corporations, and charitable foundations. As a non-profit, the Hall relies on donations for a significant part of its operating revenue. In viewing a 2007 tax return made public by the State of New York, the Hall of Fame reported total revenues of $25,505,725. Of this, approximately $12 million came in the form of “gifts, grants, and contributions.” In addition to these revenues, the Hall of Fame generated nearly $7.5 million from “auxiliary activities” made up largely of gift shop sales, $3.1 million in admissions, and $1.7 million in membership sales. The remainder of the Hall’s revenue came from traveling exhibits (discussed in chapter 9), renting out the facility for private functions, securities investments, and hosting educational and other types of events.393

392 Newman, “Here’s the Pitch,” 59; Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, 369; Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 48.

With so much emphasis placed on acquiring monetary donations, the Hall of Fame traditionally turned to professional fund raising firms to help generate the necessary revenue. In 2007, the Hall of Fame paid Checkoway Consulting & Creative of Sarasota, Florida, $16,000 to target “potential high-end donors” in a variety of fundraising campaigns.\(^{394}\) In the past, these donors traditionally consisted of wealthy individuals and organizations like the Yawkey Foundations (started by former Red Sox owners Tom and Jean Yawkey to provide health, education, and human services programs) and the offices of Major League Baseball.\(^ {395}\)

While Major League Baseball’s financial support of the museum plays an important part in helping maintain the museum’s viability, the role of baseball’s corporate entity within the Hall of Fame’s operations is a unique one. Major League Baseball has no formal authority over how the museum operates, generates revenue, or depicts the history of the game, yet it remains an influential partner in the production of history within the museum. The Hall of Fame’s relationship with the game’s corporate offices is something the staff in Cooperstown cultivated over numerous decades and something they take great care to nurture. Major League Baseball not only makes generous monetary contributions to the museum’s fundraising efforts, but also provides the museum with donations of important artifacts and helps legitimize the museum’s claims to authority by endorsing or participating in museum events. So while no one at the Hall of Fame reports to anyone within the Major League Baseball organization in any

\(^{394}\) Ibid.

\(^{395}\) James, *Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?*, 304–305.
official capacity, both parties certainly work very closely together to ensure a mutually
beneficial partnership persists.

In addition to cultivating important relationships with Major League Baseball and
numerous philanthropic organizations, another way the Hall of Fame maintains its
financial viability is by offsetting the costs of its exhibitions through corporate
sponsorship. Expensive new technology required to make engaging interactive exhibits
demanded by tech-savvy visitors makes corporate sponsorship a reality for many
museums in the modern era. The Hall proudly advertised its affiliation with IBM in its
Sports Gallery in the 1980s, and acknowledged the support of the Yawkey Foundations
and of corporate giant AT&T in the construction of its Diamond Dreams exhibit. Signage
outside of Pride & Passion thanks, among others, the Hearst Corporation and MBNA.

In 2011, Legendary Entertainment, a company with such popular film production
credits as The Dark Knight and Clash of the Titans, became the presenting sponsor for the
Hall of Fame’s One for the Books exhibit. Having also recently signed deals with EMC
Corp. and Coca-Cola, that year Hall of Fame President Jeff Idelson announced, “We’re
beginning to make some real progress and see momentum on the sponsorship front. It’s
always a bit of a tricky thing for us given that we’re a non-profit. . . .[but] this is
something I’d like to do more of.”

Not all the Hall of Fame’s forays into corporate sponsorship worked out as well as
it did with Diamond Dreams and One for the Books, however. In April of 2006, three

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396 Eric Fisher, “New Interactive Attraction at Baseball Hall of Fame,” Business
interactive-attraction-at-baseball.html.
years before the unveiling of ¡Viva Baseball!, then Hall of Fame President Dale Petrosky entered into a partnership with the CITGO Petroleum Corporation to sponsor an exhibit on Hispanic baseball. CITGO, an American-based oil company founded in 1910, became a part of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)—the national oil company of Venezuela—in 1986. Consequently, control of the company ultimately fell to American-antagonist leader Hugo Chavez. When Chavez gave a speech at the United Nations in which he called President George Bush “the devil,” the Hall of Fame cancelled the partnership with CITGO, but not before, at least as Zev Chafets asserts, it contributed to Petrosky losing his job.  

Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 159–161.

The Game and Its Record Holders Today

Back in 1977, as the Hall of Fame worked with Kissiloff Associates to reinvent its exhibitry, there began a movement within the museum to not only tell the history of baseball, but also to allow fans to make connections between that history and the game “today as it was happening.” Providing opportunities to make these connections to the modern game was not an area in which the museum possessed a great deal of strength, particularly in regards to its artifact collection, but once efforts to collect into the present day got underway, the Hall proved capable of acquiring a steady stream of relevant artifacts for educating visitors on the current state of baseball. The result of much of this work is on display in the Today’s Game exhibit.

Today’s Game serves a variety of important functions within the museum’s evolutionary process. First and foremost, it reinforces the idea that history is not just

Clark, interview.
something that occurred in the past, but something that surrounds us as part of our daily lives—a message historians struggle (with much consternation) to convey to the general public. In addition, the exhibit furthers the Hall of Fame’s efforts to convey previously silenced narratives within the game’s history, even if it means exposing shortcomings within the game the museum traditionally celebrates. In a similar fashion to the way *Taking the Field* exposed the business side of the baseball, *Today’s Game* addresses a number of important issues that detract from the pristine imagery used to package the game for more than a century.

As it turns out, much of the purity and moralizing influence baseball fans attributed to the game over the years was not the result of players spontaneously adhering to some unwritten code of conduct out of reverence for the national pastime or because the game magically exuded some aura of wholesome behavior which compelled players to act with dignity and respect. Instead, as *Today’s Game* chronicles, much of the family-friendly product professional baseball markets to the public is the result of staged events and well-scripted behaviors.

A collection of internal memoranda sent from the front offices of Major League Baseball to each of its professional franchises (and put on display in *Today’s Game*) demonstrates the degree to which professional baseball carefully crafts its image as one of a model citizenry. Even the patriotic displays taken for granted as natural by-products of the game’s inherent nationalism come from a rigid adherence to corporate mandates. In a March 26, 2008, memo sent to professional baseball personnel, Major League Baseball addressed proper instructions for honoring the national anthem. The memo, in part, read as follows:
In order to convey the proper impression and attain a semblance of uniformity, it is suggested that all uniformed personnel, during the playing of the American and Canadian National Anthem(s) do the following:

1. Stand at attention on the top step of the dugout or at their positions on the field;
2. Face the flag, hone one’s cap in the right hand and place it over the heart, and extend the left arm downward along the left pants leg;
3. Avoid spitting, chewing, laughing or talking during the playing of the anthem(s).
4. All uniformed personnel should make an effort to be out of the clubhouse and in the dugout for the playing of the National Anthem(s).

As you know, it is customary for the TV cameras to focus on the players during these pre-game ceremonies. The demeanor of all Club personnel should be respectful.

In addition to orchestrating the observance of the national anthem, the series of MLB memos reminds players not to fraternize with the opposing team while in uniform or sit in the stands during or after games. Players are also notified of the penalties for throwing equipment, charging a pitcher, or having foreign substances “on their person” during games. In a memorandum clearly concerned more with promoting a healthy image of the game than healthy players, the MLB front offices reminded athletes that “smoking in uniform in view of spectators (including in the dugout) is prohibited at all times. This prohibition also includes batting practice, post-game interviews and smoking that can be seen on television when cameras pan into the dugout during the anthem and/or during the game.”

Players also received a similar warning concerning cell phones, banning them

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400 Ibid.
in the clubhouse, on the bench, and in the field within one hour of the start of every game.\textsuperscript{401}

The display of artifacts such as the internal correspondence generated by Major League Baseball’s front offices provides visitors with another perspective from which to learn about the game, one that adds a significant degree of transparency to the production of professional sports. Here lies a critical distinction in the use transparency within the Hall of Fame. While the Hall has yet to offer a significant look inside its own processes and how they affect the history on display within the museum, it demonstrates more of a willingness to provide transparency within the game for which it claims stewardship. This examination of baseball’s less glamorous side takes on even greater significance in the Hall of Fame’s \textit{One for the Books} exhibit.

Considered the Hall’s most technologically advanced and interactive exhibit, \textit{One for the Books} opened as a permanent exhibit on May 28, 2011.\textsuperscript{402} The focus of the exhibit is an exploration of baseball statistics, and in particular, the statistics associated with record-breaking performances in the areas of pitching, batting, base running, and fielding. According to the Hall of Fame’s website, it is an exhibit which accords “millions of fans the opportunity to learn about baseball’s hallowed records through interactive technology, dynamic multi-media presentations and more than 200 compelling artifacts representing baseball’s most memorable moments.”\textsuperscript{403}

\textsuperscript{401} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{402} Fisher, “New Interactive Attraction.”

The Hall of Fame lined the exhibit with case after case of sacred artifacts, including hats worn by Nolan Ryan during each of his seven no-hitters, gloves worn by Rickey Henderson when he stole his record-setting 939th base in 1991, and a bat used by Ken Griffey Jr. during his stretch of eight-consecutive games with a homerun. Accompanying each artifact is a short descriptive tag informing visitors of the significance of the artifact within the lexicon of baseball’s immortal achievements.

In addition to the traditional artifact displays are a variety of technological components that personalize the visitor’s learning experience. These include in-case video displays as well as interactive kiosks where fans can test their knowledge of baseball records. The most dominating feature of the One for the Books exhibit, however, is the Digital Top 10 Tower. Utilizing touch-screen technology, the giant tower allows visitors to choose a statistical category and then slide their finger along a timeline that will produce statistics and digital images documenting baseball record holders for the time and category selected.

More than anything, One for the Books feeds the baseball fan’s inherent desire to view and compare statistics across generations, providing the necessary fodder for debating the greatest players of all-time. But rather than just providing visitors with an encyclopedic knowledge of baseball statistics, the exhibit looks at numbers on a deeper level. It asks visitors to ponder why we know these numbers, what makes them important, and what they mean. For instance, what does it say about the numbers in the game that those who pursue them are often surrounded in controversy? Why did Roger Maris receive so much hate mail upon approaching Babe Ruth’s hallowed home run record?

Ibid.
record? What sort of security or continuity do these numbers provide that so many fans of the game have them memorized and know the significance of them by their digits alone (e.g., “715”—the number of homeruns it took Hank Aaron to break the all-time career record in 1974; “56”—the length of Joe DiMaggio’s consecutive-game hitting streak in 1941; etc.). These are the types of questions the Hall of Fame encourages fans to consider.


Image 15. The Digital Top 10 Tower (2012). This photo displays Barry Bonds’ career home run record in One for the Books. Photo by Author
Of course fostering dialogue on the importance of different statistics must inevitably lead to a discussion on the validity of comparing numbers across generations. There are any number of elements that factor into the narrative of statistical achievements in baseball—many of them controversial and even disheartening to the avid fan. The Hall of Fame utilizes One for the Books as a way to explore some of these aspects of the game’s greatest achievements.

The Fallibility of Statistics

The Hall of Fame begins its discussion of baseball’s most hallowed records by providing visitors with a taste of post-modern reality. Upon entering the exhibit, the museum informs visitors that “baseball record books may seem definitive, but they are not,” then going on to assert, “the more we learn about the how and the why, the more it becomes clear that records are not simple facts.” The Hall demonstrates why this is the case by providing numerous examples of statistical fallibility. Among the most powerful is the example of Ty Cobb’s nine-consecutive batting titles.

As One for the Books illustrates, for decades baseball fans believed Ty Cobb won the batting title in nine consecutive years (1907–1915). Unfortunately for Cobb’s legacy, this was not the case. In 1910, the scorekeeper of the second game of a doubleheader played on September 24th—in which Cobb managed two hits in three at-bats—accidentally entered the date of September 25th on the official scorecard. When scoring officials saw no entry for Cobb in the second game played on the 24th, they credited Cobb with those same two hits again. Statisticians did not uncover the error until 1970!

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405 Wall panel, One for the Books, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 12, 2012.
When they did, and removed the two extra hits, Cobb’s average fell to .383, making it the second-highest average in 1910 to Nap Lajoie’s .384. With this revelation, Roger Hornsby’s six-consecutive batting titles suddenly became the new record. Since then, numerous discrepancies uncovered and argued upon by different statistical bureaus actually created several conflicting career hit totals for Ty Cobb.406

Ty Cobb’s record and the accidental entry of misinformation is just one of the ways the Hall explores the fallibility of statistics. There are numerous others that spark debate and bring into question the degree to which celebrating the game’s most sacred statistical achievements may or may not actually be justified. Among them is the seemingly futile nature of attempts to compare statistics across generations in a game that witnesses continual innovation in the areas of equipment design, medical care, nutrition, strength training, and even stadium construction. Additionally, the Hall of Fame points out controversial achievements, like Cap Anson becoming the first member of the 3,000 Hit Club. The museum informs visitors that Anson’s career involved four years in the National Association, which many purists do not recognize as a “major league,” and that Anson’s statistics might have been radically different had he not refused to play against African Americans.

These examples create an interesting predicament for the museum. Visitors come to the Hall of Fame to celebrate not just men and women, but in part, to celebrate numbers as well. People want to see the artifacts associated with the statistics that are cultural icons in their own right. Yet, thanks to the Hall of Fame’s recent attempts to tell

the history of the game in as thorough and honest a manner as possible, they actually
detract from the mythical aura of these statistics, potentially dissuading certain elements
of their visitorship from attending the museum. In many ways, this approach to statistics
found in One for the Books represents another clear manifestation of the museum’s slow
transition away from the celebratory. But bringing into question the validity of the
game’s most admired and cherished statistical achievements represents only a small step
toward addressing the variety of issues that undermine the purity of the wholesome
nostalgic product marketed by the Hall of Fame for generations. There are a variety of
achievement-corrupting afflictions within the game that potentially undermine a fan’s
desire to make the trek to Cooperstown.

*Gambling*

Among the more pervasive ills infiltrating baseball throughout its history has been
an epidemic of gambling. Dating back to the 1860s, thousands of dollars openly changed
hands between players and the gambling community. Gamblers with a vested interest in
the outcome of games even sat in the stands and fired off six-shooters to distract players
from teams they wagered against during critical moments of a game. Then, in 1865, three
players from the Mutuals of New York City reportedly accepted $100 apiece to throw a
game, ultimately leading to their banishment from professional baseball. ⁴⁰⁷

The gambling and subsequent penalties continued in the decades that followed,
having a disastrous impact on attendance and fan interest in contests whose outcomes
appeared increasingly predetermined. In October of 1919, the greatest gambling scandal

in the history of the game rocked professional baseball when several members of the heavily favored Chicago White Sox colluded with gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series. The fallout from the ensuing scandal (which coined one of more iconic phrases in American pop culture, “Say it ain’t so, Joe”) led to the hiring of federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis as the major league’s first Commissioner of Baseball. His mission was to clean up baseball and restore its wholesome reputation—a process he started by banning eight White Sox players from professional baseball for life.

By the time the Hall of Fame opened in 1939, National League President Ford Frick declared baseball “a game of square-shooting competition, honest play, and free from suspicion of double-dealing.” As the protector and promoter of baseball’s history, the Hall of Fame became a critical player in the promotion of the game’s revitalized image. Judge W. G. Bramham, President of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, summarized these sentiments in a June 1939 issue of *Baseball Magazine*, writing, “I am particularly conscious of what our Baseball Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., will mean to the next 100 years. . . . It is up to us and to those who follow to see that only those things which represent the highest in sportsmanship are added to the heritage which has been started in Cooperstown.”

The “Black Sox” scandal of 1919 weighed on the minds of baseball writers as they selected the Hall of Fame’s first induction class. While the openly racist and criminally abusive Ty Cobb garnered the necessary votes for enshrinement, Joe Jackson

\footnote{408}{Ford Frick, William Harridge, and Judge W. G. Bramham, “Centennial,” *Baseball Magazine*, June 1939, 290.}

\footnote{409}{Ibid., 291.}
(a member of the 1919 White Sox), did not. Jackson’s omission established a precedent in the Hall of Fame voting—any player who cheated or compromised the integrity of the professional game was not welcome in Cooperstown.

In the modern era, Pete Rose eclipsed the Chicago White Sox as the face of the gambling element within the game. Two years after his 1989 banishment from baseball, the Hall of Fame announced that anyone on Major League Baseball’s permanently ineligible list was also ineligible for enshrinement in Cooperstown. This does not stop Rose’s image, however, from appearing throughout the Hall of Fame’s museum exhibits. In *One for the Books*, the Hall acknowledges both Rose’s gritty style of play, as well as his banishment for gambling, while also celebrating him as the game’s all-time leader in base hits. The exhibit proudly displays the cleats Rose wore on September 11, 1985, when he passed Ty Cobb with his 4,192nd hit. A photo of Rose wearing the shoes while standing on first base immediately after the hit accompanies the artifact.

Rose’s presence in Cooperstown angers many baseball purists, who see the legacy of “Charlie Hustle” as one that tarnishes the game. Visitors view Rose’s inclusion in the museum as an endorsement of his actions. It is these visitors who misunderstand the difference between the Hall of Fame’s museum and the plaque gallery. The plaque gallery celebrates the game’s greatest players for their statistical achievements, and more recently, for the character they displayed while compiling their legendary numbers. By way of contrast, the Hall of Fame museum tells the story of baseball—both the good and the bad. As Ted Spencer noted when discussing the role of the museum, “we deal with

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410 Vlasich, *A Legend for the Legendary*, 43.
This history sometimes includes drunks, bigots, criminals, and cheaters, but as long as they are a part of baseball’s history, the Hall of Fame feels an obligation to include them in the narrative of baseball. Here, through their inclusion of Pete Rose, the Hall of Fame undermines celebratory achievement in the name of historical complexity, adding a degree of ambiguity to the stories of a controversial figure within the game.

Performance-Enhancing Drugs

Much like the issue of gambling, the problem professional baseball faces in controlling the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) becomes a dilemma with which the Hall of Fame museum must wrangle in order to provide some semblance of balance within its narratives. The use of PEDs is a very divisive issue in baseball, full of accusation and innuendo. The use of PEDs (such as anabolic steroids) helped rewrite baseball’s record books, artificially inflating statistical performances for an untold number of major leaguers over numerous decades. Trying to determine just how to measure the impact of PEDs, as well as how to eliminate them from the game, is an ongoing struggle for Major League Baseball. Consequently, determining the legacy of the steroid era in baseball represents an ongoing struggle for the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The use of PEDs in baseball is not anything new. As far back as the nineteenth century, players faced accusations of utilizing injections of monkey testosterone as a way of improving performance. In the 1930s, however, anabolic steroids became readily available and soon worked their way into the game. Steroids, along with amphetamines,
became the mostly widely abused drugs in professional baseball. In the post-war years, drug use became even more rampant, with such renowned players as Mickey Mantle reportedly receiving “vitamin shots” full of amphetamines and steroids, and even the great Hank Aaron using amphetamines once to help himself get out of a slump.\footnote{Chafets, \textit{Cooperstown Confidential}, 178–180.}

In the 1980s, cocaine became the drug of choice among major leaguers, with former Gold-Glove-winning first baseman Keith Hernandez estimating that approximately 40 percent of major leaguers used cocaine during this time. In 1985, Tim Raines admitted to snorting cocaine during games and sliding headfirst into bases to protect the cocaine in his back pocket. Far worse was the case of the Pittsburgh Pirates. According to author Zev Chafets, the Pirates “were the worst cokeheads in baseball. Even their mascot, the Pittsburgh Parrot, was using and dealing.” While Major League Baseball suspended seven Pirates players for their drug use, all avoided missing any playing time by performing community service and making donations to a drug program.\footnote{Ibid., 117, 180.}

The use of PEDs really came to a head in the wake of the assaults on baseball’s season and career homerun records in the decades that followed. In the summer of 1998, sluggers Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa both eclipsed Roger Maris’s single-season homerun record set back in 1961. Three years later, San Francisco Giants’ outfielder Barry Bonds did the same, and then went on to break Hank Aaron’s all-time career homerun record in 2007. By then, however, allegations that all three homerun champions utilized steroids to artificially enhance their performances had become commonplace.
Professional baseball began an investigation to track down all the game’s offenders in an attempt to restore an aura of purity and sportsmanship to the game once again. While some players, like McGwire, eventually admitted to using PEDs, many of the cases against other players remain largely circumstantial, making the investigation appear perpetually ongoing—seemingly awaiting the next “smoking gun” to emerge and provide the concrete evidence required for conviction of any number of former “greats.”

At the Hall of Fame, the staff’s goal is to remain neutral observers in the steroid proceedings among mounting public pressure to forcefully address the issue within the museum. In a scathing article written for the *Village Voice* in 2007, author Emma Span condemned the Hall of Fame for not taking a stand on PEDs. In part, the author expressed her frustration as follows:

> At a time when it's harder and harder to glorify anyone, baseball players or otherwise, and when chemistry has raced too far ahead of major league baseball for us to make any clear assessment of the last 20 years, the Hall's days as a meaningful institution—if it ever was one—are dwindling. Fans seem willing to move past gambling and steroids and anything else you can throw at the game, but simply pretending that none of it ever happened is no way to maintain credibility; the Hall needs to embrace history and let the lionizing fall by the wayside.¹⁴¹⁵

Without fully engaging in an exploration of the subject, the Hall of Fame does acknowledge the existence of steroids in a variety of fashions throughout the museum. In *Today’s Game*, the Hall erected a panel crediting steroids, amphetamines, and other PEDs with affecting the game. It then goes on to notify visitors of the museum’s intention to deal with the subject “honestly and impartially” once given “the perspective of

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¹⁴¹⁵ Span, “Can Cooperstown Save Baseball?”
time.”⁴¹⁶ In One for the Books, where the subject really comes into play, another panel reads, “In documenting baseball history, the use of performance-enhancing drugs cannot be ignored. . . . In this museum you will find artifacts, images and stories of players who have either admitted to or have been suspected of using banned substances. Even though you will not always find specific references to this issue, this museum is committed to telling the story of PEDs within the game’s historical context.”⁴¹⁷ This acknowledgement, to some degree, addresses the concerns of the questioning fan, but in another sense, serves as a potential deflecting device that stifles conversation on the topic until a later date when the Hall feels they are better prepared to take on this controversy.

In One for the Books, where it is public knowledge that PEDs played a role in a record-setting performance, the Hall of Fame addresses it. For instance, in discussing Mark McGwire’s record-setting homerun performance in 1998, the museum acknowledges that rumors about McGwire’s use of PEDs surfaced shortly afterward, and that in 2010 McGwire admitted to using PEDs during his career. It then goes on to place McGwire’s offense within the context of the rampant steroid use within the game so as not to single out McGwire, but instead, provide a better understanding of the culture of abuse that existed during this period.

While Mark McGwire came clean about his PED use, numerous other players have not, despite rumors and piles of circumstantial evidence that connect them to PEDs. Those who vociferously proclaim their innocence in the face of overwhelming evidence

⁴¹⁶ Wall panel, Today’s Game, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, July 13, 2011.

to the contrary seem to draw particular ire from the baseball-going public. Perhaps the most polarizing figure to meet this criteria is Barry Bonds, the single-season and all-time homerun record holder in major league baseball.

Much like with Pete Rose, Hall of Fame visitors find the museum’s display of Bonds-related artifacts particularly repugnant. The Hall attempts to placate these visitors in its discussion of Bonds’ 762 career homeruns by pointing out that “although Major League Baseball never identified Bonds as testing positive for steroids, allegations that he used performance-enhancing drugs clouded the accomplishment.” But this is not enough for some fans, who deface the exhibit by bringing pens to the museum and marking an asterisk next to the artifacts celebrating Bonds’ record.

The fact remains, however, that as the label says, no evidence exists linking Bonds to a positive test. Consequently, the staff at the Hall of Fame avoided acting as judges in the case and condemning Bonds for his actions. As Erik Strohl told 610 sports radio in Kansas City, the staff at the Hall of Fame does not see it as their job to pass judgment, but instead to attempt to interpret history objectively for the public so as to allow them to make their own judgments. For Bonds, and all the players suspected but never formally charged with using steroids, the Hall of Fame has chosen to wait and see how their story unfolds. As Strohl mentioned, the staff feels they need to give the passion surrounding the issue time to subside in order to gain the proper perspective on the

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419 Strohl, interview.

420 Strohl, interview by Bob Fescoe.
narrative. “There will be a time when we have to address [PEDs] on a wider scale,” Strohl acknowledged, claiming that to avoid doing so because of the black mark it has made on baseball “would be a total abdication of our responsibility as historians” and “a shameful way to approach history.”\textsuperscript{421} What form the PED narrative will take and how long it will be before it manifests itself is something baseball fans will have to await patiently.

\textsuperscript{421} Strohl, interview by Bob Fescoe; Strohl, interview.
CHAPTER 8

A FOCUS ON LEARNING

In the latter half of the twentieth century, museums began moving from being collections-based to education-based institutions. In 1984, the Commission on Museums for a New Century declared education the primary responsibility of the modern museum, and just seven years later, the American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums) required its member institutions to put education at the heart of their commitments to public service. Consequently, recent decades witnessed the growing visibility of educational departments in museums, prompting Theodore Low to declare in 2004, “it is . . . in the field of popular education, that the museum belongs today.”

This commitment to education makes sense for any museum desiring to address the needs of its constituency. Studies show that the main reason people now attend museums is to learn. This is particularly true in the United States, where the educational aspects of museums outweigh those found in other countries.

Museums are excellent educational resources for a number of reasons. Among the factors that contribute to the quality of education found within them is the ability of these institutions to present numerous facts simultaneously and in context. People tend to

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425 Low, “What is a Museum?,” 33.
comprehend information faster this way and also appear to retrieve this type of information from their memories with greater certainty. In addition, museums provide environments where visitors learn at their own pace, spending as much time exploring individual topics as they need in order to make meaning from the subject matter. Museums often present this material in the form of multisensory productions that promote a deeper understanding through the engagement of a visitor’s senses and emotions, as well as their intellect.\textsuperscript{426}

Any discussion regarding the benefits of museum learning must also include mention of the process’s inherent social component. Group communication, in its variety of forms, plays a critical role in education. According to Lois Silverman, “many scholars now believe that communication does not occur in a linear fashion, with one active party conveying information to a passive other, but that communication is a process in which meaning is jointly and actively constructed through interaction.”\textsuperscript{427} As social environments, museums prove uniquely suited for providing the type of interaction required for effective learning.

At the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the commitment to education took a variety of forms—both old and new. First was the creation of a formal education program and learning center that provides education in a more traditionally structured setting. Through these resources children use artifacts to make connections


\textsuperscript{427} Silverman, “Making Meaning Together,” 234.
between baseball and classroom subjects such as math, geometry, statistics, social studies, and the physical sciences. The interactive programs combine education and entertainment to create rewarding learning experiences.428

One example of this type of program was a recently completed lesson on geography. The curriculum required students to follow professional baseball’s expansion through the western United States, asking children to look at different elements of local culture found in places such as Arizona, Colorado, Texas, and California. Students researched cuisine, entertainment, and various local customs as a way of fostering a sense of “place.” Educators did not limit the activities to just moving across a map, however, but instead asked students to affect a travel through time as well. Instructors encouraged students to research life in New York City in the 1920s, Cleveland in the 1930s, and Texas in the 1960s, and contemplate the economic and social conditions that resulted in baseball’s expansion or contraction in these areas. It was an exercise that not only promoted a greater awareness of American geography, but also of how the country changed over time.429

The education department at the Hall of Fame came about largely thanks to an evaluation performed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). Many consider the AAM (founded in 1906) to be the most influential organization of museum professionals

428 Wall panel, The Learning Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012; Strohl, interview.

In 1970, they developed standards for formalizing the evaluation of museum performance, and in 1990, Hall of Fame administrators asked them to perform a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) study on the Hall’s operations. What the AAM found was, in their determination, a reliquary slowly evolving into a museum. Part of their recommendation for improving the Hall of Fame’s operations was for the museum to focus on enhancing its educational standards.\textsuperscript{431}

The Hall of Fame acted on these recommendations by not only dedicating more resources to education and the creation of a formalized curriculum throughout the ‘90s, but also by expanding its programming to include events such as the hosting of educational films regarding baseball’s place within American culture.\textsuperscript{432} In addition, despite not becoming a member of the AAM, the Hall of Fame took to heart AAM guidelines calling for museum history to be “founded on scholarship” and “marked by intellectual integrity.”\textsuperscript{433}

Of course the average visitor encounters most of the Hall of Fame’s commitment to education in the exhibitry. This is where a newer, less-structured educational process emerges. Here curators, designers, educators, and collections staff work together to move past the one-way, transmission-absorption model disparaged by John Falk and Lynn Dierking in \textit{Learning from Museums}. In their book, Falk and Dierking identify this model

\textsuperscript{430} Lewis, \textit{The Changing Face of Public History}, 100.

\textsuperscript{431} Spencer, interview.

\textsuperscript{432} “Hall to host educational series,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

\textsuperscript{433} Young, “A Modest Proposal,” 72.
as one traditionally utilized for the transference of information from teacher to student—a method, they assert, that stifles debate, critical thinking, and meaningful learning. What the authors found more advantageous was something they called, “free-choice learning,” a fluid method founded on the principle that effective learning is both personally motivated and non-linear. The variety of factors that influence this fluid learning process includes: the beliefs and interests of the visitor, their prior knowledge of the subject matter, the types of social interactions in which they engage, and their exposure to events occurring outside the museum that reinforce the educational materials found in the exhibits.\(^{434}\)

Where museums traditionally fail as educational institutions is in their inability to recognize the different ways today’s learners organize and process information. Museums that stubbornly stick to object-centric displays and one-way communication models struggle to maintain visitorship. Modern phenomena, such as social media and reality television, place individuals at the center of events—so museums must do the same. As Cary Carson (a lecturer at William & Mary College and the Vice President of the research division at Colonial Williamsburg) once noted, modern visitors do not want to be passive spectators, they want to feel like they have been transported back in time and that the history is actually happening to them.\(^{435}\)

\(^{434}\) Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, xii, 9–11, 137.

An essential part of making visitors feel this way is the presence of quality storytelling.\footnote{Ibid., 19.} In his 2008 doctoral dissertation on educational value in museums, Raymond Doswell asserted that “conveying compelling stories is the key attraction for learners and central to the mission of museums as educational institutions.”\footnote{Doswell, “Evaluating Educational Value in Museum Exhibitions,” 83.} The accompaniment of interactive and immersive experiences then make visitors feel like they are a part of the narrative and thus engages them in more thought-provoking ways.

In 2007, Hall of Fame curator John Odell claimed that the Hall’s museum patrons demonstrated an intense desire to learn, more than typically found at most other history museums.\footnote{Ibid., 70.} To accommodate this desire, as well as to more directly control what and how visitors learn, the Hall of Fame slowly brought its exhibit design and production processes in-house. With the exception of extremely large graphics and exhibitry pieces (which the Hall hires fabrication firms to generate), the museum now handles all aspects of exhibit design and construction—controlling everything from conceptualization to writing, design, layout, artifact selection, and even installation.\footnote{Strohl, interview.}

Increasing its focus on the variety of ways visitors learn, the Hall of Fame goes to great lengths to provide multisensory experiences for their patrons through a variety of new and experimental practices. Among these have been the incorporation of more interactive technological components, providing artifacts that allow visitors to see, hear,
touch, and smell baseball history, as well as utilizing tools meant to facilitate dialogue on different aspects of important subject matter. Past examples included everything from providing patrons with the chance to explore hall of famers’ actual lockers, to supplying visitors with large laminated cards full of conversation topics to carry through the exhibits and discuss. As Erik Strohl acknowledged, these practices are not an attempt to apply any modern learning theory uniformly across all the museum’s exhibits, but instead represent an ongoing process of trial-and-error to determine the approaches that best connect with visitors, and the ones that do not.\textsuperscript{440}

\textit{Entering Sacred Ground}

One of the more effective practices utilized by the Hall in creating rewarding educational experiences is the creation of “period rooms”—modeled after those at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. As many of the staff note, if you walk into an exhibit and it feels like an environment in miniature, chances are it is a newer or recently re-curated exhibit.\textsuperscript{441} As discussed in previous chapters, the Hall utilized this technique to provide the Art Deco character of \textit{Diamond Dreams} and in creating the feel of a Victorian parlor in \textit{Taking the Field}. Perhaps the most popular and emotional application of this technique resides in the Hall’s current tribute to America’s baseball stadiums, \textit{Sacred Ground}.

In 2005, the Hall of Fame completed a three-year, $20 million renovation, which provided an extra 10,000 square feet of exhibit space (raising the museum’s total to

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid.
80,000 square feet). This renovation improved access for the handicapped and the flow of visitor traffic through the museum while also providing for a new lobby and grand staircase to the second and third floors. In addition, the renovation also helped make room for the re-curated ballparks exhibit, *Sacred Ground.*

The premise of *Sacred Ground* is to reconnect fans to ballparks by recreating the stadium experience. In the early twentieth century, baseball stadiums were an intimate part of inner-city neighborhoods and the lives of their residents. Stuffed into whatever odd-shaped space the city had to offer, these parks contained a series of irregular layouts and dimensions that provided each park with unique character. Local residents formed bonds with these stadiums, as the structures played a vital role in unifying the communities surrounding them.

In the 1950s and 60s, the growth of the automobile created a need for larger stadium parking areas and also promoted flight from the inner cities. Following demographic shifts, baseball parks left their tight-knit communities for the wide-open spaces of suburbia. This newfound freedom resulted in the construction of expansive multi-purpose “cookie-cutter” stadiums designed to maximize revenue—usually at the expense of aesthetics.

Lost in this process were the inner-city faithful, left distraught and betrayed by the fracturing of their communities and the sense of “place” around which they partially

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formed their identities. In “Public History and the Study of Memory,” David Glassberg noted that people, particularly in their youth, bond with places emotionally and that these bonds play a critical role in the formation of their adult identities. Those who experience the breaking of the bonds (frequently through a process of relocation), often suffer from symptoms of depression for a number of years afterward.444

In recent decades, baseball franchises began moving back within the territorial limits of major cities. Unique and wildly innovative stadium designs attempted to rekindle the nostalgia of an era when fans formed extremely personal and meaningful bonds with their team’s home stadiums. The Hall of Fame takes advantage of this resurgence in nostalgia for old parks to promote greater interest in the museum, as well as to help visitors make connections to different aspects of baseball history. As Sacred Ground proclaims, “the ball parks we love rest on memories as well as concrete,” and these memories come from the attachment fans feel to ballparks that they then pass on to their children and grandchildren—much as the Hall of Fame encourages patrons to do with their love of baseball.445

In The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan asserted that history in museums was “more real,” in part, due to the engagement of the senses.446 This theory proves true in Sacred Ground, an exhibit full of bells and whistles and all the things fans love about a baseball park


445 Wall panel, Sacred Ground, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, November 6, 2012.

446 Rosenzweig and Thelan, The Presence of the Past, 106.
experience. The exhibit offers fans a chance to view a number of artifacts that made ballparks unique—everything from a costume worn by the Philadelphia Phillies’ mascot (the Philly Phanatic), to the pinwheel shaped portion of Comiskey Park’s 1960 “exploding scoreboard” light spectacular. In addition, the museum floods the room with the sounds of a stadium and invites visitors to push buttons and listen to the variety of songs played during the 7th-inning stretch at ballparks across the country. There is even a tribute to food vendors and concessionaires that allows patrons to open a door and release the scent of buttered popcorn into the air.


Perhaps the most intriguing interactive component in the entire museum also resides in Sacred Ground. Here a giant movie screen partially surrounds the visitor and offers a user-controlled, computer-simulated tour of ballparks such as Boston’s South End Grounds in 1888, Brooklyn’s Ebbets Field in 1955, and Chicago’s Comiskey Park in
1919. Simply by pushing buttons that point forwards, backwards, left, and right, the museum’s patrons can stroll through the stands or out on to the field to view the distinctive features of these old parks and really feel as if they are at the center of a time-traveling experience. It is an application of technology that epitomizes the exploration of a familiar topic in a new and innovative fashion.

Engaging the tactile senses, in addition to any number of manual interactives, is the actual cornerstone laid for the construction of Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, New York, shortly after its groundbreaking ceremony on March 4, 1912.\textsuperscript{447} The stone, left unprotected by glass so that patrons may actually walk up and touch it, carries with it an interesting tie to American history. Ebbets Field was one of the first stadiums built using concrete and steel—replacing older wooden stadiums. Officials considered its construction such a monumental feat of engineering that they buried a time capsule in its cornerstone to commemorate the occasion. Included in the time capsule were such remarkable pieces of Americana as letters from Woodrow Wilson and a copy of a telegram announcing Robert Perry’s arrival at the North Pole.\textsuperscript{448}

When the Dodgers left Brooklyn for Los Angeles after the 1957 season, the city tore down the stadium. Unaware of the presence of the time capsule, engineers began the process of demolishing the building when a construction worker who happened to witness the burying of the time capsule some forty years earlier stepped forward and


\textsuperscript{448} Strohl, interview.
informed everyone of its existence. Unfortunately, once officials opened the capsule they found its integrity compromised and most of the artifacts damaged beyond repair.\textsuperscript{449}

Though the artifacts inside did not survive, the presence of the cornerstone at the Hall of Fame conveys the importance Americans placed on baseball, viewing its major accomplishments on par with some of the most important in American history. By removing the barrier between the museum’s visitors and this emotionally charged artifact, the Hall actually allows visitors to come into physical contact with the past.

The \textit{Sacred Ground} exhibit certainly helps define what it is to make personal connections to history. As Peter Liebhold once wrote in \textit{The Public Historian}, “Visitors like to see themselves in an exhibition.”\textsuperscript{450} While few visitors to the Hall of Fame were major league superstars and know what it is to experience a 101mph fastball or to hit forty homeruns, most have been to a ballpark, felt its energy, and remember the sensations associated with the experience. This is where the exhibit reaches the Hall’s fan base.

In addition, \textit{Sacred Ground} takes advantage of the social nature of both ballgame and museum attendance to promote an environment of shared experience. A museum visit draws comparisons to baseball games in that it is not uncommon for up to three generations of family members to attend these events together. Even if the museum’s patrons arrive alone, according to the Hall of Fame’s Curator of New Media, Lenny

\textsuperscript{449} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{450} Liebhold, “Experiences from the Front Line,” 83.
DiFranza, “we want people to connect with each other and share baseball history.” By fostering the free exchange of experiences between visitors through the nostalgic, multisensory environment of *Sacred Ground*, the Hall of Fame actually fosters both the formation of collective memory as well as a fuller understanding of some of the unique cultural aspects of American history.452

So what are some of these aspects? Certainly the evolution of stadium construction speaks to changes in technology, construction materials, geographic mobility and attitudes toward conformity, profit making, and the revitalization of urban environments. A focus on vendors and concessionaires facilitates discussions of economic inflation, labor organization, and the growing globalization and health-conscious attitudes affecting American culinary choices. New climate-controlled stadiums with retractable roofs, more comfortable lounge-chair-style seating, HD television monitors, and touch-screen food and drink service speak to the modern at-home comforts required to persuade fans to venture out to the ballpark. An increased focus on providing family-friendly entertainment convinced ball clubs to install playgrounds, swimming pools, aquariums, and other attractions to draw not just baseball fans, but their spouses, partners, siblings, and parents to games to combat the growing influence of corporate-owned premier seating (which often remains unused during games). The exhibit testifies to the modern era in which baseball stadiums fight for the American entertainment dollar against an increasingly diverse array of options now


452 Strohl, interview; Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” 19.
available to the public. Ironically, it is this same fight that museums currently find themselves in, leading to many of the Hall of Fame’s innovations discussed in previous chapters.

Children and Families

Much like baseball stadiums, museums often rely on their appeal as experiences for the whole family in order to boost attendance. Their reputation is one of safe, family-friendly entertainment that also offers educational value. By providing more than just artifacts and layers of statistical information, the Hall of Fame hopes to not only engage the baseball fan, but also provide materials that capture the attention of the members of their family who might not care about the game. The museum’s goal is to keep families together throughout the exhibits, promoting interaction and conversation by connecting baseball to American history and culture.453

One of the most effective ways the museum accomplishes this is through the introduction of “Family Friendly” plaques. Meant to comply with the post-modern demand that museums become forums for discussion, these plaques encourage dialogue by helping visitors see the exhibit materials as an extension of their own lives. For example, one plaque entitled “Shattering the Glass Ceiling,” asks visitors to think about the jobs women held in the past and work at today, and then identify the professions that still exclude them. Another prompts a discussion on the legacy of segregation and why its story is important. The presence of these plaques is a direct result of management’s incorporation of the education department in the exhibit design process—with the goal of teaching visitors a little something about themselves as they walk through the museum.

453 Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 25; Strohl, interview.
The plaques do not appear in every exhibit, as they are something with which the museum is still experimenting, but they do make an important contribution in expanding the educational value of the museum.

Traditionally, younger audiences do not seek to spend their leisure time in museums. Consequently, as Dan Spock noted during a panel discussion at the 2012 National Council on Public History Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in order to change this, children need to be cultivated as museumgoers at a very young age. This happens to be one of the goals of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. In 1997, Hall of Fame President Donald Marr announced, “One important facet of the National Baseball Hall of Fame’s mission as an educational institution is to foster an appreciation for our national pastime among children.” The Hall of Fame does this in variety of ways. One is by displaying artifacts from recent and current major league stars with whom younger generations of fans are familiar. A second is by offering educational programming that parents find redeeming. Perhaps the most effective means of drawing younger visitors to the museum, however, is by building exhibits designed specifically to attract this particular demographic.

The Sandlot Kids’ Clubhouse exhibit targets children aged three to ten by providing them a clubhouse-style environment in which to learn baseball in easily digestible forms. Consisting of faux wood construction (complete with knotholes) and containing brightly colored buttons to push and large baseball-glove-shaped chairs, this

454 Lubar et al., “State of the Field.”

455 “Hall’s essay contest results announced,” undated and unsourced newspaper article, 1997 Scrapbook, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York. 235
exhibit exposed an entirely new generation of fan to baseball history. Children can read books off the shelves, put together puzzles, or watch videos of Hall of Famer Brooks Robinson narrating *Curious George Plays Baseball* or Hall of Famer Ozzie Smith telling the story of Roberto Clemente. It is an exhibit calmly lit, full of literature, and clearly meant to encourage learning rather than rambunctious behavior.

In keeping with the Hall of Fame’s mission to connect generations, the exhibit asks children to think about with whom they share their favorite baseball memories. This is but one of numerous opportunities for entire families to interact with one another in this manner. In addition, the museum also addresses a number of themes present in the larger exhibits—for example, exposing children to issues of race by hanging pictures of Jackie Robinson and Satchel Paige on the walls. Finally, *Sandlot Kids’ Clubhouse* even provides a modicum of transparency in educating children on the process of updating Roberto Clemente’s gallery plaque. Here visitors learn that Clemente’s original Hall of
Fame plaque listed his name as “Roberto Walker Clemente,” but upon performing additional research on Latino heritage and finding out that a mother’s maiden name traditionally followed a child’s last name, the Hall recast Clemente’s plaque to read “Roberto Clemente Walker.”

Complimenting the Hall of Fame’s family-friendly approach to early education is the museum’s *Be A Superior Example (BASE)* exhibit. This exhibit consists of four stations catered to conveying information to patrons with shorter attention spans, and educates children about fitness, nutrition, character, and fair play. Mirroring the cultural trends found in Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move* campaign and the National Football League’s *Play 60* program, *BASE* encourages children to be active and make healthy lifestyle choices.

Here, away from the accusations and controversy associated with baseball’s most cherished and hotly contested records, the Hall of Fame launches into its most thorough discussion of performance-enhancing drugs. Freed from the appearance of passing judgment or providing social commentary, the Hall approaches the subject as an educator, identifying the various substances in question and providing a description of both their supposed benefits and their damaging side effects.

The exhibit reaches children through a variety of interactive tools, including touch-screen displays and big blocky materials made moveable through the use of easy-to-grip handles. At the end of the exhibit, the Hall encourages children to write down a story about a time when they demonstrated good character. These are stories that visitors

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can either take with them, or leave with the Hall of Fame for possible incorporation into a future exhibit. What this process allows children to do is actually make a contribution to the museum’s operation, and potentially, to influence displays of future narratives. What it represents is a tentative foray into the post-modern doctrine of “shared authority,” something the Hall of Fame began delving into as another effective device for forging more meaningful connections with its visitors.

The concept of shared authority is one that decentralizes power within the museum. It challenges curators to democratize their processes by diminishing the exclusivity of their control and acknowledging that others have something of value to contribute to the historical process, even if they lack formalized academic training. This, according to author Michael Frisch, becomes “central to an exhibit’s capacity to provide meaningful engagement with history.”

Prior to the 1980s, museums closely resembled academic institutions in that the accumulation and distribution of knowledge focused on the abilities of the individual. In recent decades, however, the success of team-oriented approaches made collaborative models more the norm. This collaboration involved museum curators acting as facilitators while working with a variety of individuals from different departments to design, research, and produce exhibit materials. In its purest form, shared authority also incorporates the views of a museum’s constituents, producing histories with a more

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457 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xii.
representative range of perspectives and experiences by providing communities with a voice in the construction of their own narratives.\textsuperscript{458}

Shared authority recognizes that people are active agents in the creation of history. By displaying preferences and questioning authority, museum patrons begin blurring the lines between “historians” and “the public.” In addition, because museum visitors are ultimately the creators of meaning within the museum, it is important that their voices contribute to exhibit design. The opportunity to tell their own stories often increases both the popularity of an exhibit, as well as the likelihood that the museum’s effectively conveys its intended message.\textsuperscript{459}

This does not mean, however, that shared authority calls for eliminating professionalization within the museum community, but rather that institutions strike a balance between scholarly and non-scholarly authority. Sharing too little authority often results in audiences losing interest in an exhibit, or being unable to follow the narrative, but sharing too much authority may undermine the confidence people place in museums and result in narratives that inform people about things they already know.\textsuperscript{460} As Eric

\textsuperscript{458} Lewis, The Changing Face of Public History, 8, 83; Frisch, A Shared Authority, xii.


\textsuperscript{460} Lewis, The Changing Face of Public History, 103; Steven Lubar, “In the Footsteps of Perry: The Smithsonian Goes to Japan,” The Public Historian 17, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 46.
Gable noted in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, public history displays need to be a product of negotiation between top and bottom. 461

While traditionally curators produced exhibition content with little or no input from other members of the staff or the public, the process currently utilized at the Baseball Hall of Fame calls for numerous departments to work cooperatively from beginning to end. New exhibit ideas come from staff who feel a story needs telling, or from external newsworthy events that bump against baseball history. A chief curator takes the lead on an idea and then all the museum’s curators join in brainstorming concepts, writing different portions of the exhibit, and reading and reacting to text until they are able to reach an agreement on their intended message. 462

In addition to curators, the Hall of Fame’s exhibit design group also consists of people from the collections department (who play no small part in helping with artifact selection), and professionals from the education department (who assist in a variety of fashions, including designing materials for engaging with the public face-to-face). Much of the exhibit’s final form rests on the shoulders of the exhibit department—specifically designers who work on the design, layout, and mounts, and ensure the curators’ desires are both physically and financially possible. As Erik Strohl quipped, “Curators are big dreamers and the exhibit people tend to knock you back into reality.” 463

461 Gable, “How We Study History Museums,” 110.

462 Strohl, interview.

463 Ibid.
entire process for a large, permanent exhibit at the Hall of Fame takes approximately eighteen months to complete.

With well-defined internal practices for sharing exhibit responsibilities in place, the Hall of Fame recently began increasing its efforts to solicit contributions from fans, visitors, and numerous members of the baseball community—demonstrating the growing influence of shared authority principles within the museum. Certainly soliciting stories from youngsters visiting the BASE exhibit is one example, as was a similar effort to capture, archive, and display visitor memories of Fenway Park for the museum’s FENtennial celebration. Winning pictures from the Hall of Fame Photo Contest regularly find their way to the museum’s walls, while one particular exhibit, Pastime Portraits, celebrated the personal baseball photographs taken between 1928 and 1938 by Forrest S. Yantis, an insurance salesman from Troy, Ohio. Finally, in designating 2012, “The Year of the Fan,” the Hall of Fame took to social media sites to document the personal memories fans had of some of baseball’s greatest recent achievements. All of these efforts represent but a small sample of the processes currently underway to diversify the offerings, contributions, and perspectives incorporated into the museum’s exhibiry.

*Pop Culture*

When searching for ways to reach a broad constituency possessing varying degrees of subject matter knowledge, there are few means more widely utilized or effective than popular culture references. Pop culture often represents an engagement

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point around which museums form content and dialogue to help visitors identify with, and comprehend, the material. These processes help foster learning in the museum.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum has a long history of appropriating pop culture as part of their efforts to increase the institution’s visibility. As the National Baseball Centennial Commission drummed up enthusiasm for the museum’s opening throughout the 1930s, they appointed state-level chairmen such as Walt Disney, Jack Benny, Helen Hayes, and Fred Astaire to promote localized events. In the 1950s, the Hall put a recording of Abbott & Costello’s famous skit, “Who’s On First?” on permanent display. A decade later, in the heat of the space race, the museum proudly displayed a baseball autographed by twenty-one American astronauts as a way (according to director Ken Smith) “to keep baseball up with the times.”

In the latter-half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the Hall of Fame exhibits drew increasingly on the popularity of cultural phenomena to engage visitors in discussions of baseball’s impact on American life. In 2000, the Hall of Fame unveiled, You’re in the Hall of Fame, Charlie Brown! The exhibit celebrated the popular Peanuts comic strip and its service as an “ambassador for baseball,” by adorning yellow walls with a black horizontal zigzag stripe and mounting numerous cartoons along with panels detailing the life of Charles Schulz. More recently, the Hall of Fame exhibited

465 Lubar et al., “State of the Field.”

466 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 105–106.


468 “Hall of Fame Exhibits Peanuts/Charles Schulz,” Photo Archives, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
John Fogerty’s custom-built guitar made to look like a baseball bat split in half lengthwise. The former member of Creedence Clearwater Revival requested the specially designed guitar (nicknamed “Slugger”) after the success of his 1985 baseball-inspired hit, “Centerfield.”

Perhaps the most enduring relationship between baseball and pop culture is the game’s prominent place in feature films. Back in the 1930s, the popularity of motion pictures exploded as Americans sought inexpensive ways to take their minds off the Depression. During this time, professional baseball’s American League began producing films. Written by men within the game and utilizing baseball players as actors, the league’s first feature was 1934’s, *Batter Up*. In 1935, the league’s second film, *Play Ball*, actually incorporated sound and drew over 1.5 million viewers. The following year’s film drew over four million, helping revitalize American interest in baseball. As the Hall of Fame’s dedication loomed on the horizon, a 1938 American League film coincidentally celebrated one hundred years of baseball and endorsed Abner Doubleday as the game’s inventor.469

In the decades that followed, baseball became a staple of feature films, coming to symbolize the nation’s changing social and political climate. In 1941’s *Meet John Doe*, Gary Cooper played a former baseball player who became a vagrant during the Depression. In 1955’s *Three Stripes in the Sun*, aggressive Americans and polite,

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deferring Japanese players came together to mend old emotional wounds through baseball. 470

The completion of the Grandstand Theater at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1989 allowed the museum’s staff to design new types of programming around film for reaching out to the baseball community. Among these was 1997’s first ever baseball film festival held at the Hall of Fame. Fans viewed such icons of American pop culture as The Bad News Bears, Bang the Drum Slowly, Angels in the Outfield, and The Natural, while vendors walked up and down the aisles of the theater selling hotdogs, popcorn, and pretzels. 471 The festival provided a unique opportunity to draw visitors into the museum by attracting the movie-going public, as well as the museum-going public, and exposing them to a series of nostalgic takes on American sporting culture throughout the twentieth century.

Hollywood’s appropriation of baseball is in fact so prevalent that the Hall of Fame designed a permanent exhibit on baseball in film entitled, Baseball at the Movies. Like much of the museum’s exhibits, Baseball at the Movies is a mix of the old and the new. It is a nostalgic look at movies that are themselves nostalgic, but the exhibit carries with it some serious messages as well. While standing in the miniature recreated environment of an early twentieth century theater lobby, visitors view the names and


artifacts of the hundreds of baseball-themed films that flooded theaters over the past century. Sweet, idyllic films like *Field of Dreams* and *The Sandlot* demonstrate how, according to Rob Edelman, “[the] union of baseball and growing up in America is unabashedly melting-pot patriotic.”

But in addition to providing what it is the average baseball fan expects to take away from the exhibit, the Hall of Fame also slips in some history. Among the most prominently displayed artifacts in the exhibit are uniform clothing from the film, *Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*—a movie starring Billy Dee Williams, James Earl Jones, and Richard Pryor that follows the story of a Negro League team in the 1930s. Just as the museum accomplishes in numerous exhibits throughout the museum, curators manage to spark discussions of race without formally engaging in it. Here a uniform, brightly colored in clown-like yellow, red, and royal blue, stands in stark contrast to the regal pinstripes of major league uniforms belonging to teams such as the New York Yankees and hints at the myopic views some Americans held of black culture during this period—that of buffoonery-style entertainment rather than serious athletic competition.

In addition, *Baseball at the Movies* brings to the forefront discussions of the power of film as a visual experience and the impact this has on collective memory. As Marita Sturken pointed out in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Reginald Denny emerged from his beating during the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles in 1992 with no memory of the event, but after watching a video of his attack, he suddenly found the recall necessary to testify against

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his attackers. In this case, Sturken notes, video became his memory. In *Tangled Memories*, Sturken goes on to explain how films portraying historical events (like the Vietnam War characterization in Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*) move from personal memory to cultural memory, and eventually becoming a part of our historical reality. This happens because the stories in these films are often neat, coherent narratives that offer closure and make memories whole. These memories intertwine with the real ones until it becomes difficult to separate fact from fiction.\(^4\) This is the power film wields over history.

The same holds true for the baseball movies celebrated in the Hall of Fame. For example, a special display set up just outside the “theater lobby” in *Baseball at the Movies* pays tribute to the achievements of Penny Marshall’s *A League of Their Own*, a movie with previously explored ties to the Hall of Fame. In *Baseball at the Movies*, uniforms worn in the film are on display much as they are in the Hall’s exhibit about women in baseball, *Diamond Dreams*. Mirroring the cultural significance of the baseballs signed in earlier decades by American presidents and astronauts, the exhibit contains a baseball signed by Penny Marshall, Geena Davis, Tom Hanks, Madonna, and Rosie O’Donnell. The Hall of Fame then goes on to laud the screenplay for its historical accuracy, asking fans to separate what they learned about the AAGPBL in *Diamond Dreams* from what they remember of the film—creating the potential for blending fact with fiction.

A similar dilemma emerges in displays of Robert Redford’s film, *The Natural*. Redford based the story on events from June of 1948 when a “love-crazed girl” shot

\(^4\) Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 41, 85, 120.
Phillies’ first baseman Eddie Waitkus. Sensing the cultural significance of the story, Hall of Fame curator Bob Quinn later wrote to Waitkus to ask him for the bullet for the purposes of putting it on display in the Hall of Fame Museum. Thirty-six years later, when Redford’s film (about a ballplayer returning to the game after being shot by a deranged woman in a hotel) became a box office smash, the Hall of Fame procured Redford’s complete uniform from the film in order to display it in the museum.

As blockbuster films like *Platoon* and *A League of Their Own* illustrate, the use of feature films to stimulate interest in history often compromises the integrity of that history. Through their marketing and affiliation with well-known or well-liked entertainers, movies prove useful in exposing the public to important, and sometimes forgotten, stories. These films raise awareness, inspire research, and generate much-needed appreciation for significant, but underappreciated historical narratives. The downside to movies based on actual events, however, is their propensity for distorting reality through their effect on the collective memory process. It is a pervasive phenomenon in American culture and one well represented in the *Baseball at the Movies* exhibit in Cooperstown.

*Babe Ruth*

The most advantageous way for any institution to utilize pop culture references is through America’s fascination with celebrity. Celebrities are the people we as a culture study, admire, and sometimes emulate. Their exploits and images bombard us from an

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increasing multitude of media outlets until they become household names and the intimate details of their personal lives become common knowledge. In baseball circles, there is one legendary celebrity that looms over all others—a man celebrated not only for his illustrious achievements on the field but also for transcending the game to become the embodiment of American culture in the early twentieth century. This figure is, of course, Babe Ruth.

The Hall of Fame began collecting Babe Ruth artifacts well before the museum’s doors officially opened, and these testaments to the achievements of arguably the greatest player in baseball history remained a staple of the Hall’s exhibits throughout the museum’s existence. Over the decades the artifacts themselves remained largely unchanged, but their display actually reflected evolving tastes in museum practices.

The earliest displays focused on Ruth’s on-field achievements. Tourists making the pilgrimage to Cooperstown throughout the mid-twentieth century gazed upon bats, balls, shoes, and trophies celebrating some of the most hallowed performances in American sports. These artifacts found their way into spaces throughout the museum, wherever curators felt it “made sense” to place them, but focused around a more formalized Babe Ruth exhibit starting in the 1950s.

By the 1970s, the Babe Ruth exhibit resided in a little alcove flanked by two windowed walls running perpendicular to the display. The exhibit consisted primarily of two inset cases and a number of framed pictures hanging on yellow walls. The Hall added to the exhibit by acquiring some new artifacts in 1971 (including a taped ball Ruth made while a student at Baltimore’s St. Mary’s Industrial School in 1913) and staffers hung two telephones which, upon patrons picking up the receivers, repeatedly played audio
tapes of Ruth speaking. These audio recordings hinted at the audiovisual elements to come in the following years and proved one of the most popular attractions in the museum, forcing curator Peter Clark to navigate through the slanted-roofed attic (where he regularly banged his head on the beams) in order to change and restart the tapes.  

Image 18. Babe Ruth Exhibit (1974). This photo shows Chicago White Sox Manager Chuck Tanner listening to a recording of Babe Ruth’s Voice. Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

The end of the 1980s, according to a review by Marc Onigman for the *Journal of Sports History*, found the Babe Ruth exhibit “buried” on the third floor of the museum and badly in need of cleaning.  

While a video played a series of Ruth’s career

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476 “Baseball Hall of Fame doors open to players of now defunct Negro League,” *Southeast Missourian*, February 4, 1971; Clark, interview.

477 Onigman, review of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 113.
highlights, little change or reinterpretation within the exhibit meant that the Ruthian objects pretty much served the same purpose they had for decades—inspiring awe by their association with a legendary sports figure.

Today’s Babe Ruth exhibit, however, represents a radical departure from past incarnations. Placing artifacts within the context of Ruth’s on-field achievements, family life, charity work, and larger-than-life persona, Hall of Fame curator John Odell explained the exhibit as an attempt to depict Babe Ruth the player, Babe Ruth the man, and Babe Ruth the icon.478

The fact that so much of the exhibit focuses on Ruth’s life off of the field indicates that the museum wishes visitors to make their connections to this exhibit through a glimpse at Ruth’s personal life. Unlike other re-curated exhibits, however, this one is unapologetically sanitized and celebratory. This is an exhibit founded on the belief that hero worship (for all the knocks it takes from social historians) still has a place in the construction of historical narratives.

An analysis of the current exhibit finds much to promote Ruth’s character as a dedicated family man and philanthropist. A panel on Ruth’s “Public Appearances and Charity Work,” discusses his well-documented philanthropic efforts alongside various celebrities and politicians, while a giant, blown-up cutout of Ruth bending his towering frame to talk with a young child highlights a panel depicting the tremendous dedication Ruth showed toward bettering the lives of children. Current museum theory views the

technique of utilizing large cutouts as perhaps the most common way displays convey importance, and in the case of the Babe Ruth exhibit, this certainly holds true in the emphasis it draws to his prolific work with charities.\textsuperscript{479}

In moving to his home life, the museum displays pictures of Ruth, his wife, and daughter and discusses his love of family, while artifacts like Ruth’s bowling ball and bag symbolize domesticity and provide visitors with an opportunity to view Ruth as someone not unlike themselves. In reality, Ruth was a notorious drinker and philanderer who spent recklessly on cars, food, clothes, and alcohol. Ruth missed numerous games due to his hard-partying lifestyle, frequently availed himself of prostitutes, and even hired an attorney to settle a paternity suit from a nineteen-year-old restaurant waitress in 1922. While the Hall credits his second wife, Claire Hodgson, with acting as a calming influence and restricting his off-field activities, it glosses over what exactly those activities were.\textsuperscript{480}

Unlike most of the re-curated exhibits in the Hall of Fame, the Babe Ruth exhibit also ignores issues of race. Many believed Ruth had African American ancestry—charges that started back in his youth at St. Mary’s Orphanage in Baltimore. Often fellow players hurled racial insults at Ruth. Ty Cobb even refused to sleep under the same roof as Ruth due to his potentially mixed-race heritage.\textsuperscript{481}

\textsuperscript{479} Lubar, “In the Footsteps of Perry,” 51; Lewis, \textit{The Changing Face of Public History}, 69.

\textsuperscript{480} Briley, \textit{Class at Bat}, 9; Chafets, \textit{Cooperstown Confidential}, 55; Wall panel, \textit{Babe Ruth Room}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, November 6, 2012.

\textsuperscript{481} Chafets, \textit{Cooperstown Confidential}, 112.
In choosing to ignore the more controversial aspects of Babe Ruth’s life, the Hall of Fame does not so much appear to abdicate its responsibility in this instance as set a tone for an intentionally celebratory exhibit. The story of Babe Ruth is not so much one of social progress as it is conveying to the public the degree to which his aura still hangs over the game. Without making excuses for the exhibit, any visitor to the *Babe Ruth Room* can quickly determine the important part the legend of Ruth plays in telling the story of baseball. While the exhibit might benefit from a more direct acknowledgement of the degenerate facets of Ruth’s behavior, any in-depth exploration of miscegenation, substance abuse, or promiscuity seems out of place given the focus on Ruth as a symbol of hero worship within the game. It is an exhibit not intended to explore the human side of baseball heroes, but instead to demonstrate the importance of their mythological greatness in evoking love for the game.

More productively, the Hall of Fame utilizes Ruth’s celebrity to appropriate the power of pop culture in making connections to historical events. Through the Ruth exhibit, the museum exposes patrons to realities of life with polio in the early twentieth century, America’s entry into World War I, and the exuberance with which Americans embraced their new consumer culture after the war’s end. Audiovisual presentations and the ability to open and peer inside Babe Ruth’s locker from Yankee Stadium still provide the multi-sensory experiences favored by the Hall’s curators in recent years. But what really stands out about this exhibit is an apparent willingness to throw off the demand to apply the principles of social history uniformly in order to make an exhibit powerful and relevant. Here, by ignoring the more complicated side of history, the museum appears to
make a statement (whether intentional or not) about the important role myth, hero
worship, and the affinity for baseball’s “Golden Age” still play within the game.

Where the potential for improving this exhibit lies is in the missed opportunity for
the museum to provide some transparency into its intentions behind this particular design. Informing visitors as to why the museum chose to portray Ruth as they have provides the extra layer of insight demanded by modern museum scholars and enriches the museum-going experience for patrons by detailing the decisions that influenced the historical displays. This appears to be the logical “next step” in the evolution of the Hall’s Babe Ruth story.

Art

One final discussion about the use of pop culture to facilitate dialogue and engagement with history comes from the Hall of Fame’s art gallery, Art of Baseball. Why look at art in the Baseball Hall of Fame? Because, as Marie Tyler-McGraw noted in The Public Historian, “art is embedded in ideology.”482 Tyler-McGraw examined the controversial 1991 Smithsonian exhibit The West as America when she made this observation, but this does not mean that art has to be labeled as potentially subversive for her assertion to apply.

The Hall of Fame began collecting baseball-related art not only for its cultural significance, but also, initially, to fill its gallery spaces. In the decades following its opening, the museum’s policy of accepting anything and everything donated to them vastly increased all aspects of its collections, including artwork. The Hall of Fame then

took this assortment of photographs, paintings, and sculptures and placed them throughout the museum without reference to authorship, size, technique, or significance. Lacking any sort of interpretation, it exemplified the display of art for art’s sake.

Today, *Art of Baseball* utilizes the museum patron’s love of the game as a vantage point from which to view significant cultural aspects of American history. For example, a portrait of Hall-of-Famer Tom Seaver painted by artist Andy Warhol in 1977 contextualizes the piece by noting how it “exemplified the 1960s Pop Art movement.” The label then goes on to explain the techniques artists used to produce Pop Art and how the movement focused on advertisements and celebrities as a reaction to traditional fine art.

In addition to educating guests on the principles of different popular artistic styles, the Hall’s art exhibit also reinforces many of the images that tell the history of baseball. A 1952 gouache on canvas by Stevan Dohanos entitled *Listening to the World Series* depicts a number of blue-collar workers climbing up a utility pole to tap the wires and listen to a baseball game on the radio. Dohanos, it turns out, completed this work for a *Saturday Evening Post* cover that year—one of his many works that detailed life in America through portrayals of everyday items like tools and appliances. Needless to say, the piece’s nostalgic appeal to “the everyman” fits perfectly into the image professional baseball crafted for itself throughout much of the twentieth century.

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Another prominent story within the art exhibit is that of the contributions made to the game by African Americans. A 1985 painting of Smokey Joe Williams details the life of a player who dominated baseball even before the formation of the Negro Leagues. The Hall compliments this portrait with one of Negro Leagues’ star Norman “Turkey” Stearns looking determined and resolute, and carries the story into the post-integration years with a portrait of Hank Aaron, informing patrons about his growing influence off the field, especially through his numerous philanthropic efforts.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Art in Baseball, (in addition to the way it educates visitors about both cultural movements and baseball history), is its clear endorsement of how the Hall of Fame views baseball. Encapsulated within this one room are the values the museum wishes to promote within the game and within the museum. It is an exhibit in which one finds allusions to the game’s blue-collar roots and effusive nostalgia. The artwork emphasizes a number of themes that run throughout the museum’s exhibits, including baseball’s philanthropy, struggles with desegregation, and long and intimate association with American pop culture.

Through the pieces chosen for display, a baseball fan learns a great deal about the Hall of Fame. Clearly the social and cultural issues mentioned above speak to the elements of American history the museum chooses to focus on in its exhibits. In addition, by acknowledging the credentials of some of the artists within the exhibit—for example, that the artist who completed Hank Aaron’s oil on canvas is also featured in the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery and the George Bush Presidential Library—the
Hall not only educates visitors about the importance of this work, but also alludes to the type of institution with which the Hall of Fame ideally wishes to be associated.\footnote{Hank Aaron label, Art of Baseball, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 13, 2012.}

Without the twists and turns the museum employs to draw people through many of its exhibits, it is very easy for someone who enters Art in Baseball to briefly turn their head in all four directions, see pictures hanging on the walls, and exit as quickly as they entered. What this visitor misses, however, is a lesson in both American history and museum studies. The Art in Baseball exhibit reinforces the museum’s practice of sneaking history into the exhibits in places where patrons do not normally look for it. In this case, by providing pop cultural references with which to identify, the Hall of Fame provides itself with an opportunity to expand upon a number of themes found prevalently throughout the museum—themes clearly intended for visitors to take away from their trip to Cooperstown.

In addition, anyone who wants to learn a little something about the Hall of Fame itself has the opportunity to learn from Art in Baseball. Here the museum provides some transparency (whether intentionally or unintentionally) into its tenets through both the themes it chooses to promote and the manner in which it promotes them. An analysis of these practices sheds light on where the museum currently resides in its evolution and where it wishes to be.
CHAPTER 9

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

One of the greatest challenges faced by any museum is finding ways to keep people coming through the doors. While museums usually have their share of “regulars” who arrive regardless of the material on display, the fact remains that most visitors become bored of viewing the same information over and over again. To combat this, a series of temporary exhibits usually complements a museum’s permanent ones, giving patrons a reason to visit the museum repeatedly.

In addition to regularly overhauling its temporary exhibits, the National Baseball Hall of Fame traditionally relies on parents and grandparents to pass along their love of baseball to their children and grandchildren to keep the next generation of Hall of Fame visitors coming to Cooperstown. It is a strategy that, supported by the diffusion of professional baseball throughout the country and an expansion in the game’s media coverage, allowed the Hall to benefit from a steady increase in attendance throughout the twentieth century.486

During the twenty-first century, however, while annual attendance figures regularly topped three hundred thousand per year, growth proved rather stagnant compared to previous decades—and even declined slightly from 2000 to 2010. Past fluctuations in Hall of Fame attendance regularly accompanied labor strife within the game, economic downturns, and gasoline shortages. The recession of the early 2000s and the competition for tourism dollars documented in the previous chapter no doubt played a

486 Muder, email.
role in stunting recent tourism in Cooperstown. What the museum’s attendance figures highlight is the need for the Hall of Fame to find new ways of reaching audiences.

Table 1. Annual Hall of Fame Attendance at the Beginning of Each Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hall of Fame Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>7,648</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>90,079</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>130,539</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>197,522</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>213,516</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>354,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>344,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>281,054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Craig Muder (Director of Communications, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum), email message to author, October 13, 2011

Past efforts at self-promotion through exhibitry relied on the Hall of Fame to expand its physical presence. This most often took the form of traveling exhibits or loaning out artifacts to other institutions to provide greater visibility for the museum’s collections. Recent years, however, witnessed a commitment by the Hall of Fame to increase its digital presence as well. Here the museum attempted to keep pace with the rapidly evolving cyber world by focusing on the new and innovative ways people gather and share information. These efforts included: investing in more digital interactive
components, providing fans with access to online exhibits, disseminating history through smartphone apps and podcasts, and expanding the museum’s involvement in social media. The museum currently relies on all of these initiatives to keep it both relevant and financially viable as it moves forward.

Traveling Exhibits

Traveling exhibits traditionally represent great marketing opportunities for museums. They are a way to become a part of peoples’ lives by moving outside the confines of the museum building. The Baseball Hall of Fame either initiated, or contributed to, a variety of traveling exhibits throughout its history. The United States Air Force sponsored an exhibit in 1956 called *The American Dream Pageant* in which artifacts varying from Colt revolvers to Babe Ruth’s uniform to George Washington’s Valley Forge orderly book traveled through fifty cities in eight months.

In the 1980s, the Hall organized the *Chevrolet Traveling Baseball Hall of Fame* exhibit, which appeared in shopping malls across the country. This fourteen-part showcase consisted of illustrations of all 184 Hall of Fame inductees, pennants from all the major league teams, and photos of the Hall of Fame itself. The museum supplemented this presence with a traveling Cooperstown exhibit at the New York State Fair (temporarily halted after one of the hosting buildings burned down) but reinvigorated in

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487 Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 224; Lubar et al., “State of the Field.”

488 Scrapbook, 1956–59, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown.
1998 as a five-thousand-square-foot display boasting over $3 million worth of Hall of Fame artifacts.\textsuperscript{489}

By far the most comprehensive and successful traveling exhibit in the Hall of Fame’s history was 2002’s \textit{Baseball as America}. Started in 2000 and officially opened in March of 2002, it was an exhibit originally intended to travel to ten U.S. cities over four years. \textit{Baseball as America} proved so successful, however, that the museum extended the tour to fifteen cities over a six-and-a-half-year period.\textsuperscript{490}

Consisting of over five hundred artifacts and consuming roughly six thousand feet of exhibit space, this was not a display intended for malls or convention centers. Instead, \textit{Baseball as America} traveled to some of the most well-known and prestigious museums in the country, including New York’s American Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian, the Field Museum in Chicago, and The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.\textsuperscript{491}

In noting the intention of \textit{Baseball as America}, Ted Spencer recalled, “My goal was to have [the exhibit help] us become an accepted member of the museum community in this country, which I believe it did.”\textsuperscript{492}

\textsuperscript{489} “Hall of Fame Exhibit Now at University Mall,” \textit{Tuscaloosa (AL) News}, April 18, 1984; Tom Powell, “Cooperstown’s Baseball Exhibit Set For N.Y. Fair,” \textit{Amusement Business}, August 24, 1998.


\textsuperscript{491} Strohl, interview.

\textsuperscript{492} Spencer, interview.
By appearing in museums dedicated to art, science, history, and culture, *Baseball as America* made a strong statement about baseball’s contributions to all of these academic fields. The exhibit emphatically laid claim to the game’s place in the American narrative. One reporter’s story, published in the *McClatchy – Tribune Business News* in Washington, D.C., observed, “the collection is not merely loose memorabilia. Rather, it is a set of historical documents and cultural artifacts that happen to take the form of balls, bats and jerseys.”

Curators divided the exhibit into seven themes, including: our nation’s spirit, ideals and injustices, rooting for the team, enterprise and opportunity, sharing a common culture, invention and ingenuity, and weaving myths. Each section delivered its own poignant message. The evolution of baseball equipment and its effect on player performance highlighted the “Invention and Ingenuity” section, while Jackie Robinson’s 1956 Brooklyn Dodgers jersey alongside pictures of white fans cheering for Sammy Sosa and hate mail received by Hank Aaron helped address racial issues in the “Ideals and Injustices” section. In addition, cleats worn by “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, paintings by Norman Rockwell, a bat used by Roger Maris, and a letter written by Curt Flood all helped address various immigration, technological, labor relations, and popular culture connections between baseball and American history.

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Baseball as America also contained a healthy dose of patriotism and connections to war. Among these artifacts were tickets to a charity baseball game played in 1943 between the U.S. Navy and a team comprised of New York Yankees and Cleveland Indians, the goggles worn by Hall-of-Famer Bob Feller while serving aboard the USS Alabama, and a baseball bat whittled from a tree branch by Glen Stadler of the United Press after he and 130 American journalists and embassy staff became trapped in Nazi Germany at the outbreak of World War II. Hall of Fame curators then used two baseballs to bring the history of baseball’s connection to the American people full-circle. The first was the baseball found by New York firefighter Vin Mavaro in the rubble of the World Trade Center in 2001, the other was a baseball from a charity game in which players and spectators raised $71 for the widows and orphans of New York firefighters in 1858.140

In the spring of 2002, Baseball as America arrived at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and shortly after, anthropologist George Gmelch reviewed the exhibit for NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture. Gmelch felt delighted to find baseball represented in a museum that chronicled American life. Like most visitors, he felt drawn to the artifacts that provided multisensory experiences—the row of green seats from the Polo Grounds and the replicas of bats used by Babe Ruth, Rod Carew, and Mark McGwire that invited fans to lift and hold them and thereby feel what the players felt. More than anything, however, Gmelch dwelt on the social aspects of the


496 Baseball Enlists, online exhibit; Rand, “Baseball Hall Comes Here.”

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exhibit and how he enjoyed listening to patrons’ conversations and then reminiscing about communicating with his own father through baseball.\textsuperscript{497} 

Gmelch’s experience epitomized the type of personal connections the Hall of Fame seeks to establish with all visitors and on which this dissertation dwelt in the previous chapter. At one point Gmelch reflected, “I am struck at how often an artifact triggers a personal memory. . . . At moments it's like looking at a family album. . . . Everywhere I look there's something that strikes an inner chord of nostalgia.”\textsuperscript{498} After leaving the baseball exhibit and heading into other parts of the museum, Gmelch commented on how “anonymous” the rest of the museum artifacts felt, claiming, “They're not part of my family history; I have no associations with them. By contrast baseball—its history and artifacts—is real to me; it's imbued with the history of my culture.”\textsuperscript{499} 

In addition to the overwhelming success \textit{Baseball as America} had in reaching the public and raising awareness about the game’s place in American history, it had an even greater impact behind the scenes at the Hall of Fame. To help put together the massive tour, the Hall hired four curators and two designers, all with master’s degrees in museum studies. These new staffers spent two and a half years familiarizing themselves with the museum’s entire collection while they worked on \textit{Baseball in America}. As Ted Spencer recalled, “we came out of it with an incredible staff. . . and also for me with the

\textsuperscript{497} Gmelch, “Baseball in the Natural History Museum,” 135–142.

\textsuperscript{498} Ibid., 136–138.

\textsuperscript{499} Ibid., 140.
knowledge that it was time to go.” Spencer remembered thinking (and still believes today), “They are so much better than me and they are so dedicated and knowledgeable.”

More than just overhauling the curatorial staff, the traveling *Baseball in America* exhibit also facilitated a reevaluation of how the museum handled displays inside its walls. According to Erik Strohl, observing the way different renowned institutions organized and displayed the traveling baseball artifacts “really shaped the way that we handle exhibits throughout the museum.” The experience brought a new appreciation for contemporary museum practices to Cooperstown and, as numerous past and present staff members acknowledge, in looking around the museum today, one finds little bits of *Baseball in America* in everything the museum does.

*Preservation*

Sending artifacts out on the road provides the Hall of Fame with a special set of challenges when it comes to care and protection. It is rare that the Hall of Fame actually lends out its irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind artifacts. When it does, it requires a professional curator take responsibility for their care. For example, in 2000, when the Hall loaned the Minnesota Twins a Jackie Robinson jersey, Hank Aaron’s 1958 Gold Glove award, a baseball autographed by Ted Williams, and roughly fifty other artifacts valued at over $1 million, they ensured that Lori Benson, the collections manager at the Science Museum of Minnesota, took responsibility for their care. Two years later, when loaning Ted

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500 Spencer, interview.

501 Strohl, interview.
Williams’s gallery plaque to the Red Sox for a memorial at Fenway Park, the Hall requested that a marine from the honor guard stand next to the plaque at all times. This same attention went into caring for the artifacts of a 2008 traveling exhibit in Boston, a 2011 four-city tour of Puerto Rico, and a 2012 exhibit sent to Kansas City, Missouri, for Major League Baseball’s annual All-Star Game.  

When the Hall of Fame first opened, however, ideas about security and proper care for artifacts were rudimentary compared to today’s standards. The Hall’s founders knew they wanted the museum building to be fireproof, and in 1937, The Otsego Farmer reported the museum’s interior spaces to be “especially adapted to the purpose of displaying the collections safely,”—however, little detail existed as to what entailed presenting the artifacts safely.  

In displays reminiscent of the museums of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (before museums became largely visual experiences) the Hall of Fame’s early display cases contained no glass—allowing visitors to reach in and actually touch the artifacts. Among the objects left susceptible to vandalism were the portrait of Abner

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503 DiFranza, discussion; Wall panel, Cooperstown Room, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 11, 2012.
Doubleday (complete with epaulets which visitors regularly poked out) and the Doubleday baseball, mounted on the fireplace mantel by a screw driven through it.\textsuperscript{504}

A new appreciation for the complex nature of artifact preservation emerged at the Hall of Fame in the latter half of the twentieth century. It came with the realization that without the artifacts to tell the story, there was no history, and so the Hall of Fame took considerable steps toward enhancing its preservation efforts. The damaging effects of light, in particular, drove the museum’s decision to black out its windows, protecting both the artifacts and the irreplaceable signatures often inscribed upon them.

Preservation did not equate to security, however, and the Hall of Fame still needed to work diligently to close a number of loopholes in its processes that exposed valuable materials to loss. In 1983, eight vintage World Series programs the Hall of Fame leant to Major League Baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn’s office ended up in a box of memorabilia that Kuhn’s assistant, Joe Reichler, sold to a retailer. The following year, the plaque molds of thirty-nine players inducted into the Hall prior to 1964 ended up in a garbage dump in eastern Long Island, New York. Meanwhile, two Long Island collectors purchased another thirty-six Hall of Fame molds that year just by contacting the foundries that cast them. All of these incidents both damaged the Hall of Fame’s reputation with potential donors and demonstrated the degree to which the Hall still needed to address issues of preservation within its processes.\textsuperscript{505}

\textsuperscript{504} Cronin, “Croke Park,” 103–105; Clark, interview; DiFranza, discussion.

\textsuperscript{505} Helene Elliot, “Baseball Hall of Fame Molds Rescued from L.I. Dump,” \textit{Hartford Courant}, July 1, 1984; James, \textit{Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?}, 298.
Today, the Baseball Hall of Fame cares for over 40,000 three-dimensional artifacts, millions of photographs and documents, and thousands of hours of audio and video recordings. Unlike most museums, which utilize well-balanced accessioning and deaccessioning practices as part of their collections policies, the Baseball Hall of Fame never deaccessions any artifact once it becomes a part of their collection. The result is a challenging process that relies heavily on making sound initial evaluations of new potential artifacts to avoid overwhelming the museum’s storage spaces. This policy exists, in part, to reassure potential donors that their items, once accepted, receive care in perpetuity—even the objects that never go on display.\footnote{Carr, “Looking Back by Moving Forward,” 10; Tim Sullivan, “An Artifact or a Payday: Donors Seeking to Monetize Memorabilia Put Museums on Guard,” \textit{New York Times}, July 22, 2012; Clark, interview.}

A number of advancements in the museum’s preservation efforts help fulfill the promise the museum makes to donors. Starting with \textit{Pride & Passion}, the museum began installing fiber optic lighting as a more artifact-friendly form of illumination. Also, computers now control the museum’s environment—constantly monitoring temperature, light, and humidity within the exhibit and storage spaces to make sure conditions are ideally suited for preservation. When it comes to loaning out artifacts, the Hall of Fame ensures that any borrowing institution maintains similar climate-control standards before finalizing loan agreements.\footnote{Carr, “Looking Back by Moving Forward,” 10; DiFranza, discussion.} The museum’s preservation practices evolved to such a degree that other institutions began reaching out to the Hall of Fame for advice on artifact care. In a very real sense, according to the Hall of Fame’s Director of Collections, Sue
MacKay, today’s Baseball Hall of Fame actually serves “as an expert in preserving history beyond baseball.”

**Loans**

During the era in which the Hall of Fame began slowly moving away from letting their collections dictate the subject and tone of their exhibits, one useful way they found of enhancing their exhibits was by acquiring artifacts through loans. The practice of accepting loans really began in 1983 when the Hall of Fame inducted Brooks Robinson, but had no Brooks Robinson artifacts to display. Consequently, the Hall’s representatives reached out to Robinson to borrow some.

According to author and museum scholar Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, loaning artifacts is a paradox—marked by the act of “keeping-while-giving.” Providing loans to museums, Alberti contends, rids donors of the headaches associated with artifact preservation and storage, while also providing the donor with a sense of immortality from knowing some small piece of their identity will outlive them. The Hall of Fame benefits from its loan program by acquiring artifacts necessary to flesh out narratives, but only after producing piles of administrative paperwork to clearly define rights of ownership and use. Of the roughly 100 to 150 loaned objects that rotate in and out of the museum,

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509 Clark, interview.

the majority remain in Cooperstown on a year-to-year basis, with others loaned by donors for as long as three or sometimes five years.\(^{511}\)

Like with Brooks Robinson, a large portion of loans come from new classes of Hall of Famers. Anytime voters elect a player to the Hall of Fame, staffers reach out to the players to acquire meaningful artifacts. Because players often express reluctance to part with items permanently, the Hall of Fame usually takes items on loan. Every year the Hall fills Plexiglas display cases with a dozen or so objects in an attempt to summarize an inductee’s professional career—largely through artifacts representing important achievements. In 2009, this included Jim Rice’s 1976 road jersey, a bat he used to get his four hundredth career base, the glove he used throughout his career, and the uniform pants the Red Sox issued him upon Rice arriving in the majors in 1974.\(^{512}\) In 2012, Barry Larkin’s case contained his Most Valuable Player award, his silver medal from the 1984 Olympics, and a jersey Larkin wore during the 1998 All-Star Game.

\(^{511}\) Clark, interview.

What makes these displays significant is that by allowing the players to pick and choose the artifacts the public sees, the players are, in a very real sense, helping craft their own narrative. This represents the very essence of shared authority within a museum setting. It is a process that becomes particularly poignant when dealing with Hall of Famers who predecease their election to the Hall of Fame, thus leaving family members to construct their legacy. Such was the case of Joe Gordon.

Joe “Flash” Gordon played second base for the New York Yankees and Cleveland Indians between 1938 and 1950. A nine-time All-Star, Gordon hit twenty or more homeruns in seven seasons and won the American League Most Valuable Player award in 1942. Gordon retired in 1950, shortly after winning his fifth World Series ring, and passed away in 1978. Twenty-two years later, the Hall of Fame’s Veterans Committee
voted Gordon into the Hall of Fame, and staffers reached out to Gordon’s children to help them fill his display case.513

Gordon’s son and daughter provided nearly everything that ended up in the case. Among the artifacts were the typical awards and achievement-based artifacts fans might expect to see, such as Gordon’s 1942 MVP pocket watch. But what made this particular display unique was the narrative Gordon’s children constructed through the inclusion of some more personal artifacts. Included in the display case were some ladies’ World Series rings Gordon obtained for his wife, Dotty, and a series of flight records Gordon kept while working as a private pilot later in life—displayed as a tribute to the two seasons Gordon lost while serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II.514

It was an entirely different portrayal of a Hall of Famer than most fans usually see in Inductee Row, one of not just a legendary athlete, but also a devoted family man and war hero. Here, through their inclusion in the process, and through the selection of certain distinct objects, Gordon’s children actually cultivated a more personal and identifiable legacy for their father than had they just stuck to donating baseball equipment and awards. The Gordon display provided an outstanding example of not only the power of shared authority, but also of just how personal and cultural biases manifest themselves in museums—often making them politically charged.


514 Sandomir, “All-Star Scavenger Hunt.”

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The Memorabilia Market

When Alexander Cleland accepted his appointment as secretary for the Hall of Fame museum and assumed responsibility for procuring artifacts prior to the museum’s opening in 1939, he realized the importance of approaching potential donors from an economic standpoint. Cleland assured artifact owners that any object displayed at the Hall of Fame would only increase in value from its association with the museum. He viewed artifacts, not just as storytellers, but also as commodities. It was a vision more prophetic than Cleland could have possibly imagined back in the 1930s.

Part of what makes accepting loaned artifacts a more viable option for the Hall of Fame today than it was in the past is the steady decline in the number artifacts donated to the museum since the emergence of the baseball memorabilia market. Acquiring older artifacts, in particular, became more difficult starting in 1980s when the commercial market for baseball souvenirs exploded. The trend continued throughout the 1990s, and in 2003, library science professor, Frank Hoffman, observed, “an entire culture has sprung up around the creation, distribution, preservation, and consumption of baseball memorabilia.”

Unlike memorabilia dealers or buyers at auction houses and online forums like eBay, the Hall of Fame does not pay for baseball artifacts. Purchasing artifacts (in this case) carries with it the potential to erode the museum’s authority, as the Hall appears to

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515 Vlasich, A Legend for the Legendary, 54.


be just another dealer in the market for memorabilia. Additionally, the exorbitant prices fans fetch for homerun balls and other milestone artifacts provides bargaining leverage to sellers seeking to capitalize on the Hall of Fame’s desire to preserve and display these artifacts—potentially increasing annual museum operating expenses by millions of dollars. This makes it extremely difficult for them to compete in the market for new museum pieces. What the Hall of Fame relies on are those collectors who see more than just profit potential in their acquisitions, but instead, are a part of a larger culture of collectors with varying motives that run deeper than dollars and cents.

According to French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, collecting appeals to people, in part, because it is the most rudimentary way in which one exercises control over the outside world. Baudrillard contends that a passion for objects “is an escapist one” which neutralizes neuroses and calms frustrations. The practice of collecting is in fact so common and so programmed within the human psyche that the emergence of entire scientific fields, such as archaeology, provides testament to man’s propensity for collecting.518

When it comes to acquiring sacred baseball relics, fans engage in this behavior for any number of reasons (which are not always financial). Some do it for nostalgic reasons; others see it as a relaxing hobby. While certain baseball collectors might acquire items solely for aesthetic purposes, others may feel as if they are actually preserving history by attempting to compensate for society’s mistake in not deeming certain items worthy of preservation. For most, however, they seem drawn to an object’s ability to carry the past

into the future, and they use the objects as a way of representing a small part of their identity to the next generation of museum visitor. These are the types of collectors the Hall of Fame relies on to donate new artifacts to the museum.

Still, there is a segment of the population for which collecting remains largely a financial exercise and they see baseball artifacts as potentially lucrative investments. It is due to the proliferation of this mentality that the Hall of Fame sometimes struggles to acquire the necessary objects required for telling the histories they want to tell, and why, when the Hall resorts to acquiring objects through loans, they are so meticulous in documenting all aspects of the loan agreement. Often, when museums and the memorabilia market bump up against one another, things get complicated. The case of Don Larsen versus the San Diego Hall of Champions thoroughly illustrates this point.

In 1956, Don Larsen threw the only perfect game in World Series history, not allowing a single batter to reach base. Larsen gave the uniform he wore during his perfect game to the San Diego Hall of Champions around the time of his induction there in 1964. In 2012, Larsen asked for the uniform back because he wanted to sell it. Two years earlier, Larsen’s catcher during his perfect game, Yogi Berra, sold his own uniform for $565,000 (more than most major leaguers of Larsen’s era made in their entire careers). The Hall of Champions balked at first, believing Larsen’s uniform to be a gift back in 1964, not a loan. In the end, however, poorly kept documentation regarding the

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transaction necessitated the Hall relinquish the uniform, which Larsen later sold for $756,000.\textsuperscript{520}

The implications of the Larsen case proved significant for the multitude of institutions with spotty loan records who, even as late as the 1980s, accepted memorabilia on little more than a handshake agreement. Larsen’s, while perhaps the most high-profile case in recent history, was not the only time the museum community ran afoul of the sports memorabilia market. In 2006, Claudia Williams (daughter of Hall-of-Famer Ted Williams) sued the Breitbard Hall of Fame for some of her father’s mementos, including his 1949 MVP award that she later sold at auction for $299,000. Dave and Bill Christian, the only father and son to win Olympic gold medals in hockey, recently attempted to reacquire their jerseys from the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto only to be informed that the museum’s standard agreement required donors to relinquish all rights to their artifacts upon donation.\textsuperscript{521}

The Baseball Hall of Fame is also not immune to losing acquired objects to the marketplace. Consequently, despite sometimes being dependent on loans, the Hall tries to limit their use whenever possible. Hall of Fame president Jeff Idelson addressed the Hall’s position on loans in a 2012 article in \textit{The New York Times}: “The lifeblood of any museum is its collections. Our policy is that artifacts that we acquire are donated. We

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[] \textsuperscript{520} Sullivan, “An Artifact or a Payday”; Associated Press, “Don Larsen’s perfect game uniform sold for $756,000,” December 6, 2012, \texttt{http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mb/yankess/2012/12/06/don-larsen-perfect-game-uniform-sold/1751461/}.
\item[] \textsuperscript{521} Sullivan, “An Artifact or a Payday.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
have some items that are on loan, and the only time we have an interest in accepting a loan item is when we can't tell a story because we don't have anything to tell the story.”

Still, loaned items in the museum represent some of the greatest moments in baseball history. In 1992, the Hall acquired (through a loan) the glove Willie Mays used to make his famous back-to-the-plate catch in the 1954 World Series. Recently, owners took back artifacts from Babe Ruth’s “Called Shot,” as well as a cap belonging to Don Larsen, both having been on loan to the Baseball Hall of Fame for several decades. After caring for the object for twenty-seven years, the Hall also returned the cap Bobby Thompson wore while hitting his 1951 playoff-clinching homerun. The owner then turned around and sold it at auction for $173,000.

Hall of Fame Director of Communications and Education, Brad Horn, summarized the problem succinctly when he observed, “In the marketplace, it's considered memorabilia. In our world, it's considered artifacts.”

_Digital History_

During the 2012 National Council on Public History conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dan Spock of the Minnesota Historical Society commented on the need for museums to be more elaborate and innovative in order to continue drawing patrons. For today’s museum visitors, Spock contended, text- and object-based exhibits “don’t cut it anymore.” Instead tourists and educators expect more engaging experiences, like those

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522 Ibid.

523 Clark, interview; Sullivan, “An Artifact or a Payday.”

524 Sullivan, “An Artifact or a Payday.”
offered by living history museums. For museums lacking costumed interpreters and expansive landscapes in which to convey information, many turn to technology as a way to stay relevant. This is true of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum—whose forays into digital history represent just one more way the Hall operates as a mixture of the old and the new. 525

According to Jeff Idelson, “When you stroll the museum today, new exhibits include various forms of technology and interactivity, deepening a visitor's experience while maintaining the charm, integrity and content of a serious history museum.” 526 Starting around 1995, the Hall of Fame began making greater efforts to incorporate technology into its exhibits. 527 This most often took the form of audiovisual tools that allowed visitors to push buttons and listen or view more detailed information about their chosen subjects. The technology available in the marketplace today allows for far greater interactivity and personalization, however, and challenges history museums to decide how and where investments in technology will produce the greatest benefits.

Back when Laurence Vail Coleman completed his evaluation of American museums in 1939, he envisioned a time when “the dust of rapid change has settled” and visitors to history museums might walk around exhibits carrying picture books in their hands that provided them more detailed information about artifacts and exhibits. 528


526 Jeff Idelson, “From the President,” Memories and Dreams, Winter 2011, 2.

527 Ibid.

528 Coleman, The Museum in America, 264.
Today, smartphone technology fulfills Coleman’s vision and offers visitors entirely new ways to engage with museums. Whether it is by providing Quick Response (QR) codes alongside artifacts or through exhibit-related mobile applications that enhance self-guided tours, mobile technology provides additional layers to the museum experience critical for engaging audiences, particularly younger audiences, in meaningful history.\(^{529}\)

Like most history museums, however, the Hall of Fame lags behind the rest of society in the implementation of mobile technology.\(^{530}\) Outside of providing some mobile trivia apps, the Hall does little to utilize this technology to enhance the museum experience. This is a result of numerous factors. The first is that investments in technology are expensive and time-consuming to develop.\(^{531}\) With limited budgets, museums like the Baseball Hall of Fame must make decisions about the technologies in which to commit vital resources and the ones with barriers too prohibitive to investment.

In addition, technological components within museums do not typically age well. Advancements in hardware and software design often make any technological components obsolete and cumbersome to maintain within very short periods of time. The Hall of Fame learned this lesson with the laser discs it needed to reburn every year for the *IBM Sports Gallery*. Also, the museum must concern itself with adding *too many* layers to the visitor experience. For example, if patrons spend their entire visit to the museum navigating through material on their handheld devices, they risk disconnecting.

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\(^{529}\) Lubar et al., “State of the Field.”

\(^{530}\) Ibid.

themselves from the artifacts and exhibits. Finally, technology is only useful when people are comfortable using it and it adds context, enhances the story, or makes conveying information easier. Until museums assure themselves that all of these results are possible, forays into mobile technology will most likely remain tentative at best.532

One of the most conspicuous examples of technology incorporated into the physical exhibits in Cooperstown is the Digital Top 10 Tower depicted in chapter 7 as part of the One for the Books exhibit. The tower provides daily updates to thousands of baseball records and allows visitors to navigate through the information with a touch of their finger—customizing how the museum presents information.533

But there is something more innovative to One for the Books than just the way it presents information. The financing for it came from an online donations webpage (a form of crowdsourcing known as crowdfunding) that allowed fans to track the progress of fundraising efforts as well as view photo galleries detailing various stages of the exhibit’s construction.534 Leading up to the exhibit’s opening in May of 2011, individuals donating as little as ten dollars watched their names appear on a Hall of Fame webpage thanking them for their support as One for the Books came together. This page not only allowed visitors a behind-the-scenes look at exhibit construction, but also provided the


533 The Digital Top 10 Tower was something the Hall of Fame envisioned years before it actually came to fruition. In addition to procuring the necessary funding, the Hall of Fame waited to build the tower until they found video screens that emitted minimal amounts of artifact-damaging light and heat.

opportunity for patrons to feel as if they were a part of the fabrication process, even if only symbolically.

One very real way baseball fans used the Internet to actually shape the design and feel of a Hall of Fame exhibit, however, came via the controversial coronation of Barry Bonds as baseball’s all-time career home run leader. Shortly after Bonds hit his record-breaking 756th home run in 2007, fashion executive Marc Ecko purchased the baseball Bonds hit and organized an online poll asking fans to vote whether they felt the ball belonged in the Hall of Fame but permanently branded with an asterisk, in the Hall of Fame unmarked, or launched into outer space. After more than ten million votes, 47 percent of fans voted for the first option, and the branded ball now resides at the Hall of Fame.\footnote{Artifact label, \textit{One for the Books}, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, September 12, 2012.}

What made this experience so meaningful was its demonstration of the power of the Internet in shaping museum history. Here, ten million people who might otherwise have had no say in how the Hall of Fame presented history, actually found a voice. Now, the roughly 300,000 visitors per year who enter the Hall of Fame will see not just a baseball hailed as a holy relic of sporting achievement, but instead an artifact branded with the social stigma of betrayal by a disapproving fan base.

Other ways baseball fans witness a greater presence of the Hall of Fame on the Internet is through the museum’s movement into social media and sites that allow fans to download and stream original Hall of Fame content. The museum has a Facebook page (for sharing photographs and news about upcoming events), as well as its own Twitter
account in which it provides fans with fun facts and updates about Hall of Fame operations. The museum also hosts a series of monthly podcasts called *Cooperstown Conversations*, in which the museum staff discuss topics relevant to Hall of Fame exhibits. The March 2012 podcast, entitled “Breaking Ground: Women in Baseball,” featured Hall of Fame Director of Education, Anna Wade, discussing the roles of women in the game—complimenting the stories found in the *Diamond Dreams* exhibit. The podcast then went on to inform listeners about the different profiles of these women the Hall of Fame posted on Facebook and Twitter, and played a recording of a 1996 phone interview with Dolores Moore (a member of the AAGPBL’s Grand Rapids Chicks). Other podcast topics include a look at fathers and sons in baseball, a profile of Hall of Famer Hank Greenburg, a celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, and a review of Hall of Fame induction voting.

On YouTube is where anyone curious about the museum’s collections and exhibits will find the most rewarding material. Starting in 2010, the Hall of Fame began regularly uploading videos pertaining to artifacts and collections that are both educational, as well as promotional. In “A View from the Vault: Inside the Collection of the National Baseball Hall of Fame & Museum,” the Hall treats fans to a look at artifacts from the museum’s collection that do not always make it on to the exhibit floor. “Rolling through the Reels: A Look into the Baseball Hall of Fame Film and Video Archives,” highlights the immense film and video resources currently stored at the Hall of Fame. The Hall also posts short career highlight videos about Hall of Famers in their *Baseball Hall of Fame Biographies* series, and the *Exhibit Talk* series allows fans to hear curators
discuss not just the artifacts in the museum’s exhibits, but also exhibit design and fabrication.

The significance of the Hall of Fame’s social media presence is its recognition of the need to present information in a variety of forms based on the preferences of individual learners, as well as to reach online communities in the places where they congregate. In addition, these sites do more than just promote engagement with the museum’s materials, but more importantly, promote dialogue in two distinct but equally important forms. The first is between the museum and its online visitorship, allowing the public to use a variety of social media outlets in which to express their opinions and preferences—thereby helping shape the history on display within the museum. The second is between various members of the museum-going public—thus providing the all-important social component to the museum experience and helping fulfill post-modern demands that museums act as forums for conversation and debate.

In order to make the history at the Baseball Hall of Fame even more accessible to the public, efforts are currently underway to digitize the museum’s vast collections. Jeff Idelson’s goal is to “digitize and make available our unparalleled cache of baseball history-related assets, so that anyone with a hand-held device, tablet or computer can experience the Museum, no matter where they are in the world.” In order to achieve this, the Hall of Fame staff does more than just scan documents and photograph artifacts. They also research and attach the proper metadata to each artifact, allowing patrons to easily search for and locate the materials online. In addition, the museum evaluates

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536 Idelson, “From the President,” 2.
processes for managing access to online materials to ensure they are not relinquishing legal control over their materials and how researchers use them.\footnote{Strohl, interview.}

Like other institutions, the museum must safeguard against the loss of information caused by the ephemeral nature of digital technology. First, there is the danger of corruption, as damage to a single bit of information can render an entire digital document unrecoverable. In addition to the problem of storing information on media that inevitably degrades over time, is the danger of storing information on hardware or software that rapidly becomes obsolete. For example, what good is information stored for fifty years on a floppy disk if after fifty years there are no machines around that still read floppy disks?\footnote{Roy Rosenzweig, \textit{Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 8–13.}

To combat much of the danger of the digital age, the Baseball Hall of Fame maintains extensive hardcopy files. Among these records are over eighteen thousand biographical files, including one for every player ever to appear in a major league game since the founding of the National Association in 1871. These files contain newspaper and magazine articles, scouting reports, and even birth and death certificates for major league players, umpires, owners, general managers, and broadcasters. The library even keeps files on equipment managers, the women of the AAGPBL, and celebrities from the
entertainment world (such as Woody Allen, Frank Sinatra, and Robert Frost) whose lives intersected with baseball history.  

The digitization efforts and maintenance of hardcopy files at the Hall of Fame represent the epitome of the museum’s mixture of old and new. Like many who find the smell and touch of physical documents reassuring in the rapidly changing digital age, the Hall of Fame is not about to abandon their attachment to tangible historical assets. In a recent issue of Memories and Dreams (the Hall of Fame’s monthly publication), Hall of Fame library volunteer Jon Arakaki noted, “It is concerning that many libraries have ceased maintaining hanging vertical files for various reasons, including space and cost considerations.” He then went on to assure researchers used to working with more traditional materials that “those who lament that the world is changing too quickly and is losing tangible documents to hold, read and treasure, can find inspiration that at least one institution shares the sentiment.”

**Online Exhibits**

Without question, the Hall’s most indispensable digital presence comes in the form of online exhibits. Since January of 1995, when the Hall of Fame became one of the first cultural institutions to launch their own website, visitors to the virtual Hall began navigating through the museum’s collection and experiencing baseball history in entirely

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540 Ibid.

541 Ibid.
These collections coming out of Cooperstown took a variety of forms and served a multitude of purposes, but all represented changing attitudes toward the presentation of baseball history.

Online Hall of Fame exhibits in their simplest form are primarily visual or statistic-laden presentations. The *World Series Programs* exhibit consists of little more than links to images of program cover art dating back to 1903. Other exhibits, like *The 3,000 Hit Club* and *A Short History of the Single-Season Home Run Record* provide short biographies, timelines, and a wealth of statistical information, but little interpretation.

Where the museum’s online exhibits take on greater complexity is through projects such as *Dressed to the Nines: A History of the Baseball Uniform*. Rather than succumbing to the temptation to make it largely pictorial, the curatorial staff instead uses pictures to complement the historical narrative (much like the way the physical museum now uses artifacts). The intent of this exhibit is not to show off the depth and breadth of the museum’s collection, but rather to be an educational tool. The Hall places the evolution of the uniform alongside contextual events in American history. For instance, it notes how the Cincinnati Reds removed the name “Reds” from their uniform in 1954 and only brought it back in 1961 with the passing of McCarthyism. Additional movement along the timeline introduces the outrageous color combinations used by Kansas City Athletics owner Charlie Finley to coincide with the growing popularity of color.

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542 Idelson, “From the President,” 2.

Interactive components within the exhibit allow visitors to move along the timeline while accessing information in greater detail by picking and choosing the subjects they find most interesting. Additionally, a database within the exhibit allows users to enter a league, city, and year and view an artist’s rendition of that particular uniform. The Hall then drives home the educational value of the exhibit by providing activities that reinforce the material, including a mix-and-match exercise for students from fourth to eighth grade, a geography lesson for those in sixth through tenth grade, and a logic puzzle intended for high school and college students. The educational approach to this exhibit demonstrates the degree of cooperation occurring between departments at the Hall of Fame and the willingness of the Hall to find innovative ways to reach into the lives of the educational community.

In addition to utilizing the Internet as a way to take existing information and repackaging it in more accessible forms, the Hall of Fame also utilizes online exhibits to promote current museum displays, preserve past ones, and to provide a platform for covering stories in more depth than the museum’s physical spaces allow. For example, the Hall of Fame’s online version of Baseball Enlists lets today’s baseball fans view one of the museum’s most successful recent exhibits, but one that is no longer on display in Cooperstown. By scrolling through pages of information at their leisure, within the comfort of their own homes, it becomes easier for viewers to extract and retain larger
quantities of information. Here is where the online community learns more about the impact war had on segregation and the advancement of women. In addition, the online exhibit provides users time to delve into the less-celebratory stories of men like Harry O’Neill of the A’s who died during the war, or those, like Kenneth Young Jr., whose promising baseball careers came to end due to wounds received in combat.\textsuperscript{544}

The same holds true for the online version of one of the Hall of Fame’s current exhibits, \textit{¡Viva Baseball!}. Much like the exhibit found in the museum, the narrative walks through much of the same history about how the game spread through Latin America and focuses on issues of language. Designers even created electronic versions of some of the original exhibit’s manual interactive components.

Where the online version of \textit{¡Viva Baseball!} separates itself from the original is in its depth. The electronic medium allows for the exploration of topics only touched upon in the limited museum spaces. Not only is there the opportunity to explore the culture of each featured area of Latin America in greater detail, but here the Hall takes a more direct approach to topics such as exploitation. The exhibit acknowledges that “by the 1940s, the majors could no longer ignore the Caribbean. Risking little money, teams could draw from a vast pool of Latin players. Prospective pros agreed to nearly anything to get their shot at the big time, later leading to cries of Latin exploitation.”\textsuperscript{545}

Clearly, while the museum expresses concerns about providing too much of its materials online (and thus removing the need for patrons to visit the museum in person), online exhibits prove advantageous in freeing the curatorial staff from the restrictions of

\textsuperscript{544} \textit{Baseball Enlists}, online exhibit.

\textsuperscript{545} \textit{¡Viva Baseball!}, online exhibit.
physical space. This allows the narratives to contain more diverse perspectives and facets of a story that provide the depth and contextualization the history profession all too often claims is lacking in museums.

One final way the Hall of Fame uses online exhibits is to provide greater transparency into museum operations. *Museum Bound* allows fans to witness the process of acquiring, accessioning, and preserving artifacts by examining the series of events transpiring in the aftermath of Tony Gwynn’s three-thousandth career base hit.

In cases where a milestone baseball achievement occurs spontaneously (for instance, in the case of a no-hitter), the Hall of Fame reaches out to the participants immediately afterward to solicit potential artifacts for display. In an instance when an achievement slowly approaches (like in the case with Tony Gwynn) the Hall of Fame traditionally reaches out to the player’s team in advance to notify them of the museum’s interest in acquiring particular artifacts from the event. The team notifies the player and then the player decides which artifacts (if any) to donate to the Hall of Fame.546

On Friday, August 6, 1999, Tony Gwynn got his three thousandth hit while playing in Montreal. One week later, on August 13th, Hall of Fame representatives Dale Petrosky and Jeff Idelson attended “Tony Gwynn Night” at Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego and took possession of Gwynn’s helmet, cleats, pants, and bat for posterity.547

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547 Ibid.
The following Monday (August 16th) the Hall of Fame began accessioning Gwynn’s bat, covering the bottom of the knob with a protective coating of white acrylic paint and writing the unique accessioning number on the paint using “archivally safe” black printer’s ink. Accessioning numbers at the Hall of Fame consist of three parts, a letter designating whether the accessioning took place in the museum (B) or in the library (BL), a number designating the count of artifacts accessioned in a given year, and then a two-digit number representing the year accessioned. In the case of Gwynn’s bat, it was the 320th artifact accessioned by the museum in 1999 so it received an accessioning number of B320.99.548

That same day the Hall also accessioned Gwynn’s cleats, batting helmet, and pants. The cleats received an acid-free paper label attached to the shoestring with the letters “a” and “b” designating the right and left cleats. The helmet received a number on white acrylic paint applied under the bill. The Hall identified the pants with a small piece of white fabric sewn into them and labeled with black ink. Staff at the museum handled all of the objects using white cotton gloves to avoid scratching the artifacts, contaminating them with natural oils and salts, and to prevent the appearance of fingerprints. The museum then photographed the artifacts with a larger version of the accessioning label placed in front of each.549

While the artifacts went through the accessioning process, the Hall of Fame’s curatorial staff began researching Gwynn’s milestone to generate text explaining the

548 Ibid.

549 Ibid.
significance of the artifacts. The text then went to the exhibit technicians who cut labels out of rigid polyvinyl chloride (PVC), painted them, attached any photographs, and then using a metal halide vacuum exposure unit, placed the label text on a transfer sheet. They then transferred the text on to the painted board.\textsuperscript{550}

On Tuesday, August 17th, after completing the accessioning and label-creating processes, the staff prepared to display the artifacts. In Gwynn’s case, the Hall displayed his bat, cleats, and helmet, but wrapped the pants in acid-free tissue, placed them in an acid-free box, and sent them to the temperature- and humidity-controlled storage room. Then, after the museum closed, curators coordinated access to the display cases with the security staff and wheeled the artifacts over for arrangement in their display. They secured the artifacts on their mounts and positioned labels so as to avoid any confusion about the artifact to which they were referring. The staff then closed and secured the cases.\textsuperscript{551}

While \textit{Museum Bound} provides patrons with a look at some of the behind-the-scenes processes that go into developing museum exhibits, it is but a first step toward providing the type of transparency for which the post-modern museum world clamors. Because museums are political and influence the way we view history, it is important that visitors understand who is producing their history and how. The next step for the Hall of Fame will be allowing the world access to such important information as the intentions behind display decisions, the cultural and professional backgrounds of designers and curators, and how these factors, and more, influence the museum’s final product.

\textsuperscript{550} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Baseball defines a little bit of who we are as Americans. It is our national pastime both because of the long history of sport in the United States and because of the variety of ways it reaches into our lives. The vernacular of the game is a part of our everyday language. Politicians, advertising executives, educators, and movie producers regularly appropriate baseball imagery as a way of connecting with us through shared experience. The game’s maturation, at times, paralleled that of the country—from its humble agricultural beginnings to its battles over racism, sexism, immigration, organized labor, and drug abuse. Baseball also reaches us on a very personal level, calling forth memories of Little League games, trips to spring training camps, and time spent with friends and family.

In the eyes of baseball’s most fervent supporters, the game provides a culturally fractured nation with a sense of community, promotes democracy, fosters an ardent sense of patriotism, and instills the values of sportsmanship and healthy competition in the next generation of Americans. While some authors and educators, like Kevin Grzymala, credit baseball with providing a common experience that confers a sense of shared citizenship among its participants, others, like Randy Roberts, argue that it is merely Americans’ misguided belief that baseball wields such awesome power that provides the game with

\[552\] Strohl, interview by Bob Fescoe.

\[553\] Rielly, “Preface,” xix.
its sociological value.\(^{554}\) Regardless of one’s views on the subject, it is difficult to deny the overwhelming influence of baseball on American identity.

This close association between baseball and American identity cultivates a passion for the game not seen in any other sport. It is a passion that too often goes underappreciated. As Hall of Famer Brooks Robinson recently observed, “When you're playing every day, you don't always realize the impact you have on people. . . . Once you retire and step back a bit, you realize how much baseball means to people.”\(^{555}\) The meaningful ways baseball touches our lives and educates us about ourselves and our nation necessitates the existence of an institution dedicated to preserving and displaying the history of the game. Such an institution takes on not only the burden of portraying the national love affair for baseball in all its complexity, but also assumes responsibility for, in part, shaping our cultural values through the display and interpretation of its artifacts. This is the task of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

According to 2007 government filings, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum identifies itself as a “not-for-profit educational institution dedicated to fostering an appreciation of the historical development of the game of baseball and its impact on our culture by collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting its collections for a global audience, as well as honoring those who have made outstanding contributions to

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\(^{554}\) Rielly, “Preface,” xx; Kevin J. Grzymala, “Creating Home with the Ball Field: The Dynamics of Baseball and Civic Inclusivity for Germans, Irishmen, and Blacks During the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Reilly, *Baseball and American Culture*, 64; Alan Owen Patterson, “The Early European Jewish Immigrant Experience with Baseball in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 1 (February 2008): 97.

\(^{555}\) Handwerk, “Baseball Hall of Fame on Road Trip Through U.S.”
our national pastime.” Captured within this statement is the mission of a museum in transition—at times analytical and yet still celebratory. In order for the Baseball Hall of Fame to evolve into the type of museum worthy of comparison to some of the most socially relevant institutions in America, it had to disassociate itself from some of its celebratory past. But as explored in this dissertation, a celebratory reputation, once established, is not easily shed.

As recently as 2007, newspaper articles continued to promote images of the Hall of Fame that ignored improvements made to museum practices. In discussing controversy within the museum (particularly steroid abuse by major league players), the Village Voice dismissed the Hall of Fame’s obligations to contribute to modern scholarship by claiming, “Fortunately for the Hall, and its curator, the museum doesn't have to concern itself too much with thorny moral issues; it just needs to record what happened and, preferably, snag a pair of spikes or a ball from the event.” In addition, the museum’s dependence on ticket sales and donations (particularly from wealthy conservatives) reinforced the perception that critical examinations of historical subject matter took a back seat to considerations of funding.

Behind the scenes, however, a decades-old transition (still underway) began changing the culture within the museum and addressing the concerns of those who doubted the Hall of Fame’s authority. The catalyst for this change came in many forms. The Hall of Fame’s isolation from traditional museum communities (both geographically


\[557\] Span, “Can Cooperstown Save Baseball?”
and symbolically) helped inspire change intended to boost the museum’s popularity. Internal fears about the damaging effects of stagnation and becoming out-of-date and irrelevant produced a desire to transform the public’s perception of the museum. More importantly, however, the latter part of the twentieth century brought with it changing notions about the roles of museums in society. Post-modern influences called on the museum community to facilitate dialogue, to become forums for debate, and to improve people’s lives. By transforming themselves to embody the cultural values of their increasingly diverse constituencies, museums began fulfilling their obligations to educate and promote wholeness within communities.558

Among the processes involved in fulfilling these obligations was the inclusion of controversy in museum exhibits. Not controversy for controversy’s sake, or for the inevitable publicity that comes with it, but rather the incorporation of materials that challenged deeply-held emotional beliefs for the purposes of engaging patrons in productive discourse. This process added depth to historical narratives by opening them up to a variety of perspectives and interpretations—thus helping them reflect and reinforce the expectations of the modern museum-going community.

One of the primary ways of introducing controversy into historical narratives is through the introduction of social history. Here the stories of overlooked, ignored, or marginalized cultural groups force a reexamination of events attributed solely to accomplishments of white-male hegemony. At the Baseball Hall of Fame, curators and staff members responded to calls for greater diversity through new exhibits focusing on

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the achievements of blacks, women, Hispanics, and other cultural groups left unaddressed in the museum’s formative years. The incorporation of challenges to traditional narratives often met with mixed reactions—with some lauding it as a significant achievement and others viewing it as disingenuous paternalism—but the inclusion and exclusion of peoples is always going to be a sensitive subject, and as Erik Strohl learned by watching reactions to Hall of Fame exhibits, “It’s something that people want to talk about.”

In addition to meeting the needs of different cultural groups, the Hall of Fame took to addressing some of the more challenging aspects of baseball’s past. This included debunking the mythology surrounding baseball’s (and consequently, the museum’s) origins. As James Vlasich argued, the Doubleday myth endured because sometimes “Americans love simple answers to complex questions.” In this particular instance, the Hall of Fame opted to infuse some complexity into the simple answer surrounding who invented baseball—complexity missing throughout much of the Hall’s existence.

The same held true when it came to addressing the silences that ignored exploited and forgotten players, and when taking on the ugly, big-business side of professional baseball. Here the museum attracted fans to the exhibits by reinforcing nostalgic and patriotic cultural values, and then seized upon the opportunity to educate them on aspects of the history visitors might not have anticipated encountering. What made these efforts particularly unique was the Hall of Fame’s willingness to educate and engage with its audience even if it meant compromising some of the museum’s own commercial appeal.

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559 Strohl, interview.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries also brought with them a new emphasis for appreciating the way that visitors learn in museums. The focus on these processes came, in part, thanks to the formation of an education department at the Hall of Fame. This department assessed the best ways of conveying important information to the public and then helped design the materials needed for achieving these ends. Most often this took the form of cultivating personal connections for visitors through interactive and multi-sensory experiences geared toward the modern visitor’s demand to be at the center of the action.

Another way the Hall of Fame attempted to forge more personal connections to history was by providing an environment designed to promote dialogue among families. While the Hall traditionally focused on promoting stronger bonds between fathers and sons, today’s Hall of Fame makes a conscious effort to promote dialogue between fathers and daughters, as well as mothers and daughters, through the incorporation of panels, artifacts, and stories meant to temper some of the gendered bias prevalent throughout baseball’s history. Engaging family members in discussion through “Family-Friendly” plaques or through exhibits designed specifically for children helped facilitate the personal connections the Hall of Fame sought to create, as well as helped fulfill the museum’s mission to connect generations of fans through their love of baseball history.

Lastly, in recent decades, the Hall demonstrated an increased appreciation for the importance of a well-maintained, representative artifact collection. This involved moving from a policy of collecting anything and everything just to fill displays cases (usually with objects valued merely for their association with great achievements), to the development of processes that allowed the museum staff to assess acquisitions based on
their potential contribution to their documented collecting strategy. Having moved past the days of mangling artifacts for display purposes and losing signatures and fabrics to destruction by natural light, the Hall of Fame introduced state-of-the-art preservation technology into its facilities in recognition of the important role artifacts played in allowing the museum to tell the stories they felt needed to be told.

Where Does the Museum Go from Here?

Going forward there are any number of possibilities for the Hall of Fame to expand upon their commitment to cultural exploration and thereby forge closer ties to the social history community. Despite the numerous places where the museum addresses the influence of race, gender, and foreign cultures, there are numerous aspects to baseball history that remain largely absent from the museum’s displays. One significant omission from the Hall of Fame exhibits is religion—both in terms of its metaphorical use in baseball, as well as in the experiences of different religious groups in the game.

In a 2003 article in Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought, author Thomas F. Dailey looked at the role of baseball in religion. Pointing to the “fundamentally religious power” of baseball, Dailey revisited Christopher Evans’s view that by displaying the truths of the Christian faith “baseball encapsulated Protestant hopes to usher in the kingdom of God in America.” Dailey then proceeded to identify the numerous religious undertones found in such practices as “sacrificing oneself” in the game of baseball and worshipping the game’s most sacred idols and relics.

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On a less theoretical plain, the story of Jewish ballplayers is one of the great underappreciated stories in baseball history. Like the players who faced discrimination based on their race or gender or culture, Jewish players faced the same obstacles due to their religious beliefs. While Henry Ford busily occupied himself penning such incendiary newspaper articles as “Jewish Gamblers Corrupt American Baseball,” and “The Jewish Degradation of American Baseball,” ballplayers like Hank Greenburg faced the dilemma of ostracizing themselves from either the Jewish community or the baseball community depending on whether or not they chose to play on Jewish holidays.562

Another subject given little attention within the Hall of Fame’s walls is homosexuality. It is a subject, according to historian Mike Wallace, that remains taboo in most museums.563 Certainly the way professional athletes choose to ignore or disparage the presence of the gay and lesbian community speaks volumes about their comfort level in addressing this topic. Even if the Baseball Hall of Fame chooses to avoid a direct approach to the story of homosexuals in baseball and the conditions under which the stigma of homosexuality forced players to live, there are options for approaching the subject more indirectly. For example, what did forcing the girls of the AAGPBL to wear skirts and attend charm school tell us about the fears of gender role “confusion”? Certainly the AAGPBL went out of their way to promote the images of women players as current or potential wives and mothers above all else. Also, what would the presence of homosexuals in the major leagues do to the game’s carefully crafted image of “healthy

562 Patterson, “The Early European Jewish Immigrant Experience,” 93; Chafets, Cooperstown Confidential, 13.

563 Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, 120.
masculine recreation”? Why has sexual preference remained such an underexplored topic in professional sports and what does that tell us about American culture? The answers to these questions, and more, represent just some of the opportunities available to the Hall of Fame for addressing a topic increasingly making its way into mainstream media coverage.

There are numerous other opportunities that exist in the realm of social history to approach neglected or underrepresented facets of baseball history. There is the potential to compliment the efforts of *Baseball Enlists* with a look at baseball’s contribution to less popular wars, such as Vietnam. There are any number of other cultural groups clamoring for recognition for their contributions to the illustrious narrative of baseball history. Irish players, for example, dominated the nineteenth-century game in a similar fashion to the Latino players of today. One controversial topic at the forefront of moral discussions in sports is the use of Native American imagery by professional sports franchises. The appropriation of names, symbols, and cultural practices by teams like the Cleveland Indians and Atlanta Braves facilitates debate on modern issues of racial and cultural insensitivities. For the Hall of Fame it is really just a matter of choosing which stories they feel the need to tell. As Erik Strohl recently acknowledged, there are many more cultural groups beyond African Americans and Latinos where baseball has had an impact, including Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, and Native Americans,

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564 Chafets, *Cooperstown Confidential*, 40.
“but as a museum you have limited space so you have to judiciously decide what you are going to do.”

In addition to approaching new topics, there exist places within current displays to provide greater depth and complexity. The most compelling are the opportunities to draw greater connections to modern social conditions. In what ways are the controversies surrounding African Americans, women, or Latinos in baseball still relevant today? How are these still-evolving narratives playing out in modern debates on race or gender or immigration? Too much emphasis on progress and overcoming exclusion might provide visitors with a false sense of self-satisfaction that the issues addressed in the exhibits have been neatly resolved. Promoting dialogue on how these issues still manifest themselves today brings the museum more closely in-line with the demands and expectations of the post-museum visitor.

Another area of potential regarding the museum’s subject matter involves an exploration of the complex dynamics at play within many of the social movements depicted in the Hall of Fame. Proponents of cultural change rarely approached their causes as one, unified force. Varying goals and methods of achieving them often resulted in fractures within these movements. This becomes a necessary part of historical narratives for countering any mistaken attempt by visitors to oversimplify the history. The infusion of this type of complexity helps move a museum’s approach from mere acknowledgement to a more thorough engagement with the subject matter—one that links the behavior and treatment of marginalized groups with our understanding of the

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565 Strohl, interview.
history being made today—a benefit to any museum looking to educate visitors through relevant discourse.  

Part of the challenge of presenting more thought-provoking history in the Baseball Hall of Fame comes from the undermining influence of nostalgia. This nostalgia is not only a natural byproduct of the museum’s subject matter but also purposefully cultivated by the museum’s leadership, albeit for different reasons than for which the Hall traditionally used it. Unlike in past years when the promotion of nostalgia served but one purpose—to bring visitors to Cooperstown—today the museum also uses the emotional appeal of this phenomenon to draw visitors into exhibits so that they may teach them a little about American history. The problem becomes, according to Murray G. Phillips in *Representing the Sporting Past*, that nostalgia is “an appropriate framework for understanding the heroic presentations of athletes and the creation of ‘golden eras’ of sport in museums. However, nostalgia is inadequate when museums address issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, national identity and politics or when commodification, labor relations, performance enhancing drugs or violence are highlighted.”

Today the task of tempering this nostalgia and applying it judiciously throughout the museum falls to the Hall of Fame’s Vice President of Exhibitions and Collections, Erik Strohl. Breaking from the mold of his predecessors, Strohl received undergraduate training in history and graduate training in museum studies. Like many in his profession he received instruction from one of the most respected museum studies programs in the

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country, the Cooperstown graduate program at the State University College at Oneonta, New York—a program Catherine Lewis credited with helping “to standardize the [museum] profession for historians.”

The Cooperstown graduate program came about in the 1960s as a course of study meant to guide students into careers as museum professionals. It is a two-year program with approximately thirty students in residence each year taught by both full-time professors from The State University of New York (SUNY) Oneonta and adjunct faculty from the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA). The program focuses on helping students gain practical experience inside a museum, rather than a classroom, and provides instruction in all aspects of museum operations—from researching and preserving objects, to mounting exhibits, implementing educational programs, and mastering business administration.

Strohl started at the Hall of Fame as an intern from the Cooperstown program in 1998 before working as an assistant curator under Ted Spencer, and then as Curator of Research and Education. Among Strohl’s current responsibilities are overseeing the collections department, the research library staff, and the curatorial and exhibition staff. Unlike in years past, the museum is full of professionally trained staff. Strohl credits Ted Spencer and his superiors for this: “[Ted] brought in a lot of us who had museum studies degrees, so we were trained to look at these things a little differently than baseball.


569 Livermore, “Revisiting ‘The Cooperstown Idea,’” 88; Strohl, interview.
people. [There] was a concerted effort made by this museum to do that, and I think you can see the benefit of [it] just by walking around."  

Reflecting back on the conversation between Ted Spencer and director Howard Talbot in 1982, when the two men struggled to determine if the Hall of Fame was a museum or a tourist attraction, it is clear that the Hall of Fame’s leadership chose to become the former. Any conversation with Erik Strohl will confirm that. Despite all of his administrative duties, Strohl strongly believes, “First and foremost, I’m a curator and historian.” He considers it the job of his staff “to interpret baseball history and to show people how baseball’s history is connected to American history and American culture,” and, according to Strohl, “we take that very, very seriously.”

This new emphasis on professionalization within the Hall of Fame mirrored trends that occurred in the larger museum community throughout much of the twentieth century. While perhaps manifesting itself later in Cooperstown than in most other museums, it still came with the same risks—that of losing touch with the museum audience. To combat this, the Hall of Fame made an effort to bring visitors inside their processes through tentative forays into the application of shared authority and transparency.

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570 Strohl, interview.

571 Strohl, interview by Bob Fescoe.

572 Ibid.

On occasion the Hall solicited the input of visitors and scholars in helping shape an exhibit’s message. This included acquiring photographs and stories from fans and hiring external scholars to research exhibit topics. Within the organization, the process of sharing authority brought about team-oriented approaches to exhibit design that included representation from multiple departments.

When it comes to transparency, Erik Strohl believes “It’s your duty as a museum to tell people what it is you do and why you’re displaying what you’re displaying.” In recent years, the Hall of Fame Museum allowed visitors a glimpse into the design and fabrication of Hall of Fame exhibits. The most meaningful progress occurred in the realm of virtual exhibits and YouTube videos providing behind-the-scenes looks at museum processes, but wall panels recounting anecdotes pertinent to the display of particular artifacts also demonstrated a willingness on the part of the Hall to engage with visitors on a more meaningful level within the confines of the museum itself. In addition, the museum is very upfront about the use of replicas in the exhibits, identifying them as such in label text and providing forthright explanations for the necessity of their use. There is no attempt to deceive visitors into believing they are seeing something they are not.

The further promotion of transparency within the museum requires commitment at a deeper level. This involves not only providing audiences with an understanding of how the Hall of Fame makes display decisions, but also educating them as to the political nature of museums and their displays. In Mickey Mouse History, Mike Wallace argued that because exhibits represent the point of view of their designers, perhaps the best way to disabuse the public of their belief in the objectiveness of museums is to provide

574 Strohl, interview.
biographical information on designers up front in museum exhibits. Information about who the designers and curators were, what their intentions were in putting together the exhibit, and additional background details pertaining to their training and affiliations might help visitors better understand the perspective from which they are viewing history. Another suggestion for which Wallace lobbied was the construction of simultaneous exhibits pitting alternate perspectives against one another as a way to demonstrate the malleability of artifacts based on their placement and surroundings. Either way, museum audiences learn more about the political nature of display through an awareness of the subconscious (or conscious) manipulation of narratives by curators possessing their own unique set of personal and cultural values.575

The Scope of the Challenge

Historians can never fully recover the past. While it is easy enough to provide audiences with facts and interpretations, it is impossible for museum patrons to ever truly understand “how it was” in bygone times. This is particularly true in museum settings, where the majority of stimuli are limited to those readily conveyed in visual form.576 There is no artifact or immersion-style exhibit capable of recreating the experience (in its entirety) of firing a weapon in combat, standing in line for food, living in a country where you do not speak the language, or being denied access to essential human services based on the color of your skin. These are the irretrievable aspects of historical narratives.


In addition, the selective and political processes of memory formation make the search for “truth” in any sort of complete and comprehensive form an exercise in futility. In *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations*, author Simon Schama summarized the problem in a most poetic fashion: “Historians are left forever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness. . . . We are doomed to be forever hailing someone who has just gone around the corner and out of earshot.” It is a reality with which all historians must inevitably come to terms.

At the Baseball Hall of Fame, preparations for the future need to include a relaxation of their search for truth and promotion of objectivity (a strategy utilized in recent decades as a means of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the museum community). Quite to the contrary, the museum might be better served by educating audiences about the various personal and cultural influences that make truth and objectivity unattainable—bringing visitors into museum processes at a much deeper level and educating them about how the characteristics we value in museum exhibits convey important clues about who we are and how we live.

Additionally, the Hall needs to continue to focus on designing the types of powerful and engaging educational experiences required to reach modern audiences. Museums of the twenty-first century must face the changing paradigm of the museum visitor—a consumer who takes in, processes, and shares information in completely

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different ways than those of past generations. There is a growing awareness at the Hall of Fame that they, like most museums, must either adapt to this change or perish.\textsuperscript{578}

In terms of subject matter, the museum plans to continue to look at stories that are important to the history of baseball as well as the game’s place in American culture—and the topics appear limitless. “We have enough exhibit ideas and materials to last us for decades,” Strohl proclaimed. Among potential exhibit topics are the role of science in baseball, the evolution of the game’s medical practices, and expanded looks at amateur baseball and the minor leagues.\textsuperscript{579}

Recognizing that its collections focus largely on materials associated with Major League Baseball, the Hall intends to expand its collecting activities in other areas to make themselves more worthy of the title “National Baseball Hall of Fame,” rather than the sometimes implied, “Major League Baseball Hall of Fame.” This involves spending more time researching industrial leagues, Olympic baseball, women’s leagues, and foreign contributions to American baseball to ensure the museum positions itself to meet the needs of its increasingly diverse audience.

In an interesting and provocative spin, the museum staff also envision taking existing topics and approaching them from new angles. For example, rather than just documenting baseball’s associations with American culture, curators and designers intend to examine why these associations even exist. For instance, why is it possible to analyze so many important aspects of American life through the game of baseball? Another

\textsuperscript{578} Skramstad, “An Agenda for Museums in the Twenty-first Century,” 127; Strohl, interview.

\textsuperscript{579} Strohl, interview.
potential area of focus has the museum’s staff asking why it is that people are so willing to drive hundreds of miles to the middle of nowhere to visit a museum about baseball. What is at the emotional and sociological root of that passion for the game? These new and innovative approaches to traditional subjects offer the chance to provide visitors with an entirely new perspective on their trips to Cooperstown.

While all of these ideas are topics with which the Hall of Fame wishes to engage, there are numerous factors that potentially affect what actually comes to fruition. The long-term needs and desires of the museum staff and its patrons, considerations of available space and funding, external cultural influences and events, as well as the potential for exciting new and previously unanticipated artifact donations to the museum will all shape the subject matter of future exhibits.

Regardless of the topic, according to Hall of Fame curator John Odell, the museum needs to inspire people to learn about themselves. In the modern age, this means not just providing information, but interacting with visitors in ways they find useful. Today, this involves recognizing the increasingly virtual way people live their lives. While accessing a database in a museum and diving into data, seeing pictures, and listening to a narrated biography are all useful tools, allowing patrons to access this information on their phones and bring it home with them creates a more personalized and meaningful experience. Providing codes to scan or numbers to dial to access additional content about museum artifacts are just some of the ways the Hall envisions presenting

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
information in a variety of different layers. In addition, the museum looks to expand its presence on social media sites as a way for visitors to continue their Hall of Fame experience even after leaving the museum. 582

Catering to the virtual world means an increased reliance on digitized assets. It is a process that equates to a delicate balancing act. Digitization proves remarkable beneficial in not only providing visitors access to content online but also allowing museums to better preserve their resources—addressing the great museum paradox of wanting to preserve items while also allowing the public access to them. The downside is that in addition to the danger of losing information to corrupt or outdated media forms, there is the cost of the labor and digitization hardware and software, and considerations of how much information museums want available online and who will control the access to it. Do museums want to provide access to their collections for free? How much of the collection is it possible to provide digitally before you remove the impetus for visitors to attend your museum? These are the types of questions with which museums, including the Hall of Fame, must grapple.

Current Baseball Hall of Fame practices fall somewhere in the middle of the road and most likely will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. The strategy employed in Cooperstown is to allow technology to enhance the museum experience, but not replace it. The belief held by museum staff is that there will never be an adequate substitute for seeing “the actual thing” up close. The emotional response to objects is not nearly as powerful in an online environment and so, consequently, certain experiences will never

582 Doswell, “Evaluating Educational Value in Museum Exhibitions,” 70; Strohl, interview.
be replaced by doing something virtually. Touching Babe Ruth’s locker or the cornerstone at Ebbets Field, or being in the presence of Hank Aaron’s uniform are all experiences you can only get by entering the museum. Going forward, the Hall intends to integrate technology into their presentations whenever possible, but only to the degree that it effectively engages visitors in learning while complimenting the museum’s efforts in Cooperstown.

**What Will Never Change**

As addressed throughout this dissertation, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum is an institution in transition. Once a holy shrine for displaying the game’s most sacred relics, recent decades witnessed a concerted effort to reinvent the Hall by more closely aligning itself with the cultural values of its constituents. Consequently, the museum today is largely unrecognizable from what it was when it opened its doors in 1939.

This is not to say, however, that the museum has reached its full potential. The process of reinvention is still ongoing. In *The Changing Face of Public History*, Catherine Lewis noted that “change for any institution is slow.”583 This is particularly true of an institution as large and symbolically significant as the Baseball Hall of Fame. Numerous factors preclude its rapid transformation.

The most formidable obstacle is tradition. The museum’s founders designed the Hall of Fame to be a celebration of American achievement and for decades afterward continued to operate it as such. The museum appropriated myth to provide a wholesome

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patriotic sanctuary from an increasingly confusing and unfamiliar world. The early Baseball Hall of Fame was a place for Americans to come and feel good about themselves. Baseball’s close association with American identity meant that any change within the museum had to meet with the approval of the entire country if the museum were to survive and serve its original purpose as a lure for tourism dollars.

In addition, for change to be effective it must permeate all facets of a museum’s operations.\(^{584}\) Despite the influx of new staff trained in modern museum practices, the Hall remains an organization used to designing programs that promote conservative values. Exposing the more radical or controversial aspects of baseball history has never been a priority. But the staff credit Chairman of the Board of Directors, Jane Forbes Clark (granddaughter of founder Stephen Clark), with providing them greater autonomy and support than existed in the past, and curators, researchers, designers, educators, and collections staff capitalize on this by exploring new ways to approach history. When asked about the rate of change within the museum, Erik Strohl noted, “We’re traditionally a very conservative institution, like many museums are, and so it takes awhile I think for things to set in and for us to recognize necessary change, but we certainly have in regards to [post-modern museum practices] and now it’s [a matter of] ‘getting it done.’”\(^{585}\)

What will never change—always hanging over the museum exhibits and shaping visitors’ perceptions by influencing the Hall of Fame’s entire performance—is the

\(^{584}\) Ibid., 128.

\(^{585}\) Strohl, interview.
inherently spiritual power of baseball. Labor stoppages rob fans of countless games so millionaires can argue with billionaires over fractional percentages of revenue, and yet when it is all over, the fans come back. Drug scandals taint the game’s most legendary achievements, turning its heroes into frauds, and still ballparks remain packed. Owners deface every square inch of stadium space with advertisements, ballplayers cork their bats, and cable television revenues irrevocably corrupt the prospects of teams competing on level playing fields, and still somehow the baseball faithful manage to look past it all.

What baseball fans hold on to is the belief that, somewhere down deep, baseball still retains the wholesome purity of a kinder, simpler time. Fans need to believe that there is still some good left in baseball and that it can save us from the horrible, contemptible corruption of the modern world. Somewhere, away from the congested highways that herd people by the thousands into monolithic testaments to capitalism gone awry, are the innocent, small-town roots of the game that still bring families together to sit on the grass, bask in the sun, and reconnect with one another.

Cooperstown, New York, provides the imagery that fans cling to so desperately in their devotion to baseball. Here lies the insurmountable obstacle to ever completely changing perceptions of the museum. When author John Robinson published his book on baseball controversies in 1995, he noted, “if one walks down the tree-lined streets of Cooperstown, passes by the stores, churches, and parks, one is almost forced to think that if baseball wasn’t invented here, it probably should have been.”

But the impact of Cooperstown on the history in the Hall of Fame is not entirely detrimental. After all, the legacy of Cooperstown is as much a part of the baseball story

586 Robertson, Baseball’s Greatest Controversies, 9.
as homerun records and television contracts. What Cooperstown does is ground the history in a more identifiable context for many visitors. With all the media coverage surrounding million-dollar player deals, computerized strike-zone monitoring, and colossal tax-payer-funded stadium construction, the aura of Cooperstown provides some much-needed balance to the history of baseball, reconnecting younger baseball fans with the simpler way of life the game used to represent. Given this consideration, it is no wonder the museum draws so many comparisons to Colonial Williamsburg.

The quaint surroundings of Cooperstown manifests itself in other ways as well, even leaving an indelible mark on the way the Hall of Fame practices history. In 2003, Sammy Sosa, a member of the 500 Homerun Club (and a sure Hall of Famer until authorities uncovered his steroid abuse), received a seven-game suspension from Major League Baseball for using a corked bat. The National League promptly confiscated seventy-six of Sosa’s bats to investigate just how many of them had cork inside. At the time of professional baseball’s investigation, the Hall of Fame owned five of Sosa’s bats (including the one he used to hit his five-hundredth-career homerun) and they wanted to know if Sosa illegally modified any of the bats in their possession too.

Unfortunately for the Hall of Fame, laboratories possessing the technology to examine the inside of the bats (without destroying them) were not readily available in Cooperstown, and sending the bats out for testing was potentially costly. At that point, Ted Spencer reached out to his son-in-law’s father, Dr. Peter Wright, a diagnostic radiologist at the local hospital. Wright agreed to have the bats x-rayed at the hospital (and all of them passed inspection). It was a resourceful approach to a potentially
complex problem. When asked about the manner in which he improvised to get the bats tested, Spencer replied, “It’s all about life in a small town.”  

587 Collins, “In the Church of Baseball, Idol Worship is No Sin.”
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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
To: Nancy Dallett  
    COOR
From: Mark Roosa, Chair Soc Beh IRB
Date: 03/01/2012
Committee Action: Exemption Granted
IRB Action Date: 03/01/2012
IRB Protocol #: 1202007491
Study Title: The National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum and Seventy-Years of American History

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.