The first biography on one of baseball's most fabled figures - Pete "The Gladiator" Browning, the eccentric, talented and colorful 19th-century batting champion (.341 overall, three batting titles) and namesake of the famed Louisville Slugger bat. Includes numerous historical photographs.

AMERICAN GLADIATOR: The Life And Times Of Pete Browning

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The Life And Times Of Pete Browning

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THE EARLY YEARS, 1861-1881

For more than 75 years, on the southwest side of historic Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky, near the intersection of what used to be called Virgilia and Hovenia Avenues, there lay a plain granite marker. The inscription on it was slightly misspelled, and the gravesite stood in the shadow of a twisted sweetbay magnolia tree.

The old marker was replaced by a much grander one in 1984, though the tree still remains. Buried there in lot 549 is Louis Rogers "Pete" Browning, whose occupation at the time of his death in 1905 at age 44 was succinctly listed in the large lime-green City Mortuary Book as "ball player."

It was a notation of concise understatement, as the following synopsis shows.

- During the course of 13 major-league seasons, from 1882 through 1894, the bulk of that with Louisville in first the fabled American Association and later the National League, Browning compiled a lifetime .341 batting average.
- Browning's .341 figure is tied for eighth place on the all-time list with Cooperstown residents Wee Willie Keeler and Bill Terry.
- The .341 mark also ranks today as the fourth-best among the game's right-handed batsmen. Only Hall-of-Famers Rogers Hornsby (.358), Eddie Delahanty (.346) and Harry Heilmann (.342) have ever done better work from that side of the plate.
- To date, Pete Browning is one of several dozen players to have legitimately batted .400 in a season: .402 in 1887.
- Browning's .402 campaign of 1887 ranks 23rd on the all-time list of seasonal batting averages. Remarkably, Browning did not win the crown that year. He lost to American Association Triple Crown winner Tip O' Neill's .435 mark, which just as remarkably, is second-best on the all-time list. The top mark belongs to Hugh Duffy, who batted .440 in 1894 with Boston of the National League.
- Browning recorded a .467 lifetime slugging average. His personal-best was a .547 mark in 1887. Other top marks include .530 in 1885, .517 in 1890 and a league-leading .510 in 1882.
- Recorded his personal-best .464 on-base percentage in 1887, one of the hundred-best in the game's history. Finished second to .490 percentage of Tip O'Neill, who that season became the only player in major-league history ever to lead a league in batting, hits, total bases, slugging average, runs, doubles, triples (a six-way tie), home runs, RBIs and on-base percentage.
- Other notable on-base percentage marks: .459 in 1890 (second in the Players League), and a league-leading .430 mark in the American Association (1882).
- His lifetime .403 on-base percentage mark ranks among the top fifty on the all-time list.
- Twice hit for the cycle; major-league record is three.
- Only player ever to have lost a batting title to a pitcher: teammate Guy Hecker in 1886, .341 to .340.
- Browning literally swung the big lumber: he reportedly favored bats that were 37 inches in length and 48 ounces in weight.
- Namesake of the famed Louisville Slugger bat, an American icon.

A genuine pre-modern national star, one of the game's earliest pioneers, and one of the sport's most enduring and intriguing figures, Louis Rogers "Pete" Browning was born in Louisville, Ky. on June 17, 1861 at 13th and Jefferson on the city's west side.

Because the state of Kentucky did not require the official recording of vital statistics until 1911, no formal birth certificate exists today for Pete Browning or any of his six (possibly seven) siblings. However, numerous sources from his own life verify this date, including Federal census records for 1900; the legal documents that authorized his commitment to an insane asylum at nearby Lakeland, Ky. in June of 1905; the official record of his death as filed three months later in the pages of the aforementioned City Mortuary Book (number 13, page 44); obituaries from Louisville's four leading newspapers of that day—the Courier-Journal, the Times, the Herald and the Post; and Browning's first grave marker itself.

A lifelong resident of Louisville, Pete Browning was the youngest of seven (maybe eight) children born to Kentucky natives Samuel Browning (November 10, 1814-October 19, 1874) and Mary Jane Sheppard Browning (1826-April 6, 1911). The pair were married in Jefferson County, the county in which Louisville is located, the day after Valentine's Day of 1849.

The little family history left today is directly due to the incisive research of film historians David J. Skal and Elias Savada in their 1995 biography of Pete Browning's uncle, Tod Browning, a noted film director. A genre classic and the only major work to date on Tod Browning, *Dark Carnival: The Secret World of Tod Browning, Hollywood's Master of the Macabre* is equally valuable to baseball writers and historians.

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According to the special "Genealogy" section in *Dark Carnival*, which extensively details basic family history previously published by the author, Samuel and Mary Jane Browning had seven known children. The four sons and three daughters included Charles Leslie Browning (1850-1922); Florence Bell Browning (1851/52-1935); Henry D. Browning (1853-1911); Blanche N. Browning (1854/55-1861/65); Samuel L. Browning, Jr. (1857-May, 1900); Fannie E. Browning (January, 1859-March, 1907); and Louis Rogers Browning (1861-1905).

Charles Leslie Browning married Lydia Jane Fitzgerald (1853-1928), all six feet, three inches of her according to Skal and Savada, on July 5, 1872. The daughter of William M. Fitzgerald and Jane Cook, Lydia Fitzgerald Browning produced three children: Octavia F. Browning (1874-1875), who died in infancy; George Avery Browning (1876-1958); and the aforementioned Charles Albert "Tod" Browning (1880-1962). A fourth child in the brood, though never formally adopted, was raised by them. The daughter of Lydia's brother and his wife, according to Skal and Savada, Virginia "Jennie" Cook Browning (1883-1972) was a little red-haired girl Lydia and Charles took in for some unknown reason. She married William E. Block, Jr. (1877-1954) on October 25, 1900, and had six children by him (four sons and two daughters).

"A remarkably thin man, mustachioed and of average height" (*Dark Carnival*), Charles Leslie Browning was a contrast to his wife. During his life, he worked as a "bricklayer, carpenter and machinist, primarily for the firm of B.F. Avery and Sons, a world-famed manufacturer of plows and agricultural equipment."

According to Skal and Savada, his older son, George Avery Browning, was "evidently middle-named after his father's longtime employer". In time, he "became a coal merchant, eventually founding the company of Bower and Browning."

Like his famed baseball-playing cousin, George Avery Browning was a fascinating figure in his own right. Again, Skal and Savada from *Dark Carnival*

"Avery—as George preferred to call himself, is remembered as the tallest member of the family, almost six and a half feet tall, and an obsessively organized personality, with a lifelong aversion to being touched. He was also phobic about germs. His nieces recalled, more than a half-century after the fact, his wary response to their offering him a piece of homemade fudge: "Is it *clean*? Is it *clean*?" Avery preferred having most of his food prepared by his mother alone, and well into adulthood made a daily ritual trip home to eat Lydia's never-changing lunches of roast beef and homemade bread.

"Avery favored long dark overcoats which he wore regardless of the season, and constantly puffed odiferous cigars. He had an aversion to driving. Family members recalled that he stopped attending church at the age of sixteen. He never married, and his social life centered around his lodge, where, as a member of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, he achieved the rank of a 32nd-degree Mason."

Around Christmastime of 1958, he was found dead of asphyxiation at his home, the result of an unvented water heater.

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In *Dark Carnival*, Skal and Savada also provided the following information on the other immediate Browning family members.

The second oldest child and oldest daughter, Florence Bell Browning married "a certain John Ramsey of Louisville" on November 16, 1869. They were apparently childless.

Henry Browning and wife Katherine P. (maiden name unknown say Skal and Savada) had one known child, L.R. Browning (1882-1883), who died in infancy (Quite possibly, he was named in honor of his famed uncle, Louis Rogers, who began his major-league career the same year his namesake was born.) Little is known about Henry outside the fact that he "worked as a woodcarver and lottery dealer."

Blanche N. Browning died in childhood.

Samuel L. Browning, Jr. and wife Katherine (maiden name also unknown) had two daughters: Mildred (1891-1986) and Mary (no lifedates available; unmarried). Mildred Browning married Paul Kapfhammer (1891-?) and they had one child, Mildred (1912-?), who married a Benjamin McAuliffe.

Like older brother Henry, virtually nothing is known about Samuel, Jr. outside the fact that he was a "plumber, fireman and barkeeper".

The two youngest members of the immediate Browning clan, Fannie E. and Louis Rogers (Pete), never married.

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All but Charles and Henry are buried in the family plot at historic Cave Hill Cemetery on the city's fashionable east side, records show. (Charles and Henry could possibly be buried in an old family site in nearby Eastern Cemetery.)

Those same cemetery records note that Browning's father, Browning's sister Blanche, and an "Ida May Browning" were re-interred at Cave Hill on May 14, 1886. The relationship of Ida May Browning to Pete Browning is unknown.

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In October of 1874, when Browning was 13, his father—a prosperous merchant who for years ran a grocery store at the corner of 15th and Jefferson streets in Louisville—died at age 59 from injuries sustained during a cyclone.

Browning's mother, with whom The Gladiator, a confirmed bachelor, lived all his life, lasted substantially longer. She died April 6, 1911 at age 85 of old age at her home, 1427 West Jefferson Street on the near west side of the city. According to her obituary, she had lived there for more than a half century, and was survived by three children: Charles, Henry and Florence. (Skal and Savada colorfully note in *Dark Carnival* that when Federal troops marched through Louisville in 1861, Mrs. Browning—a native of Danville, Ky. and obviously a full-blooded Southerner—"flew the Confederate flag proudly from her home.")

Nothing is left of the Browning residence today. In the 1970s, it was demolished as part of an urban renewal program that cleared out huge blocks of one of Louisville's oldest neighborhoods. At the time of this book's completion, a strip-mall occupied the site.

As a youth, Browning was a crack athlete and avid sportsman who studiously avoided schoolwork. Frequently, he would hide the schoolbooks his mother had provided him under the doorsteps of the home of John Reccius. A teammate of Browning's on some early Louisville teams and later a pallbearer at Browning's funeral, Reccius was a part of a noted Louisville baseball family that also included brothers William and Philip. Rounding up companions, Browning then would spend the rest of the day shooting marbles, spinning tops or playing ball.

About the last category, the Courier-Journal had this to say in his obituary: "When a lad, he began playing ball on the commons, and was a good player from the start." Browning's proficiency as a marble shooter mirrored that of a later Louisville product to the major leagues, Dodger Hall-of-Fame shortstop Harold "Pee Wee" Reese.

A master of the game in his neighborhood where he regularly won all the marbles of his friends, Browning then began to return the common marbles while keeping only the prized agates for himself. In time, Browning accumulated a trunk full of them. Eventually, his reputation became so great that Browning had to travel to the east end of Louisville, where he was unknown, in order to get up a game.

And, according to his Louisville Times and Louisville Courier-Journal obituaries, Browning was also a superb skater who "was easily the best in Louisville", possessing an ability to "cut more funny figures and skate faster than any other boy of his acquaintance."

A lover of the outdoors, Browning enjoyed all athletics except swimming, which he claimed hurt his ears. This is not exactly insignificant since Browning, a resident of a town nicknamed the "River City", was only blocks away from the Ohio River.

Browning's habitual absences from the classroom in lieu of sports as a young man had the expected repercussions, though, leaving him uneducated and rendering him a functional illiterate his entire adult life (although like other aspects of Browning, that has been substantially blown out of proportion).

And, that adulthood came pretty early.

On Friday, April 13, 1877, still some two months shy of his sixteenth birthday, Browning made what is thought to be his debut as an organized ballplayer. And, it came against penthouse competition no less, the city's charter National League club, the Louisville Grays. Picked by many to take that year's National League flag, the powerhouse Grays were just about a month away from their seasonal opener.

Operating on all eight cylinders and more, the Grays decimated the Eclipse 22-1 behind Jimmy Devlin's nifty three-hitter; a five-for-six, five runs scored performance by first-baseman Juice Latham; and right fielder George Shaffer, who was good for four hits and four runs. The lone black marks against the Grays were a pair of errors in the ninth that cost the talented right-handed Devlin a shutout.

As for Browning, his debut was unremarkable, as he went zero-for-four, perhaps understandably so in light of the competition and maybe even the date. His work also included three putouts and one error at third base. Nevertheless, it was a start all the same, and Browning was on his way through an inaugural season that would include appearances for several different teams against a variety of competition.

There are some who can find a silver lining in anything, and the following morning, Saturday, April 14th, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran an account fully in keeping with that tradition. Whatever they lacked in reality, they more than made up with their optimism.

"The game between the Eclipse club and the Louisville nine yesterday proved to be quite an interesting contest, in spite of the one-sidedness of the score. The West-end boys proved rather weak at the bat, but they atoned for this by some very fine work in the field. Nine errors are all that are recorded against them, and in the face of the heavy batting done by the professionals, the showing is an extraordinarily good one.

"During the progress of the game, (catcher) Daily was struck in the mouth by a foul tip, which loosened several teeth. Crowley took his place and Lafferty the position vacated by Crowley. The one run scored by the losing side did not make its appearance until the ninth inning. It was presented by (center fielder) Lafferty and (shortstop) Craver—the one missing a fly and the other missing a bad throw to Latham.

"The Eclipse nine can be congratulated on yesterday's showing. The members plainly demonstrated that they know how to field, and the Amateurs will have to look sharp, for when these nines meet, the wrong pig may be grabbed by the ear."

That happened at least once because several months later, on July 17, 1877, Browning pitched the Eclipse to a 24-8 bombing over the aforementioned Amateurs, and his contributions were mighty: three-for-six at the plate, four runs scored, eight assists, six strikeouts, no walks, and a "W" in the win column.

That month was a watershed month for the talented teenager.

Ten days later, using a fine curveball and deceptive change of pace, Browning hurled the Eclipse to a 4-0 shutout win over the vaunted National League Louisville Grays. According to Browning's Louisville Times obituary, Manager John Chapman of the Louisville Nationals remarked during the game: "If (George) Hall hits one of those slow ones and its hits Browning, there will be a dead ball player."

It never happened.

This antique photograph is the earliest known ballplayer picture of Pete Browning—either a "very old" 15 or a "very young" 16 depending on when the picture was taken. He is shown with the 1877 Louisville Eclipse. A top-notch semi-pro team, they restored major-league baseball to Louisville in 1882 when they joined the newly-formed American Association, the National League's first competitor. ***STANDING:*** *Pitcher John Reccius, J. Pfeiffer, Tim Lehan, W, Zimmerman.* ***MIDDLE:*** *Quinlan (substitute/catcher), Pete Browning, M. Walsh, and catcher Coleman.* ***FRONT:*** *left fielder Charles Pfeiffer, center fielder C. Arny. (Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Louisville)*

Browning's strikeout victims that day included the slugging Hall and ace pitcher Jimmy Devlin, two of the four participants in that season's National League pennant-fixing scandal that eventually cost the city its major-league team and those two stars.

The clearly-irritated Louisville Courier-Journal ran only a note on the game, reporting in its lead paragraph that "the Grays were thrashed yesterday afternoon by the Eclipse nine". The concluding sentence of their Saturday, July 28th "homer" story gives clear indications of Browning's pitching skills the preceding afternoon: "The last inning came with the score of 4 to 0 against them, and, as the Grays went out in striking order, the figures remained unchanged."

This game is of enormous historical significance since this is thought to be the game alluded to in Browning's obituaries in the Louisville Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times as the contest that gained Browning his first major baseball attention. Certainly, it is a wonder in light of the quality competition he faced and shut down completely. Factor in his age, and the feat takes on even more brilliance, not a glitzy, shining brilliance, but a sparkling, elegant brilliance.

Sent back out against the Grays on August 3, Browning and his teammates ran straight into Frank Lafferty, who no-hit the Eclipse in an overwhelming 14-1 win. Browning received the loss, as his teammates scored their lone tally in the fifth inning off a missed third strike; a bad throw to second; and a flyball between second-baseman Joe Gerhardt and right fielder George Shaffer which was allowed to drop.

George Hall, the previous season's National League home run leader, led the Grays' offensive rampage with a four-hit performance that saw him just miss hitting for the cycle: two singles, a triple and a home run. The victory, as to be expected, was much more to the liking of the Louisville Courier-Journal, who led off its story the following morning thusly: "Yesterday afternoon, the Grays sat down on the boys from the West End; in fact, squashed them rather badly."

Spreading the wealth around, Browning went five-for-nine in several games for the Liberty in early September.

That pair of games were sandwiched around a splendid September 7th contest for the Amateurs against the Mutuals. Playing second base and batting second in the order, Browning posted fine work on both sides of the diamond in the 6-3 win by the Amateurs. Going two-for-four, one a double, and scoring once, he also played some fine defense; the game account noted "several fine stops" by Browning and second-baseman Pfeffer. Browning would have done even better save for Mutuals' third baseman T. Daily, who made "a rattling line catch close to the ground" of a ball hit by Browning, robbing that one of a sure third hit.

The big boys showed up again on Tuesday, September 11th, and Browning, stationed again at second base, went zero-for-four as the Amateurs lost 12-7. The defeat, though, was nothing to be ashamed of, coming at the hands of the city's major-league team, whom they played nearly dead-even for six frames. In the seventh, however, the Louisville National League Grays broke the game wide open with seven runs and coasted home from there.

Never a man to be held down for long, Browning broke loose the following day.

Posted first and second respectively in the lineup, first-baseman John Haldeman and Browning, at shortstop, joined forces to destroy a team from nearby Anchorage 21-2. Haldeman and Browning notched five hits each, and scored five runs apiece in the September 12th hit parade which was mercifully called on account of rain and darkness after eight innings.

Browning's work included a pair of triples, while Haldeman, who would in a few months break open major-league baseball's first scandal, contributed a double and a triple.

With the 1877 baseball season nearing a close, Browning prominently displayed his wares in as the Eclipse pounded the Amateurs 13-4 in a September 25th matchup. His offensive contributions included four hits in six at-bats, one of them a double, and two runs scored.

Stationed at first base, Browning batted fourth in the lineup. Fifth in the order was the shortstop, an "H. Browning", believed to be his brother Henry, who went one-for-six with two runs scored.

1878

Despite the devastating loss of its top baseball draw, the major-league Grays, Louisville nonetheless opened its 1878 baseball season for business in mid-May. Whatever the shock and the disarray attendant to the 1877 pennant-fixing scandal which had seen the Grays expelled by the National League, baseball life in one of America's great baseball cities still went on, though in a radically different form.

The local diamond campaign debuted with the Louisvilles taking a 12-4 laugher from the Louisville Mutuals on Saturday, May 18. Browning did not play in this game. However, this was not the only game in the city.

Across town, Churchill Downs held the fourth renewal of the Kentucky Derby on Tuesday, May 21st. The victor was outsider Day Star, a wire-to-wire victor over heavily-favored Himyar. This baseball/horse racing

tandem built the foundation of Louisville's national sporting reputation, a reputation which would later be permanently solidified by a third major sport, basketball.

On the national non-sporting front, inventor Thomas Edison made headlines with his successful experiment of the incandescent light at his Menlo Park, New Jersey laboratory, which led to the birth of he electric light bulb the following year.

One of the more notable early-season performances by Browning was in a 20-0 slaughterhouse by the Eclipse of the aforementioned Louisvilles on Wednesday, May 29th. Playing second and batting third in the lineup, Browning went two-for-six; scored two runs; and according to the Louisville Courier-Journal, played "a slashing game at second".

On June 1st, Browning, now in the leadoff spot but still at second, went three-for-five with two runs scored and one double for the Louisvilles. It was all for naught, though, as they dropped an 11-7 decision to a team named the Waddell Browns.

A week later, Browning came up with a killing cut-off throw from second to nail a go-ahead run in the top of the twelfth, then in the bottom of that frame doubled home the winning run in an exciting 6-5 win by the Eclipse-Mutuals over the Louisvilles. The defensive gem and offensive heroics were all part of a well-balanced game that included a triple, two runs scored, a pair of RBIs, five putouts and three assists.

Back in uniform with the Louisvilles on Tuesday, June 11th, Browning powered them to a runaway 17-5 victory over the Waddell Browns with a five-for-six performance and three runs scored.

Described by the Courier-Journal as "the crack hitter of the Eclipse nine", Browning singled, doubled, and scored three times in another extra-inning job June 13th. The victim was familiar, the Louisvilles, the score 6-4 in ten frames. In a June 24th game against the Louisvilles, Browning went four-for-five with a triple and two runs scored in a 9-7 victory by the Eclipse.

Browning's stellar work continued on through the summer and the season, with what had to be the most unusual combination and action coming on August 6th. Batting lead-off *as the catcher* for the Picked Nine, he responded with two hits, one a double, and two runs in a 12-6 loss to the Brown Stockings. Though he did come up with four errors, it was no doubt the product of an unfamiliar and technically difficult position. In any event, it showed two things: Browning's versatility and his steadily increasing skill as a baseball player.

1879

Among Browning's more interesting contests of 1879 were three that had absolutely nothing in common.

The first was an August 26, 1879 contest by the Eclipse against the Columbus, Ohio Deaf Mutes. This is not a misprint, a joke. Equally as serious is that Browning, batting lead-off and playing third, went hitless in five at-bats, though he did score a run in the 7-2 triumph. Unquestionably, this had to be an absolute gem of a game for the umpires to call in light of the losing team's restrictions and those of the marquee player on the winning side.

On a related note, Browning the next month played against this same team as a member for the Louisville Mohawks, a club made up of the five strongest Eclipse players plus other talented local players. The Deaf Mutes were described by the Courier-Journal as being "earnest, quiet players" whose "fame has been deservedly acquired."

About a month later, on Sunday, September 21st, Browning—again at third and batting lead-off—was part of a 7-0 shutout by the Eclipse of the Covington Stars in what the Louisville Courier-Journal headlined as "The State Championship".

A week later, on September 28th, the Eclipse were matched up against another local team: the Red Stockings. It was a close call, a very close call, but the Eclipse as they typically seemed to do, prevailed 4-3 at the wire as Browning contributed two hits and a run from his third-base/lead-off venues.

1880

By 1880, the year that canned fruits and meats first appeared in stores, the Louisville Eclipse, a sparkling semi-pro club, were hands down the top baseball club in Louisville. Besides Browning, its list of regulars

numbered future major-league star Fred Pfeffer, rated by experts as one of the 19th-century's two best second-basemen (Hall-of-Famer Bid McPhee is the other).

The steadily-developing Browning, according to existent records, continued to play third and bat in the lead-off slot. And, though the Eclipse did not go unbeaten in 1880, they most certainly did have a phenomenal campaign. Virtually invincible, they were as hard to deal with as a fastball on a hot summer's day: a stream of thin, white sewing thread ominously unraveling in the blinding sunlight.

Here is a sampling of some 17 games, from June through October, 16 of which were won by the Eclipse. The results are a testament to the team's power and Browning's hitting talents, which included ten multi-hit games and one collar, a zero-for-four contest on September 12.

- June 20: two hits, one run in 6-3 win over the Red Stockings
- June 23: four hits, one double, five runs in 28-0 stampede of Evansville
- June 24: two hits, 2 runs in 9-1 win over Evansville
- June 27: one hit in a 12-inning, 1-0 victory against Covington
- July 4: three-for-four, one double, one run, 5-1 win against the Cincinnati Americus
- July 5: one-for-four, one run, lost 7-5 to the Cincinnati Buckeyes
- July 11: three-for-six, beat Red Stockings 1-0 in 12 innings
- July 19: two-for-five, one run, defeated Covington 12-0
- July 25: one-for-five, one double, one run in 8-7 defeat of the New Orleans Lone Stars
- July 26: two-for-four, one double, one run in 3-1 win versus the New Orleans Lone Stars
- August 15: two-for-four, one double; 5-1 win over the Cincinnati Wirths
- August 22: One of the more unusual lines you'll ever see for Browning or any other ballplayer. One-for-six, but five runs scored in a 20-1 rout of the Cincinnati Alerts.
- August 29: three-for-five, one run in 6-0 win against the Ohio Columbias
- September 12: zero-for-four in 5-0 win against the Cincinnati Ravens
- September 20: one-for-four, one double, one run in 3-0 shutout of St. Louis Brown Stockings.
- October 10: three-for-five, one triple, one run, 11-3 victory over the Cincinnati Stars
- October 17: one-for-four, one run in 5-1 season-closing win over the Cincinnati Buckeyes

1881

In 1881, the year the Red Cross was founded and Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute, Browning signed his first professional contract for $60 a month. That campaign, which opened with a 9-4 win over the Cincinnati Ravens on Sunday, April 24, was hallmarked by a host of signature events.

One was a 19-inning marathon contest between the Eclipse and the Akrons at Eclipse Park before a packed house of 2,500 fans on Sunday, June 26. In the seventh, Browning tied up the game with a double to the left off a hanging curve, his lone hit in eight at-bats.

That was it for the scoring. The protracted contest was called a 2-2 draw because of darkness, and subsequently replayed as a nine-inning game. Remarkably, Browning played the entire set and that constituted a quick comeback for Browning, who had missed the previous day's game because of a serious, but undescribed illness. The Courier-Journal described the situation this way in 'Diamond Dust', their post-game notes section: "Pete Browning has about given up all idea of playing any more this season. His physician says it won't do."

The tie game wasn't the first time that season Browning's health had come into issue. In a Sunday, May 22 game, an obviously distressed Browning came to the plate in the ninth with the Eclipse down 9-8 against the Chicago Athletes. Browning got a four-run ninth going with a double that plated two runs, and the Louisville club went on to take a 12-9 victory.

The following morning's Courier-Journal played it for all it was worth with a story billed as "Browning's Last Call". That was followed by a supporting headline that read: "A Sick Man Saves The Day For The Eclipse, And Defeats The Chicago Visitors."

The early-season problems resolved themselves shortly thereafter, and a stabilized Browning went through the rest of the season without any more major health conflicts. The only things that changed were his positions, shortstop and third base, and his slot in the batting order: first, second and third.

A representative sampling of 38 regular-season games from April through October broke down this way: 18 games at third base, number two in the lineup; 14 games at shortstop, batting third; twice at third base and batting leadoff; three times at third base and batting third in the lineup; and once batting second while playing third and the outfield.

Certainly, Browning's best overall offensive games were a pair of five-hit games July 31 and August 15. The former spearheaded a 24-4 bombardment of the Covington Stars, and Browning's five-for-six line also included three runs scored. The latter featured a perfect five-for-five line, a double, and one run scored in a 15-7 blowout against yet another strong Windy City contingent, the Chicago Eckfords.

The work was reflective of a powerhouse team that during the 1881 campaign met a dazzling array of regional and national clubs. By season's end, the roster of vanquished teams read like a who's who: the Cincinnati Ravens, the Philadelphia Athletics (forerunner of the 1882 American Association major-league team by the same name), the Chicago Athletes, the Cincinnati Buckeyes, the Cincinnati Columbias, the Chicago Emmetts, the St. Louis Red Stockings (also called the Reds), the Ohio Akrons (featuring soon-to-be major-league stars Ed Swartwood and the previously mentioned Bid McPhee), the Chicago Lakeviews, the Chicago Dreadnaughts, the Covington Stars, the Chicago Eckfords, the Cleveland White Sewing Machine Company, the Cleveland White Stockings, the Cincinnati Stars, the Chicago North Ends, the Brooklyn Atlantics, the St. Louis Browns and the New Orleans Lees.

The 8-4 Eclipse win over the last-named in mid-November brought both the Louisville team's post-season Southern tour, and very long season, to an apparent end.

Several names in particular on this list stand out.

One was the Chicago North Ends, whom the Eclipse met on September 11 and 12. According to the Louisville Courier-Journal, this was not your average Chicago club. Rather, it was an amalgam of four Chicago teams which had been manhandled by the Eclipse earlier in the season: the Emmetts, the Lakeviews, the Dreadnaughts and the Eckfords.

The combination didn't work any better than the individual teams had. Like the others, the Eclipse dispatched the North Ends quite effectively, beating them 9-4 and then blowing them out 17-0, the game being called after seven innings for obvious reasons.

Then, there were the highly-acclaimed Brooklyn Atlantics, who came in for a four-game set less than a week after the contests with the Chicago North Ends. After losing the opener to the Atlantics 3-2 on an eighth-inning home run, the Eclipse racked up 9-3, 9-2 and 4-3 victories. Browning's best anti-Brooklyn Atlantics work came in the finale when he went three-for-five with a double.

The official 1881 campaign concluded the following month on Sunday, October 9, the season ending the way it had begun. With a sound victory over the Cincinnati Ravens. Only this time, Browning—collared in the late-April seasonal opener, the aforementioned 9-4 victory—got a piece of the action. In the 7-3 closing-day win, Browning went three-for-five and scored two runs.

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No game during the 1881 campaign had greater ramifications than did a long-forgotten August 21 contest against the White Sewing Machine Company team of Cleveland, Ohio.

Though the Eclipse won 6-3, the victory came under extenuating and frighteningly ugly circumstances. The Ohio squad was forced to compete without their best player, a black catcher named Moses Fleetwood Walker, whose race brought objections from several Louisville players. Browning was <u>not</u> one of them according to the newspaper accounts. The "unlevel playing field" action was decried in numerous quarters, by the Louisville Courier-Journal, the fans and even a Louisville baseball executive.

All to no avail.

The following morning, the Courier-Journal ran their story under a principal headline that read "A Disabled Club", with one of the supporting headlines reading: "An Uncalled For Exhibition Of Prejudice On The Field Towards A Quadroon."

More than a century later, the story still has all of its raw and lethal edge.

"There were between 2,000 and 3,000 persons present to see the game at Eclipse Park yesterday between the ballplayers of the White Sewing Machine Company of Cleveland, Ohio and the home nine. What promised to be a very exciting game, turned out to be a very ordinary one. The Clevelands have won a fine reputation this season, and the score of six to three in favor of the Eclipse was not earned against the visitors on merit.

"The score might have told a very different story but for an incident which occurred during the second inning in which a great deal of feeling was exhibited, and which caused considerable comment of an unfavorable nature upon the conduct of the Eclipse Club.

"The Cleveland Club brought with them a catcher for their nine a young quadroon named Walker. The first trouble they experienced from Kentucky prejudice was at the St. Cloud Hotel yesterday morning at breakfast, when Walker was refused accommodations. When the club appeared on the field for practice before the game, the managers and one of the players of the Eclipse Club objected to Walker playing on account of his color. In vain, the Clevelands protested that he was their regular catcher, and that his withdrawal would weaken the nine.

"The prejudice of the Eclipse was either too strong, or they feared Walker, who has earned the reputation of being the best amateur catcher in the Union. He has played against the League clubs, and in many games with other white clubs, without protest. The Louisville managers decided that he could not play, and the Clevelands were compelled to substitute West.

"During the first inning, West was 'burned out' by the terrific pitching of Jones, and when the Eclipse went to bat in the second inning, after one or two efforts, West said he could not face the balls with his hands so badly bruised, and refused to fill the position.

"The very large crowd of people present, who saw that the Clevelands were a strong nine laboring under disadvantage, at once set up a cry in good nature for 'the n—'. Vice President Carroll, of the Eclipse, walked down in the field and called on Walker to come and play.

"The quadroon was disinclined to do so, after the general ill-treatment he had received; but as the game seemed to be in danger of coming to an end, he consented, and started in the catcher's stand. As he passed before the grand stand, he was greeted with cheers, and from the crowd rose cries of 'Walker, Walker!'. He still hesitated, but finally threw off his coat and vest and stepped out to catch a ball or two and feel the bases.

"He made several brilliant throws and fine catches while the game waited. Then Johnnie Reccius and Fritz Pfeffer, of the Eclipse nine, walked off the field and went to the club house, while others objected to the playing of the quadroon.

"The crowd was so pleased with his practice, however, that it cheered him again and again and insisted that he play. The objection of the Eclipse players, however, was too much and Walker was compelled to retire. When it was seen that he was not to play, the crowd cheered heartily and very properly hissed the Eclipse club, and jeered their misplays for several innings, while the visitors, for whom White consented to catch, obviously under disadvantages, were cheered to the echo.

"Jones, the pitcher, was not supported adequately, and if Walker had caught, it is probable the Eclipse would have been defeated. It was a very small part of business, particularly when Walker was brought out as a substitute for a disabled man and invited to play by the Vice President of the Eclipse, who acted very properly in the matter.

"The Clevelands acted foolishly in playing. They should have declined to play unless Walker was admitted and entered suit for gate money and damages. They could have made their point because it was understood that Walker was catcher, and no rules provide for the rejection of players on account of 'race, color, or previous condition of servitude.' The crowd was anxious to see Walker play, and there was no social question concerned.

"Walker shook the dust of Louisville from his feet last night and went home. The succeeding games will be totally uninteresting, since without him the Clevelands are not able to play the Eclipse a good game."

Walker is an epic figure in American baseball history, and in the eyes of many, its single greatest casualty.

Several years later, the former Oberlin College diamond standout became the first black major-leaguer in baseball history, making his debut on May 1, 1884, ironically in of all places—Louisville. Two days later, Fleet Walker got his first major-league hit, a single, in that same city.

An historic picture featuring the first two known black major-leaguers—Moses Fleetwood "Fleet" Walker (middle, far left) and his brother, Welday Wilberforce "Weldy" Walker (rear, second from right)—as members of the 1881 Oberlin College team. (National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.)

For the record, the *second* black major-leaguer was none other than Fleet Walker's brother, Welday Wilberforce "Weldy" Walker, a star along with his brother on the Oberlin baseball team. This progressive state was short-lived though. After that ground-breaking and historic 1884 American Association campaign, no blacks played major-league baseball again until Jackie Robinson re-integrated big-top baseball in 1947. It is interesting to note that Kentucky's strong connections with both these black pioneers: Fleet Walker for the aforementioned reason and Robinson, via future Hall-of-Fame Dodger shortstop Pee Wee Reese, who did so much to ease Robinson's transition into major-league baseball. Moreover, that major-league career was affected by another Kentucky native and future Cooperstown resident, A.B. "Happy" Chandler, the Baseball Commissioner who broke the color line.

Revisionist historians notwithstanding, Walker's existence is a matter of documented historical fact. As is something else. His unparalleled talent.

A crackerjack bare-handed catcher who possessed a shotgun arm, Walker was a dependable singles hitter who exhibited speed and élan on the basepaths. In the only season he ever played, his average was .263, a full 23 points above the league average. And just how good Walker was can also be gauged by the quality of his backup. That was Deacon McGuire, who went on to catch over 1,600 games in an extraordinary, record-setting 26-year major-league career.

Where Fleet Walker would have gone as a ballplayer will never be known. But where he went as a blacklisted ballplayer and tortured soul we do know.

In 1887, Walker joined Newark of the International League (a minor-league circuit), forming with star George Stovey the first black battery in organized baseball. It was a real piece of work, as Stovey, the first, great black pitcher in American baseball annals, reeled off a 34-14 record.

Walker's last season in organized baseball was in 1889 with Syracuse in the International League.

In 1908, he published a book entitled "Our Home Colony", a book which called for black emigration back to Africa as the only alternative to racial prejudice. His publishing career also included a newspaper, The Equator. Towards the end of his life, he was tried and acquitted of second-degree murder charges following an attack by a convicted burglar, whom he had killed with a knife in self-defense.

Of all the game's black players, Moses Fleetwood Walker suffered the most, was damaged the worst, paid the highest price. Because he was the first. The blame for Walker's disintegration as first a ballplayer and then a man and citizen does not belong on the shoulders of everyone, just the mantle of those who supported and expedited his situation, either passively or actively.

It is simplistic jingoism to say that Walker was the victim of racial prejudice. This is too narrow a scope, "cartoon/tabloid" history that only recognizes his ethnicity, but not his inherently greater worth as a human being. It shows no regard for the true nature of the beast and simultaneously fails to identify the single-most important element in this crime. His color is ancillary, a sidebar. The loss *wasn't* a potentially great black catcher. It was a potentially *great catcher*. Period.

This is the way it really plays out.

When you strip a man of his livelihood, you deprive him of his life. And that is the most profound socio-economic sanction that you can impose on another human being, and its consequences are severe and undeniable You leave that individual without a trade, a future, or hope. Naked and defenseless in a relentless world that takes no prisoners, and prey for hyena-like predators. In the end, this type of behavior erodes the very fabric of free society, whose lifeblood and standard-bearers are dynamic individuals who enable it to operate at maximum strength and efficiency. Like Moses Fleetwood Walker.

This is a living death, and it has a visceral parallel in the form of another American icon and hero: the cowboy.

In the days of the more linear and less complex western society (black and white, no grays), stealing a horse was tantamount to death. Thus, the punishment for stealing a man's horse was as capital as you can get. Hanging. And, with damn good reason.

Bereft of his horse, he had no transportation, no pistol or rifle for self-defense or hunting of wild game, no food, no water, no shelter, no blankets, no bedroll, no rain poncho, no rope, no fire-making materials. No nothing. And, if the thieves had been particularly sadistic, no boots or hat. A hostile terrain, like a desert, further magnified the gravity of the situation. They might as well gone on and shot him, because when they stole his horse, he was as good as dead. With virtually no chance for survival, which they knew. And, that's murder, plain and simple.

Even felony exile is easier than what was imposed on Walker (1856-1924) and all the other black players of his time. Common criminals who have been deported back to their own country only lost their place in which to conduct their illegal business. They can still run their operations in absentia, just not in America. Walker, by contrast, had no place to go. He was an exile in his own country.

The signature of the 1881 Louisville/White Sewing Machine Company game is this. That day in Louisville, his foes proved that the ugliest thing in the world is deliberate human cruelty, and it takes all forms, shapes, sizes, colors and designs.

Dragging Walker—and unwittingly, all of baseball—to the edge of a mighty precipice, they made him feel like the loneliest man in the world; let him swing in his quiet desperation briefly and tauntingly; and then shoved him over the side without so much as a thought about what they were doing. Though he came back to play some

organized baseball later, including a year's worth of major-league baseball, Walker had been mortally wounded and by the end of the decade, he and all others like him were gone from the game.

In committing this horrific act, these grotesque thugs violated the cardinal rule of life: that we need to get along with one other because, as the man once said, we're all in this together, and nobody gets out alive.

Nobody.

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Sometime late in September of 1881, The Gladiator laid the groundwork for his lifelong battle with the press.

On July 2, Charles Guiteau had shot newly-elected President James A. Garfield in Washington's Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station. This was this country's second Presidential assassination, and it came from Garfield's own party no less. Occurring in a bloody year that also included Pat Garrett's gunning down of Billy The Kid, and the fight at the O.K. Corral between the Earps and the Clantons in Tombstone, Arizona, Guiteau's crime had deep and bitter roots.

The year before, Garfield had become the Republican Party's Presidential candidate after they had unsuccessfully tried to run General U.S. Grant for a third consecutive term. The result created deep divisions within the party, and Guiteau, a disappointed office-seeker and Republican factionalist, was reflective of that hatred and animosity.

Lingering for several months, Garfield finally died on September 19. Subsequently informed of Garfield's death, so the ageless (and undocumented) "story"goes, Browning queried an astonished reporter: "Oh, yeah? What league was he in?"

Later as a major-leaguer, he would gain the monicker of "The Gladiator" for his battles with the press, flyballs and his pathological alcoholism, best phrased by another memorable quote (also unreferenced): "I can't hit the ball until I hit the bottle!".

The colorful character material didn't stop there. There was more, loads more.

In Browning's 1905 Louisville Times obituary, teammate and long-time friend John Reccius recounted an oddity of The Gladiator's playing: "Pete was afraid of players coming in on the bases. He had a habit, too, of standing on one foot and extending the other knee if he saw a fielder approaching him.

"He always declared that if the man ran into the bone (the knee), he would be put out of business and 'Old Pete' would escape injury.

"After Pete went to the outfield, he would often catch a ball standing on one leg, with the other knee extended. Browning was also timid at the bat when the speedy pitchers were putting them in close."

That peculiar defense was partially explained in Browning's Courier-Journal obituary. "He was one of the best infielders who ever played on Louisville, but he lost his nerve after being run over and spiked by players on several occasions and was shifted to the outfield, where he always played after that time."

The Times obituary also provided several other rich tidbits on Browning and his batwork. "Old Pete enjoyed notoriety. When traveling over the circuit, the gladiator would frequently alight from the train and exhibit himself to people at the station, and if no one recognized him, he would introduce himself as the champion batter of the American Association. He has been known to impart his identity to a lone station agent."

Another paragraph noted Browning's personal statistics keeping.

"'Old Pete' kept his average on his cuffs. At night, he would transfer the figures to a book. Nobody could figure Pete's average but himself."

And, Pete Browning wasn't crazy about sliding, either, most likely for the same reason he played "ultra-defensive" baseball defense: a fear of being spiked.

The same Times obituary produced this gem from William Reccius, brother of John Reccius.

"Will Reccius tells a humorous incident in connection with Pete's inability to slide. Captain Dyler had ordered Browning to slide and gave him to understand that if he did not, he would be fined. That night, Pete told his troubles to Mr. Reccius as follows:

"Dyler fined 'Old Pete' fifty cents. 'Old Pete' can't slide, no use talkin'. Don't care if he fines me a dollar and a half, ain't going to slide. See if I do.'"

Illiterate, deaf, eccentric, and a defensive liability (although the last has been wildly blown out of proportion), The Gladiator was nonetheless well on his way towards becoming one of the game's great legends. A classic who was just a year away from exploding into major stardom.

However, Browning's emergence as an epic baseball figure was not by accident, but rather by design, reflective of the city and the times that birthed him. Larger than life in every way, Browning was so because the stage that served as his backdrop was larger still.

II
BROWNING'S LAND

Louisville's venerable and panoramic baseball history dates all the way back to 1858 when the city's first known published boxscores appeared in the July 15th issue of the Louisville Democrat.

That well supercedes Louisville's long-accepted beginning of July 19, 1865 when the city of Louisville witnessed its first organized baseball game as the Louisville Eagles met the Nashville Cumberlands in an open field that is today 19th and Duncan. Louisville triumphed 22-5. (NOTE: Because of its use by numerous sources and its detail, this item is included here. However, this game has yet to be documented by news accounts and/or a scoring summary, that unquestionably the result of an erroneous date.)

By the next year, the young team played at a diamond bounded by Third, Fifth, Oak and Park streets, although the ballpark soon was moved to a site now occupied by St. James Court.

That storybook history continued with a series of games against the fabled Cincinnati Red Stockings of 1869-1870: the sport's first professional baseball team. That is, the game's first "play-for-pay" or contracted baseball assemblage.

Louisville got the worst of it, the most egregious example being an April 21, 1870 contest between the Louisville Eagles and the Red Stockings, in which Louisville was demolished 94-7.

It really was nothing to be ashamed of. Approximately a month later, on May 23, 1870, the Cincinnati powerhouse destroyed the Lexington Onions 74-0.

Other available Louisville-Cincinnati boxscores include a 58-9 lancing on November 3, 1869—Cincinnati playing with just *eight* men, and a return contest the following day, the Kentucky Picked Nine being whipped 40-10.

In its formative and early years, Louisville also had its share of black teams. The city's first black baseball team were the Globes, who on September 16, 1874 played a charity game for yellow fever sufferers, shaming a pair of white clubs into following suit to avoid, in the words of the Louisville Courier-Journal, "being outdone by the darkly-completed portion of the human race."

Contemporaries of the Globes numbered the Acorns and the prosaically-named Black Diamonds.

In early December of 1875, the National League—this country's oldest, continuously-active major-league circuit—was co-founded by Chicago baseball magnate William Hulbert in Louisville.

There, he secretly met with representatives of the other three 'western" clubs: St. Louis, Cincinnati and Louisville. Armed with their proxies, Hulbert completed the establishment of the new circuit the following February in New York City, when he met with the representatives of the four "eastern" teams: New York, Boston, Hartford (Conn.) and Philadelphia.

Yet, despite its major part in the establishment of the National League, of which it was also a charter member, Louisville has never received its just due. This is the result principally of New York City's long heralding itself as the birthplace of the National League. However, nothing could be further from the truth than this warped view, which over a matter of time, has become accepted as the gospel truth.

That position has as much validity as the claim that Abner Doubleday invented the game of baseball in Cooperstown, New York. In point of fact, Doubleday was a cadet at West Point at the time of the alleged Cooperstown incident.

Indeed, about the only thing that these two specious claims prove beyond the shadow of a doubt is that when it comes to historical claim-jumping, New York City has no peer—absolutely none whatsoever—as the game's greatest historical thief.

Having dispensed with the falsehood that New York City founded the National League, that leaves two other options standing, both of them interesting and with great merit.

Many contend that Louisville and New York City share the honor. That is, they are co-founders, that opinion based on the solid, historical precept that the National League founding could not have been done without both of them. This is absolutely true, considering the logistics of the situation: four "western" and four "eastern" teams.

However, there is a third belief about the National League's founding, which is perhaps the most radical of all. That is the contention that Louisville was the outright founder of the National League.

A notable advocate of that viewpoint is the renowned baseball writer and historian, Harold Seymour, who boldly stated in his classic work, *Baseball: The Early Years*: "At Louisville, Hulbert and (St. Louis owner Charles) Fowle were appointed a committee with full power to act for the Western clubs and given the job of going east to negotiate with the Eastern teams they wanted to include. Louisville, therefore, was the real birthplace of the National league, not New York City."

This is not an isolated quote. Part of a baseball item from the Sunday, March 27, 1892 issue of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* says: "It is not well known that the first meeting of the National League was held in this city, at the Louisville Hotel." (The correct site is discussed later in this chapter.)

Today, the various supporters are still divided into three distinct camps, two of which have credibility. No-nonsense hard-liners like Seymour, acknowledged by many as the game's greatest scholar and the namesake of one of this country's finest baseball research awards, say that Louisville founded the National League.

Compromise artists say that Louisville, along with New York, co-founded the National League, the most reasonable assessment when all the factors are weighed in.

The third group, which adheres to the line that New York City founded the National League, is occupied solely by criminal historical plunderers and dysfunctional revisionists.

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Louisville began its major-league play by losing its opener at home on Tuesday, April 25, 1876 before some 6,000 fans to the Chicago White Stockings, the National League's inaugural flagwinner.

The Chicago club was a powerhouse that included the league's champion pitcher in Albert Spalding; the loop's champion batter in Ross Barnes; and future Hall-of-Fame first-sacker Cap Anson, the first man to collect 3,000 hits. After a brief hiatus, a revised Chicago club came back in the 1880s and became the game's first dynasty. In the space of seven years, they churned out five flags behind the likes of Anson, George Gore, Billy Sunday, and eventual Hall-of-Famer King Kelly. The club also featured a first-flight infield. Nicknamed "The Stone Wall" by foes who viewed it as virtually hit-proof, its second-sacker was Louisville native Fred Pfeffer.

The opening-day score was 4-0, and was the first shutout in National League and thus, major-league history. The pitcher of record for the Louisville Grays was the brilliant Jimmy Devlin, a rising gold-and-silver-laden star who destroyed himself the following season.

The inaugural 1876 campaign ended the way it had begun—with a loss, Louisville dropping an 11-2 decision on Thursday, October 5, 1876 at home to the Hartford Dark Blues behind James Clinton.

Favored to win the 1877 National League pennant, the Louisville franchise suffered a late-season tailspin, that initially attributed to poor hitting and star pitcher Jimmy Devlin's bout with a case of the boils.

Instead, they ran a disappointing second to the Boston Red Caps. After the season, the reason became clear: a mammoth game-fixing scandal that ultimately led to Louisville's ignominious departure from the National League and the lifetime expulsion of five Louisville players: utility infielder Al Nichols, outfielder George Bechtel, shortstop Bill Craver, outfielder George Hall and pitcher Jimmy Devlin. It was a particularly cruel blow to a city who was both a charter member and co-founder of the league.

The scandal's damage also reached quarters far beyond the team. One prime example was Walter N. Haldeman, one of the city's most prominent citizens. Publisher of the renowned Louisville Courier-Journal and President of the National League Louisville Baseball Club, he had been encouraged by his son, John Avery Haldeman, to give more space in the newspaper to baseball.

This was far from partisanship. Buoyed by the additions of such players as Hall, first-baseman Juice Latham, center fielder Bill Crowley and right fielder Orator Shaffer, the 1877 Louisville Grays sported a new look that made it a major contender for the flag in the eyes of many.

Briefly a member of the 1877 Louisville National League outfit, it was the younger Haldeman, oddly enough, who broke the story of the scandal. At the heart of the scandal were telegrams sent to Devlin that contained the code word "sash", indicating that a game should be thrown.

The losses of Nichols and Bechtel were inconsequential. A utility infielder who batted .211 during the season, Nichols had a history of associating with gamblers. He later defied his ban by playing some minor-league baseball, then faded into obscurity.

Likewise, Bechtel was also a meaningless player, although he "had a history" as they say, none of it good and all of it a harbinger of vile things to come. Investigated the season before for shady play following several questionable games, Bechtel was given the option of resigning or being expelled. He adamantly denied any wrongdoing and chose to fight it out.

Unquestionably, the pair of games had no bearing on the 1876 pennant race because certainly no one was going to deny Chicago that season. Nonetheless, at stake was one of the cardinal principles behind Hulbert's establishment of the new league: unimpeachable honesty on the parts of all concerned. After all, this was the National League, not its rickety and corrupt predecessor—the National Association, where Bechtel had played prior to coming to Louisville and where thievery was the rule, not the exception. As time would quickly prove, however, the Bechtel incident was merely a prelude to the 1877 National League pennant-fixing scandal, the game's first great scandal.

The departures of the other three players, however, were an entirely different matter. Craver was a quality shortstop who batted .265 in 1877. The only mark against the 35-year-old player was his age.

The losses of Hall and Devlin were the most egregious and devastating. Both were 28, in the prime of their careers, and in their respective entities, bona-fide stars with bright futures.

The runner-up in the 1876 inaugural National League batting race with a .365 average for Philadelphia, Hall had led the neophyte circuit that year in home runs. The kind of sterling power hitter that is the lifeblood of every successful team, the British native (1849-1923) had come back in 1877 to rank among the league leaders with a .323 average.

His 1877 platework also included runnerup positions in total bases, slugging average and triples. Hall's career resume also included play with the 1874 National Association champion Boston Red Stockings. The game's first major-league circuit (1871-1875), the NA had birthed the sport's first dynasty in that Boston club, which took four straight NA flags, 1872-1875.

Devlin was no less a great one.

Indeed, if there was a centerpiece of the Louisville team in those years, it was Devlin, who literally was their only pitcher both seasons. In 1876, he pitched all but one of Louisville's 66 games and all 60 in 1877, that mammoth work a reflection of the early years of the sport.

A 30-game winner with Louisville both years he pitched for them, 30-35 in 1876 and 35-25 in 1877, Devlin also led the team in hitting in 1876 with a .315 average. That year, he also led the league in games (66), complete games (66), strikeouts (122), and innings pitched (a gargantuan 622 frames). In addition, he also finished second in the ERA race (1.56) and he was fourth in wins (30).

Devlin undoubtedly would have done better in 1876 had he not lost a major-league record 14 shutouts; he was 5-14 in such contests. Furthermore, Devlin still holds the major-league mark for most losses in a season by a rookie pitcher.

The next year, in 1877, Devlin again led the National League in games (61), complete games (61) and innings pitched (559). He also finished second in wins (35), win percentage (.583) and strikeouts (141), and his 2.25 ERA was the third-highest in the National League.

The last years of Devlin, a man who literally threw away a fabulous pitching career, were perhaps the most anguished and pathetic of the scored quintet. Following the ban, Devlin made numerous pleas for re-instatement. He was denied it every time. Devlin returned to his native Philadelphia, where oddly enough, he became a policeman. He died there in 1883 of tuberculosis.

He was all of 34.

Long after the fact, the scandal made for interesting copy, as evidenced by this baseball note from the Courier-Journal of Sunday morning, August 31, 1890.

"The National League was formed in 1876. The following season, five men were expelled form the Louisville club for admitted dealing with a pool-room keeper in New York named McCloud, who had an agent in Boston.

"The prompt expulsion of Devlin, Hall, Craver, Nichols and Bechtel by the directors of the Louisville club was a good lesson to the men who remained to make their living out of baseball.

"Devlin died almost broken-hearted after working for years in vain to get the League to re-instate him.

"Craver, one of the men who was expelled without positive proof, is now a policeman at his old home in Troy. George Hall is working at his trade, a silversmith, in Brooklyn.

"Nichols is still trying to get back. At the last League meeting, he had a petition before that body praying for a hearing. The League has yet to re-instate an expelled player.

"George Bechtel is somewhere about West Philadelphia."

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The 1877 flag-throwing fiasco was a startling contrast to the elegant home of the 1876 and 1877 Louisville National League club, a ballpark which had been modelled after the handsome Hartford (Conn.) Ball Club Grounds.

During its two decades in the major leagues, Louisville used three ballparks. In a sidebar note that is reflective of Louisville's somewhat bizarre major-league history, all three of the city's major-league ballparks were either catastrophically damaged or destroyed.

Louisville's first two major-league teams, the 1876 and 1877 squads, played at a ballpark located at St. James Court. Later, that area served as the site of the 1883 Southern Exposition. Opened by President Chester A. Arthur on August 1, 1883, the fabulously successful exposition ran through 1887. A palatial mansion district since the 1890s, St. James Court today is one of the finest examples of extant of Victorian architecture.

Known as the Louisville Baseball Park, as well as St, James Court, the sporting facility was located just a few blocks south of downtown Louisville. Its boundaries were Magnolia, Fourth, Hill and Sixth Streets; home plate was at the intersection of Fourth and Hill.

In mid-April of 1876, the ballpark's grandstand was heavily damaged by a tornado. The violent storm, however, did not delay the season opener and the city's major-league debut on April 25, 1876. Just over a week later, Louisville posted its first major-league victory, crushing St. Louis 11-0 at home.

Eclipse Park, Louisville's second big-league ballpark, was used by the city during its entire American Association membership (1882-1891) and briefly during its second National League stint (1892-1899). Located at Twenty-Eighth and Elliott on the city's west side, it was destroyed by fire in late September of 1892.

The city's third and last big-top ballpark, also called Eclipse Park, was located at Twenty-Eighth and Broadway, across the street from the original Eclipse Park. Used by Louisville during the bulk of its second National League tenure, it too fell victim to a fire, that blaze occurring somewhat prophetically during Louisville's last major-league season.

Like the two before it, Louisville's last major-league ballpark disaster was a direct product of the wooden style that characterized the game's early sporting edifices.

The cost of the conflagration was enormous. Because of the fire, the Louisville club was forced to play the last six weeks of its concluding major-league campaign on the road. Also known as League Park, Eclipse Park II hosted Louisville's and Kentucky's last major-league game on September 2, 1899, Louisville blasting Washington 25-4.

Regarding its team name, Louisville was known officially as the "Louisvilles" during all but two years of its major-league existence. The exceptions were the 1882 and 1883 seasons, when the franchise was known as the Louisville Eclipse, retaining the name of the city's crack semi-pro club that reigned supreme locally before Louisville became a member of the American Association. That name is a reference to a famous 18th-century racehorse and sire, who is the foundation sire of Thoroughbred Racing.

Other nicknames included the "Grays" (1876 and 1877), believed to be a reference to the gray uniforms the South had worn during the Civil War, and the "Cyclones", after a violent windstorm that cut up the city in 1890, the year Louisville captured its only major-league pennant and appeared in its only World Series.

Its most politically-charged nickname was the "Night Raiders". This was a reference to the Kentucky tobacco wars of the 1890s. During that time, tobacco companies gave unusually low prices for tobacco; some farmers struck back at the big tobacco interests. Their battles also included "night raids" against fellow tobacco farmers who went along with the pricing system of the tobacco companies.

The final nickname was the "Wanderers", in 1899, when the city spent the last month and a half of the city's final major-league season on the road after fire destroyed the city's ballpark.

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Louisville's position as a great American city, and thus as a major-league baseball town, was the product of sound geography.

Founded in 1778, it was named Louisville the following year in honor of Louis XVI (1754-1793), the French king (1774-1793) who had aided the cause of the American colonies during the Revolutionary War. Granted "city status" by the Kentucky legislature in 1828, it became the state's largest city two years later and remains so today.

Located on the Ohio River, just above the point where that river pours into the Mississippi River, Louisville was originally a frontier settlement. Its growth was a direct product of westward expansion since the Ohio River was both a major conveyor of people and goods.

The first big break for Louisville was the Louisiana Purchase in the spring of 1803 (with the famed Lewis & Clark Expedition of that acquisition commencing later that year when Meriwether Lewis met up with William Clark in Louisville). That freed navigation to the sea, the lower Mississippi and New Orleans, a major shipping lane which had been previously held by the Spanish. That in turn made Louisville a vital link in the shipping of goods between the deep South and the big cities of the North.

The chain was forged permanently in 1830 with the construction of the Portland Canal. The canal opened the way for free and unrestricted traffic from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. Prior to that, boats had disembarked in Louisville, then re-entered the Ohio River below the Falls of the Ohio.

As a result, Louisville was transformed from a frontier outpost to first a booming river town, then to an essential port city along the heavily-trafficked Ohio River.

The city grew substantially with the advent of railroads in the mid-1800s. That form of transportation changed the face of the country, sparking a slow shift of the nation's major transportation mode from water to land. Goods could be transported much more quickly and directly via railroads, and Louisville was a part of it all via the Louisville & Nashville (L&N) Railroad, founded in 1850 so that Louisville could maintain its mercantile economy.

A logical consequence of this commerce was growth, and at one time, Louisville ranked as one of America's biggest cities. By the end of the 19th century, though, Louisville had stagnated, bypassed by such cities as Cincinnati, a major competitor for southern trade and at one time the pork capital of the world; Chicago, still the railroad crossroads of America, and at one time, a major venue for stockyards and steel mills; Pittsburgh, an industrial giant nicknamed "Iron City"; and St. Louis, yet another mid-America Mecca because of its location at the doorsteps of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.

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Besides Pete Browning, early Louisville baseball produced five other national baseball figures in Larry Gatto (1856-1910), Alton Kolb (1864-1948), Zack Phelps (1857-1901), John McCloskey (1862-1940), and Harry Pulliam (1869-1909). Contemporaries of Browning and towering figures in their time, they are all virtually anonymous today. It is a barometer of how much of the game's earliest and most priceless history has been lost.

Larry Gatto

Born on Christmas Day of 1855 in Genoa, Italy, Gatto had two principal passions in life: his saloon business and the game of baseball. By any and all standards, Gatto was an unqualified success at both ventures.

At the time of his death in Louisville at age 54, Gatto was reported by the Louisville Courier-Journal to be the wealthiest saloonkeeper in the city. Much of this success had come from "an oyster with each drink", a marketing tool which had made Gatto nationally famous.

Another part of Gatto's success was the fact that he ran a clean operation. Simply put, the saloons of this devout Catholic were just that: a place for good food and drink, and no more.

A respected businessman, upstanding citizen and solid family man, Gatto was also well-known in the community for his generosity to charities. Certainly, Gatto had not come easy to his prosperity, which at the time of his passing was reported by the Louisville Courier-Journal to be in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars. Immigrating to this country with his family, the Gatto clan initially settled in Boston, then moved to New Orleans, before finally staking roots in Louisville.

To help the family make ends meet, Gatto was forced to leave school at an early age. It was reported by the Louisville Courier-Journal in its obituary of Monday, April 18, 1910 that Gatto had begun life with a bundle of newspapers under one arm and a bootblack's kit over his shoulder. He was the classic Horatio Alger rags-to-riches story in every way.

A man whose saloons were considered to be a model in that business and hailed as an innovator in modern saloon methods, Gatto was well-known in both local and national baseball circles.

According to reports, his friends in baseball numbered in the dozens, and included some of the most prominent figures of the day. A "hands-on baseball man", Gatto also owned parts of several of Louisville's major-league teams, one of them the 1890 co-World Championship squad. And, during one season in the 1880s, he acted as the unofficial Business Manager of the Louisville major-league team, traveling with the club, paying bills, and buying and releasing players.

Also, for years there was a crackerjack amateur nine in Louisville named after Gatto. And at the turn of the century, when the city was desperately trying to save its major-league franchise, he was also a leader. When it could not be recovered, Gatto again was a leader in bringing top-ring minor-league baseball to Louisville.

Gatto's name runs even deeper than that in the city's baseball history.

For years, his saloon on Liberty Street (formerly Green Street) was—according to some accounts—the site of the secret 1875 Louisville/National League meetings. However, that fact was not historically documented until the summer of 2005 with the discovery of critical information in Al Kolb's obituary (see succeeding profile).

As a result, between Gatto's and Kolb's obituaries, it is now known exactly what part Gatto's saloon played in the 1875 Louisville/National League founding story. And with it, everything falls into place and ties up a number of longstanding loose ends.

First of all, the meetings unquestionably took place at Gatto's saloon. Whatever question remains about that historical fact in Gatto's obituary is answered in Kolb's obituary.

Secondly, the address of one of Louisville's most famous watering holes—for years only generally known—has been fixed as 323 West Liberty Street (information unearthed in Al Kolb's obituary).

Thirdly, the long-historically accepted site—the Louisville Hotel—simply housed the members of this secret commission, whose members went on to establish this country's oldest consecutively operated league, the National League.

And, finally, convenient as it might be, the Galt House—a venerable landmark still in existence today and then located five blocks east of the Louisville Hotel, was not the site of the meetings nor did it house any member of the committee.

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The whereabouts of the original of this ancient photograph is unknown; its value, however, is unquestioned despite its heavy water damage.

You are looking at the single-most valuable picture in all of Louisville baseball history because it is the only known photograph of the 1877 National League Louisville Grays, and prior to 2006 when it was discovered, it was thought not to exist at all.

After drawing dust and water for decades, this historic picture makes its first re-appearance.

***BACK ROW**: George "Orator" Shaffer (RF), Charles "Pop" Snyder (C), James Alexander "Jimmy" Devlin (RHP), Al Nichols (utility infielder).*

***SEATED:** George Hall (LF), Bill Craver (SS), Joe "Move Up Joe" Gerhardt (2B), George Warren "Juice" Latham (1B), Bill Hague (3B).*

***FRONT:** Frank Bernard "Flip" Lafferty (utility OF), Bill Crowley (CF).*

The starters on the team were Latham, Hall, Devlin, Hague, Shaffer, Gerhardt, Snyder, Crowley and Craver. Missing from the picture are John Haldeman and Harry Little, both substitute second-basemen.

The original caption reads as follows:

Above is a half-time reproduction of what is probably the most valuable photograph in the world. It was taken in 1877, and contains the pictures of the Louisville players who sold out to gamblers and prevented the local club from winning the pennant in the National League from Boston.

The players on whom the guilt was fastened were Devlin, Hall, Craver and Nichols. Catcher Snyder was also under suspicion for a time, but it was not proven that he was bribed to throw the games to Boston.

The players, it was alleged, were paid considerable money by Detroit gamblers to lose enough games to keep Louisville from winning the pennant. The team left Louisville with only fourteen games to play, and two victories out of this number would have given Louisville the pennant. The gamblers bet a considerable amount of money that Boston and not Louisville would win the flag and won their money, as the Louisville team won but one game on the trip.

Detectives were put on the case and the facts were made known. The players were blacklisted forever, and none of those against whom this action was taken has since played professional baseball. The photograph reproduced here was taken when there was every indication that Louisville would win the championship.

For many years, it hung in Nick & Jake's place, and was later acquired by A.J. Alford, of 340 West Jefferson Street, who loaned it for reproduction. The picture was never before printed in a newspaper, and very few persons had any idea such a photograph was in existence. (Eclipse BBHR)

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Al Kolb

The third and final owner of Louisville baseball's most famous bar, J. Alton ("Al") Kolb bought the historic site of the 1875 Louisville/National League meetings from Larry Gatto in 1893. Throughout its entire operation, it was a family affair, Gatto having bought it from his father-in-law, Anthony Montedonico, who had started the place in 1865. Gatto then sold it in 1893 to Kolb, the son-in-law of Montedonico.

Under Kolb's tutelage, it endured until December of 1947, when the owners of the building refused to renew the lease of this Louisville (and national baseball landmark). Rather than change locations of the 82-year-old bar, for obvious reasons, Kolb simply closed up shop.

It marked the end of a memorable chapter in Louisville's sporting history and night life.

During Kolb's tenure, the place at 323 West Liberty Street (now the back of the Marriott Hotel) was long a hangout for newspapermen, theatre people, baseball figures and many others who used Kolb's bar as meeting place for drinks and conversation. In "the old days", as his Louisville Courier-Journal obituary pointed out, the glittering contingent included "men of the four newspapers which occupied the same block." Also in the group were Louisville Courier-Journal publisher Henry Watterson; writer Irwin S. Cobb; Col. John T. Macauley of local and national theatre renown; and champion batsman Pete "Gladiator" Browning.

And Kolb, like Gatto before him, ran his place on the straight and narrow.

"There was never a fight in our bar, no patrol ever pulled up at our door, and no law was ever broken there," he was quoted in his Louisville Courier-Journal obituary.

Besides its association with famed figures of an older Louisville, Kolb's place was well-known for its "Louisville rolled oysters" (a tradition started by Gatto). Before Prohibition, the place sold the usual variety of liquor. During the "dry" years, it served only near beer, and after repeal, it never sold whiskey again.

Only twice in its 82-year history was the bar closed: for a few days during the 1937 flood and again in 1940 for repairs.

According to information from Kolb's *The Sporting News* obituary of August 25, 1948, the secret 1875 Louisville/National League meetings were held where one would expect them to be held: in a little back room at the end of the old walnut bar.

A native of Frederick, Md., Kolb was a maker of horse collars for several years before coming to Louisville in 1890, the year that a cyclone hit the city and also the year of its only major league pennant and World Series action.

Though not active in the business for several years prior to his death, Kolb nonetheless rarely missed a day coming in to look over the business. In his final years, his sons—J. Alton Kolb, Jr. and Lowell Kolb—ran the place. Their attempts to buy the building from the owners (the Guthrie Coke estate) also proved unsuccessful.

A seminal figure in Louisville baseball history, Al Kolb died at his home on 2065 Douglass Boulevard on Saturday night, August 14, 1948, eight months after he had closed his famed bar.

His death was front-page news in the following morning's Louisville Courier-Journal, who closed his obituary by noting that both Kolb and his bar "were 82 when they expired."

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Zack Phelps

President of the Louisville American Association baseball club in the mid-1880s, the American Association president during Louisville's flag-winning and co-World Championship 1890 season, and for years a National League attorney, Zack Phelps was born in Hopkinsville, Ky. on July 17, 1857. He came to Louisville at an early age with his parents.

A brilliant student, Phelps was determined to become a lawyer. However, his studiousness and drive, according to a Louisville Courier-Journal article the day after his death, forced him to relocate to Salt Lake City, Utah for reasons of health. After two years of reading law, he was granted a diploma, and in 1880, his health renewed by his protracted tenure in the West, Phelps returned to Louisville to practice law.

On January 1, 1881, Phelps formed a law partnership with a Judge William Jackson. On the same day, he was married to Miss Amy Kaye. In years afterward, Phelps was fond of saying that that day was the beginning of two grand partnerships: one with a graceful lady for life, the other with a good business friend that lasted until Jackson's death.

A highly successful criminal lawyer, Phelps had upwards of 300 cases on the docket at the time of his untimely demise. And, he was a man who numbered friends in all walks of life. One was minstrel Al G. Field. Upon learning of his friend's untimely death, Field left the stage of the city's venerable Macauley Theatre and declined to go on during the remainder of the evening program.

Phelps was also busy in many other ways, as one might expect one of the town's most distinguished citizens to be. He was a member of several fraternal groups, and he was closely identified with several city charities. Phelps was also an ardent Democrat, who espoused the causes of a number of political figures.

Unquestionably, the most prominent was the ill-fated William Goebel. The only sitting Governor ever assassinated in this country, Goebel was shot down on January 30, 1900 by an unknown assailant outside the Kentucky statehouse.

Phelps baseball resume was something, too.

From 1885 through 1887, he was the president of the Louisville American Association club. That tenure included some celebrated run-ins with the hard-hitting and hard-drinking Pete Browning. Interestingly enough, Phelps' grave in Louisville's historic Cave Hill Cemetery overlooks that of Browning's.

In 1890, Phelps served as the president of the American Association**,** a position he re-assumed late in the 1891 season as the loop began its trek into permanent oblivion. One of the best-known baseball men in the country, he was an also an attorney for the National League for a number of years.

Pneumonia claimed Phelps on August 29, 1901 after a 16-day siege, and his passing marked the exit of one of Louisville's and America's greatest baseball patrons. Phelps is buried on a lot owned by his wife's family. (Sadly enough, his widow followed her husband to the grave some ten weeks later.)

Zack Phelps' final resting place is a white marble cross over a granite circle with an inlaid ivy bed; his name, lifedates and an inscription are in raised letters.

The inscription reads: "One who loved his fellow men."

It is a worthy epitaph to be sure, yet as is the case all too often with summations for fine, productive men, it is an understatement of the highest order.

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John McCloskey

He was a king without a crown, a trail-blazing pioneer who spent his entire life spreading the gospel of baseball throughout the country. And, though long forgotten by the game to which he gave his whole life, John McCloskey produced a body of baseball work that was both magnificent and lasting.

Nicknamed "The Father Of The Texas League", McCloskey either founded or helped establish numerous other minor-league operations during his life. Besides the Texas League (1888), that group also included the Pacific Northwest League—the forerunner of the modern-day Pacific Coast League, and the Southern League. All three operate today in powerful fashion, a sterling tribute to the baseball genius of McCloskey and his indefatigable work at the grass roots of the game.

A generous man who often used his own money to sustain struggling ballplayers, clubs and circuits, McCloskey is reputed to have established more professional baseball leagues than any other man in the history of the sport.

Though he never played in the majors, McCloskey managed several big-top clubs, including his hometown's National League aggregation in 1895 and briefly in 1896. It was one of some three dozen major- and minor league teams (at all levels) he piloted during his venerable 36-year managing career (1888-1932), a figure believed to be a record.

The vast majority of that work came in the minors, where he spent 31 years, turning out a 1,713-1,632/.512 mark and a number of flagwinners.

Possessed also of a strong eye for baseball talent, McCloskey discovered a number of fine players over the years, including Fred Clarke, Jimmy Collins, Joe Tinker, Joe "Iron Man" McGinnity, Herman Long, Red Ehret and Jack Pfiester.

Nicknamed "Honest John", McCloskey started his extraordinary diamond career as the batboy for the 1876 Louisville National League team. By the time he had retired in 1930, McCloskey had held every major position in the game: player, coach, manager, scout and executive.

McCloskey died on November 17, 1940 at age 78 and was buried in Louisville's Calvary Cemetery, within sight of the final resting place of another Louisville baseball great and should-be-Hall-of-Famer, pitcher Gus Weyhing.

McCloskey's grave is watched over by a two-sided marker. On the front is his name and lifedates; the reverse contains his name, nickname ("Honest John") and a mighty inscription that reads:

"This tribute of grateful memory is dedicated by the youth and manhood of America, benefited by his life spent as a player, manager and league organizer of his beloved game, baseball.

It is a great epitaph for a giant of the game, a man who was truly the "Johnny Appleseed of baseball."

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Harry Pulliam

Harry Pulliam (1869-1909) was one of this country's youngest and brightest baseball executives when he shot himself in a New York hotel on Wednesday night, July 28, 1909. Lingering briefly, the brilliant but tormented Pulliam died the following morning.

It was a profound loss for the game, which had picked the intelligent, but high-strung Pulliam from another profession altogether: newspapering. Pulliam was the city editor of the Louisville Commercial in the 1890s when Barney Dreyfuss persuaded him to become club secretary for the Louisville National League team he had just purchased. Later, the talented Pulliam served as the team president from 1897 through 1899.

In 1900, Dreyfuss took over the Pittsburgh franchise. Pulliam joined him, and subsequently served as President of the esteemed National League from 1903 to his death in 1909. According to his listing in *The Ballplayers*, Pulliam was an eagle of a baseball man.

"His reputation for honesty and his businesslike approach to baseball won him election as NL President in 1903. He helped forge a peace between the AL and NL that resulted in the National Agreement that governed baseball through 1920.

"Fearless and honest in enforcing league rules, he was strongly criticized by New York's John McGraw over the 1908 Merkle incident and also came into conflict with Charles W. Murphy, the Chicago owner, over a ticket-scalping controversy."

Pulliam was buried on August 2, 1909 in Louisville's venerable Cave Hill Cemetery.

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VI
HOUSE OF MADNESS, HOUSE OF DARKNESS: 1897-1905

Tracking Browning for the last years of his life, even via the definitive Louisville publication of the time—the Louisville Courier-Journal—is like tracking a polar bear in an Alaskan blizzard. You know that he is there, but the question is where?

Previous reports about the 1897-1905 timeframe said that the late 1890s found Browning working as a cigar salesman, his bar—located near his residence at Thirteenth and Market—having failed, perhaps for the most obvious of reasons. Giving that up, Browning turned to caring for his mother, and during the baseball season, Browning was seen frequently at local baseball games. As in previous years, Browning was always well-received and well-remembered by crowds. And, then there followed his sudden and rapid end.

Actually, there is a little more, but not too much of a look inside his life—baseball or non-baseball. The result is that all that remains today is a few pages on his final decade, hardly an equal balance. But that is it, at least for the time being.

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While Pete Browning was on a steady descent, his old team was on a steady rise, the pair going in opposite directions, like two gigantic and magnificent ships passing each other in the night.

Joining the National League in 1892 for a second time after the 1891 collapse of the American Association, Louisville quickly became a perennial doormat. Late in the decade, though, they started to steadily improve because of a stream of good players that began to come their way, notably future Hall-of-Famers Fred Clarke and Honus Wagner. It was only a matter of time before things came all together. They did…just not in Louisville.

After the 1899 season, Louisville was one of four cities dropped by the National League and the curtain came down on Louisville's major-league baseball forever. The bulk of the Louisville franchise was then transferred to Pittsburgh by owner Barney Dreyfuss, who had bought half of the Pittsburgh franchise, then wound up as the sole owner of the Pirates shortly thereafter.

Dreyfuss did not have to wait long for success because of the likes of Louisville-bred stars like the aforementioned Clarke and Wagner, as well as Tommy Leach and Deacon Phillippe. Spear-headed by that group, the Pirates garnered three straight National League flags (1901-1902-1903) and one World Championship (1909). And, while that success had taken place geographically and logistically in Pittsburgh, it was not lost to insiders that at least in one way, the dynasty was Pittsburgh's in name only, its body and blood having come from a somewhat betrayed and thoroughly plundered Louisville major-league franchise.

Though they lost major-league baseball forever after the 1899 season, Louisville—always a most resilient city—quickly rebounded and became a roaring minor-league baseball town in 1902, a position it still holds today.

And, it started off with a bang.

Battling neck and neck with longtime geographical rival Indianapolis the entire season, Louisville lost the pennant race on the last day of the season as Indianapolis snatched a *tripleheader* from St. Paul. Indianapolis needed all of that because Louisville itself took a tripleheader from Minneapolis.

The powerhouse Louisville club, managed by "Derby Day" Bill Clymer, included batting champion John "Babe" Ganzel (.370) and Ed Dunkle, the loop's winningest pitcher with a 30-10 mark.

By the time Browning died in 1905, Louisville had a well-ensconced minor-league team, and was once again a major baseball city.

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On March 22, 1897, the fabulous Louisville Commercial ran a Pete Browning-inspired article about Louisville first-baseman Perry Werden.

"He says, after the manner of the once mighty Gladiator, that his lamps are in great shape, and that he expects to send 'em out at a good margin over the .300 clip."

It wasn't idle boasting. Werden batted a career-best .302 for the 1897 Louisvilles, then resumed a lengthy and productive minor-league career.

It remains a mystery today exactly why the Missouri native (1865-1934), born Percival Wheritt Werden, spent the bulk of his epic 24-year baseball career (1884-1908) in the minors. Though Louisville's first-base chores the next year were handled by two future long-time stars—a misplaced Honus Wagner and Harry Davis, one would think that after a career-best season, a spot could have been found somewhere on Louisville's roster for Werden. Perhaps it was his age, or his long service in baseball up to then (14 years), or the feeling that 1897 season was the best Louisville would get out of him.

Regardless, the numbers and talent of this 6'2", 220-pound slugger, also known as "Moose", are undeniable.

His major-league statistics (American League, American Association, National league and Union Association) include a lifetime .282 batting average; 150 stolen bases; the league lead in triples in 1890 with Toledo of the American Association (20) and again in 1893 (29) with St. Louis in the National League—evidence that the big man's batting prowess was complemented by fine speed; and a 12-1 pitching mark (proof of his athleticism) for the St. Louis Maroons, champions of the Union Association in 1884.

His career minor-league work (for more than a half-dozen circuits) includes a .341 batting average; 2,184 hits; 350 stolen bases; 1,214 runs scored; one .400 season; two batting titles; and numerous other offensive crowns in hits, stolen bases, doubles, triples and home runs. He was also an umpire and a manager in the minor league.

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The month after the Werden article appeared, Browning made his debut as a professional umpire—as part of a two-man team—in an exhibition game between Louisville and St. Paul. It was a wild game. Down 5-1 going into the seventh frame, Louisville exploded for six runs and then held on to win 7-6. As expected, Browning got some extensive coverage in the Courier-Journal's game story of Sunday, April 12, 1897.

"Another interesting feature was the initial appearance of the once great Gladiator as an umpire. To start with, his appearance as an official of that kind was most picturesque. He was enveloped in one of the blue and gray uniform coats of last year's teams, with his pants rolled up and a spotted bike cap. His old friends could hardly recognize him until he was pointed out to them.

"It did not seem to be the prevailing impression among the spectators during the first part of the game that those lampterines of his, which are of world-wide fame, were in the best of condition. This was when things did not look very favorable for the Colonels, though, and the fans' criticisms of Pete ought to be taken with due allowance.

"They were in a humor to criticize anybody at that time, and naturally took the most conspicuous object on the field, which was, without doubt, the Gladiator."

That same day, another local newspaper—the Louisville Commercial—also praised Browning's umpiring skills.

"Pete Browning as an umpire would be a great attraction around the circuit, if he would be nothing else. "He has a presence and dignity which it would embarrass even Tebeau or McAleer to penetrate.

"When he says a thing doesn't go, he says it in such a way as to give the impression that the sun can turn to darkness and the moon to green cheese before he would take it back or compromise himself the slightest.

"Now, if lamps were burning brightly and his microphones were in good working order, there is no reason why he should not be an active member of Uncle Nick's (NL President Nick Young) staff. But then, you know, 'if' cuts a very large figure in baseball."

On April 27, Browning made the Louisville Commercial not as an umpire or player, but as a "playing" spectator during a 13-inning, 3-3 tie in Louisville against Pittsburgh.

"When Pete Browning stopped two foul balls in the neighborhood of the right-field foul line, near the grand stand, the bleachers applauded him to the echo."

A month later, the Courier-Journal reported that the upcoming installation of an automatic baseball machine in the historic Macauley Theatre. The new-fangled electronic replay machine would reproduce all of Louisville's remaining road games for local fans, who would doubtlessly "take advantage of this opportunity to cheer the home team to victory."

Locally, the last prominent sporting news of Browning came on October 5, when the Courier-Journal ran a short item on a former Louisville player. "Farmer Weaver, who, while a Colonel, was considered just as beautiful as Pete Browning dared be, is still playing fast ball. He proved to be Milwaukee's premier batsman this season."

1898

On March 29, 1898, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran a bizarre piece of poetry. Entitled "Baseball Among the Ancients", and submitted by a Louisville baseball official, it ended with a 'tribute' to Browning. It went:

"The devil was the first coacher—he coached Eve when she stole first—Adam stole second.
"When Isaac met Rebecca at the well, she was walking with a pitcher.
"Samson struck out a great many times when he beat the Philistines.
"Moses made his first run when he slew the Egyptian.
"Cain made a base hit when he killed Abel.
"Abraham made a sacrifice.
"The Prodigal son made a home run.
"David was a great long-distance thrower.
"Moses shut out the Egyptians at the Red Sea.
"Pete Browning made a hit in '76."

Several days later, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran a more down-to-earth pickup from the Washington Post:

"Of course, old Pete Browning was the champion stationary outfielder of the Association, but he also had a record as a stationary thinker, remarked Gus Weyhing.

"We had four or five comedians on the Louisville team, but Pete could never see the point of any of their gags and I don't think you could drive the point of a funny story into his head with a pile driver.

"Pete was the premier slugger of the Colonels when Louisville was in the Association. But Pete didn't rank among the timely batsmen. With ten runs ahead or in the rear, Pete could flatten the scrolls in the pitching of Mattie Kilroy or tame Dumpling (Sadie) McMahon's speed.

"As a base runner, Pete was a few shades faster than Jack Milligan, Ted Larkin or Denny Lyons, who could do the 100 yards a few seconds better than a minute. But Ted and Jack and Denny could do a bit of thinking when they landed on the base, and they knew, after arriving at first, that the second sack was the next point in the baseball compass.

"When Pete had registered at first, the opposing pitcher and first baseman set a trap for him, and often threw the Gladiator into the trap right under his nose and before those lamps of his."

The piece concluded with a Browning classic, the Gladiator being picked off by pitcher Dave Foutz unassisted in a September 5, 1886 game between the St. Louis Browns and the Louisvilles.

The end of the 1898 season brought a rich season-farewell dinner story from the Courier-Journal on October 17, a story that seemingly had everyone but the longtime baseball star who had set the table for all of them.

"The Colonels said their good-byes last night at the Galt House, where Manager Clarke 'set 'em up' to the finest banquet that hostelry could prepare. All the players were present, as were the directors and other officials. It was a regular course dinner, and continued from 7 until nearly 10 o'clock. Champagne flowed like water and the players threw off all restraint after a long season's work.

"Speeches were made by Dr. T. Hunt Stucky, Charlie Dehler, President Pulliam, Manager Clarke, Charlie Dexter, Catcher Kittridge, Decker, Powers and others. It was a regular love feast, and great things were predicted for next season. Every man on the team said that he was eager to play in Louisville again; all were pleased with the team, and everybody was enthusiastic regarding the outlook.

"After the banquet, the players divided the money accruing from the benefit game. There was nearly $1,200 to be divided among the eighteen players and each of them received $66.40. All were immensely tickled. They asked that their thanks to the public, the newspapers, the committee and everybody else be expressed through the Courier-Journal. They all seemed to appreciate the recognition of the season's work.

"Manager Clarke publicly announced to the players that the Colonels of next year would be made up exactly like that of the season just closed, except that two substitute fielders and two more catchers would be added.

"The players were also paid their salaries yesterday, and it is not strange that last night every man of them was happy to the highest degree. Today, they will begin leaving for home."

1899

On April 20 and again on June 11, the Louisville Courier-Journal carried citations about Browning umpiring. The first was a semi-pro contest between the Lincks and the famed Goss Brothers, the latter long one of the city's top clubs. The second umpiring stint was along the same lines, a contest between the Middendorfs and the Firemen, the latter captained by ex-Louisville star and Browning's longtime running mate—Chicken Wolf.

After Browning left the game, virtually all that remained of him were memories. On August 6, 1899, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran such a story about Pete Browning's baserunning under the emblem of "Short Baseball Stories".

"Pete Browning, the gladiatorial assassin of speedy shoots, who has thrust the heart of many a pitcher from its normal location up into the throat, would have equaled Harry Stovey as a base runner, if he plowed up the dirt with his shape by sliding into bases, says Arthur Irwin.

"Pete was one of the Brotherhood gang on Tebeau's Cleveland team in 1890, and in the morning practice pf the team, Tebeau tried to get Pete to practice sliding.

"Pete was clever enough to get a long start of the pitcher, but instead of hitting the ground for a slide, he ran over the bases, and was a soft mark for the basemen.

"Pete was afraid of twisting an ankle or springing a charley horse.

"Why don't you slide, you big lobster?, Tebeau would say.

"What! Old Pete slide? Supposing old Pete would take a crimp in his shaft and he laid out of the game for a month or two, what would this club do without Pete and his bat?

"If I do say it myself, Old Pete wins as many games with his stick as you do with your headwork, Cap. Pete will never slide. He's too plentiful with his bat.

"So Tebeau fixed up a job with Pete that worked for a few games, or until the infielders were next to him. Tebeau instructed him to throw a jolt into the ribs of the baseman as he crossed the base. The first time that Pete tried to turn this trick was on Yank Robinson.

"Yank was nothing if not a trickster, and when Pete shucked his elbow into Robinson's ribs, Robbie brought the ball up on Pete's jaw for an upper cut, and Old Pete took a head-first dive and was down over ten seconds.

"Get up, you big dub. You're down for a ten-second count, and I get the winner's end of this purse, said Robbie, as he chucked Pete in the abdomen with his foot.

"Pete was an easy out, and when he came back to the bench, he swore he would never take another chance on punching in the clinch. But Tebeau jollied him till his courage came back, and he worked the rib-roasting racket on every second or third baseman or shortstop in the Brotherhood, excepting Robbie."

And on October 20, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran this Washington Post pickup, yet another trip down memory lane with one of Browning's former teammates, Tony Mullane.

"Shades of an eventful and glorious past on the baseball arena bobbed up in Washington last week with count Antonio Mullane, the ambidextrous twirler of the old Cincinnati Reds, says the Washington Post.

"Tony's blue-black locks are still innocent of frost, and the spring and vigor of youth burn in his piercing eye. A Frohman juvenile man in appearance is Antonio, the twirling craftsman of the Association, the two-handed palmer of the pigskin globe.

"I was an ambidextrous pitcher, but as a rule, I never called on my left hand unless we were playing an exhibition game or in practice for the amusement of a few friends, said Tony.

"But my two-handed trick got me in trouble when I was pitching for the Baltimore team early in the eighties. We were up against it in the last inning, and the old Eclipse team of Louisville had us on the hip.

"It was the last inning, one hand was out, second and third occupied, and the next man up was Pete Browning. I slung three hot incurves close to Pete's shirt and he fanned. Chicken Wolf came to the bat, and he was about due for a hit. In a reckless moment, I shifted the ball to the left hand, pitched him a slow curve and I guess that ball is still on the run. He pasted it over the left-field fence on the Louisvilles, and I went to the dressing room and clubbed myself in the shins with a baseball bat and was fined $25 for being fresh. It was the first slow curve Wolf ever hit off me, as the slow-teaser was his weakness.

"Pitching has changed since my days. There's more hitting and fewer strike-outs; shut-out games are fewer, and hits plentier than when the pitcher of the eighties ruled the baseball roost.

"The public liked the pitcher's science instead of the heavy hitting game in those days. But the public taste has changed.

"(Old Hoss) Radbourne was the greatest pitcher of my day, and for all time, in my humble opinion. He knew nothing but baseball, but he was a Shakespeare on that subject.

"Clarke Griffith, Hughes, of Brooklyn, and McGinnity, of Baltimore, are my favorites in the big League, though there are any number of good ones among the youngsters.

"Keep your eye on this Waddell, of Louisville. He will give some of these crack hitters a push down Nick Young's batting column next season."

The article then concluded with this item.

"Tony has applied for a position on Uncle Nick's staff of umpires, and has the endorsement of several prominent magnates. He will probably be given a trial next spring."

1900

Unquestionably, the first big baseball news of 1900 was the April 2, 1900 arrival of the Pittsburgh Pirates (nee the old Louisville Colonels) in Louisville for a series of exhibition games. In its pre-game story of April 3, the Louisville Courier-Journal noted that the Pirates "were busy yesterday morning selecting wagon tongues at Hillerich's bat factory thirty minutes after the team stepped from the Illinois Central train."

On May 3, 1900, the Louisville Courier-Journal reported that former Louisville star Reddy Mack had gone insane. There was nothing unusual about insanity—certainly not an insane ballplayer—at this time.

In retrospect, however, it must have set some sort of team record as no less than four members of the 1885-1886 Louisville American Association squads eventually went insane: Mack (1900), Wolf (1901), Phil Reccius (1902), and Browning (1905).

Although Browning played little part in the local sporting news, there was plenty of variety. On June 10, heavyweight champion James J. Jeffries umpired a game between the Nicelys and the Porzigs of the City League, the latter winning 11-4 before a crowd of 2,000.

On July 2, the Louisville Courier-Journal reported a raucous co-ed baseball game.

"Between 5,000 and 6,000 people witnessed the game at Reccius Park yesterday between the Reccius team and the Bloomer Girls' team. The game resulted in a victory for the Reccius by the score of 8 to 0.

"The contest was stopped at the end of the eighth inning because the crowd in the field pressed in so close to the diamond that to play was impossible.

"A canvas fence had been arranged around the grounds, and men and boys cut this with knives and sneaked in. In this way, considerable damage was done to the visiting team. The hits were: Reccius 9, Bloomers 3. Errors: Bloomers 4, Reccius 2.

As the summer wore on, the local baseball coverage got more and more bizarre.

The following month, on August 5, the Louisville Courier-Journal ran a game account of one of the earliest games in Kentucky baseball history: the 140-41 shellacking of the Shelby Baseball Club (of Hardinsville, Ky.) by a Lawrenceburg, Ky. squad on August 14, 1867.

And, on August 6, the Louisville Courier-Journal carried an astonishing interview with longtime Chicago NL President and former Louisville manager (1885-86) James Hart. The middle part of the story said Pete

Browning—pushing 40 and out of major-league baseball since 1893 and out of it altogether since 1896—*was still trying to catch on as a pinch-hitter.*

As Hart told a Chicago Post reporter:

"Coming home on the lake boat recently from my trip East to see my mother, a passenger told me that Pete Browning, the old Louisville player I used to manage (1885 and 1886), had expressed himself as ready to get into the game to slug the ball.

"They may be wanting some fellow to sit on the bench and wait for a pinch in the ninth to bat in a run or two, said Browning. Old Petronius B. is not so old that he has lost his batting eye. Some of the managers will be telegraphing Pete to come to do the business."

1901

While there are no major stories on Browning in 1901 in the Louisville Courier-Journal, this year nonetheless deserves one brief note because 1901 is the "lost season" of Louisville minor-league baseball—as lost as Pete Browning became in his late years.

After trying desperately during a two-year period to first save its National League franchise, then trying to join another major league (a short-lived version of a new American Association, and the American League), Louisville finally settled down in 1901 as a member of the Western Association. What Browning was doing during the late 1899-early 1901 timeframe, when Louisville attempted to re-establish itself as a major-league city, is unknown, since the major newspaper coverage of all those meetings carries no mention of Browning—prominent or ancillary.

The city's first minor-league foray, it is temporary and strange.

Playing at the "old stand" at 28th and Broadway, home of the city's last major-league team, they opened with a 7-2 loss (losing pitcher: Gus Weyhing) to Indianapolis on April 25. However, they played good ball and were in contention when the bottom dropped out in a bizarre reversal of fortune that is the signature of Louisville baseball history.

In early June, the Grand Rapids, Michigan franchise was moved to Wheeling, W. Va. A month later, Grand Rapids regained its team as the Louisville franchise was moved there due to poor attendance. It was typical Louisville luck because Grand Rapids went on to win the pennant**.**

1902

That Louisville is a multi-faceted national sporting city is evidenced by the early-March arrival of Willie Hoppe, the 13-year-old "boy wonder billiardist", for a series of exhibitions. He is at the beginning of a long Billiards Congress of America Hall-of-Fame career, which lasts until 1952 when he retires.

Later in the month, on March 13, the Louisville Courier-Journal reports that the new minor league team will be called the Eclipse, not the Colonels, in honor of Browning, (Chicken) Wolf, (Leech) Maskrey and other members of the fabled old Louisville American Association team.

It is a great gesture, but the Eclipse name at best lasts only that season, because by 1903 the team is being identified as the Colonels, a name they will retain for some seven decades.

Louisville's first, complete minor-league season features a Pete Browning-style finish. Though the Colonels win a tripleheader on the final day of the season, they nonetheless narrowly lose the American Association pennant to Indianapolis, *who also wins a closing-day tripleheader.*

1903

Despite the lack of news on Browning, the local baseball pages remained interesting reading.

On February 16, the Courier-Journal recorded the early death of Philip Reccius, one of Browning's longtime pals and baseball contemporaries.

In early April**,** the Louisvilles lose exhibition contests to Christy Mathewson and Joe "Iron Man" McGinnity, but salvage everything by later beating the legendary Cy Young and Boston 8-6.

On April 16, the Louisville Courier-Journal produced a major baseball piece about the whereabouts of former players, "What Becomes Of Old Stars". Sadly, it gives only this line on Browning: "Pete Browning is in Louisville."

A month later, Browning's longtime teammate and friend, Chicken Wolf, dies. In mid-July, the Courier-Journal carries a story about a new baseball invention, which shows how much the face of baseball is changing. The complicated electrical apparatus is designed "to remove all doubt as to whether the runner or the baseman" has reached the base first.

Louisville's baseball year closes with an epic five-game series between the city's top two semi-pro teams at that time—the aforementioned Reccius team (run by Browning's friends) and the equally powerful Goss Bros. team. The 5-game series begins in late September and ends in late October, the Goss Bros. taking the series with a 3-0 shutout in the fifth and deciding game.

The series is emblematic of Louisville's semi-pro and amateur baseball that dated back to the days of Browning's first team, the Louisville Eclipse.

Besides the aforementioned teams, the amateur and semi-pro squads in Louisville's first half-century of baseball include the Eagles, Eclipse, Eclipse-Mutuals, Olympics, Rhodes-Burfords (named after a well-known furniture store), Deppens, Garrys, Harvey Coons, Eppings, Blue Clippers, Everhardts, Rudolph & Bauers, Cigarmakers, Utopians, Butchertowns, Muldoons, Globes, Mutuals, Mohawks, Morning Star, Etheridge, Hirsch Brothers, Waddell Browns and many others that over the years combined to make Louisville a major baseball town on all levels.

Indeed, this baseball was taken so seriously that on innumerable occasions, it actually outdrew both the city's major- and minor-league clubs.

1904

In mid-April of 1904, Pete Browning made the baseball columns again.

It had all started with an April 13 Louisville Courier-Journal story about Jimmy Ryan holding the record for the longest hit ever made. A long, hard drive at the old Lake Front Grounds in Chicago in 1885, it had gone over the fence and onto a freight train bound for San Francisco.

However, the article pointed out that the 'record' had been discounted by George Van Haltren, who that same year hit a ball over the fence in a California game and into the sea. It was subsequently picked up by a steamer bound for England via India and the Suez Canal, and Van Haltren estimated that it traveled 21,000 miles without being removed from the ship.

The article ended with this line: "If anyone can equal this record, Van would like to hear from him."

Sure enough, Browning showed up in the pages of the Sunday, April 17th Louisville Courier-Journal with a story that topped both men. Headlined "Pete Browning Back In The Game", it read:

"Pete Browning, the 'Old Gladiator', read in the Courier-Journal last week about long hits that have been made by ball players, and being in a reminiscent mood, said:

"A brother member of Jimmy Ryan's smoking club also wishes to make a little statement in regard to the long drives made by himself in the year 1882 at Atlantic City.

"I was playing with the Louisville American Association team at that time and did not think that any one would say that they could hit a ball harder than I could, and even today I do believe that I can fool a great many of the youngsters in the game.

"At this game that was played at Atlantic City, I hit a ball pitched by Tommy Burns, once a right fielder of the old Brooklyn club, and a pitcher of the Atlantic City team at that time.

"Well, there is no necessity in making any more talk, but they are still looking for the ball, which was a terrific drive over the center-field fence into the Atlantic Ocean. Jimmy Ryan's ball has been found, but they are still looking for mine."

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Remembrances are all that Browning had at this point, and on June 1, the Courier-Journal followed with this Detroit newspaper pickup about the golden age of batting.

"I think the golden age of batting, says Jake Beckley, according to the Detroit Free Press, was from 1885 to 1891. Of course, they say there were no batters in those times like (Nap) Lajoie and (Honus) Wagner, but I think the sluggers of that generation were the genuine article.

"Here's a point that is always overlooked when it comes to comparing the records—the difference in the scoring methods.

"In those days, infielders got errors time after time on plays that every scorer now gives as hits. Fifteen years ago, the scorers were always soaking the fielders and the old idea of scoring an error to anyone who touched a ball and didn't get it was in some reporters' minds till they croaked.

"The hits that (Dan) Brouthers, (Tip) O'Neill and (Pete) Browning made were the real thing. They fairly smoked as they sped along."

1905

In late January of Browning's final season of life, the Courier-Journal reported the death of Riley Hawkins, a long-time baseball rooter and local character.

About 60, Hawkins—an alcoholic who had been the product of a fine Louisville family—had been found dead in his cell at the local workhouse.

A month later, the Louisville Herald ran a piece on a new-fangled baseball invention—the batting helmet. Other interesting baseball items included a July 10 piece about the death of former Louisville pitcher Pete Dowling, a hardcore alcoholic and mentally unstable individual who had been killed in Oregon by a train; a July 18 piece about the retirement of longtime Chicago President and former Louisville manager James Hart from the game; a July 30 item about noted nature writer Clarence Hawkes, who regularly attended baseball games despite being blind; and a voluminous August 15 article about college men in baseball.

Another major sports story was the February 1 death in Asheville, North Carolina of the legendary bookmaker and gambler, "Pittsburgh Phil" (real name: George Smith).

But all of those paled in comparison to the death of Browning.

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Some people live so long on the edge of life that they seemingly lose all fear of heights. Almost automatically, by reflex, they come to believe in the transient vagaries of life, relish them in fact, and suffer nothing in contradiction.

After a time, over the years, it becomes an ingrained habit, a routine, this way of life that can be activated by such stimuli as alcohol, drugs, and gambling. Feast or famine. Starve in the off-season, feast in the on-season. They have never known any other way of life, and therefore believe it to be the only way of life with the possible exception of the rich, whom they obviously know nothing about.

So it was with Pete Browning. But what goes up under these circumstances must always come down. And, when Pete Browning's life began to unravel, the decline was rapid, the fall precipitous, the end dark and lonely.

After some years out of the public light, he came back in on stage, and with it, the end of his peaceful retirement and life. All at once, it seemed, it all caved in on him, burying him. In actuality, it had been building up for years, and this was the culmination of forces no one could stop.

On June 7, 1905, according to official records, Louis Rogers "Pete" Browning (a.k.a. "The Gladiator", "Line-'em-out Pete", "The Louisville Slugger", etc.) was produced in the criminal division of Jefferson County Circuit Court where he was declared a lunatic and ordered to the insane asylum at nearby Lakeland.

As a matter of course, the Courier-Journal story the next day recounted Browning's prowess as a hitter, towards the end relating Browning's secret for his batting success: daily washings of his eyes with buttermilk. Even under the direst of circumstances, Browning was extraordinarily readable copy.

It began: "Pete Browning, the old gladiator who for many years led them all in batting, and who was for many years was the idol of the bleachers, the best known ballplayer in the country, was declared insane in the Criminal Court yesterday and will be sent to the Kentucky Asylum for the Insane at Lakeland.

"He was tried yesterday morning, the proceedings requiring only a short time, and few of the people in the courtroom who heard the name as Louis Browning knew that the man who was declared to be mentally unsound was 'Pietro Gladiator' Browning. The only witnesses were some of the persons who have talked to Browning during the last few days and his physician, R.H. Kelsall.

"Browning was not removed from his home and was not taken to the asylum yesterday, but he is under guard and will probably be confined during the next few days. At present, he is not well and is in bed all the time. It is thought that he is not really ill, but simply imagines that his condition is serious.

"Browning has been slightly off for some time, and during the last few weeks has been fishing every day, spending almost his whole time in this occupation. During the last two weeks, he decided that he was sick and went to bed. He lives with his mother and sister at 1427 West Jefferson Street. He showed unmistakable symptoms of insanity, and his physician, Dr. Kelsall, said that he might at any time become violent and hurt some one.

"Mrs. Browning is also ill and has been in bed for the past two months. Some of Browning's old friends, who had not ceased to take an interest in the old ball player, went to see him and decided that it would be better for him to be removed to an asylum where he could receive proper care and treatment."

(As to be expected, the press coverage of Browning's commitment was extensive. The most sensationalistic was a front-page story in the Louisville Evening Post, which bannered its afternoon story under a bold-face all-caps headline that read: "Pete Browning Has Lost Mind".)

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Officially founded in 1870 as the Fourth Kentucky Lunatic Asylum, the institution quickly became known as Lakeland because of its proximity to a "postage-stamp" town that no longer exists. By the time of Browning's commitment in the early 1900s, which followed those of teammates Philip Reccius and Chicken Wolf, the hospital was called the Central Kentucky Lunatic Asylum and was a self-sustaining community that grew crops, raised hogs and even had its own dairy herd.

At its apex in the 1950, Lakeland housed nearly 2,500 patients. At the time of Pete Browning centennial ceremonies in 1984, it housed approximately 125 patients and is officially known today as Central State Hospital. Both the numerical reduction and name change are reflections of modern psychiatry.

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After some improvement, Browning was removed from Lakeland by one of his sisters on June 21, 1905. But it wasn't under the most ideal of circumstances. Far from it.

The June 22 Louisville Courier-Journal carried this story:

"Old Pete is himself again. This does not mean that he is the same 'Pete' Browning who used to line 'em out with the big stick, but the 'Gladiator' is once more sane and is in better physical condition than he has been for several months.

"He was released from the Central Kentucky Asylum for the Insane yesterday morning, and is now at the home of his mother, 1427 West Jefferson Street. The old ballplayer is still somewhat weak, and is confined to his bed, being unable to see anyone except his family, but his head is clear once more.

"The relief came when an abscess which had formed in his head burst, and since (then) he has been himself.

"Browning was once of the best-known ballplayers in the country, being famous in every city in the country as a batter. Two weeks ago, he was declared insane in the Criminal Court and ordered confined there in the asylum. Pete was taken to the asylum. The physicians there were interested in his case and watched him closely. They finally decided that he was not really insane, but was suffering from an abscess.

"The abscess burst the other day, and immediately 'Pete' began to show improvement. This continued, and yesterday it was decided that 'Pete' should leave the asylum. His sister went for him and he returned to Louisville with her, going to his home. He was put to bed at once.

"Pete had little to say about his release, but he was glad to get back home again. He remembers little of what happened during the last two weeks. Under the law, Pete is still insane, and must have another trial before he can be restored to his legal standing again.

"As soon as he is well enough, he will be presented in court and another trial had before a jury. There is little doubt that he will be declared sane again. The many friends of 'Old Pete' in Louisville were greatly pleased yesterday when they learned that he had been released from the asylum."

Of course, all of this was an optical illusion,

On Wednesday, July 26, 1905, Browning—not surprisingly—was admitted to old City Hospital (later renamed General Hospital and now called University Hospital). There he underwent surgery for ear trouble and a tumor of the breast shortly thereafter.

The following day's Louisville Courier-Journal carried what is now in retrospect the most definitive account ever of Browning's mastoiditis. Though neither glamorous nor colorful, it proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that the longstanding condition was responsible for all his personal, professional and physical problems. That it's taken so long to bring this to the surface is indicative of the choices that writers have made over the years. Faced with the truth or sustaining the myth, they have always run the myth.

Under the headline of "Old Pete Again: Must Submit To Operation Of The Ear; Taken To City Hospital Suffering As He Did Before Sent To Asylum", the local paper reported:

"Pete Browning, Louisville's most famous ballplayer, who was recently released from the Central Asylum for the Insane, was taken to City Hospital yesterday and an operation to relieve an abscess-like affection of the ear will probably take place today.

"Browning's condition is not serious at present, but a similar operation of a few weeks ago and the affection of the nerves which lie near the ears is thought to have become general. His death may be the ultimate result.

"Browning was admitted to the hospital at once yesterday morning after application to the Board of Public Safety had been made. He was examined by Dr. Percifull, interne of the hospital, but the exact nature of his affection has not been determined. An extensive examination will be made this morning, and should an operation be deemed necessary, it will take place at once.

"The growth in Browning's head is of long standing, and was recently the cause of an inquest into his sanity, which resulted in his confinement in the insane asylum at Lakeland.

"An operation was performed soon after he was taken to the institution, however, and the mastoid cells, just behind the ear, were opened. It was found that those cells had been filling with a foreign growth, which pressed upon the brain, and it was believed that this had caused the insanity, as Browning improved rapidly following the operation and was soon released.

"After the examination yesterday, however, it was found that the growth had again affected the brain and he has had severe pains in his head for several days."

Once again, Browning made a rapid recovery, and he was sent home, only to return in early August after experiencing more difficulty. Becoming morbid and losing hope, Browning refused to take his medication or co-operate with doctors.

In late August, Browning slipped away from the hospital and walked to his mother's house, explaining that he didn't like to hear people groan. That same night, he was taken back to the municipal hospital.

On September 1, 1905, Hillerich & Bradsby signed a contract for its first autographed model with future Hall-of-Famer Honus Wagner, who had begun his career at Louisville in 1897. The first man to have his name on a bat, Wagner was part of modern endorsement-advertising history.

But, as those new stars began to rise and shine, an ancient star—and the catalyst for all of that history—began to dim.

Around the time of the historic contract, a growth appeared once again on Browning's neck. Deteriorating rapidly, Browning finally yielded to his relentless adversaries on Sunday afternoon, September 10, 1905 at 2:15. Present during the waning hours of the final siege were his mother, Mrs. Mary Jane Sheppard Browning; two

sisters, Mrs. Florence Ramsey and Miss Fannie Browning; and one brother, Charles. Another brother, Henry, was unable to come to his bedside because of serious illness.

While the official cause was listed as "asthenia" (an antiquated catch-all term meaning "general loss or lack of body strength"), Browning's medical problems were specific and substantial.

Besides the brain damage caused by the crudely-treated mastoidal condition (which had its genesis in his childhood, when he began suffering painful earaches), he had cancer at the end. In addition, Browning was no doubt suffering from cirrhosis of the liver at the time of his death, a by-product of his years of lethal drinking. (His liver problems dated back to 1888.)

The timeframe of Browning's alcoholism was well-documented in the Times obituary under a sub-section headed "His Introduction To The Foams". According to this, it dated all the way back to Browning's early amateur days (1877).

"'Old Pete' was never known to take a drink until he played a game in this city with an amateur nine. He was asked to fill in for one of the players. On third base, a keg of beer had been placed, and those who reached the foaming fountain were entitled to a glass of lager. Pete knocked so many three-baggers and home-runs that little beer was left for anyone else."

It left little to the imagination. Just beyond the obvious embellishment and a little beneath the surface humor, however, lay a stark commentary of Browning's alcoholic abuse which had begun as a teenager.

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There is also a dark side to Pete Browning's death.

It has been suggested in some quarters that the principal cause of Pete Browning's early death was paresis, the third and final stage of syphilis. Incurable even today, paresis is characterized by a total mental breakdown (what the layman would call insanity) followed by death.

On the face of it, there is information to sustain this view.

The paresis concept is fully consistent with Browning's times (the two major social diseases of his day, syphilis and gonorrhea, were untreatable until the advent of penicillin decades after his death); Browning's profession; his nickname ("Pietro Gladiator *Redlight District* Distillery Interests Browning"), his unstable mental condition towards the end of his life; and his personal habits, which included an alleged fondness for prostitutes. (And they were easily accessible, according to Skal and Savada in *Dark Carnival*: "The city's higher-class whorehouses lined Tenth Street just a few blocks from his home…")

And, paresis is mentioned in Browning's file at Cooperstown as being the cause of death.

However, these points need to be made regarding Browning's alleged paresis.

First, caution is always in order when dealing with any kind of sensationalistic material—doubly so in Browning's case, whose life for decades was a repository of historical embellishment and error.

Secondly, unlike the mastoiditis, the alcoholism, its attendant cirrhosis of liver, and cancer, the paresis to date has never been medically, legally or historically/journalistically corroborated *beyond the shadow of a doubt* by anyone.

There is good reason for that.

The reference to paresis in Browning's file is part of a letter written in 1959. That letter substantially pre-dates the birth of modern historical/statistical baseball research and writing—the 1969 publication of the inaugural edition of the Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia; the rise of gifted, definitive and scholarly historical baseball writers like David Nemec; and 25 years of medical research on Pete Browning (1982-present).

Measured against those exacting standards, the paresis concept—at best—is based upon historical hearsay and circumstantial evidence.

Finally, it should be remembered that any brain infection, regardless of its cause—be it mastoiditis, paresis or whatever—can produce erratic behavior.

Totalled up, it produces this bottom line. Either, Browning's death was a combination of a crudely-treated mastoidal condition that had finally infected his brain; cirrhosis of the liver (via his lifelong alcoholism); and cancer.

Or, all of those things plus the paresis.

In any event, paresis was not the lone—or principal—cause of death.

And whatever the causes of death, two things were for certain. First, effective treatments for all that ailed him were years away. Secondly, Browning's end had not easy.

But neither had been his life. They had mirrored each other, and in places they defy comprehension, interpretation or understanding.

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One final note on Browning's end.

It has been suggested that the alleged paresis factor is the principal reason for Browning's continued exclusion from Cooperstown. Not so.

Indeed, three top-notch pitchers from the same era all died from paresis, one of them a Hall of Famer (Hoss Radbourne), and two others who should be there—Bobby Mathews and Bob Caruthers.

The continued exclusion of Browning, as well as Mathews and Caruthers, is based upon league affiliation (detailed in Chapter VII).

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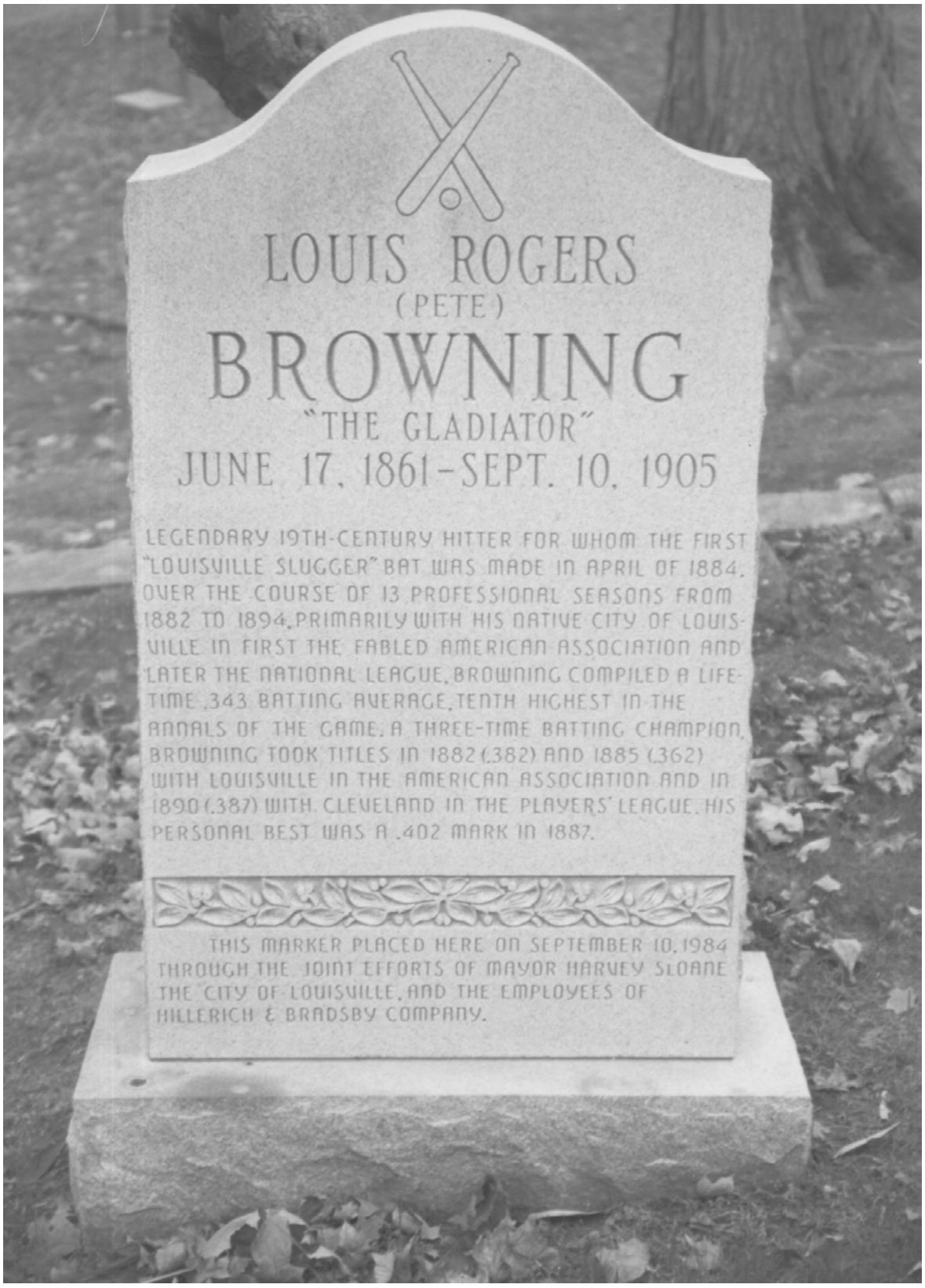
News of Browning's untimely death was carried the next day by Louisville's two leading newspapers, the Courier-Journal and the Times, as well as the Louisville Post and the Louisville Herald. (Numerous national newspapers also carried the story, including the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune and the Cincinnati Enquirer.)

"Called Out For All Time On Life's Field" ran the headline of the Courier-Journal while the Times bannered their piece with: "Pete Browning 'Out' Of Life's Game."

Both stories were masterpieces filled with rich detail, newsy biographical facts and colorful anecdotes, though their leads were substantially different. Far from being duplicates, each were separate entities with their own special flavor and character. The evening Times carried the most extensive story of all, using a brief, poetic, two-sentence lead that led simply into a voluminous story.

Pete Browning's old grave marker. Note misspelled first name. (Eclipse BBHR)



Pete Browning's new grave marker. (Eclipse BBHR)

"Louis Rodgers Browning's lamps are out until eternity's morn. 'Old Pete"' the Gladiator and hero of the baseball world, died yesterday afternoon at the City Hospital at 2:15 o'clock."

By contrast, the morning Courier-Journal ran a protracted, nostalgic and evocative lead which neatly set up the rest of the obituary.

"'Old Pete'" Browning, gladiator of the baseball diamond, whose steady eye was proof against the curves of the best pitchers who ever stood in the box and whose line drives, times without numbers, set Louisville fans wild with joy, is gone. Long-time idol of the lovers of the national game, Louis Rogers Browning breathed his last in the City Hospital at 2:15 o'clock yesterday afternoon.

"'Line-em-out Pete' was a favorite nickname for him in the days when he was in his prime. When the game looked doubtful and when the opponents appeared to be getting the lead in those days, the fans unconsciously studied their score cards to figure just how soon 'Pete' would go to the bat.

"Tall and ungainly in appearance, he would rise from the bench, lifting his 'stick', which was longer than that used by any other player, and amble to the plate. Such a movement was always a signal for a cheer and 'Pete' seldom failed to give the fans good cause to cheer lustily a few seconds later.

"It was when the game was in a pinch that 'Pete' was at his best. He joyed in driving the ball into the suburbs at all times, but he loved it best when it was most needed. He took pride in his ability to hit when a hit meant everything, and he had good reason to be proud. Such conversations as the following were often heard in the grand stand:

"Last half of the ninth—two outs—two men on base—score 3 to 2 against Louisville—we need this game—to lose it will send us back three points in the percentage—who's up?"

"Pete!"

"Line her out, old fellow! If you ever loved us, line her out!"

"Oh, joy! Where is it? To the woods! Old Pete is right to-day, and the game is over! I knew he would! I knew he would!"

"Then the young fans would climb down from the bleachers with their hearts in their throats and promise themselves that when they grew up they would be professional ball players and that to be President was nothing when compared with the glory of a man like Pete."

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In accordance with the wishes of the family, a simple funeral service was held the following afternoon, Tuesday, September 12, at 2:30 at the home of Browning's mother. Bannered "Funeral Of 'Old Pete': Famous Ballplayer Laid To Rest After Simple Services; The Casket Hidden by Flowers, Many Being from Old Associates on the Diamond", the Louisville Evening Post ran a stark and moving story that in part ran:

"The big double parlors were filled with friends of the dead ball player. There were men who knew him when he first swung a bat and who saw him hit the ball on the nose in the day of his glory, as no player had ever done before.

"The casket, draped in black cloth, was covered with flowers. The surviving members of the old Eclipse team, which set the ball of the national game in Louisville to rolling, sent designs. There were wreaths of green and clusters of roses, and a big blanket of pink roses.

"A trifle thin, 'Old Pete' looked as natural as in life and the hands that had swung the biggest of bats were folded to peace across his breast. It was a long line that passed the head of the casket to take a last look at the last Gladiator of them all."

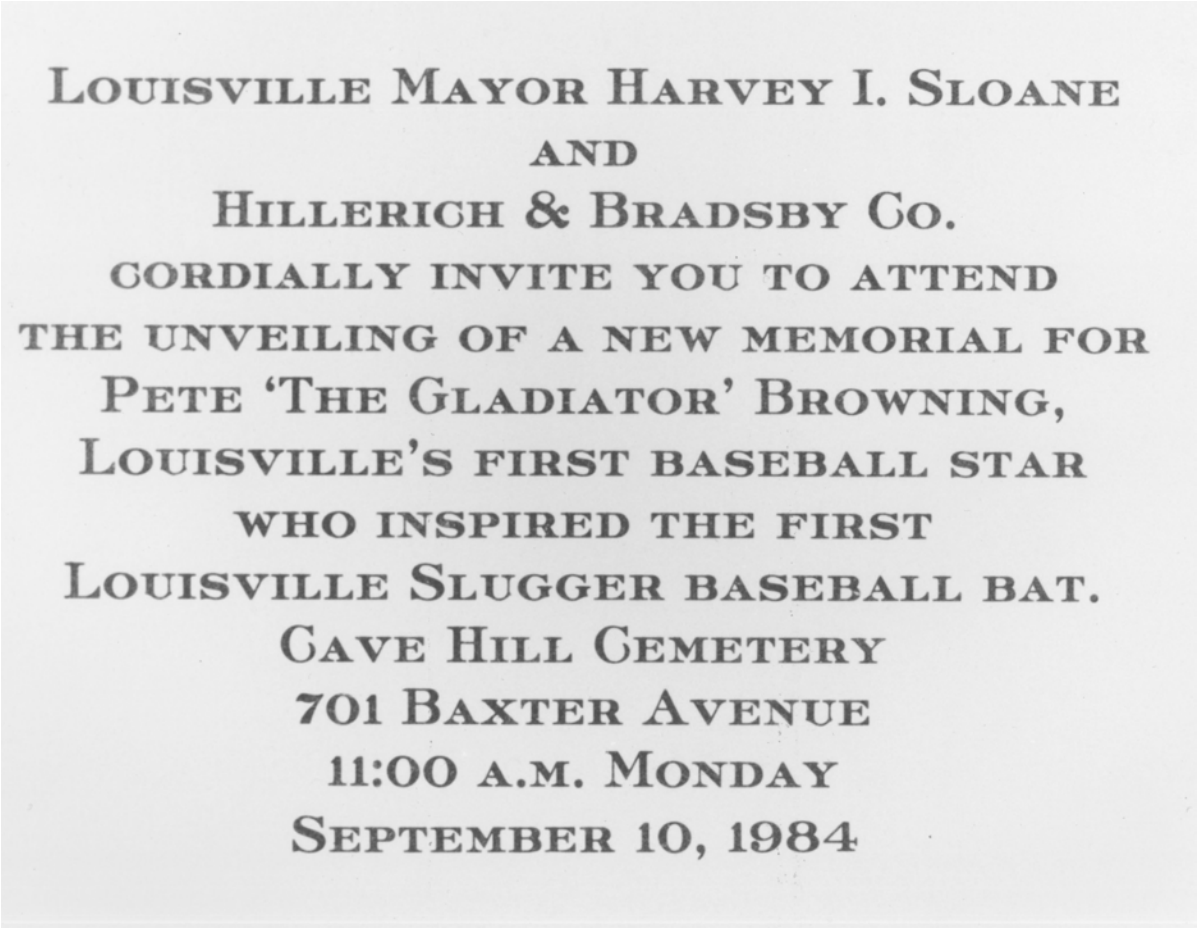
Serving as Browning's pallbearers were John Dyler, his first manager, and former teammates John Reccius, Tim Lehan, Isaac Van Burkalow, Charles Pfeiffer and Tom McLaughlin.

From his mother's house, Browning (who apparently died intestate) was taken to Cave Hill Cemetery, the final resting place for many of Louisville's major-league ballplayers, as well numerous nationally prominent local and state figures.

One of the more prominent major-leaguers is another Louisville batting champion, William "Chicken" Wolf, who had died several years before in 1903 and whose end Browning mirrored exactly.

And, both he and Browning share distinguished company with Revolutionary war hero/explorer George Rogers Clark (older brother of William Clark, part of the famed Lewis & Clark Expedition); 7'8" Jim Porter, "The Kentucky Giant"; Meriwether Lewis Clark, Jr., the creator of the Kentucky Derby and a grandson of explorer William Clark; J. Graham Brown, longtime owner of the Brown Hotel (whose house chef invented the nationally-famed "Hot Brown" sandwich); Kentucky Fried Chicken king Harland Sanders; newspaper editor Henry Watterson, namesake of Louisville's Watterson Expressway; and hotel magnate Louis Seelbach, owner of one of the city's finest hotels, the Seelbach Hotel.

And there Browning lay for years, his gravesite marked by a plain simple granite gravestone. Then on September 10, 1984, on the 79th anniversary of Browning's death and during the centennial year of the Hillerich & Bradsby Company, the world's most famous batmaker joined with the city of Louisville to honor Browning with a new grave marker that correctly spelled his name and fully detailed his lifetime baseball achievements.



Official invitation to the dedication ceremonies of Pete Browning's new grave marker. (Eclipse BBHR)

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Besides Cave Hill Cemetery, the spirit of Pete Browning lingers on in the Louisville consciousness at the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory and Browning's Restaurant & Brewery. Both are located in downtown Louisville, and the latter, at Louisville Slugger Field, is an establishment Browning would have found fully to his liking, with its excellent food complemented by a full-service bar…and home-brewed beer.

All that's missing now for Browning is a plaque in Cooperstown, and a statue in his home town.

The Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory, corporate headquarters of the Hillerich & Bradsby Company, makers of the world-famous Louisville Slugger bat. (*©Copyright Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory Archives)*

The first biography on one of baseball's most fabled figures - Pete "The Gladiator" Browning, the eccentric, talented and colorful 19th-century batting champion (.341 overall, three batting titles) and namesake of the famed Louisville Slugger bat. Includes numerous historical photographs.

AMERICAN GLADIATOR: The Life And Times Of Pete Browning