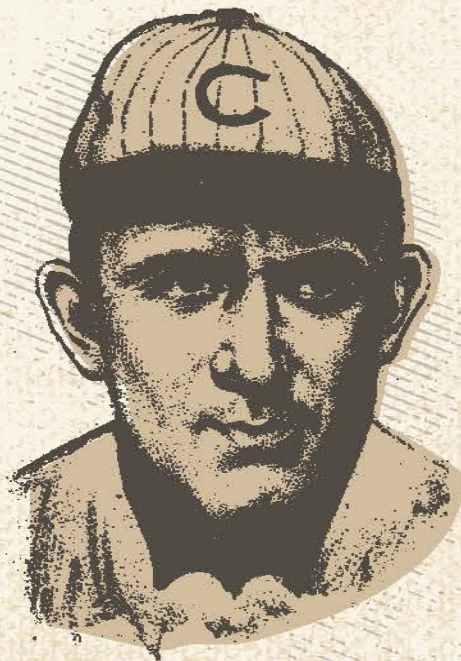


IF YOU BUILD IT...



This season marks the 150th
anniversary of the Cubs' founding.

BY **GARY COHEN**
AND ED HARTIG





Team photo of the 1870 Chicago White Stockings, the inaugural team of the Chicago Cubs franchise.

This season has been celebrated by many as the historic 50th anniversary of the beloved 1969 Cubs, but there's an even bigger anniversary that even the most die-hard North Side fans are likely overlooking. The 2019 campaign also marks 150 years since the team's founding.

Most historical records list 1876—when the National League was formed, and the then-White Stockings won the inaugural pennant—as the first year of the franchise. But the roots of the team that would officially become the Cubs in 1907 were planted and nurtured back in 1869 when the city of Chicago absolutely refused to be outdone by their neighbors in Cincinnati.

As it turns out, civic pride can take you a long way.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Baseball in the 19th century—or base ball as it was known back then—was a much different sport than the one played at Wrigley Field today. It was a less organized, amateur affair played with minimal



equipment (i.e., no gloves, helmets or catcher's gear) and pitchers who threw underhand from 45 feet away to a spot requested by the batter. Fans at that time were often called "bugs" or "cranks."

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As the fledgling sport gained in popularity following the Civil War, dozens of teams popped up in and around Chicago, with names such as Garden City, the Athletics and the Atlantics. The best Chicago team by far was the Excelsior Base Ball Club, but they were

still no match for the more established East Coast franchises.

Losses to teams from Washington, D.C., in 1867 and Cincinnati in 1868 left the Excelsiors devastated, with local and national press reporting on their "embarrassing" performance.

"Perhaps the only thing in which Chicago has not put forth efforts to outstrip New York is in a ball club," opined a piece in the New York Tribune. "A professional organization exists there, which is the city's pride, but its playing strength has not been sufficient to make a respectable stand against the heavy clubs outside. The Excelsiors may be doing something to bring up the club to first-class playing merit; but, if so, they are doing their work quietly."

By the spring of 1869, the Excelsiors were no more, having merged with another local club. But that year would prove to be a major turning point, not just for the future of baseball in the Windy City, but for the history of professional baseball.

In the spring of 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings announced they were going on a cross-country baseball tour and that they would be doing it as a fully professional outfit. That made the Cincinnati nine, which was founded in 1866, the first club to pay athletes for the sole purpose of playing baseball.

The powerhouse Cincinnati club went undefeated, playing about 70 games from April through November in cities ranging from Boston to San Francisco. Center fielder and manager Harry Wright listed the team's record

as 57-0, counting only games against established clubs as part of the National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP), the first governing body of the sport.

News of the Red Stockings' exploits was reported throughout the Midwest, including in the Chicago papers. And the team wasn't just winning; it was crushing the competition, posting scores of 103-8, 85-7 and 53-0.

For two Chicagoans, Thomas Foley and Lewis Meacham, this was simply too much to bear. In their opinion, Chicago's amateurish brand of baseball was an embarrassment, and something needed to be done about it. After all, if a team from Cincinnati could do what the Red Stockings were doing, then a team from Chicago could certainly do it as well.

THE PLAN

Foley was a professional billiards player and well-known gambler from Cashel, Ireland. He also owned and operated a local establishment that was a combination saloon, billiards parlor and gambling hall. Foley was popular and well connected around the city, regularly hobnobbing with prominent Chicagoans such as Marshall Field, Potter Palmer, George Pullman and Joseph Medill.

Following the Civil War, Vermont native and former Union soldier Meacham moved to Chicago where he served as sports editor at the Chicago Tribune. A lover of baseball, he looked to provide daily coverage of the game while boxing, horse racing, billiards and swimming received only rotating coverage.

The two met when Meacham was covering Foley during local billiards tournaments, and they agreed the state of Chicago baseball was a mess. Together, they drew up a plan to push for a professional team for the city.

The challenges they faced were many—including finding money, players and a proper venue—but just as challenging was changing the populace's mindset about baseball. Many in the workforce viewed ballplayers as no-good layabouts who often failed to show up to work and introduced a bad element into the community.

Meacham promised to use his resources at the Tribune to promote the need for a professional team, while Foley would talk up the game when he rubbed elbows with Chicago's elite at social events.

Within a short time, a letter to the editor appeared in the Tribune positing Meacham's and Foley's animating question: If Cincinnati can field a team that promotes community pride, why can't Chicago?

"There is no doubt of the fact that, as a base ball centre, Chicago is a failure," read one piece. "It is humiliating enough to make that acknowledgement, but still it is bare truth."

Additional articles appeared detailing the failure of local baseball, along with letters from fans asking where they could send money to purchase subscriptions to the new team (before it was even formed).

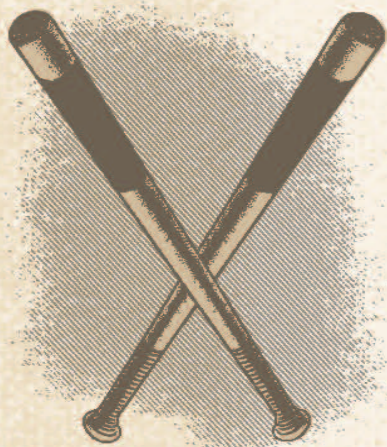
Little did anyone know, but these missives were plants written by Meacham and Foley. Their goal was to stir up interest while breaking down the idea that ballplayers were good-for-nothing loafers.

With the articles as ammunition, Foley rubbed elbows with Chicago's elite to promote the formation of a club. A group of about 50 prominent Chicago business and social leaders met on October 1, 1869, at the Briggs House Hotel in downtown Chicago to discuss the formation of a pro team.

They immediately overcame two significant obstacles. First, members of the Chicago Board of Trade vowed to financially support the enterprise, giving it instant credibility. Second, a committee was formed to determine the best way to raise additional funds.

A further meeting on October 7 was just as positive. Gone was any talk of players as slackers. It was down to business as the group addressed writing a





constitution and by-laws for the new club.

Meeting three at the Briggs on October 12 was a historic day for Chicago baseball. The group approved a constitution and by-laws, the rules for membership dues and the appointment of officers, officially giving birth to the Chicago Base Ball Club—today's Chicago Cubs.

The officers of the new club were a who's who of influential Chicagoans, including real estate tycoon Potter Palmer, Union general and Civil War hero Philip Sheridan, industrialist George Pullman and Chicago Tribune managing editor Samuel J. Medill. Many of the positions, including a long list of vice presidents, were ceremonial at best, but the inclusion of so many movers and shakers was a mark of civic pride.

GOING PRO

Foley was appointed business manager—the one position that required any real work—giving him the responsibility and financial resources

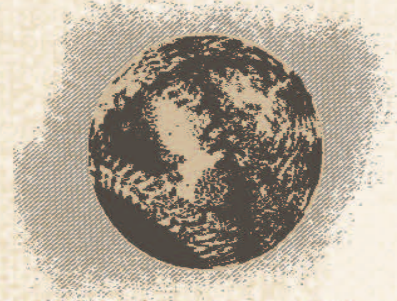
to find players. His first signing was Jimmy Wood as second baseman and manager for a reported \$2,000 per year (the equivalent of about \$37,000 today, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index). By the following spring, Foley and Wood had signed a professional nine that would play more than 70 games against pro and amateur clubs from April to November.

The team, nicknamed the White Stockings for their snowy white hose, split their home games between Ogden Park on the North Side (near Ontario, east of Michigan Avenue) and Dexter Park on the South Side (near 42nd and Halsted).

In the inaugural 1870 season, Chicago went 22-7 against professional teams, winning the championship of the NABBP by edging out the New York Mutuels on the season's final day. Early wins of 157-1 over Memphis and 111-5 over Grove City of Kankakee, Illinois, highlighted the need for separation between professional and amateur clubs.

The following year, the White Stockings joined the newly formed professional league, the National Association. Chicago was in the hunt for the NA pennant until late in the season when their ballpark was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire. The team didn't play the next two years as the city rebuilt, but the White Stockings rejoined the National Association for the 1874 and 1875 campaigns.

In 1876, White Stockings president William Hulbert and newly named player-manager Albert Spalding spearheaded the formation of the National League, and their team won the inaugural pennant. From there, the Chicago professional baseball club grew into one of the early powerhouses of the sport and one of the most beloved sports franchises of all time. As the saying goes, the rest is history.





Members of the 1876 Chicago White Stockings, who captured the NL Pennant in the inaugural year of the National League.