The first fifty years of professional baseball in Richmond, Virginia: 1883-1932

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Abstract

The First Fifty Years of Professional Baseball
in Richmond, Virginia: 1883-1932

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Master of Arts in History
University of Richmond, May 2001

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A detailed history of Richmond, Virginia's relationship with professional baseball has never been chronicled, especially the turbulent, early years of its development. This study explores Richmond's relationship with baseball from 1883-1932. It includes information about the men who played on the field, the team owners, and also comments on the relationship shared by the team and the city.

The most reliable source of information regarding early baseball is the local newspaper. A detailed reading of the Richmond Daily Dispatch, and the successive Richmond Dispatch and Richmond Times-Dispatch, was undertaken for this project. While several newspapers have existed in Richmond's history, often competing for readership during the same period, the Dispatch was selected for its continuity in publication and for its support and consistent reporting of baseball.
I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. W. Harrison Daniel, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Robert C. Kenzer

Dr. R. Barry Westin
The First Fifty Years of Professional Baseball
In Richmond, Virginia:
1883-1932

By
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B. B. A., College of William and Mary, 1992

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Acknowledgements

Informal conversations are often the source of inspiration. The direction and topic selection for this thesis can be attributed to two such conversations. As I began my studies at the University of Richmond, several people told me that at some point I should talk with Dr. W. Harrison Daniel, my thesis advisor, and Dr. John W. Outland in the Political Science Department, as they both share a passion for the game of baseball and its history as much as I do. Through these conversations I was encouraged to consider the topic of Richmond’s association with baseball as a history thesis project. It was in Dr. Daniel’s Saturday morning class on Baseball’s Golden Age that I realized that several historians have developed professional and academic careers studying this great game.

I want to thank the Department of History and especially Dr. Daniel, Dr. R. Barry Westin and Dr. Robert C. Kenzer for their guidance and encouragement as I have continued my program of study at Richmond. I also want to express gratitude for their patience and understanding as my travel schedule and other professional responsibilities have often interrupted or interfered with these studies.

My passion for the game can be directly attributed to my father, Jack Mayer. He introduced me to the game and spent many evenings and Saturdays coaching my Little League teams. His enthusiasm for the game was transferred to me. We have shared many experiences playing the game in the backyard, listening to games on the radio, going to Riverfront Stadium and enjoying a weekend engulfed in baseball history in Cooperstown. Thank you, Dad.
Most importantly, I must thank my wife Kimberly for her encouragement and understanding. She has provided great comfort and support on the days I have struggled with writing or expressed frustration with the microfilm reader. I also must thank her for her understanding for the many times that the laptop or library has kept us from doing the other things in life. Thank you, Bert.
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The First Fifty Years of Professional Baseball

In Richmond, Virginia:

1883-1932

Organized Baseball Comes to Richmond

The crack of the bat, the roar of the crowd, and the umpire's call of "Play Ball!" have long indicated the arrival of baseball season. The sounds of professional baseball were first heard in Richmond, Virginia over 115 years ago. The first fifty years of Richmond's association with the professional game were marked by instability, both in terms of league affiliation and local ownership. However, since 1932, when Eddie Mooers acquired the financially strapped Colts, the city of Richmond has enjoyed a relatively stable relationship with baseball. In the 68 years since the purchase, only three changes have occurred in Richmond's ownership and league affiliation. ¹

Eddie Mooers is widely credited for saving baseball in Richmond during the Great Depression. His Colts, playing in the Piedmont League, entertained Richmond fans until 1953, when the club was forced out of the city to make way for the higher

The new team, nicknamed the “Virginians” (‘Virginias’ in their initial season of 1954), played in the renovated Parker Field located at 3001 North Boulevard. After the 1964 season, the Virginians left town, and Toledo replaced Richmond in the International League. Richmond was without a team for the 1965 season.3

In 1966, professional baseball and the International League returned to Richmond in the form of the Braves. The Richmond Braves came into existence when the National League’s Milwaukee Braves relocated to Atlanta, Georgia, thereby displacing the Atlanta Crackers in the International League. The franchise was relocated to Richmond and renamed the Braves. Richmond’s new team also made Parker Field their home. The Braves played at Parker Field until 1984. During that offseason, The Diamond, at a cost of $8 million, was constructed on the same site as the old Parker Field.4

Richmond’s affiliation with professional baseball was not always as constant as it has been for the past sixty-eight years. The beginning of baseball in Richmond was marked by instability. As the professional game of baseball developed, the early years saw the rapid creation and failure of several leagues and teams. These early setbacks are

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4 Benson, Ballparks, 333.
evident in the study of Richmond’s history with the sport. Richmond shared in the
struggle to transform baseball from a boyhood game to a business enterprise.

The earliest indication of organized baseball in Richmond is discovered in the
writings of Henry Chadwick. Chadwick is often remembered as the “first great baseball
sportswriter.” Chadwick was born in Exeter, England in 1824 and moved to America in
1837. During the 1850’s he was a member of the New York Cricket Club and
Manhattan’s National Base Ball Club. As a journalist for the New York Clipper and later
the Brooklyn Eagle, New York Times, the Herald, the World, the Sun and the Tribune,
Chadwick became widely credited for supporting the development of the sport and
increasing its popularity. Chadwick’s contributions to the game were officially
recognized in 1938 when he was selected for membership in the Baseball Hall of Fame.  

In 1848, Chadwick married a young woman from Richmond. During his frequent
visits to the city, he attempted to organize both cricket and baseball teams. However, he
had little success. In March 1861, the New York Clipper ran an article to help promote
the game in Richmond. Historian George Kirsch described the article as “expressing
surprise at the tardy development” of the game “in a town with good fields and plenty of
young men with ample leisure time.” Chadwick’s surprise seems justified since

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5 Harold Seymour, Baseball: The Early Years (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, reprint in paperback 1989) 9. The Early Years is part one of a three volume history of baseball written by Seymour. His work is significant in that he was a pioneer in the academic study of the game of baseball. His three-volume history of baseball is based in part on his Ph.D. dissertation for Cornell University. This work represents the first doctoral dissertation on baseball accepted by a history department.

Baltimore and Washington already had established teams. The article encouraged those interested in developing a club to contact “H.C.” so that a one could be formed by mid-April. However, a few weeks after the article appeared, hostilities commenced at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. Organized baseball in Richmond would have to wait until after the Civil War.7

It was not until the summer after the United States Civil War that organized ball was introduced to Richmond. “Captain Alexander G. Babcock, a local ice dealer,” is credited with creating the first amateur club in Richmond. In 1866, Babcock assembled several other gentlemen to form a team they called the “Richmond.” The team practiced on a vacant lot on West Franklin Street, near the current intersection with Harrison Street. That location was a few blocks from the original location of Richmond College. Babcock’s example inspired the formation of several other local amateur nines- including the “Union Hill Ashbys, the Church Hill Lone Stars, and the Manchester Alerts.” One team, called the “Union,” was composed of “clerks in the various departments of the military government administering the city.”8

The formation of baseball clubs in Richmond received national attention in the New York Clipper. In his 1998 article, “Baseball and the Civil War,” George Kirsch quotes a Clipper article, “Base ball fever is rapidly assuming the form of an epidemic among the constructed and reconstructed denizens of the former stronghold of

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Davisocracy.” This “base ball fever” produced at least six teams that competed in the Richmond area. Bernard Henley reports that on July 2, 1867, a contest between the Pastimes, a Babcock-assembled team of Richmond all-stars, and the Monticello Club of the University of Virginia was staged to establish a state champion. The game was played at the Old Fairgrounds in Richmond. The Monticello Club soundly defeated the Pastimes 53-25, before “a sweltering crowd of several thousand.”

Baseball had started as a gentleman’s activity. The game was played for sport and all of the players were amateurs. By the end of the 1860’s, baseball’s amateur era was beginning to close. As the game gained in popularity, organizers saw the opportunity for financial gain by charging a fee to watch the games. Spectators expected to see a higher caliber of play in return for their admission price. During the 1860’s, clubs began to provide players with financial incentives to play the game. However these incentives were not in the form of outright payment or salary. In order to preserve the appearance of amateurism, many of the typical arrangements provided the players with under the table rewards or secret shares of the gate receipts. It was also the practice for the team owner to provide the player with “employment” with his company. The player, while under contract in one of the magnates’ companies, would devote most of his time to practicing the game and not the specified job. In short time, bidding wars to attract the best personnel developed amongst rival owners. Players were encouraged to abandon their

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10 Henley, “The Early Years of Baseball in Richmond,” 48.
contracts with one team in favor of better offers from another (a practice known as revolving). As the game increased in popularity, baseball began to attract the interests of gamblers. With gamblers came the possibility of game fixing, and with players receiving minimal payments to play the game, a gambler needed to offer little in the form of incentive for the player to throw the game his way. To combat these evils, teams turned to the practice of open professionalism.11

The famed 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings became baseball’s first openly professional team. In March 1870, ten professional teams organized the first professional league, the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players. Charter members of the league were the Philadelphia Athletics, Washington Olympics, Washington Nationals, New York Mutuals, the Unions of Troy, Boston Red Stockings, Forest Citys of Rockford, Forest Citys of Cleveland, Chicago White Stockings and the Kekiongas of Fort Wayne (which dropped out in mid-season and were replaced by the Brooklyn Eckfords). The Athletics won the first championship, however, the Boston Red Stockings under the leadership of George Wright won the next four.12

While Richmond did not have a representative team in the National Association of the 1870’s, the city did host two league games in 1875. The April 30, 1875 Daily Dispatch reported that on April 29, a crowd of 1500 “paid their way through the gates and at least 500 men and boys of economical and enterprising turn of mind clambered over the fence” at the Fair-Grounds (located at Franklin, Belvidere, Main and Laurel

11 Seymour, The Early Years, 47-56.
12 Ibid., 59-61.
Streets, site of current Monroe Park) to witness the game between the champion Boston Red Stockings and the Washington Nationals. As described by the *Daily Dispatch*, "the play altogether surpassed anything of the kind ever witnessed in Richmond." The Red Stockings were victorious by a score of 22-9. After a day of touring the historic sites in Petersburg, the Red Stockings defeated the Old Dominion Club of Petersburg 43-3. On May 2, 1875 the Red Stockings and Nationals again played at the Richmond Fair-Grounds. The Boston Club once again claimed victory, but this time by the score of 24-0.\(^\text{13}\)

The National Game had come to Richmond, and the city was excited about baseball. This enthusiasm helped Henry C. Boschen, a local shoe manufacturer, launch Richmond's long association with professional baseball.

\(^{13}\) *Daily Dispatch*, (Richmond, Virginia) April 30; May 3, 1875.
Chapter One

Richmond and The Professional Game
1883-1884

Henry C. Boschen, owner of a shoe manufacturing factory located on Broad Street, between Second and Third streets, is regarded as the “father of professional baseball in Richmond.” In the late 1870’s, Boschen’s doctor advised him to partake in active exercise. He decided to take up baseball and eventually formed a team composed of employees from his factory. Boschen himself served as the team’s pitcher and is one of several men credited with having invented the spitball. He used slippery elm to increase the amount of saliva. It is also reported that he paid $25 to have a man from Washington come to Richmond and teach him to throw a curve. As was the practice of the day, Boschen found the best local ballplayers and gave them employment at his factory. In this manner, he could maintain that his ‘amateur club’ consisted entirely of his employees.¹

Boschen’s team played against local amateur nines and staged exhibition games with visiting National League teams. The games were played at ‘Boschen Field’ located at the “head of West Cary Street” (near the modern Cary/Lombardy streets intersection).

In his 1935 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* article, G. Watson James, Jr. further describes the location of the field as being “opposite the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad yard and very close to the first factory erected by Mrs. Kidd of Pin Money Pickle fame.” The field was described as being so large that it was impossible to hit a ball beyond its boundaries.²

On March 27, 1883, the *Daily Dispatch* announced that the team was reorganized as the Richmond Base-Ball Club. Boschen’s team of factory workers was taking the first steps toward professionalism. The grounds of Boschen Field were renovated and now included a grandstand with “two private boxes on each end, which will be expressly for the ladies.” The team would display new uniforms consisting of “drab shirts, pants and caps with cardinal stockings and belts.” The announcement indicates that a limited number of season tickets were for sale at the Richmond Club offices at 215 East Broad Street. The initial team roster was listed as Bennett and Henry M. Morgan, catchers; Boschen and Gladman, pitchers; James E. Powell at first; Edward (Eddie) C. Glenn second; E. T. Scharf, shortstop; William (Billy) M. Nash at third; Dulane in left field; Stratton in center; and Hankins playing right field.³

Several days later it was announced that “several foreign players” had been added to the roster, “making it much stronger” than the previous year. Perhaps the strongest addition to the roster was pitcher Charley Ferguson, a native of Charlottesville.⁴ Stratton,

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³ *Daily Dispatch*, March 27, 1883.

⁴ Ibid., April 7, 1883 and April 14, 1883.
Morgan and Scharf were all natives of Baltimore and were well-known players in that
city. When the Richmonds visited Baltimore for a series of games at Oriole Park, all
three “were received as great favorites by the audience.”

Boschen proved to the Richmond public that his 1883 team would play at a higher
level than before when on March 27, it was announced that the season would commence
April 2nd, 3rd, and 4th with three games against the Cleveland Club of the champion
League. However, the *Daily Dispatch* did not provide game summaries, nor did the
paper have public announcements advertising the games.

On April 7, 1883 the *Daily Dispatch* announced that the Richmonds had secured
a four game series with the “famous Red-Stocking Baseball Club of Boston.” Richmond
“cranks,” the term used to describe baseball fans in the 1880’s, would have the
opportunity to see the famed visitors for the first time in eight years. The series of games
drew such a large crowd that the home team decided to have tickets available at the Club
offices during the day to help alleviate crowds that gathered at the gate before the game.
Tickets sold for 25 cents. Attendance for the third game was estimated at 800-1000
spectators. The largest to attend a Richmonds game.

Boschen’s Richmonds regularly staged games with regional professional and
amateur clubs. Locals included the team from Richmond College and a team known as

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7 *Ibid.*, March 27, April 2, 3, 4, and 5, 1883.
the Fultons. Teams from Baltimore (Athletic, Our Boys and the Waverlys), Philadelphia (Defiance and Siddons) and the Washington Nationals were common opponents. The Daily Dispatch frequently reminded readers that the Richmond team was an amateur club that fared well against the mostly professional opponents.9

Boschen secured a game to be played at his field with a “picked nine” and a team identified as the Swans, a team of “colored professionals.” The advertisements promoting this game highlighted Swans star “FOWLER, the only colored professional in America.”10 At the time baseball did not have an official policy barring players of color from playing within the ranks of white ballplayers, although many clubs had an unwritten policy to prohibit black ballplayers. By the 1880’s the ban became a widely accepted practice that was not broken until the celebrated appearance of Jackie Robinson in a Dodgers uniform in 1947.11

It is assumed that the Swans’ star “Fowler” was Bud Fowler (born John W. Jackson), the first professional African-American to play baseball. He began his career in April 1878 with Chelsea, Massachusetts. While first appearing in the professional ranks as a pitcher, Fowler is best remembered as a second baseman. His career was marked by frequent changes of teams and leagues. It is written that his inability to stick with one team was more a product of his race than his playing ability. He is known to have played with teams in 22 different states and Canada. Although he never played with

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9 Ibid., April 20, 21, and 26-29, May 13, 15, and 22-24, 1883.
10 Ibid., April 19, 1883.
11 Seymour, The Early Years, 334-335.
a team in a major league, Fowler did play at the highest level of minor leagues in the Western League (Keokuk 1885, Topeka 1886) and the International League (Binghamton, 1887).\(^\text{12}\)

In June 1883, a newly-formed corporation challenged Boschen for baseball supremacy in the city of Richmond. On June 21, 1883 it was reported that “a group of gentlemen met in this city yesterday and organized the Virginia Base-Ball Association.” William C. Seddon was selected as President of the organization, Charles E. Epps, Vice-President, Frank D. Steger, Secretary and Thomas C. Alfriend, Treasurer. The Association was announced as a capital stock company of no less than $5,000 nor more than $20,000 with $1,400 secured.\(^\text{13}\)

In an article headlined “THE BASE-BALL BUSINESS,” the Daily Dispatch of June 24, 1883 wrote that the Virginia Base-Ball Association’s Board of Directors consisted of “some of the best people of all classes.”\(^\text{14}\) Indeed the board members were prominent residents of Richmond. Henry Seddon, a wholesale grocer, had expanded his business to include stock speculation. Frank Steger and Thomas Alfriend were insurance salesmen. The other board members were “a pork packer, a railroad and machinist supplier, a judge on the 7th circuit court, three merchants, and a stockbroker.” Charles


\(^{13}\) *Daily Dispatch*, June 21, 1883.

\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*, June 24, 1883.
Epps, while not a confirmed member of the professional class, was the captain of the police force.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to extolling the virtues of the new club’s board members, the \textit{Daily Dispatch} article commented on the players, stating that the Association has “engaged a strong nine, who in their new uniforms will present a splendid appearance on the field.” These uniforms were white with a red belt and stockings. The word “Virginia” appeared in red across the chest. The players signed by the Virginia Base-Ball club decided to stay in Richmond despite “the many offers to go elsewhere.” From the presented roster: Morgan, catcher; Ferguson, pitcher; Powell, first base; Scharf, second base; Ford, shortstop; Nash, third base; and the outfield of Glenn, Hankins and Latouche, it is apparent that the Virginia Base-Ball Club signed all of Henry Boschen’s Richmonds Club.\textsuperscript{16} E.J. Kilduff was the VBBC’s inaugural manager.\textsuperscript{17}

Henry Boschen was not party to the organization of this new association. In the June 19 and 22, 1883 \textit{Daily Dispatch}, Boschen’s Richmonds Club had advertisements announcing games on June 25-27 with the Mutual Club of Baltimore. On June 22, 1883 he published in the \textit{Daily Dispatch} a letter to the public. He reminded the readers that he had spent the last five years “building up the National pastime in this city.” His enterprise had provided the city with quality baseball at no profit to himself, until the

\textsuperscript{15} Robert H. Gudmestad, “Baseball, The Lost Cause, and the New South in Richmond, Virginia, 1883-1890” \textit{Virginia Magazine of History and Biography} vol. 106, no. 3 (Summer, 1998), 274.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Daily Dispatch}, June 24, 1883

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, July 4, 1883.
1883 season "being the first in which I have been able to realize anything for my labor."

He suddenly had his team "taken from" him. He thanked the public for its past support and respectfully asked for its continued patronization and patience as he assembled a new club to play the dates for which he had secured contracts with outside clubs.\(^\text{18}\)

A few days after the Virginia Base-Ball Club was organized, the three person committee that was designated to find suitable grounds for the establishment of a ballpark, settled on the land of "Mr. Otway Allen’s Farm near the west end of Franklin Street" across the street from Richmond College. The Lee Monument is located near the original main gate/homeplate area. A fence was erected on June 26, 1883 and the grounds were expected to be ready for the Virginias first game on July 4. While the field itself was rough and uneven, the grounds were described as "ample" and the grandstand was a "credit to the city and the Association." Most games had a 25-cent admission policy. For an extra 15 cents, fans could have a covered seat in the grandstand. Often the club advertised free admission for ladies accompanied by gentlemen. Seat cushions were available for a rent and there was a brass bar under the grandstand that sold bock, lager and whiskey.\(^\text{19}\)

The Virginia Base-Ball Association wanted to emphasize to the public its commitment to professional baseball when it announced that an agent of the club was

\(^{18}\) *Ibid.*, June 19 and 22, 1883. The first game with the Mutuals resulted in a 15-11 defeat for the Richmonds. The remaining games were rained out.

dispatched to the "North with the full authority to make engagements with the best clubs of the country." Games were secured with the Nationals of Washington, the Newarks and Trentons of the Inter-State League and the famed St. Louis club of the American Association. The Virginia club was rewarded for its efforts with large crowds. The *Daily Dispatch* regularly reported attendance figures over 1500 and even as high as estimates of 2500-3000 for the visit by St. Louis.\(^{20}\) When the Southwarks of Philadelphia presented a team that did not meet the standards expected by the Virginias and its fans, Mr. Kilduff, Virginias' manager, cancelled the remaining games in deference to "justice to the patrons of the National game" in Richmond.\(^{21}\) A similar situation occurred on August 10, 1883. When the "Our Boys" Club of Baltimore failed to deliver a quality ballclub, the Virginias' manager announced that anyone dissatisfied could be refunded at the ticket office. Nobody took the manager up on his offer, and the game proceeded with Virginias victorious 17-9.\(^{22}\)

From those experiences, Virginia Base-Ball Association realized that quality opponents were needed in order to generate public support and large attendance. The *Daily Dispatch* recognized that the financial benefits of baseball extended beyond the treasury of the Virginia Base-Ball Club. "A good game of baseball attracts not only our

\(^{20}\) *Daily Dispatch* July 8, 24, Aug 5, 12, 15, 19, 1883.


\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*, August 11, 1883.
citizens, but outsiders as well. Country merchants will stay over a day or so, if they know they can have such amusements.”

While Henry Boschen continued to host games between his Richmonds and visiting clubs at Boschen Park, it is apparent that he could not compete with the success of the Virginias. In an attempt to bring more fans to his ballgames, Boschen lowered ticket prices to only 15 cents, a 40% discount off of the usual admission of 25 cents.

He even attempted to discredit the Virginia club, as evidenced in the August 28 Daily Dispatch headline: “Alleged Hurtful Interference with the Virginias Game in Brooklyn.” When the Virginias were in Brooklyn on a recent visit, the game and, more importantly, the opening of the gates to the paying public were delayed upon allegations that the Virginias were in violation of an Alliance rule by having played a club with a “black-listed” player on its roster. Players were black-listed when expelled from one team. The Alliance created a rule to prevent teams from hiring and playing clubs that utilized so called “black-listed” players. The allegation against the Virginias was brought to the Brooklyns attention shortly before the gates were to be opened. The delay and confusion caused many fans to go home.

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23 Ibid., July 25, 1883.

24 Ibid., July 25, 1883

25 Ibid., August 28, 1883.

26 The League Alliance was an organization created by the National League in 1877 and lasted until 1883. The Alliance was largely a ploy by the League to preserve its dominant role over other baseball leagues and is a predecessor to modern Organized Baseball. The Alliance was formed in efforts to prevent other teams and leagues from invading League territory and was an attempt to stop revolving. The Alliance provided a set of rules that governed the playing arrangements for League and non-League teams, provided for territorial rights as only one team from a given city could hold membership, and protected the ballclubs’ rights to a player’s contract via the reserve clause. Seymour, Early Years, 98-103.
The Dispatch article states that “Mr. Boschen’s name has been attached to the trouble.” Boschen explained to the newspaper that W.S. Wise, playing with the Washington Nationals was a black-listed player from Harrisburg. The Virginias were in violation of the Alliance rule by having played the Nationals in both Washington and Richmond. Boschen wrote to the secretary of the Alliance, Mr. Williams in Columbus, Ohio. The Virginias countered that the alleged player was not present in either game with the Nationals, and therefore there was no violation. In the end, the Virginias and Brooklyns did play the ballgame. While the Virginias were victorious on the field, they suffered from “annoyance” and financial loss due to the low attendance.

The Virginias 1883 season began with an exhibition game on July 4 and concluded on October 20th. The team had played a total of 47 games and won 33 of them. Of the fourteen loses, nine were to teams from either the highly regarded minor league, the Inter-State Association, or the two major leagues: the National League and American Association. Ford (.330), Glenn (.322) and Nash (.320) were the leading hitters for the club, while Charley Ferguson was the pitching ace (in the early years of professional baseball, it was common for one or two men to pitch every game, Paul Latouche served as the other pitcher.)27 The Virginias were expected to have most of the same team for the 1884 campaign. The biggest loss, however, was Ferguson. In September, he signed a contract to pitch with the Philadelphia Athletics in the National

27 Daily Dispatch, October 28, 1883.
League. Ferguson’s major league career only lasted five years. He died of typhoid fever at the age of twenty-five.\textsuperscript{28}

On September 4, 1883 the \textit{Daily Dispatch} printed an article from the \textit{Capitol} (a Washington paper) with the introduction that the news would “be of interest to Richmond base-ballists.” The article posed the opinion that in order for a professional baseball team to be profitable, it must be entered into a league. The paper even suggested the formation of a league of teams in cities as far north as Albany, New York and Hartford, Connecticut and ranging south to Richmond. The main merit of the proposed league, as opposed to other leagues that were in existence, would be reduced travel time and cost. The article also noted that for “the information of the outside world, Richmond is as liberal in its patronage of good ball-playing as any city its size in the Union, and it is believed that the Virginia Base-Ball Company would be in full accord with such a movement as the one above referred to.”\textsuperscript{29}

Apparently, William Seddon and the other board members of the Virginia Base-Ball Club agreed. On September 12, Seddon attended a meeting at the Monongahela House in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with the purpose of forming a new baseball league. Those in attendance were A.H. Henderson of Chicago; T. J. Pratt, Philadelphia; B.F. Matthews, Baltimore; M. B. Scanlon and William Warren White, Washington; William C. Seddon, Richmond; and A.G. Pratt and W.H. Camp of Pittsburgh. The conference


\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Daily Dispatch}, September 4, 1883.
decided that the new league would be called the Union Association of Professional Baseball Clubs, with permanent officers of H. B. Bennett (Washington), President; Thomas J. Pratt (Philadelphia), Vice-President; William Warren White (Washington), Secretary.

The new league did not immediately settle upon the number of teams or which cities would be represented. It did, however, make an important decision. The league chose not to endorse the reserve clause:

Resolved, that while we recognize the validity of all contracts made by the National League and American Association, we cannot recognize any agreement whereby any number of our ball-players may be reserved for any club for any time beyond the terms of the contract with such club.\(^{30}\)

The reserve clause was a device created by baseball owners to limit individual player salaries and prevent competitive bidding. The clause reserved the rights to a player's services as well as the player's future negotiating rights to the team that signs him to a contract. A player under reserve to one team was black-listed from playing on other teams until the player was released by the first team. National League owners first introduced the reserve clause on September 29, 1879. The initial clause allowed owners to reserve five players. By 1883, the National League and the rival American Association had extended the reserve to eleven players.\(^{31}\)


\(^{31}\) Seymour, \textit{The Early Years}, 104-115. Seymour contends that the reserve clause was the foundation for professional baseball, without it, baseball may never have developed into a prosperous enterprise. The
Although Richmond was not selected to join the Union Association, the Virginia Base-Ball Club entered into agreement with the Eastern League, at a meeting held at the Bingham House in Philadelphia, on January 4, 1884. The Eastern League was originally named the Union League of Professional Base-Ball Clubs, but the organizers wanted to avoid confusion with the Union Association, "which is pursuing an entirely different course from that contemplated by the Eastern League." In addition to the Virginias, the Eastern League membership included the Monumental Club of Baltimore, Quickstep Club of Wilmington, Active Club of Reading, and the Allentown Club of Allentown, Pennsylvania, Trenton Club of Trenton, and Domestic Club of Newark, New Jersey, and a club from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At the Bingham House meeting, officers were selected, and Virginias' W.C. Seddon was elected as President, S. Reineman of the Trenton Club was selected as Vice-President and Henry H. Diddlebock of Philadelphia was chosen as Treasurer. 32

The Eastern League adopted the rules of the American Association with a few changes. The American Association was one of the two existing major leagues. The Association operated during the seasons 1882 through 1891. The league's founding originated over disputes with the National League regarding games on Sunday, ticket prices and the sale of beer and whiskey at the ballpark. The topic of Sunday ballgames clause was so important to baseball's development that in the Early Years, he devotes an entire chapter to the subject. The reserve clause remained part of baseball's labor relations until the historic court ruling in 1976. Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, Baseball: An Illustrated History, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) 1994, p 443.

32 Daily Dispatch, January 6, 1884.
had been controversial since the professionalization of baseball in the 1860’s. Most localities had blue laws that restricted work and other activities on the day of the Christian Sabbath. While club owners did not want to violate local laws (the Northeast and South were more strict than the Midwest), they realized that hosting games on Sunday would allow many people to attend games who otherwise could not. It was also assumed that by introducing the game to those not as familiar with baseball, greater popular interest would be generated, thereby increasing attendance on other days of the week. The National League, with the majority of the teams located in the Northeast, resisted allowing the weekend games. This stance in combination of the bans or limits on alcohol sales at ballparks contributed to the formation of the American Association. Since many of the Association’s ownership groups were mid-western brewers, these two issues were important. The predominant occupation of the league owners earned the American Association the nickname “the Beer and Whiskey League.”

The American Association adopted the playing rules of the National League, but permitted Sunday games (where legally accepted), allowed the sale of alcohol, and provided teams the right to establish their own ticket prices, as long as the visiting team received $65 from the gate receipts. The National League mandated a 50 cent admission charge. Most Association teams preferred 25 cents, so as to allow the “common man” access to the games. The Association differed from the National League in the manner of

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33 Detailed histories of the founding of the American Association can be found in Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 61-79, Seymour, The Early Years, 135-147. The most complete history of the American Association is found in David Neme: The Beer and Whiskey League: The Illustrated History of the American Association- Baseball’s Renegade Major League (Lyons & Burford, Publishers, 1994).
determining its champion. The League crowned the team with the most victories, the Association decided that the team with the greatest winning percentage would be the champion.\textsuperscript{34}

The style of play in the 1880's was different from the game today. The visiting team did not necessarily receive the first at bat, a coin toss decided which team would have that opportunity. Most ballfields did not have locker rooms. Visiting teams prepared for games at the hotel and rode to the game in horse-drawn carriages, often being tormented by tossed objects and verbal taunts from the cranks of the home team. Substitutions were limited to the replacement of an injured or ill player. As a result, many players became adept at more than one position, allowing managers to shift the players on the field. Pitchers threw from a box fifty feet from homeplate. Until 1884, pitchers were required to deliver the ball from a point below the hip. Batters were allowed to call for a high or low pitch and were granted three strikes for an out or seven balls for a free base. The familiar strike count of four balls and three strikes was not established until 1889. Foul balls were not considered strikes and batters employed a flat-sided bat that enabled them to knock an unwanted pitch into foul territory without suffering a strike or a poor hit in play. Few fielders wore gloves, so hand injuries were quite common. Since a catcher’s equipment was rudimentary at best, he positioned himself several feet behind the batter. The umpire was then in a position several feet

\textsuperscript{34} Nemec, \textit{Beer and Whiskey League}, 22.
behind homeplate and often had a poor vantage point for a call. With only one umpire on the field, there were often disputes over poor calls.\textsuperscript{35}

The Eastern League did adopt a few rules of its own. The pitcher was to deliver the ball from a point below the shoulder. The home team was required to remove disorderly persons from the grounds within fifteen minutes or the game could be called in favor of the opponent. The Eastern League also established that a game would be considered complete if the side that batted first had completed their fifth inning and the team that batted four times was ahead in runs. The Board was directed to appoint four regular umpires and two substitutes. The salary would be $100 a month for the regulars and $5 a game for the substitutes.\textsuperscript{36} The American Association had developed the system of salaried umpires in the middle of the 1882 season. Entrance into the Eastern League required $100 in annual dues.\textsuperscript{37}

There was much anticipation amongst the residents of Richmond for the home team’s inaugural season in a professional league. The Virginias opened the baseball season hosting the Providence club of the National League for a three game set beginning April 3. The Virginias also conducted exhibition games with other National League clubs including, Cleveland and Philadelphia. The Eastern League schedule did not begin until May 14 when the Harrisburg team came to Richmond. The exhibition games drew


\textsuperscript{36} The first Eastern League umpire corps consisted of R. J. Pearce of Brooklyn, William Hoover of Philadelphia, J.J. Smith of Easton, and Wesley Curry also of Philadelphia. The substitutes were Christian Hassett of Brooklyn and H.A. Mill of Lynn, Massachusetts. \textit{Daily Dispatch}, March 18, 1884.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Daily Dispatch}, January 6, 1884.
large crowds, despite cold weather. The first game with Providence had nearly 1000 spectators in attendance. When Philadelphia came to visit; the presence of the Virginias’ 1883 ace Charley Ferguson produced sizable crowds.38

The opening of the Virginias 1884 season was also marked by controversy. In October 1883 the Virginia Base-Ball Club had agreed to a verbal contract with Ted Sullivan. However, Sullivan had decided not to honor the agreement, even though he recognized the verbal commitment as a contract. Sullivan had been the manager of Chris Von der Ahe’s St. Louis Browns of the American Association and led that club to a second place finish in 1883. Sullivan, a railroad news agent by trade, was an experienced baseball man, having organized the first Northwestern League in 1879. He had decided to leave the Browns after player disputes and frequent interference by Von der Ahe.39

In February 1884, Sullivan visited with the directors of the Virginia Base-Ball Club and asked to be released from his contract. Since they did not release him, he announced he would be in Richmond no later than the 25th of March to take charge of the club. However, after returning to St. Louis, he telegraphed the directors to see if they still insisted upon arrival in Richmond. When they responded that they did, he wrote that he would not come to Richmond, but was staying in St. Louis. Henry Lucas, founder of the St. Louis Maroons and a driving force behind the Union Association, presented Sullivan the opportunity to earn $1000 more than the Richmond club offered. His position also

38 Ibid., March 14; April 3, 4, 11, 14, 24, 1884. The attendance figures for the dates that Charley Ferguson pitched were not given, the crowds were merely described as large.

39 Nemec, Beer and Whiskey League, 48; Daily Dispatch, April 13, 1884.
presented the opportunity to compete in the same city as Von der Ahe’s Club. With
Sullivan otherwise employed, the VBBC’s directors brought in M. S. Allen from
Rondout, New York to serve as manager and pitcher for the Virginias. In 1883, Allen
had pitched for the Leader Club of Kingston, New York. Felix Moses replaced Allen as
manager by July 18, 1884.40

In addition to Allen, the Virginias featured other new ballplayers. Also from the
Leader Club were battery-mates, the Dugan brothers: Edward, a pitcher and William, a
catcher. Doyle, a pitcher with major league experience replaced Fergusson and teamed
up with Bill Morgan, a catcher, to form the teams’ other battery. Jim Powell continued at
first, Billy Nash at third, Smiley at second and Dick Johnston, also from the Leader Club,
completed the infield as the shortstop. The outfield included Eddie Glenn, David Cain,
and Stratton. Paul Latouche returned to the team as an alternate.41

Three articles from April and May editions of the Daily Dispatch indicate that the
residents of Richmond were developing a passion for the game. In the April 4, 1884
Dispatch, W.J. Manning posted a notice that “the Base-Ball flag may be seen flying over
609 Broad street every day that a game is to be played by the Virginias, either in town or
abroad.” Manning also noted that every game would be bulletined on his board. On May
31, 1884 it was posted that for all Virginias’ away games, a complete score by innings,
with various statistics, could be seen at all times on the board at Andrew Krouse’s

40 Daily Dispatch April 2, 13, and July 18, 1884.
41 Ibid., March 14, 1884.
Restaurant on Broad Street near Brooke Avenue. That same day’s *Daily Dispatch* printed for those “not familiar with the game in detail” an explanation of the abbreviations listed in the box score. The clarification was written in response to a letter sent to the paper by “T.E.P.” of White Hall, and ran under the heading “For the Uninitiated.”

While the fans in Richmond were developing a passion for the game, the spectators at the Virginia Base-Ball Park were developing a reputation for poor behavior. In an article describing the crowd’s “howls, hoots and hisses” after a poorly called game by umpire William Hoover, the *Daily Dispatch* admonished both the cranks and the Association management:

> A Richmond crowd thinks it their right, if not their duty, to ratify or disapprove the decisions of the umpire; but they ought nonetheless, always to remember the presence of the ladies. A repetition of the doings of yesterday will be very injurious to the Association. It will drive people away. Better management should prevail.

The article also commented that an officer of the club did try to quiet the crowd, however, his actions “only made them worse.”

The Wilmington (Delaware) *Sunday Critic* sullied the reputation of the crowds in Richmond even more. On May 30, 1884, the *Daily Dispatch* ran a reprint of an article claiming that “the audiences in Richmond are beyond description for rowdyism . . . (treating) the visiting clubs to the vilest abuse from all classes.” The Richmond paper,

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which only a month ago reprimanded the local fans for its verbal assault upon the umpire, now defended the hometown cranks. The article pointed out that the rough element in the Richmond crowd is "probably smaller comparatively than in other cities," and the taunts from the crowd are usually reserved for situations that warrant such a reaction. 44

The Eastern League season was disrupted on May 27, 1884 when it was announced that the Monumental Club of Baltimore had disbanded. The Ironsides Club of Lancaster, Pennsylvania was chosen to complete the Monumental's schedule. However, the club was ruled ineligible for full league membership, thus relegating games against the Ironsides as exhibitions. This situation was reversed in July. The Harrisburg Club withdrew from the Eastern League and disbanded. On July 16, 1884 the officers of the Eastern League convened at the Bingham House for a special meeting. The Ironsides and the York Club of York, Pennsylvania were both granted full membership into the Eastern League. The league had originally extended an invitation to the Atlantic Club of Long Island as Harrisburg's successor. However, the club failed to meet its financial obligations to the league, and York was accepted in its place. 45

The Active Club of Reading added to the Eastern League's woes when the team, suffering poor attendance, withdrew from the league. In August, the seven-team circuit lost two more teams. This time the teams did not disband, but were accepted into two of the three competing major leagues: the Wilmington Club (the Eastern League

44 Ibid., May 30, 1894.

45 Ibid., May 27 and 28, 1884; Richmond Dispatch July 5 and 18, 1884.
championship leader) to the Union Association and the Virginias to the American
Association. The Wilmington Club lost 15 of their first 17 games in the majors and soon
disbanded. The Virginias, while struggling, fared better in their move to a major league.
The Eastern League was able to finish as a five-team league in 1884. The league was
reorganized as the New York League for 1885.\textsuperscript{46}

The Virginias foray into the American Association began on August 5, 1884. In
1882, the American Association had started as a six-team circuit that rivaled the six-year
old National League for major league status. The league expanded to eight teams for the
1883 season. In the 1883-84 offseason, the Union Association with its open pledge to
challenge the reserve rule, began play. American Association leaders, feeling threatened
by the upstart, decided to expand to twelve teams for the 1884 season. Brooklyn,
Indianapolis and Washington were immediately chosen. Brooklyn and Indianapolis had
teams that competed in other leagues in 1883; Brooklyn was the Inter-State League
Champion. For the twelfth team, the American Association had approached the
Virginias, but selected the 1883 Northwestern League Champion Toledo ballclub
instead.\textsuperscript{47}

The Washington ballclub was at a disadvantage from the beginning of the season.
Unlike all the other teams in the Association, the Statesmen was not an established
ballclub and had to be formed from scratch. The team struggled to a 12-51 record for a


\textsuperscript{47} Nemec, \textit{Beer and Whiskey League}, 40, 57, 60.
winning percentage of .190 when the team was forced to disband for financial reasons. An invitation was then extended to the Virginias to take Washington's place in the Association. The August 5, 1884 *Richmond Dispatch* printed one short paragraph announcing that the Virginias were changing leagues, and that the first game in the Association was scheduled for that very afternoon against the Athletics of Philadelphia. The paper also announced that Mr. Seddon had been dispatched "up North to secure the services of several good players, which his club greatly needs, if they wish to hold their own against the American Association clubs."48

The other members of the Eastern League were quite upset with the action of the Virginia Base-Ball Club. Henry Diddlebock, the Eastern League secretary, wrote William Seddon that the Eastern League threatened to reject the resignation of the VVBC and instead would expel the club on the grounds of financial indebtedness to the league. Much as blacklisting would prevent another team from signing a player, expulsion could prevent a team from playing in another league. The Eastern League contended that the VBBC owed $24.50 for Seddon's expenses when he ventured to Bingham house in July for the EL's special meeting and another $20 in fines levied against Powell and E. Dugan ($10 for each man). Seddon's reply, as printed in the *Richmond Dispatch*, countered that the $24.50 in expenses were league expenses, as his travel was conducted in his capacity as Eastern League president. In the case of the fines, Seddon explained that the $10 assessed to Powell for arguing with the umpire should be negated. Powell's role as

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48 Nemec, *Beer and Whiskey League*, 60, 73; *Richmond Dispatch* August 5, 1884.
captain of the club gave him the right to do so. Seddon agreed that Dugan was out of line in his argument, and the amount would be deducted from his salary and credited to the league.\textsuperscript{49}

Seddon and the directors of the VBBC recognized that the club needed more than just talent in order to compete in the American Association. The stockholders met on August 8, 1884 and announced that they would seek to increase the stock from $5000 to $10,000. Two hundred shares of stock with a value of $25 were made available for purchase. The team’s announcement encouraged interested parties to “call at the office of Thomas L. Alfriend, the Treasurer, No. 1117 east Main street.” The club directors appealed to the “lovers of the great national game” to “not allow the Virginia Base-Ball Club to go down now that it is on the eve of a most brilliant career.” The advertisement of stock was announced on the same day as the Virginias were beginning a homestand after completing a two-week road trip.\textsuperscript{50}

The Virginias completed the season tenth out of the thirteen teams that played in the American Association (including last place Washington). The club finished the American Association season with a 12-30 record for a .286 winning percentage. The team had better success when it was in the Eastern League, amassing a 30-28 record and a .517 winning percentage. In the American Association standings, the Virginias finished

\textsuperscript{49} Richmond Dispatch, August 9, 1884.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., August 9 and 26, 1884.
ahead of the expansion Indianapolis Hoosiers (12th) and charter franchise Pittsburgh Alleghenys (11th). 51

The Virginias late season entry into the American Association helped bring large crowds out to the Virginia Base-Ball Park. The first game versus the Athletics drew nearly 2,000 spectators despite morning rain. A late September match with the visiting St. Louis Browns brought over 2,000 to the grounds. However, the Virginias’ poor showing against the Browns discouraged attendance for the next game. Just over a 1,000 fans witnessed a more closely contested game, although the result was another Virginias' loss. 52

Much as they were chastised for rowdyism early in the year, the Richmond fans continued to cause problems as the season waned. This time the conflict was race related. Late in the season, the Toledo Blue Stockings were scheduled to play a series in Richmond. On Toledo’s roster was African-American catcher Moses Fleetwood (Fleet) Walker. Fleet was well educated and had played ball for Oberlin College. He had played with the 1883 Toledo club in the Northwestern League. When the Blue Stockings joined the American Association in 1884, he became the first African-American to play in the major leagues. The controversy started when Charlie Morton, the Toledo manager received a letter from “seventy-five determined men” stating that Fleet would be mobbed if he appeared on the field in Richmond. A rib injury kept Walker from playing, and no

51 Nemec, Beer and Whiskey League, 73; O’Neal, International League, 340; Richmond Dispatch, October 21, 1884.

52 Richmond Dispatch, August 6 and September 28 and 30, 1884.
mention of the threat or Walker was written in the *Richmond Dispatch*. It is curious to note that when Toledo came into town, violence was threatened if Walker played in Richmond. Yet, only a year earlier, Henry Boschen, without incident, was able to actively promote the visit of the African-American player Bud Fowler.\(^5\)

Despite the absences of African-American players, African-Americans often attended games at Virginia Park. The *Daily Dispatch* wrote “the colored spectators always hurrah for the visiting team. They yell with delight when the home club gets a set-back. That isn’t in good spirit.” While at Boschen Park, “Quite different from on the Virginia Park, the colored part of the crowd cheered-on the home boys on every good play.”\(^5\)

At the winter meeting in December 1884, the American Association decided that of the four new clubs, only the Brooklyns would be retained for 1885. Thus Richmond’s only experience with a baseball club in the major leagues ended after less than half a season. In order to remain at the professional level, the Virginia Base-Ball Club was forced to seek another league. Later in the same month, W.C. Seddon joined other “baseball men” for a meeting at the Bingham House to discuss the formation of a new Eastern League of Base-Ball Clubs. Clubs representing Richmond, Norfolk, Washington, and Brooklyn were among the teams that set up the new league.

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\(^5\) Nemec, *Beer and Whiskey League*, 68-69; Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns, *Baseball*, 41. *Richmond Dispatch* September 2, 1884; Riley, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Negro Leagues*, 810. The Walker incident is discussed in all three books, but with slight variance. Nemec reports a rib injury was reported by Toledo manager Morton as Walker’s reason for non-appearance, and it was baseball’s color barrier that prevented Walker from playing in 1885. Ward and Burns report that the injury was “split fingers” sustained while catching. It was the injury and not race that caused Walker’s release before the Richmond series. Riley agrees with Nemec that the injury was broken ribs. He lists the race incident as occurring in Baltimore or Louisville. The combination of threats and the injury led to Walker’s release.

\(^\#\) *Daily Dispatch*, April 20 and May 1, 1884.
Lancaster, Trenton, Newark, and Jersey City were selected. A vacancy was reserved for a proposed club in Baltimore. However, the Monumental Club was never able to fill that slot, as Billy Barnie, manager of the Baltimore Orioles of the American Association refused to grant the Eastern League permission to post a club in that city. The Quaker Club of Philadelphia moved to Wilmington and filled the resulting vacancy.55

At the meeting, the constitution and playing rules of the American Association were adopted. Henry H. Diddlebock was elected president with a salary of $1,000, plus traveling expenses. Comparatively, the president of the American Association earned $1,800—paid by $25 per month contributions by each club. George M. Ballard, of Newark was selected as vice-president. The elected Board of Directors were Washington's Michael Scanlon, J. Henry Klein of Trenton, John Copland of Lancaster, and Mr. McCarrick of Norfolk. Each club deposited $250 in a reserve fund that would be divided by the clubs still active in the league at the end of the season.56

There was a new excitement for baseball in Richmond as the 1885 season was ready to commence. The papers were projecting good things for the Virginias. In October 1884, the Virginias secured the services of Joseph Simmons as its manager. Simmons had led the Wilmington Quicksteps to the 1884 Eastern League pennant and filled the Virginias most glaring weak-point from the 1884 season, that of good management. The VBBC directors had so much faith in Simmons that they granted him "full authority to employ and discharge any of the men at his own will." That trust was

55 Richmond Dispatch December 14, 1884; March 14 and April 4, 1885.
56 Ibid., December 13 and 14, 1884.
justified; Simmons did not have to make any personnel changes through most of the season. The July 21, 1885 *Richmond Dispatch* reported: “Manager Simmons started with eleven men, and he has not signed nor released a player this season. How many managers have done this?”

The fans shared the excitement displayed by the newspapers. The exhibition season began with the 1884 National League Champion Providence Club before 1,200 people despite damp and threatening weather conditions. The fact that the Virginias shut out the champs 4-0 encouraged “nearly 3,000, including an unusually large number of ladies,” to witness game two of the three game series. The Virginias were again victorious, this time 7-3. Although the club lost the third game of the series, the strong showing against the National League champions created even greater anticipation for the Eastern League season. When the Norfolk Club journeyed to Virginia Park to open league play, 1,500 cranks saw the Virginias win 8-1.

While fan support started strong for the Virginias, the rest of the Eastern League was not as successful. As early as June 20, the Wilmington Club was forced to suspend operations in that city and transferred to Atlantic City. That move was short-lived, lasting only four days. After a 14-9 defeat to the mighty Virginias, the Atlantic City club disbanded. That same day, the Jersey City club also announced its decision to disband.

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57 *Ibid.*, October 21, 1884; March 8, 24 and July 21, 1885.


The failures of the two teams prompted the Eastern League Board of Directors to meet in Philadelphia on June 29, 1885. The Directors voted to expel the Wilmington Club (Atlantic City Club) for failure to pay financial obligations to the league. The Trenton Club was granted permission to play out the remainder of its season in Jersey City. Ballclubs from Albany and Hartford had been extended invitations to join the Eastern League. When both organizations declined the invitation, league directors voted to continue as a six-team circuit with the Virginias in Richmond, Nationals in Washington, Trenton Club now playing in Jersey City, Norfolk, Lancaster, and Newark.

The scheduling committee rearranged the schedule for the remainder of the season.\(^{60}\)

In addition to the financial trouble of some clubs, the 1885 season presented other woes for the Eastern League. The umpiring was deplorable. The situation was frustrating for the players as well as the fans. Early in the season, the Richmond Dispatch supported the umpires by criticizing the Brooklyns for kicking:

> Whether the decisions were correct or not, the umpire fills a position which makes his announcements final and its acceptance obligatory, and it no more becomes base-ball than any others to attempt to usurp the rights of and to bulldoze those of higher powers. It is hoped that the experience of yesterday will be beneficial to our boys, and that they will never fall into this deplorable habit, but always strive for and gain success by good honest playing, and not by kicking or bulldozing the umpire.

Throughout the season, the Dispatch issued similar statements to the local cranks, including one by Manager Simmons, warning them against hissing and hooting unfavorable calls.\(^ {61}\)

\(^{60}\) Ibid., June 30 and July 1, 1885.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., April 10, July 9, and August 13, 1885.
The league tried to improve the situation. In late May, league president Henry Diddlebock suspended umpire William Quinn. The Dispatch described Quinn’s recent performance at a Virginias game against the Jersey City Club as full of “unjust decisions” that “gave the game” to Jersey City. The paper surmised that it was those decisions that caused his suspension. The Dispatch was surprised that Quinn umpired the next Virginias game and assumed that he must have been reinstated.62

The Eastern Leagues’ umpire problems were not limited to Quinn. According to the Dispatch, “The Eastern League finds it hard to secure good umpires. Nobody seems to be able to please the audiences and clubs, and therefore good men decline to serve.” Because the league was consistently forced to use replacements, the inability to secure professional umpires only exacerbated the problems on the field. The Dispatch often lamented about the leagues’ failure to have an official umpire sent to Richmond for the Virginias’ games. The umpire problems grew so great that several clubs met in Baltimore in late July and voted to depose Diddlebock as President. Mr. George M. Ballard was chosen as his successor.63

Simmons’ boys fulfilled management’s hopes for a strong team. By July 21, 1885, the Virginias had produced a 46-11 record and held a nine game advantage over the second place Washington Nationals. The lead was so great that newspaper reports began to print: “it is hardly likely they will be overtaken.” While the prospect of winning the

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63 *Ibid.*, July 1, 9, and 26, 1885
championship was appealing to management, the Virginias' easy victories began to have a negative effect on attendance. The early season crowds had regularly been between 1,000-2,000 people. By the end of July, a game at Virginia Park with the Trenton Club only brought out 500 spectators. Public outcry reasoned: "Who wants to see a one-sided game? We know who will win without going out to the grounds." 64

The dwindling fan support forced Thomas Alfriend, President of the Virginia Base-Ball Club to gather the club directors and friends of the club for an August 7 meeting. Alfriend announced that the club needed to raise $1,500 to carry them through the remainder of the season. At the meeting, the club gathered subscriptions totaling $200. A subscription committee was formed to "call on the business-men of the city for contributions." A formal statement encouraging public support to save the pennant for Virginia was printed in the Dispatch. Alfriend was confident that the money could be raised. 65

Immediately after the club's announcement, the second place Nationals came to Virginia Park for three games. The series drew large crowds. The Virginias took all three games with 1,500 fans watching the Virginias win 5-4 in the third game. The excitement of the pennant chase ended as Washington left town. Norfolk next visited Virginia Park for four games. The home team won the first three, but there were only 500 in attendance during the second game. The third game did not have a reported

64 Ibid., July 21, 26 and August 22, 1885.
65 Ibid., August 8 and 9, 1885.
attendance figure. The final game of the series was August 17, and the Virginias were not scheduled to have another home game until September 14.⁶⁶

The subscription campaign was not able to produce the results hoped for by the directors. In an effort to fund the ballclub, on August 22, 1885, it was announced that Billy Nash and Dick Johnson, two of the team’s best players, were sold to the Boston Beaneaters of the National League for $1250. Nash, a Richmond native, went on to enjoy ten years in Boston. He played with the Beaneaters from 1885-1889. In 1890, he signed with the upstart Player’s National League team in Boston, but returned to the Beaneaters in 1891, playing through the 1895 season. He was traded to Philadelphia to finish out his major league career. His final season was in the minor leagues in 1899.⁶⁷

While the sale proved fortuitous for Billy Nash’s career, it proved disastrous for the Virginias. They lost the next five ballgames, the first three to the Nationals. Their firm grasp of the Eastern League was in jeopardy. The report from “Sporting Life” printed in the September 1, 1885 Dispatch even began to speculate that Richmond would not have a ballclub for the 1886 season.⁶⁸

The Virginias fell apart late in September. The players were a month late in receiving their salary and threatened to disband the club. Instead of quitting, they voted to withdraw from the Virginia Base-Ball Club management and attempt to complete the

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⁶⁶ Ibid., August 13, 14, 15, 16, and 18, 1885.


⁶⁸ Richmond Dispatch, August 23, 25, 27, 28, 29 and September 1, 1885.
season on their own. The VBBC tendered the treasury to the players. The feeble sum amounted to roughly $7.50 per man. While pride propelled the players to want to finish the season and compete for the pennant, the fans did not support their efforts. About 250-300 spectators came out for the Virginias’ first game without management. Only two hundred came to the park the following day. After that game, two of the Virginias’ players accepted offers to join the Newark Club and left on the evening train. The team could not finish the season, and Washington won the Eastern League pennant. Richmond’s first entry into the ranks of professional baseball came to an inglorious end. The collapse of the Virginias began an eight-year drought for Richmond without a professional baseball team.69

69 Ibid., September 18, 19, 20, 22, 1885 and September 16, 1894.
Chapter Two
Professional Baseball Returns to Richmond
1890-1901

With the Virginia Base-Ball Club no longer in existence, the spring of 1886 did not hold the same excitement for the Richmond fans that 1884 and 1885 had held. The Richmond rooters did not have a team of their own for the coming 1886 season. April of that year provided the “lovers of the game” in Richmond with the only opportunity to witness professional ballgames in the city. The Boston Club of the National League had leased the Virginia Base-Ball Park for the last two weeks of April for a series of exhibition games and workouts before the National League season began. The Boston Club promised a game every afternoon, announcing two games with the Rochesters, one with the Newarks, and split squad matches on days when another team was not scheduled. The Boston team featured three players who were prominent players on the Virginia Base-Ball Club: Billy Nash, Dick Johnston and Pop Tate. The first game played by Boston and Rochester was held on April 19, 1886 and brought about 600 spectators to Virginia Park.¹

The practice of National League teams venturing south for pre-season exhibition games began in 1870 with both the Chicago White Sox and Cincinnati Red Stockings. Each club made a trip to New Orleans that spring. Throughout the 1870’s, other professional clubs began to experiment with exhibition games with minor league teams in

¹ Richmond Dispatch, April 18 and 20, 1886.
the South. It soon became custom that the clubs would head south for a short stay in training camp followed by an extended exhibition season visiting different minor league teams throughout the region. The minor league teams welcomed the major league clubs, and enjoyed the profitability created by the large crowds wanting to see baseball’s best players. In Richmond, some of the largest crowds and most significant revenue days were earned when the Virginias hosted travelling major league teams at Virginia Park. By the end of the 1890’s, southern spring training was practiced by all major league teams.²

On March 9, 1890, the Richmond Dispatch printed an article entitled “Base-Ball Players: How the Knights of the Diamond Pass the Winter.” The article highlighted a life of luxury filled with “expensive meals, the finest cigars, exotic beverages” and little physical conditioning. In the spring “it is no easy task for the trainer of a base-ball team to get his men into proper form and condition after five or six months of luxury and idleness.” The poor conditioning of the players added to the club owners’ interest in a southern spring training. The warmer temperatures were viewed as a way to prevent “muscular colds and rheumatism” while working off the winter’s inactivity.³

Without a professional ball team of its own, Richmonders had to satisfy their baseball interest with the occasional exhibition game, local amateur teams and college baseball. Interest in baseball on college campuses began to develop in the Northeast in the late 1850’s. The first intercollegiate game was played July 1, 1859 between Amherst

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² Seymour, Early Years, 182-185.

³ Richmond Dispatch, March 9, 1890; Seymour, Early Years, 184.
College and Williams College. While the Civil War slowed some of the growth of the college game, southern colleges were quick to catch up with their northern counterparts. At the University of Virginia, where townball had been played before the war, several baseball clubs were formed by 1866. By the end of the 1870’s, clubs were also formed at Washington and Lee, Randolph-Macon College, and Richmond College. These early college teams were student organized and controlled, supplying their own equipment and raising funds to cover expenses. They played intercollegiate games as well as games with various amateur and professional teams.4

During Richmond’s years without a professional team, The Richmond Dispatch helped keep its readers interested in baseball by regularly printing scores and game summaries of local college teams, including the University of Virginia, Randolph-Macon College, Wake Forest, Georgetown College and Richmond College. The April 18, 1886 Richmond Dispatch article that announced the Boston Club’s lease of Virginia Park also included a game summary of the Richmond College and Randolph-Macon College match that entertained about 300 spectators on the Richmond College grounds. The Richmond College boys easily won 13-3, scoring at least one run in every inning.5

The prospect for professional baseball in Richmond brightened in March 1890. On March 1, 1890, City Circuit Court Judge Beverly R. Wellford recognized the charter for the Richmond Athletic Association. It stated: “The purposes of the company are to

5 Richmond Dispatch, April 18, 1886.
organize, manage, control, and operate a base-ball club or clubs, to encourage athletic
sports and exercise, and to do such other things as may be proper in the conduct of its
business.” The clubs’ officers were B. C. Metzger, President and Manager; V. Donati,
Vice-President; Secretary and Treasurer C. B. Neal; and Mssrs. Levin Jones and P.M.
Courtney serving as the other directors. The capital stock was to “not be less than $2,500
nor more than $25,000, divided into shares of $25 each. Real estate may be held, not
exceeding $10,000 in value.” The association had obtained a three-year lease on Mayo
Island for the development of a ballpark.6

The site of Mayo Island was chosen for its geographic location. Being in the
middle of the James River and separating the cities of Manchester, on the southern bank,
and Richmond, on the northern bank, an island ballpark provided access for the residents
of both Manchester and Richmond, being “easily reached from the post-office of either
city within ten minutes.”7 While many thought that the island would prove too small for
a ballpark, the Richmond Dispatch reported that the grounds were to “have an average
width of 380 feet.” The distance from the gate to centre-field was reportedly 515 feet. In
order to prevent balls from being hit into the James River, “the grounds are enclosed with

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6 Ibid., March 2, 1890.

7 The city of Manchester became independent from Chesterfield County in 1874 and was annexed by the
city of Richmond in 1910. In 1890, Richmond had a population of 81,388 and Manchester had 9,246. In
the Census of 1910, Manchester’s population of 9,715 was included in Richmond’s census total of 127,628.
Printing Office, 1913) 915, 940, 946, and 967.
a high, almost air-tight fence, and to the left of homeplate, where is the narrowest part of the field, there is stretched above the fence a wire gauze about seven feet high."

Mayo Island Park featured a grandstand that was 100 feet long and 28 feet wide. The grandstand contained "800 chairs taken from the Exposition building" with a network of gauze wire designed to protect the occupants from batted or thrown balls. Between the grandstand and the out-door seating areas, the park had a total seating capacity of three thousand. People attending games at Island Park would enter through a "passimetre which (would) register and keep an accurate record of the entire number of visitors each day." A tiered seating section was designed especially for the "colored" fans.

In the construction of Mayo Island Park, the Richmond Athletic Association renovated an old house "fronting the bridge avenue" to provide dressing rooms and lockers for the players, uniforms and equipment. The building also afforded "the provision of other necessaries." Constructed next to this building was the team's ticket office. Here patrons could purchase general admission or grandstand tickets. Tickets were twenty five cents for the general admission and an extra charge for grandstand seating.

The team assembled by the Richmond Athletic Association consisted mostly of local talent. Charles W. Householder, a player with the old Virginia Base-Ball Club, was

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chosen as the captain and first baseman. The remainder of the infield was composed of Alexander D. Hill, of Paterson, New Jersey at second, A. W. Stanhope of the Metropolitan Club of New York City at third, and Richmonder, Charles “Barley” Kain as shortstop. The outfield had two Richmonders in Paul Latouche, also a Virginia Base-Ball Club player, in left and “Reddy” Foster in center. Right-field was played by W.C. Kelley of Lafayette, Indiana. The team featured two experienced batteries in Hurte and McCaffrey from Philadelphia and Quarles and Widgins from the 1889 Roanoke club. The team was outfitted in dark blue uniforms with white stockings, belts, and caps. “Richmond” was spelled in white letters across the chest. The team was known in the Richmond Dispatch as the “Richmonds.”

The first opponent for the Richmonds was William Barnie’s Baltimore Orioles, a member of the American Association. The Orioles arrived in Richmond on March 21, 1890 and planned for an entire week of spring training with the Richmonds. The series was much anticipated by Richmond cranks, as the Orioles featured the beloved Pop Tate. Tate had started his career with Boschen’s Richmond club, then played for the Virginia Base-Ball Club before being sold with Nash and Johnston to the Boston Bean-Eaters at the end of the 1885 season. The Richmonds and Orioles first game was canceled due to wet weather. A prolonged rain kept the Mayo Island field from being ready for play. As of March 22, 1890, the field had been “top-dressed with red clay,” but had not been rolled or sodded. The Orioles did play a five-inning practice game with the Richmond

11 Ibid., March 7 and 23, 1890.
College ballclub at the open field on Franklin Street that was once the site of the Virginia Base-Ball Park.\textsuperscript{12}

The Richmonds and Orioles finally met on the field at Mayo Island Park on March 24, 1890. That first game drew nearly 1,000 patrons to the new ballpark. The crowd included "quite a number of ladies" and a large "colored contingent." Despite still not having sod, the field was described as firm. The "heavy city street roller, with six mules hitched to it" worked the field the entire day, and the area behind the plate was "well covered with saw dust." Although the Richmonds lost 8-6, the fans were excited that professional baseball was back in Richmond. At the end of the week, Bamie was impressed enough with the Richmond ballclub that he took their application for admission to the Atlantic Association with him. He promised to deliver it himself. However, he expressed doubt that the Richmonds would gain acceptance.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite not having a formal league affiliation, the Richmonds planned a full exhibition schedule for April. Most of the games were scheduled for Island Park, but the team also scheduled a two week road trip for the last half of the month. The wet weather that hampered the readiness of the field for the first game caused the cancellation of many of the home exhibitions. The team's miseries continued while on the road trip. The weather cooperated, but their batting and fielding did not. Although the club lost most of the games, Manager Metzger felt that the competition with "well-drilled and strong clubs" would help his team. While the competition may have improved the

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., March 22, 1890.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., March 25 and 29, 1890.
player’s skills, the club’s poor play dampened the excitement that was generated by the prospect of professional baseball back in Richmond. On May 1, 1890, fewer than 250 attended the Richmonds’ first home game after the northern trip. Although the Richmonds defeated the Marylands of Baltimore 15-4, an even smaller crowd came out the next day to watch the home team win 17-1. The Saturday game was cancelled due to the low attendance on Thursday and Friday. 14

The Richmonds only played a few more ballgames before management decided to disband the team. The Richmond Athletic Association’s failure to secure a league for its baseball team seemed to verify the Washington Capitol’s opinion posed in 1883: in order for a professional team to be profitable, it must be in a league. 15

After the Richmond Athletic Association club was disbanded, several of the players formed the Player’s Club. Mr. Charles “Squire” Donati, Vice-President for the disbanded Richmonds and an Eighteenth street restaurateur, served as the new club’s manager. The Dispatch described Donati as “very anxious to see a club kept here.” The club continued to play local teams and hosted exhibition games with traveling professional teams. However, Donati’s “Giants”, as the club was known, struggled to maintain its existence. “They barely earned enough money to buy baseballs.” Despite

14 Ibid., April 29 and May 2 and 3, 1890.
15 Ibid., September 4, 1883 and May 18, 1890.
the struggles, Donati attempted to keep the team in the field for two more seasons. Finally in 1892, Donati’s endeavor ended, as the club did not last through March.16

Richmonders once again had baseball games to attend in 1893. Semi-professional teams in Richmond, Petersburg, Forest Hill and the squad from Richmond College regularly met for games. While there was not an organized professional league in 1893, the interest in these games helped encourage the creation of the Virginia State League in 1894. The Virginia League was a six-team league comprised of teams representing the cities of Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, Lynchburg, Staunton and Roanoke.17

There were actually two separate plans proposing the formation of a professional baseball league in Virginia for the 1894 season. Mr. T. K. Sullivan of Washington advocated the formation of a league that would incorporate teams from across the state. The other proposal came from W. B. Bradley of South Richmond and Tim West of Richmond. These two men were involved in the management of the Manchester (Forest Hill) and Richmond teams that competed in 1893. Their proposal was a for a quad-city league that featured their two clubs plus teams from Norfolk and Petersburg.18

Mr. Sullivan scheduled a meeting with the purpose of organizing a state league on the afternoon of March 6, 1894. Bradley and West decided to hold a similar meeting that morning. Mr. Perkins of Petersburg and Mr. C. Sommers of Norfolk joined them at the

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16 Richmond Dispatch, May 18, 1890; E.R. Chesterman, “Ball in Other Days: History of the Game as Played Here in Richmond,” Richmond Dispatch September 16, 1894; Ben Blake, “Parks, Leagues, Names are All that Change” Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 16, 1985, c-9. Chesterman, in reference to Donati, writes, “I think Richmond owes much to his memory.”

17 Richmond Dispatch, March 3, 4 and 7; September 16, 1894.

18 Ibid., March 3 and 4, 1894.
Ryall Hotel in Richmond. Mr. Apperton and Mr. Morris representing Staunton and Roanoke were also in town, but did not join the morning meeting. At the early meeting, the original foursome decided to expand their league and invited Apperton and Morris to an evening meeting. The second meeting convened at 8 o’clock and ended with the formation of two committees, one to establish rules, regulations, and bylaws; the other to study transportation and schedules. Sullivan’s meeting was cancelled. The Dispatch announced that Sullivan left Richmond that night and accepted the position of manager for the Atlanta team in the Southern League. The Southern failed to complete the season, ending play during the first week of July 1894.  

Each of the representatives at the March 6, 1894 evening meeting agreed to enter a club in the Virginia State League Association. The league’s board of directors featured a representative of each club, and Mr. C. Sommers of Norfolk was selected as president. The VSL voted to accept the National League rules of play for the 1894 season and made successful application to the National League for recognition and protection under the National Agreement.  

The Executive Committee selected an umpire from each city to conduct games and represent the league. The umpire salaries for the first year were $50 per month. By 1896, the league would have a chief umpire employed at $150 per month and two assistant umpires earning $100. The league decided to restrict player salaries to

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20 The National Agreement was essentially the peace agreement that settled the baseball war of the American Association and the National League started in 1883. The Agreement, crafted in 1884, provided regulations for teams and leagues for players and territories. Seymour, *Early Years*, 144-148.
$5,000 per club, this compares to the National League’s 1894 salary expenditures of nearly $30,000. Each team was to hire an official score keeper who was responsible for reporting on all games played in its home city. Gate receipts were to be shared by the home and visiting club, with 40% going to the visitors and a guarantee of $33.33. With his gift of three dozen balls and $50 to the pennant-winning club, Albert Spaulding’s baseball was selected by the Virginia State League as the official league ball. The schedule committee was forced to draft a second schedule for the 1894 season. Before the 1894 season started, the Richmond and Manchester teams were merged, and Lynchburg was admitted as a third team from the western part of the state.21

W.B. Bradley, owner of the Richmond Club and Timothy West, its manager, leased the 360 by 380 foot lot on the corner of Vine and Main streets for the construction of West End Park. The ballpark featured a 600-seat grandstand and “bleacheries enough to seat every rooter in the city.” A roof, designed to cover the bleachers, was added in early June 1894. The grounds were built to front Main Street with the grandstand, directly behind the diamond, built at the Vine Street corner. This site was selected with transportation for spectators in mind. The lot was located on a stop of the Main Street car-line. It was speculated that the Clay street line would also service the park on game days. The combined car lines promised service that would arrive and depart every two and a half minutes. West End Park went on to serve as the home of Richmond’s professional baseball team for three seasons, 1894-1896.22

21 Richmond Dispatch, March 14 and 18, 1894; April 12, 1894; April 7, 1895; February 11, 1896.

22 Benson, Ballparks, 332; Richmond Dispatch, March 14, 1894, April 22, 1894, and June 12, 1894.
The Virginia State League team that represented Richmond during those years carried a variety of nicknames onto the field. In the late nineteenth century, it was common for teams not to have an official nickname. Rather, the team was known by its full name (much like the original Virginia Base-Ball Club of 1883) or the team went by the name of the ball club's home city (such as Henry Boschen's "Richmonds" also of 1883). Newspaper reporters took great liberties in creating nicknames for ballclubs, often utilizing several names for the same team.23

The baseball writer for the Richmond Dispatch was an obvious proponent of this style, as a variety of names were utilized to describe the 1894 Richmond entry in the Virginia State League. At the beginning of the season, the team was simply known as the "Richmonds." By the end of the first week of the season, the Dispatch writer was referring to the team as "Tim West's Colts," using colts to symbolize a group of strong, young men. The "Colts" moniker was soon dropped in favor of "bloody-shirts" or "Richmond Reds," both references to their red jerseys. The Dispatch writer also utilized the name "Legislators," drawing upon the city's status as the state seat of government. On June 24, 1894, the Dispatch began an article by referring to the team as the "Richmond Reds" in the first sentence and then used the name "Legislators" in the second. Later in the season, the team was given the official nickname, "Crows," when Bradley replaced the red shirts with a custom-made black uniform. This uniform featured black pants and shirts with "Richmond" across the chest in large white letters. When

23 Filichia, Professional Baseball Franchises, ix-x.
management outfitted the team in blue uniforms for the 1895 season, the nickname was changed to Bluebirds. This name would prevail into the 1896 season. 24

As evidenced by the large crowds that routinely flocked to West End Park in 1894, Richmonders heartily welcomed the Virginia State League. Attendance for games that season varied from 600 to 6,000 persons, with the average attendance being nearly 1,500 patrons. The Dispatch writer noted that in the latter half of the season the "accommodations at West End Park frequently proved inadequate for the crowds that thronged it." Regulars in the crowd were Virginia Governor Charles T. O’Ferrall, his sons and members of the Governor's staff. 25

Richmond fans did more than attend home games in large numbers. The Richmond Dispatch dubbed a regular group of spectators as the "Grand Amalgamated Order of Rooters." This group’s recognized leader was "General" John C. Small. The Amalgamated Association attended home games in large numbers, jeering the opposition and supporting the home team. Under Small’s guidance, the group routinely made special arrangements with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad so that rooters could attend games in Norfolk and Petersburg. The group’s support for the local boys extended beyond their hurrahs at the ball games. In the middle of the season, they established a

24 Richmond Dispatch, April 29, May 2 and 3, June 5, 13, 23, 24, 26, 28, September 15, 1894; April 14, 1895; March 15, 1896.

25 Ibid., July 1 and September 2 and 16, 1894.
purse of over $104.50 to be shared amongst the players if they should win the Virginia State League championship.26

The fan support was also able to ease some of the racial tension that existed in stands at the Virginia Base-Ball Club's games in the 1880's. When the Virginias played at Virginia Base-Ball Park, it was routinely noted in the newspaper accounts of the game that the African-American rooters supported the visiting teams. At West End Park, the fan support was decidedly for the home team. The Richmond Dispatch even gave special recognition to "Buck" Spotswood on July 19, 1894. At the July 18th ballgame, John Small was not in his usual place leading the Order of Rooters, and the crowd was not in its typical fervor. Spotswood was able to rouse the African-American fans to lend the missing support. The paper noted, "In everything but color, "Buck" is eligible for membership in the amalgamated association."27

By placing a strong team in the field, the Richmond management gave fans every reason to lend their support. Formed as a combination of the 1893 Forest Hill and Richmond semi-pro teams, the Richmond Crows featured many players with local ties. The team also featured the return of Edward "Pop" Tate. Tate's major league career had ended with the Baltimore Orioles, but the Crows provided him opportunity to continue playing baseball. Joining Tate on the Crows roster were Charles "Barley" Kain; Tim West, manager and first baseman; "Baby-face" Phillips, who had made a name for

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26 Ibid., July 17 and 20; September 1-2, 1894.

27 Ibid., July 19, 1894.
himself while playing with the Richmond College ballclub; "Reddy" Foster and Jake Wells. These men formed the nucleus of a ball club that started the season strongly and was in contention for the pennant up until the last week of the season. The final tally placed Petersburg with Spaulding’s flag with a 72-44 record and a .6207 winning percentage, Norfolk in second at 66-45 and .5946, and Richmond in a close third with 67 wins and 48 defeats for a percentage of .5826.28

The league magnates were pleased with the success of the Virginia State League. At the end of the season, three of the six teams, Petersburg, Norfolk, and Richmond reported earning a profit. Although all three declined to publicly divulge the amount of the earnings, the figures were estimated to be several thousand dollars. Attendance at Virginia State League ballgames varied by locality with Richmond’s single game low of 600 being equal or higher than the estimated average at four of the other clubs’ home parks. Exact attendance figures were not recorded, but Richmond was guessed to have the highest average at nearly 1,500 fans. Norfolk had the second highest average attendance with nearly 1,300 to 1,400 persons attending each ballgame. Petersburg averaged between 600 and 700, Lynchburg around 400, Roanoke 350. Staunton with just under 300 persons per game was forced to fold late in the season, and the State League moved the franchise to Newport News-Hampton.29


29 Richmond Dispatch, September 16, 1894.
At the year end meeting, the Virginia State League owners decided to submit to the National League its intention to sponsor a State League for the 1895 season. The League would once again be a six-team circuit composed of the same clubs that had concluded the season with the Newport News-Hampton club being a minor exception; the franchise was transferred to Portsmouth. A major change for the 1895 season involved the financial prospects of the ballclubs. Mr. Smith, manager of the Roanoke Club, put forth a proposal calling for an alteration in the distribution of gate receipts, especially at games played in Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk. Smith's plan was an attempt to help the clubs from the smaller cities have the same fiscal opportunities as the clubs from the large cities by sharing the revenue a bit more equally.  

Public interest in the 1895 season of the Virginia State League was noticeably strong. At the beginning of the 1894 season, the State League was viewed as a mere expansion of the semi-pro ball that had been played in Virginia for the previous several seasons. For the most part, the players were local boys or unknown professionals who could not catch on with an established league. During the season, the State League was able to earn the respect of fans and baseball men as a competitive professional league. With the strong enthusiasm and a new plan to share gate receipts equitably, the State League owners hoped to capitalize upon popular support. At this time baseball, like many other business ventures, was illegal on Sundays, leaving Saturday as the only weekend game. Without games on Sundays, the summer holidays and Saturdays usually produced

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30 Ibid., September 9 and 16, 1894.
the largest attendance, and the schedule makers planned for Richmond, the largest city and the team with greatest 1894 attendance, to play at home on all three holidays and seventeen of the twenty-two Saturdays during the season.\textsuperscript{31}

The Richmond patrons did not disappoint the State League directors. The first game of the season brought 5,000 cranks to West End Park to witness the Bluebirds defeat of Petersburg. The Richmond club continued that success by winning the first five ballgames, and did not suffer a defeat until the sixth game on Saturday, April 21, 1895, when the crowd was once again over 5,000. The Bluebirds continued to dominate the Virginia League, not only winning the pennant, but also maintaining possession of first place for all but one day of the season. Richmond ended the season with 78 victories and only 45 losses for a winning percentage of .634. Lynchburg was the closest rival finishing 69-51 (.575). No other team in the State League finished with a winning record.\textsuperscript{32}

It was no surprise that the Bluebirds started the season as strong as they did. The Richmond management made a conscious effort to strengthen the team for the 1895 season. Tim West who had served as both co-owner and field manager in 1894 selected Jake Wells to be the team’s manager for 1895. Wells brought back many of the same players including “Reddy” Foster and “Barley” Kain. But perhaps Wells’ most important addition to the Bluebirds squad was pitcher Jesse Tannehill from Cincinnati. Tannehill

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., April 14, 1895.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., April 16, 17, 19, 21; September 3 and 15, 1895.
became the premier twirler for the club in 1895 and 1896. He won 20 ballgames in 1895 while losing only 7. In the 1896 season, Tannehill posted a 23-17 record for Richmond.33

After the season, Lynchburg and Richmond, the first and second place teams of the Virginia State League began a series of seven games to compete for the Nowlan Cup. The cup series was originally called the Green Cup, as Mr. Green, a jeweler in Roanoke, proposed the idea for the contest. He created a beautiful silver cup that he would present to the winner. However, when Richmond and Lynchburg declined to play any of the games in Green’s hometown of Roanoke, he rescinded his offer. The Nowlan Company, jewelers in Lynchburg, offered a new cup. The victor would have possession of the Nowlan Cup until the end of the next season, when the first and second place clubs would compete for the nineteen-inch tall silver and gold trophy. The first three games were played in Lynchburg. After the series shifted to Richmond, the Bluebirds won the Cup with a 5-3 victory in the sixth game played before over 5,000 cheering patrons at West-End Park.34

The Bluebirds’ season included one more exhibition series. Nashville, the Southern League pennant winners challenged Richmond to a five game “championship of the South.” All of the games were played before large crowds in Richmond’s home ballpark. While the Bluebirds captured the first game 16-3, Nashville rebounded for a

33 David F. Chrisman, History of the Virginia League: 1900-28; 1939-51 (Bend, Oregon: Maverick Press, 1988). 1-2; Richmond Dispatch April 14, 1895.

34 Richmond Dispatch, August 30; September 15 and 22, 1895.
7-0 shutout of Richmond in game two and captured game three by the score of 14-9. Richmond won a close game four (6-4) to set up an exciting fifth game. Nashville captured the crown with a 13-4 drubbing of the Bluebirds.\(^{35}\)

With the success of the Virginia State League in 1895, plans were made to continue for 1896. Popularity for the Virginia State League was so strong that baseball men in Danville and Hampton filed for franchises. League operators denied these bids, voting to keep the VSL as a six-team circuit. John C. Small, who gained fame as Richmond's chief rooter, was selected by the owners to serve as league secretary and treasurer. Mr. J. L. McLaughlin, of Lynchburg was selected as league president. The schedule committee awarded Richmond with home dates for all three holidays and every Saturday of the season. It was decided to continue the Nowlan Cup Series. The 1896 season was to be divided into halves. The winner of each split season would play for the Cup. The outlook by fans and league officials was that 1896 would be a banner year.\(^{36}\)

In the first half of the 1896 season, Richmond was not able to duplicate its 1895 heroics. The Bluebirds won their first game against Roanoke, but lost the second game. On July 1, the club finished the first half of the season with a 35-29 (.547) record and earned second place, behind Lynchburg 44-29 (.603). The second half season returned Richmond to its winning ways, with the team taking the standings lead on August 11.


While the season proved to be going well for Richmond, it was disastrous for the league.\(^{37}\)

At the conclusion of the first half, the Petersburg club was encumbered with debt. Money from spring exhibition games was still owed to the Baltimore and New York National League clubs. The club was about to expire under the debt burden. Several businessmen raised money to continue a club in Petersburg. These men were given the understanding that they would not incur the debts created by the previous club’s management. In August, National League President Nick Young ruled that the Petersburg club owed the money to the National League franchises. Virginia League directors replaced the Petersburg club with a team in Hampton.\(^{38}\)

On August 20, the Roanoke club announced that it was disbanding its team. Management cited financial concerns and poor attendance as it reasons. The next day the remaining league owners met and decided to continue the Virginia League schedule with only five teams. The very next day, the Lynchburg Base-Ball Association decided to end its club’s season despite being second in the standings and after winning the first half crown. Lynchburg’s decision was precipitated by the fact that the club was scheduled for nine games against the defunct Roanoke club. The management realized that nine idle days this late in the season would be financially disastrous. The club paid the player’s salaries in full and sent them home. The remaining clubs decided to reorganize as a four-

\(^{37}\) Ibid., July 2 and August 12, 1896.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., August 12 and 13, 1896.
club circuit for the remaining twenty-two games of the season. Richmond was declared the champion of the first half of the season, and the victor of the remaining twenty-two games would be crowned the second half champ. The two champions would then play for the pennant and the Nowlan Cup. 39

The quest for the Cup did not contain the same excitement as in the previous year. With only a week to play in the season, Richmond and Norfolk accepted bids to join the Atlantic League for the 1897 season. This league was composed of teams in Hartford, Connecticut; Newark and Patterson, New Jersey; Reading, Lancaster and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. With teams in larger cities, this league was able to draw larger crowds. In turn, teams could earn stronger profits and would be able to field much stronger teams than the Virginia League. Naturally, the other two Virginia League teams found little interest in the last few games of a soon to be defunct league. Norfolk won the second championship. However, the Bluebirds were able to halt Norfolk's late season charge for the title and defeated the Crabbers in five games to capture the Virginia State League pennant and the Nowlan Cup. 40

The Atlantic League had been formed in the fall of 1895. In its origin, the AL was a six-club circuit, with teams in Hartford and New Haven in Connecticut, Patterson, New Jersey, Wilmington, Delaware and New York City. The New York club, called the Metropolitans, was owned by Andy Freedman, who was also owner of the National

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39 Ibid., August 21-23 and 25, 1896.

40 Ibid., September 13, 16-17, and 23 1896.
League's New York Giants. Halfway through the first season, Lancaster replaced New Haven. League owners expelled the New York Mets because of Freedman's habit of transferring players between his two clubs. Philadelphia was brought in to replace the Mets. After the first season, the Atlantic League decided to expand to eight ballclubs for 1897 and extended the invitation for Richmond and Norfolk to join. At the same meeting, Ed Barrow, the owner of the Patterson franchise and future General Manager and President of the great New York Yankee ballclubs of the 1920's, 1930's and early 1940's, was selected as president of the league.41

Throughout professional baseball there was optimism for a strong 1897 season. The Sunday, March 21, 1897 Richmond Dispatch printed an article titled "Base-Ball-Outlook for 1897." The article was written by O.P. Caylor, a long-time writer for the different newspapers in Cincinnati, an instrumental founder of the American Association in 1882, and a National League ball club owner. Caylor's article expressed high expectations for the season. In 1896, there were 72 cities represented by teams that subscribed to the National Agreement and more were scheduled to operate in 1897. Caylor noted that even in periods of a financial downturn, much like the financial panic that began in 1893 and continued into 1896, baseball not only prospers it usually records a banner seasons. He reasoned that when compared to other forms of entertainment, baseball is significantly less expensive. During a depression, theaters and racetracks, with admission fees ranging from $2-$5, become a costly outing, while baseball at $.25

or $.50 is very affordable. With that in mind, the major leagues were looking for a strong season. Caylor noted that the minors should do so as well since, “the rule has been that success or disappointment for the major body affects the minor leagues and associations in a similar manner.”

The fans in Richmond shared the optimism that Caylor expressed for the game. Jake Wells was returning for his third year as manager of W.B. Bradley’s Richmond ballclub. Wells re-signed some of the Bluebirds’ stars of 1896, with Kain and Foster both on the returning squad. Joining them in the field were Bob Pender, Paddy Boyle, Copper Hargrove and Norman “Kid” Elberfeld, a youngster at 21 years-old from Cincinnati. However, Well’s greatest challenge for 1897 was to improve the squad’s pitching. Jesse Tannehill had signed a National League contract with Pittsburgh. To replace Tannehill, Wells signed Jack Chesbro, who had played with the Roanoke club in 1896 and Sam Leever, who had been courted by several National League teams, but preferred to have more time in the minor leagues. After shining with Richmond, both Chesbro and Leever advanced to successful careers in the major leagues; Chesbro earned selection election to the Hall of Fame in 1948.

With a strong team in place, Bradley wanted a larger ballpark. The new grounds, named Broad Street Park, was built on land leased from the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad near the spot where Allen Avenue dead-ends with Broad Street.

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42 O.P. Caylor, “Base-Ball: Outlook for 1897.” Printed in Richmond Dispatch, Sunday, March 21, 1897.

The northern fence overlooked the R.F.& P. railyard. The park was built with a seating capacity that exceeded 6,000. The field at Broad Street Park was enormous with "over the fence homers being few and far between." The left field line was the shortest, measuring 295 feet. Straightaway center measured 560 feet. The line down right was 340 feet, and the right field wall actually incorporated the side-wall of a house that was adjacent to the grounds. The location provided occupants of the building with a view of the game in both the upstairs and downstairs windows. With 80 feet between homeplate and the grandstand, the area in foul ground behind the plate was increased over the measurements at West-End Park. The field itself was slightly elevated to assist in drainage after a rain.\textsuperscript{44}

Bradley's Richmond Base-Ball Club began the season wearing the Bluebird uniforms from 1896. After the first ten games, Bradley outfitted his ballclub with new gray uniforms, and the team's name was changed to the Johnny Rebs. On September 3, 1897, Bradley, the sole stockholder in the Richmond Base-Ball and Athletic Association, sold the ballclub, the rights to the Atlantic League franchise and the lease on Broad-Street Park to V. Charlie Donati and Clarence T. Boykin. Donati, known to Richmond baseball fans for his semi-pro teams in the early part of the decade, eliminated the name Johnny Rebs, and the club played the remaining two weeks of the schedule under the name Giants. Donati created an environment of entertainment at the ballpark. For the first game under new management, the club hired the Stonewall Band of Staunton to perform

\textsuperscript{44} Benson, \textit{Ballparks of North America}, 332; \textit{Richmond Dispatch}, March 28, 1897.
a concert during the time between the games of the Labor Day double header. He also popularized the practice of players engaging in throwing and running contests before games.45

On the field, the Richmond ballclub earned the respect of the other Atlantic League franchises and enjoyed the support of the Richmond crowds. The Bluebirds opened the season against Lancaster with a 9-7 victory before nearly 4,000 spectators at Broad-Street Park. After their first game playing under the name “Johnny Rebs,” the Richmond club had posted a 7-4 record and held control over second place in the league standings. By July 6, the Johnny Rebs were wallowing in sixth place with a .475 winning percentage, yet continued to attract large crowds at Broad Street Park. The day before, the club played two games in honor of the Fourth of July holiday, and despite losing both games, 5,580 people came out for the morning game and 6,747 attended the afternoon match. After Donati took over the team, the club began a small climb in the standings. On a Labor Day double header, the Giants took both games from the Norfolk Brooms and attracted over 7,000 spectators for the second game. The Richmond Club finished the season in fourth place with a 73-58 (.557) record. Lancaster won the pennant finishing 90-44 (.667).46

Atlantic League owners met at the end of the season to contemplate plans for 1898. All eight clubs decided to remain in the league with Manager Scharsig given

45 Richmond Dispatch, May 8 and September 4, 5 and 11, 1897.

46 Ibid., April 27, May 9, July 6, September 7 and 19, 1897.
permission to move his franchise out of Philadelphia. Allentown became the new league
city for 1898. The league offered the two Virginia clubs a four-year contract to remain in
the circuit. While Richmond finished fourth in the standings, the club, along with
Hartford and Newark, was one of only three that posted a profit in the season.47

While the Richmond ballclub’s future for 1898 in the Atlantic League was secure,
its ownership was in heavy dispute. On September 24, 1897, the Richmond Dispatch
reported that the Richmond Railway and Electric Company was planning to purchase a
controlling interest in the Richmond Base-Ball and Athletic Association. Their intention
was to abandon the one-year old Broad Street Park and return the club to West-End Park
on Main Street. When W.B. Bradley’s baseball team had played at West-End Park in
1894-96, the railway company prospered from the fans riding their Main Street line in
order to attend ballgames. However, the company refused Bradley’s attempts to have
them invest in the club. At the end of the 1896 season, Bradley entered into a five year
contract with the Traction Company that ran the Broad Street car line and built a new
ballpark. The move to Broad Street Park had meant an end to a significant revenue source
for the Richmond Railway and Electric Company. They now wanted it back.48

The Richmond Base-Ball and Athletic Association was capitalized at $12,000
with 120 shares of stock. When Bradley sold the organization in early September 1897,
Donati, C.T. Boykin and P.B. Shield each purchased one-third interest. Within a few

47 Ibid., September 21-22, 1897.
48 Ibid., September 24, 1897.
weeks, Mr. Boykin sold his thirty-eight shares to Donati. Mr. Donati was willing to sell sixty-one of his shares to the Richmond Railway and Electric Company, with the understanding that he would remain the baseball director and Jake Wells would be the manager. P.B. Shield was the counsel for the Traction Company and threatened a legal challenge if the ballclub attempted to rescind its contract to remain at the Broad Street location.49

Through the legal battles, the Traction Company emerged victorious. After the courts ruled that the ballclub was legally bound to Broad-Street Park, the Richmond Railway and Electric Company withdrew their offer. Mr. John Skelton Williams, President of the Richmond Traction Company, purchased all of Mr. Donati's shares in the baseball association. Williams decided to hire W.B. Bradley as the general manager, renewed Jake Wells as the field manager, and restored the nickname Bluebirds for the Richmond ballclub. The ballclub continued the tradition of blue and gray uniforms with some modifications. The team now donned blue stockings, belts and caps, gray shirts and pants and blue and white striped sweaters.50

The Richmond Railway and Electric Company was not about to let the Traction Company have all the baseball profits to themselves. The February 13, 1898 Richmond Dispatch reported that throughout the late winter, the Railway and Electric Company had begun construction on a ballpark on Vine and Main streets. They were proposing the

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., November 27 and 28, 1897; February 27 and March 13, 1898.
development of another Virginia League throughout the state. However, this new league would not be able to apply to the National League for protection, as the Traction Company owned recognized rights to Richmond. It is uncertain what the fate of the Railway Company’s efforts were, for this was the only mention in the Richmond Dispatch about the proposal. It is likely that without the protections accorded in the National Agreement, no other parties responded to the company’s plan.  

The legal disputes concerning team ownership that occurred in Richmond in 1897 were the first indication in Richmond that baseball was more than just a game; it was business. Factors leading to this conclusion had been evident in other levels of the sport for decades. Business interests created the concept of the American Association. Many of the team owners were brewers by profession. When the National League prohibited the sale of alcohol at games and expelled Cincinnati prior to the 1881 season, brewers in several cities formed the American Association, a league that had become known as the Beer and Whiskey League. It was only natural for the railroads and trolley companies to become involved in baseball. In Baseball, the Early Years, Harold Seymour presents several examples of associations formed between the rail companies and baseball owners. Many were limited arrangements such as the excursion trains run by the C&O Railroad to Petersburg, Norfolk and Hampton during Richmond’s tenure in the Virginia State

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51 Ibid., February 13, 1898.
League. Other examples include outright ownership, such as the Richmond Traction Company’s 1897 purchase of the Richmond Base-Ball and Athletic Association.\(^5\)

Excitement was high for the opening of the 1898 season. Not only did the *Richmond Dispatch* have strong pre-season praise for Wells’ Bluebirds, but the paper also noted that correspondents from other league cities were impressed with the Richmond squad. A grand parade was planned to begin the festivities for the first game. Special seating arrangements were made for Virginia Governor J. Hoge Tyler and his staff, and Richmond Mayor Richard M. Taylor was to throw out the first ball. Despite the festive plans, international events would soon cast a shadow over the first game and the entire 1898 season.\(^5\)

On February 3, 1898 the USS Maine, anchored in Havana Harbor, suffered a tremendous explosion. The incident increased the tension that already existed between Spain and the United States. War seemed imminent. A week before the Atlantic League was scheduled to commence championship season play, the *Richmond Dispatch* noted that “as soon as this war excitement cools off a little and good old steady times settle, the fever of 1895, 1896 and 1897” would return to the Richmond ballpark greater than before. However, the “war excitement” would not cool off. The day before the season opened, the paper announced that President William McKinley issued a call to arms. The

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\(^5\) *Richmond Dispatch*, April 17 and 24, 1898.
proclamation issued the order for the assembly of a volunteer army of 125,000 men to be organized to aid in the war effort against Spain in the fight for Cuba's independence.\footnote{Ibid., February 16, April 17, 24, and 26, 1898.}

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was relatively short, lasting about the length of the baseball season. While the war provided limited impact upon daily life in the United States, it produced a major effect upon minor league baseball. Attendance at minor league games was down. In Ed Barrow's memoirs, he quotes an article from \textit{Spalding's Baseball Guide} for 1898: "The Atlantic League, like all minor leagues in that year of our war with Spain, had to suffer financially, only one club in the circuit of eight escaping heavy loss. That was the Richmond club, which won the pennant." Despite winning the pennant with a 78-43 (.644) record, team ownership did report ending the season with a debt. The loss was largely attributed to interest in the war, the chief cause for the decreased attendance figures.\footnote{Barrow, \textit{My Fifty Years in Baseball}, "40-41; Joel Zoss and John Bowman, \textit{Diamonds in the Rough; The Untold History of Baseball.} (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1996.) 87; \textit{Richmond Dispatch}, September 11, 1898.}

After the financial results for 1898 were made public, the \textit{Richmond Dispatch} printed an editorial that advocated abandoning the Atlantic League and reviving a Virginia League. The very next day, E. H. Cunningham, manager of the Norfolk Club and W. B. Bradley, president of the Richmond club, announced that they would withdraw from the Atlantic League and announced their intention to revive a State League. However, Mr. M. M. McGuire, as representative of the Richmond Base-Ball and Athletic Association, the controlling body for the Richmond Bluebirds, announced that the
franchise rights to Richmond belonged to the Atlantic League, and the team would participate in that league. Throughout the offseason, the Richmond paper printed articles speculating which league would be home for the Richmond ballclub, Bradley advocated for a Virginia League franchise and the Association wanted to continue in the Atlantic League.\textsuperscript{56}

Richmond and Norfolk were not the only cities questioning future affiliation with the Atlantic League that offseason. A late-fall \textit{Richmond Dispatch} headline read: "DECAY OF LEAGUE, The Atlantic Now Seems Likely to Go to Pieces." By spring the paper's outlook had changed, proclaiming: "NOW FOR BASE-BALL. The Prospects Are Bright For Atlantic League Success." The Atlantic League decided to drop Hartford and allowed Norfolk to leave. Scranton and Wilkes-Barre were admitted. The paper noted that interest in the national game had revived since the ending of the war and there was great anticipation for the season.\textsuperscript{57}

The 1899 season opened with little fanfare and for the first time, the Richmond ballclub began with an away game. Also for the first time, the club lost its first game. However, the club did not endure a long losing streak and soon posted a 5-4 record, good enough for third place. The club won its first home game by a score of 7-1 against the Newark club before a large crowd of over 2,000 people, including the governor. Behind the solid pitching of Jack Chesbro, the club had attained the top spot in the Atlantic

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Richmond Dispatch} September 18 and 20, October 13, 14 and 16, November 25 and 27, 1898.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}, October 16, 1898; March 5 and April 9, 1899.
League standings by July 1, with a 41-14 record (.746). The nearest competitor was the Wilkes-Barre team that was playing at a (.592) percentage with 32 wins and 22 losses.\(^{58}\)

Richmond’s excitement for baseball was not shared throughout the league. On July 5\(^{th}\), Scranton announced that it was disbanding its ballclub. President Barrow announced a meeting to plan for the remainder of the summer. The Dispatch expressed graves doubts about the season continuing. Up to that point most of the league’s teams were continuing the financial losses that had started in the previous season. The Paterson club existed only with the help of the other league teams, the Wilkes-Barre management had begun to sell players and the Newark owners had openly expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the league.\(^{59}\)

At the owners meeting it was decided to drop the Paterson club and continue as a six-team league. A new schedule was devised, and Richmond was awarded the first half pennant. The team had amassed 50 victories with only 16 losses (.758). The Richmond club ended the first season on perhaps on the most stable ground with the strongest attendance, however midweek games were lightly supported. At the conclusion of the meeting, Manager Wells announced the sale of one of Richmond’s stars. Pitcher Jack Chesbro was sold to Pittsburgh for $1,200. Richmond prepared to open the new season without its ace.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) Ibid., April 27, May 7 and 9, July 1, 1899.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., July 6, 1899.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., July 6, 8 and 9, 1899.
The new season was short-lived. On August 5th, it was reported that Ralph Seybold a Richmond outfielder was sold to Cincinnati and Joseph Dolan, the club's second baseman was going to Philadelphia. The same day it was revealed that the entire Wilkes-Barre franchise was sold to Charles H. Manning, president of the Kansas City Base-Ball Club. He intended to send the premier players from Wilkes-Barre to his Kansas City squad. The next night it was decided that the Atlantic League was disbanding. Jake Wells was able to make an agreement with P. T. Powers, president of the Eastern League, to take the remainder of his club to Syracuse, New York to complete the season as a replacement club. At the close of the 1899 Atlantic League season, Richmond was again on top of the standings with 13 wins and 9 losses (.590). In his five seasons with Richmond, Wells had led the team to five pennants.61

After the Atlantic League folded, plans for a Virginia State League for 1900 were immediately started. Jake Wells returned to Richmond, this time as the team owner. During the winter of 1898-99, Wells and Ed Barrow, Atlantic League President entered into a joint business venture. They opened a vaudeville theater in Richmond. An unusually large snowstorm delayed the opening of the theater for several days, costing the pair substantial capital. During the first few weeks the theater continued to lose money and Barrow sold his interest to Charles McKee from Pittsburgh. Soon thereafter, the business began to take off and within three years, McKee and Wells had twenty-one theaters and summer amusement parks throughout the South. One of the amusement

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61 Ibid., August 8, 1899.
parks was in Richmond. The partners built a pavillion at Reservoir Park near the junction of the two trolley lines. The booming theater business allowed Wells to buy into the Virginia League. He employed Mr. Charles Boyer as the field manager for his team.62

Wells continued the Bluebird name for his team and continued to utilize Broad-Street Park. Harry Berte, who had played for Wells in the mid-1890’s, was brought in to play shortstop and serve as infield coach. Barley Kain and Reddy Foster returned to Richmond to play for Wells, who was also able to sign Lee Tannehill, Jesse’s little brother, to play third. The remainder of the ballclub, while newcomers to Richmond, had playing experience in other minor leagues.63

Richmond opened the Virginia League season by shutting out Petersburg 6-0 on the first day and winning 5-3 the second day, and was once again victorious in the third game, 12-3. The Bluebirds continued their winning streak for the first six games, not succumbing to defeat until Portsmouth won 4-0 in the seventh game of the season. Richmond finished the first month of the season with a 15-10 record (.600) and was in third behind Norfolk (.826) and Hampton (.708).64

Jake Wells must have found the summer of 1900 to be very frustrating. His team was playing well and, on June 1st, he was selected to assume the presidency of the Virginia League after E.H. Cunningham of Norfolk resigned. His amusements business

62 Barrow, My Fifty Years in Baseball, 47-48; Richmond Dispatch August 8, 1899, March 21 and April 6 and 15, 1900.

63 Richmond Dispatch, April 22 and 29, 1900.

64 Ibid., May 1, 2 and 9, June 1, 1900.
was booming. However, despite having a solid ballclub, the fans were not coming to the games. His team was losing money, and the public's interest in baseball seemed to be fading. His wildly popular amusement businesses required him to focus his energies upon the theaters full time, and he announced his resignation as league president. He turned the ballclub over to the players and volunteered to serve as an advisor to his baseball club.  

Four days after Wells withdrew from the league; the Richmond ballclub was forced to do the same. When Petersburg announced that it financially could not survive and was withdrawing, the Richmond club was left with limited options. The other league members, all centered in the Tidewater-Peninsula region, decided to drop Richmond and continue the season as a four team league consisting of Portsmouth, Norfolk, Hampton and Newport News. The Richmond players received the news during the fourth inning of their June 12 game against Newport News and made no attempt to win. The club finished with 21 wins and 13 losses (.600).  

After the failure of the Virginia League in 1900, baseball men in Virginia looked to add some North Carolina teams to the league rather than make another attempt with weaker Virginia cities. Discussions for a Virginia-North Carolina League began in January 1901. Several cities were being considered for admission to the new league. At times a league of as many as eight or ten teams was considered. However, on February 18, the league was formally organized with a plan for six teams. Norfolk, Portsmouth,  

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65 Ibid., June 1, 8, and 12, 1900.  
66 Ibid., June 12, 1900.
Newport News and Richmond, with Mr. Donati once again involved in baseball ownership, were to represent Virginia. Raleigh was the only North Carolina franchise secured at the time, but within a month Wilmington was admitted as the sixth franchise.  

Mr. Donati hired Barley Kain as his manager. The ballclub consisted of many of the members of the 1900 squad. The league recognized Richmond's past support of its teams and awarded the franchise home games for the season opener and all of the summer holidays. Nearly 1,000 rooters came out for the first game of the season at Broad-Street Park. The Grays, as the Richmond club was named, battled Wilmington to a thirteen inning 4-4 draw. The club then shut out the visitors the next day. The excitement generated by the first two games did not last long. Richmond became one of the worst teams in the league. 

Trouble for the league began on June 21st. The Newport News and Portsmouth franchises both announced that they were withdrawing. The franchises were moved to Charlotte and Tarboro in North Carolina. League directors decided to split the season and rearranged the schedule to accommodate the new locations. Richmond ended the first half in last place with a paltry 19-38 record (.333). The second half started somewhat better for Richmond. The club won seven of the first twelve ballgames (.583), and was third in the standings. However, the club was on poor financial ground. On July 6, 1901, management offered to allow the club to continue as a cooperative. The players refused

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68 *Richmond Dispatch*, April 14, 16, and 17, June 22, 1901.
the plan, and the team was forced to disband. Norfolk followed Richmond's lead and withdrew. The North Carolina teams attempted to continue, but the entire league was declared a failure on August 17, 1901. With the third consecutive season aborted before its conclusion, Richmond fans and baseball managers became weary of the sport. The City of Richmond was once again about to endure an extended absence from the ranks of professional baseball. A team did not play here until 1906 when the Lawmakers represented Richmond in a new Virginia League.69

Richmond was not alone in its struggles to maintain a professional baseball club at the turn of the century. The experience of Richmond was reflective of the national interests in the game. The failures of the Atlantic and Virginia leagues were typical of many small minor league circuits. Even the National League, America's only major league in 1899, went from a twelve-team league to one of only eight ballclubs. The League eliminated teams in Louisville, Cleveland, Baltimore and Washington in hopes of restoring profitability to the venture.¹

Baseball owners were primarily responsible for their own troubles. Many entrepreneurs attempted to capitalize upon baseball's increased popularity in the 1890's by establishing teams and leagues of their own. Most teams and leagues joined the National Agreement, thereby, recognizing the National League's premier status as the only major league in exchange for territorial rights and protection from raiding of players by wealthier teams. In the late 1890's several minor leagues attempted to challenge the National League's sole claim to major league status, and a costly baseball war erupted. By August 1901, the National League's competition with the American League forced owners to announce that protections accorded by the National Agreement were

abrogated, and the minors were threatened with significant player and geographic disputes.²

Thomas Jefferson Hickey, president of the Western League, quickly responded to the nullification of the National Agreement. He sent a telegram to all minor league presidents notifying them of the League’s actions. He urged the men to meet on September 5, 1901 at Chicago’s Leland Hotel. All eleven of the organized minor leagues were represented in person or by proxy. The first order of business was to establish the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, an organization that still governs minor league baseball.³

The intent for the formation of National Association was to bring the minor leagues into a cohesive group that could prevent the major circuits from raiding their rosters. In the organization’s second meeting on October 24-25, 1901, the Association established rules and regulations in order to stabilize minor league baseball. The most important was a classification system. Minor leagues were divided into four classes: A, B, C and D. This system was designed to provide equal competition among teams in a given league. Leagues composed of smaller cities and lower operating budgets were labeled as Class D. The team rosters were to be composed of players with limited experience. Class A, the highest classification, contained the most experienced minor league players. The classification system was altered in 1908 to include an AA rating. In


1946, AAA ratings were introduced. In 1963, the B, C and D ratings were discontinued and “rookie league” and “instructional league” circuits were formed for the least experienced players.⁴

The National Association’s organizational system became known as Organized Baseball. Professional leagues or teams that did not join the Association were labeled as “outlaw leagues.” Under the old National Agreement, leagues that did not sign the Agreement were simply referred to as “independent leagues.” It was these independent leagues that necessitated the formation of the National Association. They challenged the stability that the Agreement had provided. With the recognition that the preservation of the Association was paramount to the individual league’s survival, Organized Baseball sought to create a negative image for outsider, hence the use of the term “outlaw.”⁵

In January 1903, the two competing major leagues came to agreement that both the National and American Leagues could share status as major leagues. The end of hostilities between the two leagues paved the way for a Major-Minor League Agreement within the framework of the National Association. With stability restored to Organized Baseball, the American public once again welcomed the sport as the National Pastime. While the major leagues entered a profitable era, the minor leagues saw an explosion of popularity. The expansion of the minors began with 13 leagues in 1903 and by 1914 there were 40 leagues party to the National Association.⁶

⁴ Obojski, Bush League, 14-15.
⁵ Ibid., 16.
⁶ Obojski, Bush League, 16-17; Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 178-183.
With baseball's popularity restored nationwide, it did not take long for the game to return to Richmond. In 1904 and 1905, three semi-pro leagues thrived in the city. The Twin Cities League was apparently the strongest of the three. All Twin Cities games were played at Broad-Street Park, and the *Times-Dispatch* included detailed game summaries and complete boxscores in the paper. The league featured four teams: the Richmonds, Manchester Colts, the Brownies, and a team representing the Northside known as Barton Heights. The league's most significant player was Charles "Barley" Kain, the star of Richmond's professional ballclubs of the late 1890's. On April 23, the first Saturday of the 1905 season, nearly 4,000 spectators came out to witness all four teams of the Twin Cities League participate in a pair of games at the ball park. Barton Heights defeated the Colts in the first game 3-2, and the Brownies conquered the 1904 league champion Richmonds by a score of 9-6.149

The Twin Cities League shared the baseball spotlight in Richmond with the Suburban League and the Capitol City League. The Suburban League was also a four-team circuit and featured the Northside Stars, the West End Angels, the Chestnuts and the Knoxalls. The Capitol City League was comprised of six ballclubs. The teams were the Brooklands, E.E. Blues, Monroes, Hobos, Elbas, and White Swans. Both leagues played at various ballfields around the Richmond area. The *Times-Dispatch* regularly reported

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149 *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 16, 19, 20, 23, August 19 and 20, 1905.
league standings and scores of their ballgames, but rarely provided complete boxscores or game summaries.  

Interest in professional and semi-professional baseball had seen a resurgence in other parts of the state by 1905. Danville was the lone Virginia representative in the Virginia-North Carolina Base-Ball League. Danville's competition consisted of a team in Greensboro, one in Charlotte (the Water Drinkers) and a team that by the end of the season was simply dubbed the Orphans. The Orphans began the year in Salisbury- Spencer, later moved to Winston-Salem and by the end of July was without a home. The team struggled for three weeks after leaving Winston-Salem, but the Orphans financial situation had created too much hardship for the club and the league. Both the team and the league announced disbandment plans on August 20, 1905. The Danville club, league pennant winners, continued to play for the remainder of 1905 by staging exhibition games throughout the state of Virginia.  

The local amateur leagues created a new enthusiasm for baseball, and the travels of the Danville club generated interest in a revival of the Virginia State League. On September 2, 1905, the Danville Base-Ball Association was created as a joint stock company capitalized at $2,000 in anticipation of a new league. Two weeks later, a *Times-Dispatch* headline announced that the Virginia State League would begin play in the spring of 1906. Teams in the league would be required to feature at least eight men

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that were local or at least Virginian. Richmond baseball hero Jake Wells was directing the league’s organization.\textsuperscript{10}

On October 25, 1905, the league was officially organized as the Virginia League of Professional Base-ball Players. Jake Wells was elected to serve as president for the six-team circuit. Ballclubs representing Richmond, Roanoke, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Danville, and Lynchburg were scheduled to begin play on April 26, 1906. Charlie Donati and W.B. Bradley, famous in Richmond for their efforts at maintaining Richmond’s professional baseball franchises in the 1880’s and 1890’s, controlled the lease of Broad Street Park and set about planning for the team to represent Richmond in the new state league. The men selected Charlie Shaffer to be the team’s manager. Although play would start in April, Shaffer would not need to have his roster within the leagues’ salary limit of $800 a month until June 1. He planned to bring many players to Richmond for tryouts with the intention of settling on thirteen or fourteen by June.\textsuperscript{11}

Richmond’s entry in the Virginia League was officially known as the Richmond Club. As it did in the 1890’s, the newspaper wanted to provide the team with a name other than that of the city. The sporting editor of the \textit{Times-Dispatch} advertised a contest allowing its female readers to submit “appropriate names for the aggregation that is to represent the capital city.” The contestant submitting the chosen name would receive a season’s pass that would allow her and her escort to have a grandstand seat at all of the Richmond Club’s home games. Entries included “White Stockings,” “Dixie Trotters,”

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, September 3 and 15, 1905.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, October 26, 1905; March 11 and 17, April 4, 1906.
“Eagles,” “Commanders,” “Annexationists” (the submitter explained the club “would surely annex the biggest portion of the games they will play”), “Old Dominions,” and “Sprinters.” However, none of these names captured the editor’s attention. The winning entry was submitted by both Miss Minnie M. Dickenson and Miss A. T. Entright. Both ladies were awarded a season’s pass and upon their suggestion, the ball club was dubbed the “Lawmakers.”

Although the team was still known as the Lawmakers, during the 1907 season the Richmond Times-Dispatch began to refer to the team as “Colts.” It was common for the paper to utilize both names in the same article. “Colts,” being the shorter of the two was the name most often written in the headline. “Lawmakers” was sometimes utilized in the subheading and both names were written in the text of the article, often in the same sentence. By 1911, the Times-Dispatch had dropped the name “Lawmakers” altogether and referred to the Richmond ball club exclusively as the “Colts.”

The city of Richmond was eager to welcome Virginia League play in 1906. The season opened on April 26th amidst a celebratory atmosphere. The players for both the Lawmakers and the visiting Lynchburg Hillclimbers were marshaled to the game in a grand parade that featured a band seated in wagon pulled by mules and the players riding in the back of “all of the automobiles in town,” eight in all. The parade was the first motorcade in Richmond’s history. As the procession wound through the main streets of

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12 Ibid., March 8 and 11, and April 6, 1906.

the city, onlookers hung out of windows and crowded on street-corners to cheer the
return of the game to the city. As the caravan passed Richmond College, the students
greeted the Richmond ballplayers with cheers of encouragement. When the procession
ended at Broad Street Park, the Reverend Dr. J. B. Hawthorne, pastor of Grove Avenue
Baptist Church, threw out the first ball to indicate the start of the season.\textsuperscript{14}

The 2,000 fans who came out to root for the Lawmakers left Broad Street Park
disappointed on Opening Day. The Hillclimbers won the game 6-3. The team assembled
by Richmond manager Charlie Shaffer was not strong enough to capture the Virginia
League pennant in 1906, but did capture the attention of the Richmond fans. The
ballclub entered the final week of the season with a 50-53 record. After the Lawmakers
shut out Danville 2-0 in the morning game, seven thousand patrons came out to witness
the second game of the Labor Day double header against the Tobacconists. The
Lawmakers won every one of the remaining games to finish the year in third place at 57-
54 (.513).\textsuperscript{15}

While the Lawmakers finished well behind the champions from Lynchburg on the
field, the season was a success in the financial sense. The Richmond Club, while
refusing to release exact figures, acknowledged that the team made several thousand
dollars profit. The team had been accorded by the schedule-makers home games every
Saturday, and the Richmond fans did not disappoint league operators. The Saturday
attendance averaged several thousand spectators and was reported to nearly equal the

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, April 26-27, 1906.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, April 27, September 4 and 9, 1906.
attendance at many American League games. The season was such a success, that all teams in the Virginia League reported a profit. With such a strong first year, the league magnates were looking forward to the future.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1907, each of the Virginia League clubs once again turned a profit. The \textit{Times-Dispatch} did not report financial figures, but it was reported that Richmond once again was the leader in terms of dollars earned, despite finishing fourth in the standings. The Richmond club had started the season with a winning streak, but by mid-season the Lawmakers were last in the six-team circuit. In early July, owner Bradley released manager Charlie Shaffer and made several player changes that helped improve the team. Shortstop Ralph W. Reeve finished out the season as manager. The most important acquisition came from the Portsmouth club in the form of pitcher Robert "Dutch" Revelle. Revelle proved to be Richmond's ace hurler over the next several seasons. After the July personnel shake ups, the Lawmakers made a push for respectability and finished with an even record with 62 wins and 62 loses. In addition to the strong pitching of Revelle, Bill Heffron captured the league title for stolen bases with 54 and Guy Titman lead the league by scoring 67 runs.\textsuperscript{17}

The 1908 season has gone down in history as one of the most exciting in Richmond's baseball history. At the conclusion of the season, the \textit{Times-Dispatch} remarked that the city had "never supported the team as well as they did the 1908 pennant

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, September 9, 1906.

\textsuperscript{17} David F. Chrisman, \textit{History of the Virginia League (1900-28; 1939-51)}, Maverick Press (Bend, OR, 1988), 3; Calisch, "Birth of Baseball in Richmond," 3; \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, June 30, July 3 and 23, September 22-23, 1907.
The attendance for Lawmakers' home games averaged more than 5,300 fans with a season total of 442,622. The average was more than several major league clubs including the New York Yankees and St. Louis Cardinals (about 5,000 each) and the Brooklyn Dodgers, Washington Senators and Boston Braves (each under 4,000). The season pinnacle came during the second game of the Labor Day double header versus Danville. The clubs were in a tight pennant race with only a few weeks to play. A large crowd of nearly ten thousand saw the Lawmakers take the close first game, 2-0. Over 15,000 fans packed into Broad Street Park for the afternoon game. The fans saw an exciting 1-1 game that was ruled a tie after ten innings. The Lawmakers' victory in the first game pushed them ahead to stay. The pennant was officially clinched on the evening of September 12, when the Lawmakers' Quinn and Revelle pitched the team to victory in both ends of a double header against Roanoke.\footnote{William S. Simpson, Jr., "1908, The Year Richmond Went Baseball Wild," \textit{Virginia Cavalcade} (Spring 1977) pp. 184-191. Calisch, "Birth of Baseball in Richmond," 3; O'Neal, \textit{International League: A Baseball History, 1884-1991}, 335; \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch} September 20-21, 1908. Quote, RTD, September 21, 1908. An accurate count of the attendance of the afternoon game was not available. Published figures have the attendance somewhere between 15,000 and 19,000.}

The 1908 team did not have the personnel problems that plagued the 1907 season. Perry Lipe, formerly of the Southern League, was brought in to manage and play third base. He finished the season as the league leader in runs scored with 65. Lipe built a strong team that featured Jake Kanzler at first, Jimmy Ison, second baseman and Sandy Sandherr completing the infield at shortstop. The outfield returned the starters from the 1907 team: Guy Titman, Bill Heffron and Doc Sebrie. The stars on the mound were Dutch Revelle, who led the league with 199 strikeouts, and mid-season acquisition Jack
Quinn, who finished with 14 victories, no defeats and three ties. Of this remarkable team that so captured the public's attention and won 87 games while only losing 41 (.680), only Quinn would see playing time in the major leagues. He was drafted by the New York Yankees near the end of the 1908 season. He enjoyed a 23-year career in the majors and was one of the seventeen pitchers allowed to use the spitball after it was banned by Major League Baseball in 1920.  

The euphoria of the 1908 season did not last in 1909. The Richmond club played well, but suffered long slumps in the early and middle part of the season. As the season entered its final week, the Colts narrowly held on to third place. The club ended the season at Broad Street Park with a double-header against first place Roanoke. Although the team did not have a chance at first place, nearly 12,000 fans attended the season's final games. The Colts lost 7-1 in the first game, but the fans were rewarded in the second with an 8-0 victory by the home team. The highlight of the season occurred in that final game. Colt second baseman and leadoff hitter, Jimmy Ison, sent the first pitch over the left field bleachers and out the ballpark. Ison's home run was the only ball hit out of the Broad Street Park all season.  

The Colts finished the season in third place (63-61, .508). Roanoke and Norfolk finished in a tie at 73-49 (.599). Rather than having a playoff to decide the champion, the Virginia League Directors ruled that the pennant belonged to Roanoke. Norfolk's final


day victory was overturned by a technicality. The game was originally to have been played in Petersburg earlier in the season. The teams decided to play the postponed game as part of a double header to end the season. However, league rules stated that “No postponed game shall be played on any field other than that on which it is regularly scheduled.” In the ruling, the directors reasoned that Norfolk had an unfair advantage by having an extra game on its home field, and Roanoke was crowned as the League Champion. 21

The Colt’s disappointing season of 1909 was repeated in 1910. The club finished fifth in the six-team league. The Richmond boys posted a 50-67 record for a .427 winning percentage. By the end of the season, public interest in the professional team fell to its lowest point in several years. The Times-Dispatch writer proclaimed that as the losses piled up, “interest began to die, and it has been dying in carload lots ever since.” At the second to last game of the year less than 100 patrons sat in the ten-cent bleachers with a similar number in the grandstand and no one in the twenty five-cent bleachers. Despite the poor season, nearly four thousand fans came to witness the season’s final game. The large attendance was attributed to custom rather than actual support for the club as “enthusiasm was about as slow as a narrow gauge (rail)road in the Virginia mountains.” The crowd which “normally yells themselves hoarse urging the home team to its best efforts, breathed a sigh of relief that the agony was over.” 22

21 Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 13-14, 1909.
22 Ibid., September 7, 10 and 11, 1910.
After the two disappointing seasons, the *Times-Dispatch* began to waver in its support for the team’s ownership. Since the beginning of the professional game in Richmond, *Times-Dispatch* writers were ardent supporters of the team and its ownership group. While an article might criticize the team’s owners or its players for a particular action, the overwhelming attitude was of unflagging support. Despite the team’s record, the paper consistently urged fans to go to the games and support the home team. This unwavering support had helped professional baseball become a financially profitable venture in the city. Now that the game was firmly established and “as fat as Standard Oil for the owners,” the paper began to openly challenge the Colts ownership.\(^{23}\)

The ire of the *Times-Dispatch*, and the public, was sparked by more than poor performance in the boxscores. In August 1910, it was announced that the Montreal franchise in the Eastern League was to be sold for $40,000. An unnamed Baltimore man was interested in buying the club and bringing it to Richmond. He intended for W. B. Bradley, the Colts owner, to be a financial partner. The *Times-Dispatch* was in favor of Richmond moving to a higher league rather than “plodding on as the leading town in a small one-state circuit, whereas its rightful place is with cities of its size and larger.” The *Times-Dispatch* argued that Richmond’s leaving would not destroy the Virginia League, instead it would make it stronger. The level of play exhibited in a higher classification league would inspire baseball fans throughout the state and increase the interest in the local franchises. The entire state would benefit with the Eastern League in Richmond. It

was up to Bradley to accept the offer from Baltimore. A month later, it was apparent that Bradley was not interested.24

Bradley was criticized as being comfortable in the Virginia League and not willing to spend the money necessary to pay better ballplayers. The Colts were the only team that earned a profit in each season of the Virginia League. Being in the largest city and enjoying the greatest popular support, Bradley could count on the rest of the league presenting Richmond with a favorable home schedule that included most weekends and all holidays25. Bradley’s financial success made the league viable. The league needed him. With his position secure, he had limited incentive to spend money on higher salaries. As a result, during the 1910 season, many low salaried players were brought in to tryout for the team, but each one failed. Throughout the season more and more ballplayers were brought to Richmond and released. The Times-Dispatch argued that with money spent on the travel expenses of all of these players, Bradley could have allowed the club to hire a few quality players. The critics also claimed that Bradley owed the city a faster paced ballclub and higher classification of a league. It was predicted that if he did nothing, the Richmond club would lose money the next season and the Virginia League would then fail. Richmond would then be without baseball.26

24 Ibid., August 14; September 14 and 15, 1910.

25 The population for the city of Richmond in 1910 was reported at 127,628 with another 23,437 persons living in Henrico County. Norfolk was the state’s second largest city with a population of 67,452. Norfolk County added 52,744 people and Portsmouth had a population of 33,190. Census of 1910, 946 and 952.

26 Ibid., September 11, 14 and 15, 1910.
In October 1910, the outlook for baseball's immediate future in Richmond was grim. It soon took a turn for the worse. Norfolk threatened to leave the Virginia League and start an Eastern Virginia League. Charles H. Consolvo, president of the Norfolk franchise, cited that his ballclub was in severe financial difficulty, and the league was to blame. In order for him to keep his team in the Virginia League, he wanted the league to increase its competitiveness. To do so, he felt that it was necessary to eliminate Roanoke and Danville, add Portsmouth and Newport News, and increase the salary limit. These moves would remove the least profitable teams, add cities with a potentially larger fanbase, geographically centralize teams to reduce travel costs, and increase the level of play, thereby attracting a larger audience. The other league members were reluctant to make the changes. It took the league owners nearly a month to settle the dispute. Amidst the threats and legal maneuvers, the minor stockholders charged that Norfolk's financial woes were more to blame on Consolvo's mismanagement than the structure of the Virginia League. The shares of Norfolk club stock were placed in receivership, and Norfolk's Virginia League franchise was officially placed on sale.  

After the Virginia League stabilized the situation with Norfolk, Bradley attempted to quiet his Richmond critics by publicly addressing the issues that had been raised. In a *Times-Dispatch* interview, he admitted that 1910 was disastrous and that several mistakes were made. He reported that he was committed to "getting a real team" for 1911. Commenting on the Eastern League situation, he noted that several northern teams were

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27 Ibid., October 9, 11, 12, 16, and 28, 1910.
clamoring for the franchise and the option was not there for him at this time. "The public
don’t want this any worse than I do." He promised fans that he was constantly on the
lookout for an opportunity to move Richmond into a faster league, with the most realistic
hope being the Tri-State League, a league composed of many of the former Atlantic
League cities. The article concluded, "this is the kind of talk that the Richmond fans
have been waiting for." Peace was restored and hope renewed for 1911.28

Despite the enthusiasm exhibited at the start of the 1911 season, it was another
dismal year for the Colts and the Virginia League. Bradley had displayed high
expectations for his club. James W. (Jeems) Sullivan was hired to manage the team.
Bradley expressed so much confidence in Sullivan that he vowed to "leave everything in
his hands." The confidence was rewarded with a 2-0 victory over Danville on Opening
Day. Unfortunately the Opening Day victory was not a harbinger of better days for the
Colts; Richmond’s winning ways did not last long. The club finished the season fourth in
the league, mustering only 56 victories with 62 losses (.475). The victory total placed the
club tied for fifth place with Lynchburg, but the winning percentage placed the club
slightly ahead of the Hill City club (56-65 and .463). Richmond captured fourth place by
a mere .012 percentage points. Two factors helped prevent a worse finish for the Colts.
Sullivan was released near the end of the season, and Steve Griffin was brought in to lead
the club the last few weeks. Griffin had a strong reputation for his ability to manage
ballplayers, and to his credit, Richmond finished out strongly. While Griffin’s

28 Ibid., October 23, 1910.
accomplishments helped the Colts earn a few victories down the stretch, the fourth place finish should be attributed to three canceled rainouts. As a result, the Richmond club played three fewer games than Lynchburg and finished ahead of Lynchburg in the standings because of three fewer loses.\textsuperscript{29}

Despite the poor attendance at Colts' games, baseball was not suffering from lack of interest in Richmond. In fact, the game's appeal was perhaps at its height of popularity. The amateur games were generating so much attention from both spectators and participants that the existing teams formed the Richmond Amateur Baseball Association. This organization was designed to create several new leagues and oversee the construction of up to three ballparks specifically for these clubs.\textsuperscript{30}

Professional ball at its highest level also captured the fascination of Richmonders. On October 10, 1911, Broad Street Park was the site for a game of Major League All-Stars playing against Connie Mack's World Series bound Philadelphia Athletics. Leading the All-Stars was none other than Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Walter Johnston and former Richmond ball player- Norman "Kid" Elberfeld. The All-Stars defeated Mack's Athletics 13-8 before 9,000 ecstatic Richmond fans. A few days later, when the Athletics met the New York Giants in the World Series, several thousand Richmonders crowded outside the \textit{Times-Dispatch}'s Main Street office to "see the game" on the electronic bulletin board that was hung on the side of the building. The crowd was so large that Main Street had to be shut down to accommodate the spectators. As the series progressed,

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, April 20 and September 7, 9 and 10, 1911.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, September 18 and 25, 1911.
the crowds grew larger. The *Times-Dispatch* theorized that one would have to “delve deep into the archive of history . . . to learn of an event which has produced more interest locally than the present battle between the two champion baseball teams.”

The poor attendance at Colts’ games was not due to a problem with Richmond’s interest in baseball. The problem was with the Colts themselves. Richmond fans demanded better players and a higher classification of play. Ownership was against a move to a league that would increase expenses and payroll. Gus Malbert, writing in the *Times-Dispatch*, argued that the real problem was that the ownership was comfortable with the profits realized with the minimal effort and expense needed in the Virginia League. He contended that if the ownership would consent to a stronger classification of baseball, the appeal of the game would create greater gate receipts that would not only cover the increased expenses, but would also generate a greater profit. Malbert stated that Richmond is in a state of “baseball rebellion.” The fans and the city deserved better baseball.

Ernest C. Landgraf proposed to end Richmond’s baseball frustration by securing franchise rights in the newly formed United States League. On December 1911, William Abbott Witman of Reading, Pennsylvania organized the United States League of Professional Baseball Clubs. The USL was designed to rival the American and National Leagues for major league status. Although the USL adopted all of the playing rules of Organized Baseball, it refused to abide by the territorial rights established by the current

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major league clubs and was regarded as an “outlaw league.” Abbott’s circuit was created as an eight team league with franchises in Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, New York, Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Reading, Pennsylvania (Abbott’s team) and E. C. Landgraf’s Richmond team. While the new league planned clubs in cities with established baseball teams; the league prepared its schedule to prevent a duplication of home games and did not threaten direct daily competition.33

Throughout the winter, the Richmond newspaper was brimming with baseball news. Excitement was high for the prospect of major league baseball and the United States League. With considerable attention being focused upon the invading outlaws, W.B. Bradley and Steve Griffin frequently wrote to the Times-Dispatch with news of the Colts with the hope that renewed enthusiasm for their club would decrease the attention given to Landgraf’s proposed club. The Sporting News reported that most of the baseball world showed little interest in the USL, but Richmond and Reading had an “unusual enthusiasm” for the league. However the article discounted this excitement since both of these cities were “very inferior” minor league towns.34

Richmond’s eagerness to accept the United States League was based upon more than mere baseball interests; the new league was viewed as a vehicle to promote the city. A major booster campaign had begun in the fall of 1911. As part of the campaign, a weeklong “Booster Tour,” composed of over one hundred business representatives, chartered a Seaboard Air Line train and traveled throughout Virginia and North Carolina

33 Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 193-201. Richmond Times-Dispatch, December 22, 1911.
34 Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 197. Richmond Times-Dispatch, January–March, 1912.
to “advertise Richmond, its industrial manufacturing and mercantile greatness, and its many advantages as a distributing center and as a business town in general.” The United States League was seen as a way to continue the promotion of Richmond. The *Times-Dispatch* wrote, “It will sound mighty good to read on the scoreboards: Richmond 4, New York 0; Richmond 5, Cincinnati 2. Richmond will be in the class it deserves.”

The city eagerly awaited the start of the 1912 season. With two teams, its fans were assured of a professional game nearly every day of the week. Landgraf’s Richmond Rebels, as northern newspapers dubbed the team, called Lee Park their home field. The ball yard, located on North Boulevard at Moore Street was constructed in only 28 days. Bradley’s Colts once again played at Broad Street Park. While staying within the framework of the Class C league’s salary limit, Bradley and Griffin increased their efforts to field a competitive ballclub. While he had considerably more leverage in signing ballplayers, Landgraf was hindered by the expectations to produce a major league caliber team despite the fact that most of the best ballplayers were already signed to American and National League contracts. The Rebels only notable players were former major leaguers Ralph Seybold and Bert Blue. Seybold, the former American League home run king for the A’s, had started his professional career in Richmond, but was 41 years-old and had not played major league ball since 1908. Blue was also a former Athletic. He

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35 *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 24, 1912 and January 10, 1912.
had primarily been a reserve catcher and had played in a mere 17 major league games. During the 1911 season, he played in the Class D, Ohio State League.36

The excitement generated by the USL actually heightened Richmond’s anticipation for the beginning of the Virginia League season. The Virginia League opened the season two weeks earlier than the upstart league, and the Colts were greeted on Opening Day with the now ritual parade through the streets. The procession was cheered by an exuberant crowd. However darkening skies, hail and lackluster play drove many of the baseball celebrants away from the stands as the Goobers of Petersburg defeated the Colts 7-3 on April 18. Large crowds continued to patronize Broad Street Park, and in mid May, the club had over 4,000 fans in attendance for a Saturday game. When the Rebels finally took the field on May 1, over 9,000 spectators came to Lee Park to cheer the hometown boys to a 2-0 victory over Washington.37

After the season started, the Times-Dispatch reported regularly on both of the home teams. Updates of Colts’ games and Virginia League standings were posted daily, albeit they were now relegated toward the bottom of the page or even pushed to the second page of the sports pages. The United States League received top billing.

Standings of the USL, American League and National League were grouped together under the heading “Results of the Three Big Leagues.” Richmond was one of the few

36 Benson, Ballparks of North America, 132; Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 198; Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 14 and 30, 1912.

37 Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 19 and May 2 and 12, 1912.
cities to recognize the league in the same class as the AL and NL. However, it did not take long for the Times-Dispatch to cease the comparison.\textsuperscript{38}

While the United States League was well received in Richmond, the USL struggled elsewhere. By May 28, New York dropped out of the league after only 50 fans showed up for the previous day’s game. It was reported that Richmond, with its strong attendance, and Pittsburgh, with perhaps the best press coverage, were the only teams making money. Reading, near bankruptcy (court papers were filed June 1), could not keep its players from signing contracts with teams in Organized Baseball and had to disband. Despite these troubles, the league owners met in Pittsburgh and voted to continue. This plan may have been optimistic. On June 4, the Times-Dispatch headline read: "Players Determined Not to Play Again Until They are Paid." The USL spent the next two weeks without an official schedule. Teams played each other in an attempt to keep busy and make some money while the owners tried to reorganize the league. By June 24, 1912, the United States League was finished. The Rebs finished with a 22-13 record (.629) and were in second place behind Pittsburgh.\textsuperscript{39}

The Virginia League was not impervious to franchise failures in 1912. In efforts to revive the league, the circuit added teams from Newport News and Portsmouth and expanded to an eight-club format for the season. The VL began to experience its financial failures about the same time that the United States League was falling apart. On June 5, Danville announced it was "ready to give up its franchise." The next day

\textsuperscript{38} Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 202-205. Richmond Times-Dispatch, May 3 and 24, 1912.

\textsuperscript{39} Pietrusza, Major Leagues, 205-207. Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 4, 8, 9, 11, 20, 23 and 24, 1912.
Portsmouth announced it was losing money but would continue. Suffolk and Bluefield, West Virginia entered bids for franchises in the league. However, magnates decided to drop Lynchburg along with Danville and continue as a six-club league.40

On the field, the Richmond Colts enjoyed a successful season in 1912. After losing their first game, the club had a breakeven April, posting a 5-5 record by the time the USL started its season. The club was 21-17 when the USL first announced its troubles on June 4. As the season progressed, the Colts actually vaulted into first place on August 28, but then lost two games to Roanoke to drop out of the lead. Roanoke finished out the final week of the season atop the rankings, and Richmond fell to third behind second place Petersburg. The Colts 77-56 (.579) record was a dramatic improvement over the previous years.41

After years of frustration with the ballclubs' performance, the Richmond fans and press were beginning to look at W. B. Bradley with favor. The strong performance of the 1912 Colts eased some of the criticisms, however other concerns still existed. The condition of Broad Street Park had deteriorated significantly since its opening in 1897. Bradley announced plans to build a new park at the beginning of the 1912 season, however, dissension amongst Bradley and the other members of the ownership group prevented plans from progressing. When the United States League failed in June, Bradley put forth a bid to purchase Lee Park. However, the owners of the Richmond Baseball Corporation and P.J. White and Son, the contractors, were engaged in a contract

40 Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 5-13, 1912.
41 Ibid., May 1, June 5 and 24, August 29 and 31 and September 8, 1912.
dispute over the final $600 payment for construction. The USL franchise’s board of directors charged that the contractor failed to complete the construction in a satisfactory manner and still had “much work” to complete. The legal battle over the park prevented its sale to Bradley and his partners.42

Before the 1913 season Bradley was successful in securing land and building a new ballpark. The new ballyard, also known as Broad Street Park was built a few blocks to the west of the vacated playing field. Similar to the original Broad Street Park, this field was built upon land leased from the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad. The field was located on Broad at the intersection with Addison Street. The Times-Dispatch described the “Bradleyized enclosure” as being “to the west of a certain shoe manufacture and to the north of a hop-pressing emporium whose shadows lure and sometimes lead.” The lease with the RF & P was terminated after the season in 1916 when the railroad determined that the location would be used to build a new rail passenger terminal. Broad Street Station, long abandoned as a train station, still exists and is the current home of the Science Museum of Virginia.43

The 1913 season began with the usual high hopes. This year, the hopes were enhanced by the return of Steve Griffin as manager and the promise of strong play as was exhibited at the end of the 1912 season. The fans’ hopes were rewarded as the Colts won the opener by defeating the Goobers of Petersburg 3-0 behind the strong pitching of Charley Strain. The club remained at the top of the Virginia League standings for most of

42 Ibid., January 7 and June 15, 1912.

43 Benson, Ballparks, 332; Richmond Times-Dispatch April 12, 1913.
the season. However, with only a few weeks to play, several injuries caused the Colts to surrender their position to champion Petersburg and runner up Roanoke. Griffin’s boys finished in third place with 74 victories paired with 60 losses (.552).  

Bradley decided that the Colts needed new leadership in 1914, and Steve Griffin was released after the last game was completed in 1913. Griffin acknowledged that the season had been disappointing, but countered that it was not entirely his fault. Much of the demise was attributed to luck, or lack there of. He realized that luck was against him when he had reported for the first day of training and “fell through the incomplete clubhouse and cracked his ribs.” Bradley selected Ray Ryan, from Cincinnati, to guide the Colts.  

The first challenge faced by the Richmond club in 1914 did not occur on the field, but was in the boardroom of league magnates. In the first draft of the league’s game dates, league owners decided to create an equitable schedule that provided each team with the same number of Saturday home games. This plan was vehemently opposed by Richmond ownership, but was approved by the other ballclubs. This arrangement planned for the Colts to be away from Broad Street Park on weekends for the first time in the Virginia League’s brief history. In the previous years, the league’s schedule designers reasoned that since Richmond had the largest population and attracted the most fans per game, the entire league would receive greater financial benefit by having Richmond at home. However, owners now thought that if they altered the schedule to provide more
games with local rivalries, Richmond/ Petersburg and Norfolk/Portsmouth, the excitement generated by these games would create fan interest and boost attendance throughout the league. Gradually the owners came to realize that the increased travel costs would outweigh the revenues derived from the new fan support. They also realized that by increasing the number of games a team would play against one opponent, they would likely reduce the competitiveness of the championship race. Without a pennant race, attendance was likely to decrease, not increase. The owners met two weeks before play started and drafted a calendar that presented a greater balance in the number of meetings between opponents. However, the new schedule did not make concessions to Richmond, and for the first time, the Colts played Saturday games on the road. The *Times-Dispatch* warned that this situation would spell financial ruin for the other teams in the league.  

As the season neared the summer midpoint, the league owners began to realize the folly of the schedule. Portsmouth had started the season miserably, but began to win ballgames. However, fan interest was lost along with the early season ballgames. Without crowd support, the team struggled financially and was sold. The team’s new owners projected that they would not be able to finish the season. Petersburg, although on a stronger financial base, was hopelessly in last place in the standings and was seeing fewer and fewer fans in attendance. On July 3rd, the magnates decided to create a split season. The winners of the two half-seasons would face each other in a playoff for the

\[45\textbf{Ibid.}, \text{March 8, 15 and 29 and April 2 and 5, 1914.}\]
Virginia League pennant. The first half champion was crowned on August first. The second season actually began with the games on July 2 and continued into September with the original schedule. The games played from July 2 through August 1 counted for both halves of the split schedule. The owners reasoned that this arrangement would increase attendance by crafting two pennant races.\textsuperscript{46}

The split schedule produced some of the results desired by the owners. All of the teams completed the season, and the arrangement saved them from financial ruin. However, there was no playoff. Norfolk easily won both halves of the schedule and was crowned league champion. Richmond under Ray Ryan showed marked improvement over the previous seasons and finished second in each championship race. The Colts finished the season with a total record of 78-56 (.582), while Norfolk posted a 93-48 (.660) record.\textsuperscript{47}

On the field, one of Richmond’s stars for the season was future Hall of Fame pitcher Burleigh Grimes. Grimes only played a few months of the season for the Colts. He was on loan from the Birmingham Barons of the Southern League and was recalled after his final Colt victory on September 12, 1914. In his major league career, which lasted from 1916-1934, Grimes was noted for his spitball. He was another of the

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., July 2-4, 1914.

\textsuperscript{47} Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 12 and 13, 1914.
seventeen pitchers legally allowed to use the pitch after it was banned in 1920. When his playing career ended in 1934, he was the last active spitball pitcher. 48

It is ironic to note that Norfolk manager, Dr. Buck Pressley, had originally agreed to a contract to manage Richmond for the 1914 season. In 1913, Pressley managed Roanoke to second place in the Virginia League standings, while also maintaining a medical practice in the city. At the conclusion of the season, Pressley and W.B. Bradley agreed to terms to have the manager lead the Colts in 1914. Before he signed the contract, Pressley notified the Colts owner that he was retiring from the game and planned to focus his attention on his medical career. A few months later, Roanoke’s team president, H.C. Elliott, sold all but $100 of his interests in the club and then invested heavily in the Norfolk franchise. Mr. Elliott convinced Dr. Pressley to reconsider his baseball retirement and manage the Norfolk squad. Under Pressley’s guidance, the Tars won the pennant with ease. 49

During the 1914 season, the story that attracted the most attention from baseball fans in Richmond did not involve the Class C Virginia League, but instead focused upon two other leagues; the upstart outlaw Federal League and the Class AA International League. The Baltimore Terrapins of the Federal League created such a financial hardship


49 Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 14, 1913, March 15 and April 12, 1914.
for the city's International League franchise, the Orioles, that Oriole owner Jack Dunn sought to move his franchise. Richmond was his choice for relocation.\(^{50}\)

The Federal League had its roots in the failed United States League of 1912. Although the USL was a financial disaster, the league sparked interest in the formation of another league outside of the framework of Organized Baseball. John T. Powers was the organizer of the Federal League. In 1913, the league was based in the Midwest with franchises in St. Louis, Detroit, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Cleveland and Covington, Kentucky (across the Ohio River from Cincinnati; in midseason this franchise moved to Kansas City). The league was determined to remain independent and took great caution in assembling rosters so as not to enter into direct confrontation with Organized Baseball.\(^{51}\)

Encouraged by its success in 1913, the Federal League owners prepared ambitious plans for 1914. League owners selected James A. Gilmore as the new president and decided to expand into eastern cities. In the plans, owners sought new, modern stadiums and attempted to sign high caliber ballplayers; the goal was to establish their league as a third major league. The eight-team circuit dropped Cleveland from its roster and positioned new clubs in Buffalo, Brooklyn and Baltimore. The Federal League was able to sign high profile players to contracts and was able to create popular interest in its franchises. The league was now anxious to enter into direct competition with Organized

\(^{50}\) *Ibid.*, June 26, 1914.

Baseball. In Baltimore, the Federal League expansion team, the Baltimore Terrapins, built Terrapin Park directly across the street from the Orioles’ American Park.\textsuperscript{52}

Baltimore had a long and proud history in baseball, especially in the major leagues. In the 1890’s the National League Orioles won three consecutive championships. In 1900, the National League decided to reduce to eight teams and released the Baltimore club. The upstart American League welcomed Baltimore, but in 1902 the franchise was relocated to New York. Baltimore owner, Ned Hanlon, attempted to bring another major league team to Baltimore but was unable to secure a franchise in either league. He then purchased the International League franchise from Montreal and moved it to Baltimore. Jack Dunn, a former National Leaguer, was hired as the player-manager of the club in 1907 and guided it to the IL pennant in 1908. Dunn purchased the club from Hanlon in 1909 and established a reputation for developing exceptional baseball prospects. His teams were often regarded as the strongest in the minor leagues.\textsuperscript{53}

Ned Hanlon saw the Federal League as the opportunity to restore major league baseball to his beloved Baltimore. The city enthusiastically welcomed the outlaws. Although the Oriole club was widely regarded as having the better talent of the two Baltimore baseball teams, the fans were enchanted by the concept of a return to major league status. On Opening Day an estimated 28,000 were in attendance at Terrapin Park to watch the home team, behind the pitching of Jack Quinn, defeat Buffalo 3-2. The day was celebrated with a parade, the city mayor threw out the first ball and scalpers were

\textsuperscript{52} Benson, \textit{Ballparks}, 24; Okkomen, \textit{Federal League}, 5-9; Pietrusza, \textit{Major Leagues}, 212-227.

\textsuperscript{53} O’Neal, \textit{The International League}, 236-239; Sullivan, \textit{The Minors}, 71-73.
getting as much as $10 for tickets. The same day, the Orioles hosted an exhibition game with the New York Giants and drew only 1,500 fans, most of them in attendance only because they could not get tickets for the game across the street.\textsuperscript{54}

As the season progressed, the Terrapins’ attendance figures were routinely above 20,000. The team played well, remaining in contention for the league pennant until late in the season. The success of the Federal League franchise caused the Orioles to suffer greatly. Attendance figures were measured in the low hundreds despite the Orioles hold upon first place in the league. Dunn, facing financial ruin, sought to relocate his organization and targeted Richmond. Richmond fans were anxious for a higher classification of baseball and businessmen were eager to promote the city.\textsuperscript{55}

On June 26, 1914, Alvin M. Smith, President of the Richmond Business Men’s Club declared an open meeting to discuss the possibility of moving the Orioles to Richmond. Within three days, organizers were able to secure the support of W.B. Bradley owner, and Thomas B. McAdams, president of the Virginia League Colts and raised nearly $15,000 in subscriptions toward the $62,500 purchase price for stock in the club. In the purchase agreement, Dunn reserved fifty-percent of the stock for himself and agreed to a twenty-percent cash payment with the balance being paid in installments.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Benson, \textit{Ballparks}, 24; Okkomen, \textit{Federal League}, 11-13; Pietrusza, \textit{Major Leagues}, 229; Sullivan, \textit{The Minors}, 75-76.


\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, June 26, 27 and 29, 1914.
However, the public’s enthusiasm for better ball in Richmond was soon crushed by the Virginia League. Despite having the support of the Richmond franchise, the other league magnates voted against the proposal to move the Richmond franchise to Lynchburg and allow the Orioles to relocate to Richmond. At the July 3, 1914 meeting that created the Virginia League split schedule, the directors determined that the city of Richmond was too important to the league’s financial success. The move would only be allowed if $15,000 was paid to the league in exchange for the territorial rights to the city. That same day, the International League directors also voted to block the move.57

Without the approval of either league, the sale was cancelled. With the denial of the sale, Richmond missed the opportunity to have Babe Ruth representing the hometown team on the diamond. Dunn already having lost over $28,000 on the season, was forced to sell his star players. In a deal worth nearly $25,000 Ernie Shore, Ben Egan and Ruth were sent to the Boston Red Sox. In the end, Dunn sold a total of ten players to several clubs including the New York Yankees (formerly the Baltimore Orioles, relocated to New York in 1902) and Cincinnati. The Orioles went from being the probable pennant winner to a disappointing fifth place finish.58

At the International League’s winter meetings, the league owners decided to reverse their position on Dunn’s proposal to move to Richmond. Dunn and the Richmond Exhibition Company, under leadership of President Alvin M. Smith, Vice-President Dr. William H. Parker, and Secretary and Treasurer Ben W. Wilson, were able

57 Sullivan, The Minors, 76; Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 3, 1914.
58 Pietrusza, The Majors, 243; O’Neal, The International League, 244; Sullivan, The Minors, 76-77.
to bring the Orioles to the Virginia capital. To make room for the International League franchise, the Virginia League accepted $12,500 for the territorial rights to the city. W.B. Bradley agreed to surrender his franchise, including the players under reserve so that the league could relocate the team to a new city. Rocky Mount, North Carolina was chosen as the expansion-city, and the Virginia League extended beyond the borders of the Old Dominion for the first time.\(^{59}\)

Although Broad Street Park had only been used for two seasons, extensive renovations were needed to meet the expectations of the International League standards. A larger and "more up-to-date clubhouse" was built. In its design, accommodations were made for the visiting teams. The grandstand seating capacity was increased from 1,987 to 2,546. The first two rows of seats were removed and replaced with six rows of chairs. The chairs numbered 856 in total. The admission cost for a reserved chair was 75 cents, the highest ticket at the ballpark. Grandstand seats were 50 cents, and general admission for bleachers was 25 cents. Dunn assumed that the local fans would begin to prefer the first-base bleachers more than they had previously, as that was preferred seating side in northern cities. In addition to changes in seating capacity and comfort, Dunn’s most significant improvement was to introduce turnstiles. Attendance was no longer counted by hand.\(^{60}\)

\(^{59}\) Richmond Times-Dispatch, Dec. 6-10 and 12, 1914; Shelly Rolfe, "Virginians to Virginians," Richmond Times-Dispatch, Sunday, April 4, 1954, special section A-1; Robert L. Scibner, "Two Out, and ---? The Richmond "Virginians" Need Not Feel Unfamiliar in the International League, They Have Been There Twice Before," Virginia Cavalcade, Spring, 1954, 18-22.

\(^{60}\) Benson, Ballparks, 333; Richmond Times-Dispatch December 9, 1914 and March 23, 1915.
The city was exuberant in its welcome of the International League to Richmond. Mayor George Ainslie declared a half-holiday for April 27, 1915, the Richmond team’s Opening Day. In the proclamation, he encouraged businesses to close early so that their employees would be able to attend the game. The day was celebrated with an automobile parade followed by a brass band. Dignitaries in the parade included Mayor Ainslie, Virginia Governor Henry Carter Stuart and International League President Ed Barrow. The festive atmosphere drew 7,500 baseball and civic enthusiasts to the park. The excitement was so great that the gates had to be opened a full three hours before game time. The overflowing crowd witnessed the home team defeat the visiting Toronto Leafs 11-8.\[61\]

When Dunn moved the Orioles to Richmond, the club was officially renamed the Virginians. However, in the Opening Day game, the team was forced to overcome a deficit four times before securing the victory. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* noted that the triumph was a “demonstration that Richmond has a team that has the spirit to fight an uphill battle. On all sides they were dubbed the Climbers, and Climbers they shall be called.” As has been exhibited in the past, the newspaper took the lead in creating a nickname for the town’s team, and throughout the season, the team was referred to in the paper not as the Virginians, but as the Climbers.\[62\]

Richmond’s first year in the minor’s highest classification was not a successful one. The club finished with only 59 victories paired with 81 losses (.422) and finished in


seventh place in the eight-team league. Buffalo was the pennant winner at 86-50 (.632). The only club to finish behind Richmond was Jersey City, 52-85 (.380). Jersey City had been struggling financially for three years in a row and was the subject of constant relocation discussions. The only significant achievement on the field was turned in by Allen "Rubberarm" Russell. His 239 strikeouts earned him the league title and helped propel him to an eleven-year major league career. Despite the poor record on the field, the Richmond franchise did bring people out to the ballpark. The club’s attendance record placed them second only to Providence in total attendance. While Richmond did not fare well in the International League, the relocated Colts, now playing in Rocky Mount, North Carolina under the name Tarheels, went on to capture the Virginia League pennant.63

The month of December 1915 proved tumultuous for the Richmond franchise. As the International League prepared for its winter meetings, there was speculation that several of the league owners were inclined to drop Richmond from the league’s roster. At the close of the season, it was apparent that the Federal League would not return for another season, and with the Feds now out of the Baltimore, several owners wanted to return the Monumental City to the International League. Jack Dunn reiterated that he was committed to Richmond unless there was opportunity to reclaim his rights to Baltimore. Throughout the month, confusing reports indicated that Richmond would retain a franchise then cast doubt upon this decision. After a month of intense negotiation,

63 O’Neal, “International League,” 336; Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 14 and 19, 1915.
Richmond was able to remain in the International League. The Richmond Exposition Company purchased Dunn's majority interest in the franchise. Dunn then purchased the floundering Jersey City franchise, took the best players from Richmond and relocated to Baltimore. The league also moved the bankrupt Harrisburg franchise to Newark, New Jersey.  

Dunn's departure left the Richmond Exposition Company with a baseball franchise but no manager and few players. William Andrew "Uncle Billy" Smith, previously with Atlanta, was chosen to lead the ballclub. Smith was chosen for his experience. He had managed teams for 21 seasons and won six minor league championships. Uncle Billy was also a notorious tobacco chewer, "the tighter the game, the more he chews. And the size of the chew is sometimes immense."  

Billy Smith's club started the season in surprising fashion. The team opened at home with the champion Buffalo Bisons and won 9-7. The Climbers defeated the Bisons in the next two games as well. The winning ways continued into early June, when the Climbers were leading the pennant race. However, the ballclub could not retain this position and found itself sixth in the standings after splitting a doubleheader with Baltimore on the last day of the season. The final record of 64-75 (.460) was a mere three games ahead of seventh place Rochester. Dunn's Orioles finished in third at 74-66 (.529).  

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64 Richmond Times-Dispatch, December 12, 14, 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, and 28, 1915.  
65 Scribner, "Two Out, and --?," 21.  
In 1917, the Richmond Exposition Company was forced to find a new playing field for the Virginians. The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad reclaimed the land that had been leased for Broad Street Park so that a new passenger terminal could be built. With assistance from City Council, the company was able to purchase the abandoned Lee Park, last used by the United States League in 1912. A contract was awarded to R.M. Anderson & Co. to erect a new grandstand. The new ballpark was called Boulevard Field. In its acquisition of the ballpark, the Richmond Exposition Company was re-chartered as the Boulevard Athletic Field Corporation. The leadership remained nearly identical to the original organization. Alvin M. Smith was president. Ben Wilson was secretary/treasurer and Grover C. Duis and Dr. William H. Parker were members of the board of directors. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* noted the ownership arrangement marked the first time in the history of professional baseball in Richmond that the ballclub was the direct owner of the playing grounds.67

The 1917 season opened amid a sense of uncertainty. On April 4, 1917, two weeks before Opening Day, the United States Congress ratified President Woodrow Wilson’s declaration of war. Europe had been engaged in conflict since 1914, but for the most part Americans had been able to continue with relatively normal lives. Now that the country was formally engaged in the confrontation, normal life was sure to end. As the European conflict escalated, attendance at baseball games began to deteriorate. In 1914

when combat started, there were 42 minor leagues in Organized Baseball. In 1917, only 20 leagues opened the season. Of those, only 12 would finish. 68

On April 17, 1917, Opening Day for Richmond in the International League, the usual parade and assembly of dignitaries took on a more patriotic posture than in previous years. The day started with the traditional baseball parade through the streets of the city, ending with the players taking the field before 7,000 spectators. The ceremonial first ball was thrown out by Governor Henry Carter Stuart, and the Richmond and Rochester players began the game with Jesse Tannehill, the former Richmond pitcher in 1895-96, serving as one of the two umpires. The game was halted after the sixth inning when a military parade entered the gates of Boulevard Field. In efforts to recruit men to meet Virginia’s quota of supplying 800 men for the Navy, a parade of Bluejackets, Marines and the 58 piece Marine Band had marched through the city. As a scheduled part of the parade, the military men entered the stadium and performed drills for the crowd before continuing their march to Capitol Square. 69

As the sixth inning ended, the sounds of the military bugle corps announced the arrival of the Marines and Bluejackets. At the head of the procession were Captain R. B. Sowell and the mounted Richmond police, followed by a squad of bicycle officers. A man attired as Uncle Sam rode a “Democratic donkey” was at the head of the column of the men in military uniform. The cheering crowd was brought to its feet as the band

68 O’Neal, International League, 65-68; John H. Farrell, “Great Inroads Made on Minors by the War,” printed in Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 16, 1917. Farrell was Secretary of the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs.

69 Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 18, 1917.
played “Dixie” during the entrance procession. After watching the Marines perform marching drills, the crowd was once again brought to its feet as the band played the “Star-Spangled Banner.” The game resumed after the procession left the field. In the game, Richmond fell behind three times, but managed a rally to tie the score each time. However, the Rochester club emerged victorious in ten innings.  

The Climbers struggled in the early part of the season. On May 24, the club released Billy Smith as manager. Otto Knabe took over the club on Saturday, May 26, 1917. Knabe had been a star infielder of the Philadelphia Phillies and manager of the Baltimore Terrapins in the Federal League. In 1916, he started the season playing second base for Pittsburgh and ended with Chicago. Besides serving as the Richmond manager, Knabe also played second base. It was hoped that he would be able to mentor the clubs’ young second baseman, a local boy named Eddie Mooers.  

Knabe could do little to help the Climbers. The club finished in last place. The record was 53 victories and 94 losses (.361). The only consolation that Richmond’s management and fans could take from the season was that on the last day of the season, the club prevented Jack Dunn from having an opportunity to capture the pennant. The Virginians were scheduled to play a double header with the Orioles in Richmond. The weather forecast called for rain and Dunn wanted to have the games switched to Baltimore. Richmond management refused. The local moguls were still upset that Dunn had conspired to return to Baltimore in 1916 with most of Richmond’s good players. The

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., May 25, 1917.
final two games between Richmond and Baltimore were cancelled by weather. Toronto, under the guidance of player-manager Nap Lajoie, took the pennant by winning both games of its double header with Rochester.\textsuperscript{72}

The effects of the war were great upon baseball, especially the minor leagues. Attendance was down, as the call to join the armed services took fans from the seats. Others were engaged in labor for the war effort and didn’t have time for leisure or were afraid to be viewed as a “slacker” by wasting time watching men play a game. Wartime travel restrictions and player military enlistments increased the burdens placed upon ballclubs. In its recap of the 1917 season, the \textit{Times-Dispatch} correctly surmised that the ownership of the Richmond ballclub suffered tremendous financial losses from the season. The loss was so great that it was speculated that the ownership group was contemplating not even fielding a team if the war did not end. The same sentiment was shared by many of the owners of International League franchises.\textsuperscript{73}

In the Spring of 1918, Provost Marshall General Crowder issued a “work or fight” order which mandated that all men of draft-age not engaged in work essential to the war effort were subject to the draft. The draft rule cast doubt on the possibility of professional baseball for 1918. As a result, the International League owners voted to disband the International League. Later that day, the owners of the Baltimore, Toronto, Rochester, Buffalo and Newark franchises formed a new league called the New International

\textsuperscript{72} O’Neal, \textit{International League}, 67-68; \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, September 16, 1917.

\textsuperscript{73} O’Neal, \textit{International League}, 68; Scribner, “Two Out, and --?,” 22; Joel Zoss and John Bowman, \textit{Diamonds in the Rough, the Untold History of Baseball} (Macmillan; New York, 1989; reprint Contemporary Books; Chicago, 1996) 88-93; \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch} September 16, 1917.
League. The vote to disband was a ruse to eliminate Richmond, Montreal and Providence. The five owners reasoned that the clubs on the geographic outskirts of the league strained the feasibility of operating the league within the travel restrictions imposed by the war effort. The new league embraced teams in Syracuse, Binghamton and Jersey City to complete its roster. With the trickery of those five owners, Richmond was out of the International League. 74

Chapter Four

A Return to the Virginia League
1918-1929

The scheme to oust Richmond, Montreal and Providence from the International League is viewed as trickery only in historical hindsight. The Richmond Times-Dispatch’s report of the March 1918 league meeting expressed no shock or outrage at the vote to disband the league and the immediate creation of the New International League. In fact, the paper was quick to fault the residents of Richmond and their failure to provide enthusiasm and financial support for the team as the causes for Richmond’s failure to remain in Organized Baseball’s highest classification of the minor leagues.¹

Before the International League owners scheduled the fateful day of meetings that ended the league and formed a new one, Richmond’s ability to remain in the league was publicly questioned in this city. On Tuesday, March 26, 1918 an open meeting was held in the auditorium of John Marshall High School to discuss the team’s financial past and possibilities for the future. The Sunday, March 24 Times-Dispatch printed an article encouraging baseball fans of “every description” to be present at this important meeting and to purchase a subscription for season passes to Virginians games. The passes were available for $28 and included the war tax levied on amusements. Despite the endorsement by the paper, a mere 125 supporters attended the meeting. At the meeting, it was revealed that the club had averaged $10,000 in losses over the previous two seasons

¹ Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 27-29 and April 1 and 7, 1918.
and would need $50,000 to run the ballclub in the upcoming season. A minimum of 500 season passes would need to be sold. Ninety-eight subscriptions were sold that night with pledges for 81 more.²

However, the next day the International League directors voted 6-2 to disband the league. The formal vote was conducted by sealed ballot. In an article on March 29, 1918, it was surmised that the two votes to continue the league were from Jack Dunn of Baltimore and James McCaffrey of Toronto. Another article in the same day’s edition of the Times-Dispatch reported that Ben Wilson, secretary of the Richmond club, sent a telegram to the paper indicating that the Virginians and Newark club were the two teams that voted against the motion to disband. Regardless of the vote, the Times-Dispatch noted that the heavy financial losses and the public’s failure to support the team made the vote to end the league a necessary action on the part of the organization. The contemporary accounts all pointed to finances as the cause of Richmond’s failure to remain in the International League, not a conspiracy by the other owners as listed in most modern accounts of the incident.³

Even Alvin Smith, president of the club, had his memory affected by historical hindsight. In an article published in 1954 on the eve of Richmond’s return to International League baseball, it was noted that his 1949 recollections of the 1918 events represented a different story than that printed in the 1918 newspapers. He claimed that he


³ Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 27 and 28, 1918; O’Neal, International League, 69; Rolfe, “Virginians to Virginians.”
had been so taken back by the movement to disband that he hadn’t had time to think of fighting it in court. He credited the maneuver by Dunn and the other owners as the only reason Richmond failed to remain in the league. In his support of the 1954 team, he went as far to say that Richmond had supported play in the International League once before, and he surmised it would do so again. It seems the $10,000 losses and the limited season ticket subscriptions were no longer in his memory as the cause of the Richmond team’s demise.4

Despite the war conditions and financial struggles of the International League franchise, the city of Richmond did not spend the 1918 season without a professional ball club. Immediately after the International League folded, W. B. Bradley and the Virginia League re-entered Richmond’s baseball picture. Bradley, president of the Virginia League, was eager to have Richmond and its potentially large fan base as part of the VL. In the same March 29, 1918 article that announced the vote to dissolve the International League, the *Times-Dispatch* indicated that Bradley and the Virginia League were interested in restoring a team to Richmond.5

Richmond’s entry into the Virginia League was not accommodated immediately. Throughout the month of April, the Virginia League owners debated three questions: Should the league try to continue the league despite the state of war, should the city of Richmond be admitted into the league despite its failure to support an International

4 Rolfe, “Virginians to Virginians.”

5 *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 29, 1918.
League team, and if Richmond enters the league, what team would be forced out to make
way.6

It took over a month before all of the answers were discovered. Early season
amateur games in Richmond drew a greater attendance than the 1917 season average for
International League games in the city. Bradley noted that it was originally speculated
that the general population and civic organizations "were opposed to amusements while
America is at war and were opposed particularly to baseball. That doesn't seem to be the
case at present. I think on the whole people want amusement, something to divert their
minds from the war." The organizers of the Southern Association of Baseball Clubs
shared his sentiments. When they announced their season schedule, team presidents
Heineman, of New Orleans and Frank, of Atlanta speculated that the war year would be
good for baseball. While the Virginia League and Southern Association held strong
hopes for the 1918 season, few others did. Only nine minor leagues began the season,
with none of them playing the complete schedule. Even the National and American
Leagues ended their season after the games of Labor Day Weekend.7

On April 8, 1918 the owners determined that the Virginia League would indeed
continue, the owners now had to decide if they wanted Richmond in the league. While
Bradley had maintained a public interest in including the city, many of the league owners
pointed to the March 26th meeting and the lack of popular support for a team in the

6 Ibid.; March 29, April 3-5, 7, 9-10, 13, and 26 and May 3, 1918.

7 O'Neal, International League, 69; Zoss and Bowman, Diamonds in the Rough, 91; Richmond Times-
Dispatch, April 3 (quote) and April 9, 1918.
minors’ highest classification as cause for concern that they would not support Virginia League ball. After witnessing great support for the amateur leagues in Richmond, the committee seemed comfortable that the Virginia League would be supported by the city. In fact, the league began to recognize that it needed Richmond. “It wants the city because it has been found necessary in the past existence of the circuit to annex some well-populated and important locality in order to give some push to the baseball season,” announced Bradley on April 12. The only problem was how to fit Richmond into the schedule. All of the current franchises were interested in remaining in the league. Several plans were discussed including expanding to an eight-club circuit. After several weeks, on May 2, it was decided that the league would feature only four teams in 1918, with the probability of expanding to six in 1919. The four for 1918 were Richmond, Norfolk, Newport News and Petersburg. A ninety-game schedule was adopted, with play beginning on May 23, 1918.8

Richmond’s 1918 entry in the Virginia League once again went by the name Colts and was led by President Ben W. Wilson and Manager George Stinson. The Colts played their home games at Boulevard Field, still owned by Wilson’s corporation. On the field the club was made up of mostly young, unheralded players whose playing experienced consisted mostly of college baseball. On the recommendation of Richmond College coach Frank Dobson, two men with experience on the Spiders’ baseball club were featured on the squad, “Mac” Pitt at third and “Tom” Miller in centerfield. Pitt, still a

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8 Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 4,5,7,9, 10, 13, and 26 and May 3 and 22, 1918.
collegiate player, was on temporary contract with the club until a permanent roster could be organized. Miller had a professional contract with the Colts organization.9

After the turbulent winter, Richmond’s baseball fans welcomed the first game of the Virginia League season in splendid fashion. Nearly 2,000 rooters came out for the Opening Day festivities. The day began with the annual parade. The procession originated at the Richmond Hotel at 3:00 PM. Governor Westmoreland Davis and Mayor George M. Ainslee were on hand, with the Governor throwing the ceremonial first ball to Colts catcher, Holmes. In game action, the Colts did not disappoint their fans and defeated the Petersburg Goobers by the score of 4-1. The former Richmond College Spider, Miller provided the heroics by belting a three-run home run over the left field fence in the sixth inning.10

The season started well, but baseball came to an abrupt end on July 20, 1918. On July 19, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker upheld a lower board’s ruling in the draft appeal by Washington Senators catcher Eddie Ainsmith. Ainsmith had been called to military service under the “work or fight” order issued in the spring. In the appeal decision, Secretary Baker ruled that baseball was not an essential industry. He recognized that the game provided social value in relaxation and a reprieve from the “stress of intensive industry and occupation.” However, in the trying times of war “the demands of the army and the country are such that we all must make sacrifices, and

9 Ibid., May 22 and 23, 1918.
10 Ibid., May 23, 1918.
nonproductive employment of able-bodied persons useful in the national defense, either as military men or in the industry or commerce of our country, cannot be justified."\(^{11}\)

The evening of Secretary Baker’s decision, Virginia League owners decided that the games on July 20, 1918 would be the last of the season. During the deliberations to end the season, it was proposed that the clubs should finish out the month of July, however that motion did not receive a second. The decision to end the next day was passed unanimously. One reason that the owners closed the season quickly was declining attendance, especially in Richmond. The poor attendance was not necessarily attributed to low interest by the fans, but rather the draft. Many of the typical spectators were engaged in military service.

The Colts entered the final day of the season in second place, behind Newport News. Both ballclubs had 28 victories, but the Shipbuilders had only lost 20 games compared to Richmond’s 21 defeats. By chance, those two teams were scheduled to face each other at Boulevard Field on July 20 and provided the league with a championship match-up. The Colts took advantage of the opportunity and won the game 5-2 and captured the pennant with 29 victories (.586) compared to 28 (.571) for Newport News. Both teams had 21 loses.\(^{12}\)

When the Armistice was signed ending the war at 6 AM November 11, 1918, there was immediate hope that baseball would return in 1919. Return it did. Baseball saw a resurgence that was similar to the boom experienced after the Civil War and the

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\(^{11}\) Zoss and Bowman, *Diamonds in the Rough*, 91; *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 20, 1918.

\(^{12}\) *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 21, 1918.
Spanish American War. Attendance at Major League games doubled in 1919 and hit nine million in 1920. The Virginia League took advantage of the renewed interest in the game. For 1919, it expanded to six clubs, adding Suffolk and Portsmouth. The magnates adopted a split schedule with the first season closing on July 5, and the second concluding on Labor Day. The league also sought higher status, petitioning for Class B protection in Organized Baseball. With the higher rank, an improved caliber of players was sought and the salary limit was set at $1,600 with a restriction of no more than thirteen players to a team.13

Frank Mills Dobson, the coach of the Richmond College Spiders, was hired to be the manager for the Colts. His tenure with the Colts began with a 9-6 loss to the Petersburg Goobers on Opening Day. The next day, the Colts lost the second game of the year to the Goobers by the score of 5-1. Dobson’s Colts continued to suffer, amassing a 3-8 (.273) record by May 26, when it was announced that the club was seeking a new manager.14

B. W. Wilson was able to sign Charles Albert “Chief” Bender as the new player-manager. Bender, a native of the Chippewa tribe through the maternal side of the family tree, gained the nickname “Chief” as result of his mother’s heritage. He earned fame as a pitcher on Connie Mack’s champion Philadelphia Athletics, playing for the club from 1903-1914. With the Athletics, Bender was part of five pennant teams, and he became

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13 Seymour, Golden Age, 255; Zoss and Bowman, 93; Richmond Times-Dispatch Nov. 11 and 17, 1918; April 16, 1919.
14 Richmond Times-Dispatch, May 9, 10, 24, and 26, 1919.
the first pitcher to earn six World Series victories. In 1915, Bender played in Baltimore with the Federal League. His Major League playing career ended with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1917. He was elected into the Hall of Fame in 1953. When Ben Wilson signed Bender to join the Colts as player-manager, the Chief was trying to revive his major league career and was in negotiations with Pat Moran, manager of the Cincinnati Reds. Bender, however, was more impressed with Wilson’s offer. He took over the Colts on May 29, 1919.\textsuperscript{15}

Bender took control of team with a 4-10 record and began to turn things around immediately. In his first game, the Colts won 8-4. By the end of the first half-season the club had moved out of last place and had a 20-31 (.392) record. Petersburg claimed the first half title with a 33-18 (.647) record. In the second half, Bender’s Tribe (or Indians, as the Richmond team was affectionately referred to by this time) easily captured the pennant with a 40-19 (.678) record. Norfolk finished in a distant second at 33-27 (.550). In appreciation of his efforts, the Richmond fans, under the guidance of Norman Johnson, created a fund drive to raise $2,000 to purchase an automobile for Bender. The drive did not reach its stated goal, but owner Wilson contributed a large sum to help purchase the vehicle.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Richmond Times Dispatch}, May 30, July 8 and September 3,7 and 11, 1919.
The Indians' second half pennant should have set the stage for a seven game Virginia League Championship Series between Richmond and Petersburg, however, a dispute over rules and financial arrangements prevented the two teams from determining a season champion. The rules dispute was between the owners of the ballclubs. Ben Wilson contended that the games should be played at alternate locations, with Petersburg, the first half winner hosting the first game and Richmond the second. His plan would have the Saturday game in Richmond. Mr. Kidd owner of the Petersburg team, contended that the National Agreement rules provided that the first two games be played at the home park of the first season champ. Wilson wanted the home team to retain the grandstand receipts while dividing the daily revenue with the players in a 50-50 share. Kidd contended that Wilson was attempting to over commercialize the series and retain more profit for himself, especially by conniving to have the Saturday game played in Richmond. To complicate matters, the Petersburg players threatened to strike on grounds that the owners were attempting to take money away from the players. Their contention was that the National Agreement provided that the gate receipts from the first four games of the series were to be divided amongst the players of both teams with the owners earning the profits from any of the remaining games. This plan ensured that players would earn a minimum of 2/3 of the post season gate receipts compared to Wilson’s 50% plan. As a result of the disputes, the series was cancelled.  

17 Ibid., September 4-6, 1919.
In 1920, the Virginia League expanded to eight clubs, adding two North Carolina teams: Rocky Mount and Wilson. The league again decided to employ the split season. This year the championship series did not have the disputes exhibited in 1919. The Colts, behind new manager Lee Gooch easily captured the early flag by winning 43 and losing only 14 games (.754). Their outstanding record gave them an 11 ½ game margin over second place Portsmouth (33-27, .550). At the mid-point in the season, the 1920 ballclub brought about comparisons to Perry Lipe’s 1908 Richmond team. The Times-Dispatch noted that the remarkable aspect of the 1920 ballclub that there were no “stars” on the team. The Colts exhibited solid ability at all positions. At the end of the season, several of the Richmond players were sought after by Major League teams. Pitcher Mike Kircher was sold to the St. Louis Cardinals shortly after the second half began. By September 5, the White Sox had drafted first baseman Jimmy Poole and pitcher Guy McWhorter. The Sox also expressed interest in shortstop Luke Stuart and second baseman Jesse Baker. After the season, third-baseman “Bing” Arragon returned home to Cuba to play on a Cuban All-star team in a barnstorming tour with a team of Major League All-stars made of many members of the New York Giants and featured the Yankee’s star, Babe Ruth.\(^{18}\)

The Colts early season success was not duplicated in the second half of the season. The ballclub finished 33-25 (.569) and was in third place behind first place Portsmouth (39-19, .672) and second finisher Petersburg (39-22, .639). The

\(^{18}\) Ibid., April 22-23, July 4-5, September 5, Oct 14 and Dec. 4, 1920 and January 10, 1921.
championship series featured Richmond and Portsmouth, with the opening game being hosted by Portsmouth with an alternating home and away rotation. The league made certain that disputes over the location would not cancel the series as it did the year before. But, despite the league's efforts, there was a minor controversy before the series started. A few days before the pennant series, the Truckers sold their shortstop, Pie Traynor, to the Pittsburgh Pirates for $10,000. The club then petitioned the Colts to allow them to play Rocky Mount's star shortstop, a man named Champlin. Ben Wilson refused on the grounds that the club was already playing a utility man named Winston who was acquired after the league date for roster changes. The league rules mandated that a player had to be with the club thirty days previous to the post-season series. Wilson's contention was that the series was to be played by the Colts and Truckers, not by a collection of all-stars. Wilson gave in when he realized that he did not have the backing of league president Bradley, "as he did not want to cheat his boys out of the series."

The contest proved exciting. The opening game, a 5-5 tie before a crowd of 7,000, was called on account of darkness. The clubs then traded at-home victories. The Colts winning 2-1 at Boulevard Park. The Truckers winning 8-3 in Portsmouth. The Colts took control of the series by winning the next two games, 3-0 in Richmond and 6-2 in Portsmouth. The Truckers rebounded 7-4 before 5,000 fans on Saturday afternoon at Boulevard Park and then evened the series on Monday with a 5-2 victory. The Truckers then captured the Virginia League pennant with a 10-9 thriller in the deciding game.

19 Ibid., September 13-14, 1920.
A few days after the Colts defeat in the championship series, Ben Wilson announced that his “two large mercantile concerns” were becoming too great to allow him to continue with active ownership of the ballclub. He announced that he would retain his controlling interest in the club and was employing Ken E. Finlay to serve as President of the Richmond Club of the Virginia League. Finlay, owner of the Broadway Theater in Richmond, was the former owner of the pennant-winning London Baseball Club of the Canadian League. A native Canadian, he had been a college-star in both ice hockey and lacrosse.21

In addition to bringing championship experience to the Richmond Club, Finlay was able to add a working relationship with lower minor league circuits. One of his theatrical associates was the owner of the Danville Club of the Piedmont League. He and Wilson intended to utilize this relationship to have the Class D Danville Club serve as a “training ground” for future Colts. Finlay’s plan to develop the Danville Club as a farm team was built upon a concept started by Robert Hedges in 1913 and popularized by Branch Rickey throughout the 1920’s. Rickey’s St. Louis Cardinals farm system began in 1920 with part-ownership of the Houston Buffaloes in the Texas League. By 1928 the Cardinals owned, in-whole or in-part, seven minor league franchises and controlled 32 franchises by 1940. Rickey’s use of the farm system played a pivotal role in the development of the St. Louis Cardinals World Champion Gashouse Gang of the 1930’s. Finlay’s relationship with the Danville Club insured the Colts that would have a steady

21 Ibid., September 23-25, 1920.
supply of ballplayers in the upcoming season and beyond. With Finlay as club president, exciting times were expected for the Colts. However, most expectations were for action on the field, but during the Virginia League winter meetings the Colts were once again at the center of a controversy that threatened to destroy the league.22

At the winter meetings, the league magnates agreed to follow the lead of the Major Leagues and prohibit the spitball and “other freak deliveries.” The salary limit for players was established at $2,800, with a committee of three created to enforce the rule. All Virginia League members supported both decisions. The controversy once again centered on Saturday games. Being the only games on weekends, Saturdays generated the greatest attendance and were by far the most profitable. The league owners voted that no team should host more than two-thirds of the seasons’ Saturday games. Wilson hoped to utilize the strengths of having one of the strongest ballclubs in the circuit and his location in the city with the greatest attendance to persuade the committee to commit a home game to the Capital City each week. The two-thirds rule was not acceptable to Wilson. He stated, “Unless Richmond is given 100 percent Saturday games, you can consider me out. My franchise will be disposed of and the league can make other plans.” He initially conceded that he would be willing to rent his ballpark to “some person acceptable to him should a change in ownership of the Colts” be necessary. A week later he modified the statement, clarifying that if the league refused to grant Richmond homes games every Saturday and a new franchise is sought for the city, they will have to erect

their own playing grounds. Wilson owned two-fifths of the stock of the Boulevard Field Corporation and had the support of the other stockholders.23

To support the position that Saturday games were vital to Richmond, Wilson released financial numbers indicating the profitability to all league members of Saturday games in the Capital City. Under league rules a portion of the gate receipts were shared by the home and visiting team. On holiday games, the total league attendance was pooled and shared evenly by all eight clubs. In 1920, Richmond paid out $10,570.70 to the visitors and received $7,657.91 for its road games. The club received $2,912.79 less than they paid out. In the holiday pool, Richmond contributed a league high of $5,728.87. Norfolk was second in payments with $4,602.86. Newport News contributed the least at $1,171.03. Each team received $2,808.35 in pooled funds. Ben Wilson contended that "Under no other conditions can we operate without a loss and we must have all Saturday contests."24

After the dispute of the October meeting, the league owners reconvened on Saturday, November 6, 1920 to determine the 1921 schedule. To enter a team into the Virginia League, each owner needed to furnish a bond of $2,000 to the league treasury. Wilson refused to attend the meeting or post the guarantee, unless he was assured of at least twenty home Saturdays. The other moguls denied this request. By failing to submit the fee, Wilson in effect surrendered his franchise. The seven other owners unanimously voted to declare Wilson's stake forfeited. The league decided to explore its options: scale

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23 Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 29 and November 6 and 9, 1920.

24 Ibid., November 6, 1920.
back to a six club circuit (if a current member were willing to withdraw), accept an offer from one of the several interested parties in Richmond for the franchise rights or seek a new city for the eighth Virginia League franchise.\textsuperscript{25}

The Virginia League franchise committee headed by C. Moran Barry, owner of the Norfolk Club, spent several months determining the fate of the Virginia League. The committee determined that it was important for the league to have a team in Richmond. Of the several interested parties, the committee selected Jake Wells as the new franchise owner. Wells had not been active in baseball since he sold his Richmond franchise to W.B. Bradley so that he could devote his energies to his booming movie and vaudeville theater business. Wells was the principle owner and president of the new organization. Ray Ryan was brought in to manage the club and was listed as secretary of the Richmond Baseball Club, Inc. when the team became a registered corporation. Included in the list of associates were H.C. Ebel, Ware B. Gray, and Virginia League president William B. Bradley, as the business manager.\textsuperscript{26}

While the league was still deciding upon proper title of the Richmond franchise, the new ownership group was preparing plans for a new ballpark. By the end of December 1920, it was announced that surveyors and engineers deemed Mayo Island an acceptable site for construction of a modern facility that would be suitable for both baseball and football. Mayo Island had not been used for baseball since the failure of the original Virginia League. The construction contracts, with H. Carl Messerschmidt,

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Richmond Times-Dispatch, January 11, 13, 14, 16, and 21 and February 11 and 17, 1921.
architect, and E.L. Bass and Brothers, builders, were signed on February 11, 1921. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that the organization filed the application for a building permit the next day.27

The permit called for a total of five buildings to be built on the east side of the twenty-acre island. Island Park was situated between the 14th Street Bridge (to the west) and the Seaboard Air Line Railway Bridge (to the east), and was adjacent to the Virginia Boat Club. The permit described the overall dimensions of the ballpark as 400 by 500 feet with a “frontage of 200 by 60 feet.” The field itself measured 294 feet down the leftfield line, 400 feet to centerfield, and 356 feet down rightfield. A few feet beyond the leftfield fence was the James River. A “large wall” was constructed on the northern side (leftfield) to help prevent baseballs from being batted into the river. However, it was often reported that spectators would sit in boats in hopes of gathering in a water soaked home run ball. The original plan estimated the construction costs to be $12,000. A year later it was reported that the total costs amounted to $66,333, inclusive of the purchase of the lot and construction of the ballpark.28

Despite the construction of Island Park, Boulevard Field was not to remain idle during the summer of 1921. Ben Wilson promised to create a baseball war in the city. Wilson and the Amateur Baseball Commission of Richmond came to an agreement that had the various amateur leagues playing double-headers every Saturday and presented the

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27 Ibid., December 31, 1920 and February 11-12, 1921

option for two or three weekday contests. With the opportunity for a first class baseball field, the amateur association saw its ranks increase to thirty-four teams playing in eight different leagues.\(^{29}\)

Despite the fact that Boulevard Field was not controlled by a club that subscribed to the National Agreement, Wilson was able to secure a major league exhibition game between the Brooklyn Giants and the New York Yankees for April 7, 1921. Ed Barrow, business manager for the Yankees, wrote that he was satisfied with the arrangements and assured that the game would be played. The Yankees’ ballclub featured two former Richmond ballplayers. Pitcher Jack Quinn played for the 1908 Richmond Colts. “Chick” Fewster had been signed as a third baseman by Jack Dunn shortly after he brought his International League franchise to Richmond. However the main attraction for Richmond fans was the opportunity to watch Babe Ruth play baseball.\(^{30}\)

Wilson’s version of a baseball war against the Virginia League was not limited to the amateur season and major league exhibition games at his baseball park; he filed suit in City Circuit Court against the Virginia League and the owners of the seven franchises that forfeited his team. In his court case, Wilson claimed that the expulsion of his team was illegal and contrary to the league’s constitution. He sought an award of $50,000 in damages, that total being his estimated value of the franchise, the value of the eight reserved ballplayers claimed by the league, and his percentage of the league treasury. The players represented the largest portion of the total at $30,000. The league responded

\(^{29}\) *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, February 10 and March 12, and 27-29, 1921.

\(^{30}\) *Ibid.*, January 16 and April 7, 1921.
that it had acted within the bounds of the laws of Organized Baseball. The case marked the first time that the validity of these laws was challenged in a Virginia Court. At the end of the trial, a jury awarded Wilson $6,500. In the league's appeal of the verdict, Judge R. Carter Scott upheld the amount of restitution. However, in his ruling, Judge Scott eliminated the Rocky Mount Athletic Association and its ownership group from responsibility. Bradley, as league president, and the other six organizations and their owners were ruled liable for the $6,500 damages.\footnote{Ibid., April 12 and December 16, 1921 and May 30, 1922.}

Despite Wilson's lawsuit, the Virginia League forged ahead with plans for the 1921 season. The league once again featured eight cities, with two in North Carolina and the remaining six based in Virginia. The split schedule was adopted with the two winners meeting in a championship series. During the series, sixty percent of the gate receipts of the first four games was pooled for players. The winning team earned sixty percent of the pool and the remainder went to the second place finishers. The season schedule was lengthened to provide each team with 138 games, sixty-nine at home and on the road. The increased number of games pushed the end of the season to September 24; the latest baseball had been played in the Virginia League. The Richmond club was awarded home games on sixteen of the season's twenty-two Saturdays. League admission prices were fixed at 40 cents for general admission with grandstand seating prices left to the discretion of the home team. At Island Park, the grandstand seats cost patrons an additional 20 cents. Admission for ladies was 25 cents and boys were admitted for only
20 cents. The admission prices included the war tax on entertainment that began being levied while the United States was engaged in the World War.\(^{32}\)

The season started with the traditional fanfare of parades, political dignitaries and a crowd of 7,500 on hand to witness the Colts 6-5 loss to the Petersburg Goobers. After losing the second game of the season by a score of 14-3 on the Goobers home field, the Colts finally defeated their Petersburg rivals 7-5 in the third game. This up and down momentum continued throughout the season. On Saturday, May 14, the Colts climbed atop the league standings, but only held the lead for a week. The club finished the first half of the season with 30-30 (.500) record and was in fourth place. Rocky Mount and Wilson finished at the top with 38-25 (.603) records. Portsmouth finished third at 34-38 (.472). The first half pennant was awarded to Rocky Mount on July 18 when the Wilson Broncos and Richmond Colts played the last three innings of a game that had been abbreviated earlier in the season. Richmond won the game 10-4 and improved its first half record to 31-30.\(^{33}\)

The second half of the season was riddled with controversy. Poor play led to decreased popular support and financial troubles in Petersburg. When the grandstand was destroyed by fire, the club could not afford to rebuild, so the league was forced to move the team. The franchise was awarded to an ownership group in Tarboro, North Carolina. At the time of the move, the club had amassed a paltry 4-22 (.154) record and was in last place. However the franchise shift was the least of the league’s troubles.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., February 18-19 and April 29, 1921.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., April 21-24, May 13-15 and 22 and July 1,3 and 19,1921.
Violations of the league salary limit by the strongest clubs instigated a series of protests that once again threatened the stability of the league.\textsuperscript{34}

As the season neared the midway point, protests were raised against Rocky Mount and Wilson over abuses of the salary limit. Since the clubs finished at the top of the league standings in July, the first half pennant championship and a berth in the league playoff was in question. Although the league had awarded the pennant to Rocky Mount, the Portsmouth and Newport News clubs appealed to Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the commissioner of Organized Baseball, in hopes of having the league decision overruled. In a decision delivered on September 10, Judge Landis determined that the Carolina teams were in violation of the limit and awarded the pennant to the Portsmouth Truckers. At the time of the ruling, the Wilson Bugs held a commanding lead in the second half race. President Bradley utilized the Landis ruling to nullify all of Wilson’s games previous to July 23, the date that the club’s salary level was reduced to meet the league limit. As a result of the ruling, the Bugs went from first to fourth, and Norfolk at 46-28 (.622) was able to claim the second half pennant. Portsmouth, the first half winners, finished second at 44-28 (.611), and Richmond was third at 44-29 (.603). Norfolk and Portsmouth squared off for the season flag.\textsuperscript{35}

While Norfolk and Portsmouth met in the official Virginia League title series, the Carolina teams paired up for their own championship series. They contended that most of the other clubs in the league were also in violation of the salary limit. Therefore, the

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, July 1, August 2 and September 10, 1921.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, September 10,11, 18,20-21, and 24-25, 1921.
season titles should be restored to Rocky Mount and Wilson. As the winners of each half of the season, their owners felt that the clubs should be contending for the league flag. In hopes that Judge Landis would rule in their favor, the clubs staged their own league championship series. Rocky Mount defeated the Bugs in four of the five games to claim the “unofficial” pennant.\(^{36}\)

In the league sanctioned series, controversy continued. After five games, Portsmouth had a 3-2 game edge over Norfolk. However, the series was never finished. The Norfolk players were in disagreement with the management over the players’ share of the post-season gate receipts. In reaction to management, the players established a plan to “laydown” the series to Portsmouth. Some players even purchased rail tickets to take them home after the sixth game of the series, proving that they had no intention of trying to win and extend the series to a seventh and deciding game. At the request of Mr. Barry, the Norfolk team owner, the Virginia League began an investigation of the allegations against the Norfolk players. In the end, Portsmouth was awarded the League Championship.\(^{37}\)

As in the previous seasons, the fate of the Virginia League was in doubt during the winter. Two teams were placing claim on the league pennant. The Petersburg team folded in August and the replacement Tarboro, North Carolina franchise was not entirely stable. The Suffolk team nearly folded as the season ended, and that city was unlikely to continue to support a baseball franchise. Many of the owners were dissatisfied with the

\(^{36}\) Ibid., October 4 and 9, 1921.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., October 1 and 3 and November 17 and 21, 1921
league in 1921 as a result of the disputes and a sense of disunion defined by state boundaries was being formed. To further add to the league’s troubles, W.B. Bradley, citing conflicts of interest in his dual role as a member of the management for the Richmond Colts and President of the Virginia League, announced his resignation from the presidency on February 2, 1922.  

The selection process for a new president only increased the tension among the Virginia League ballclubs. In the early discussions, Rocky Mount and Wilson supported the election of W.G. Branham, president of the Piedmont League and a resident of Durham, North Carolina. The Virginia clubs were split in their support of Frank Lawrence of Petersburg and Edward R. Willcox of Norfolk. After nearly two months of heated debated, the league moguls finally selected William S. Moye, of Rocky Mount as Bradley’s successor.  

Under the new leadership, the Virginia League embarked on the 1922 season with only six teams; Suffolk and Tarboro (transferred from Petersburg) opted not to field ballclubs. In a departure from tradition, the Colts did not open the season on their home field, nor was the rival Petersburg Goobers the inaugural opponent. The Richmond ballclub traveled to Newport News to play the Shipbuilders on Opening Day. Although the Colts were not playing at home, Governor E. Lee Trinkle, accompanied by Hiram Smith, chief of staff, and several Newport News city officials were on hand for the opening day ceremonies. The festivities were punctuated by the Governor throwing out

38 Ibid., November 17 and 21, 1921 and February 3, 1922.

39 Ibid., February 3-5, 7, 11, 16, 24 and March 2, 1922.
the first ball, although his toss was about six feet short of the plate. Unfortunately, the Colts' effort in the game came up just as short as the governor's, the Shipbuilders won nine runs to two.\textsuperscript{40}

The Opening Day loss was indicative of the early part of the season for the Colts. The Richmond team won only once in their first six games. The dismal first week prompted Ray Ryan to resign as manager of the Richmond club. Ryan left the ballclub and returned to Welch, West Virginia where he owned a large "automobile business." Left-fielder John Boyd Keller served as interim manager until the club selected Ruben "Rube" Oldring as the manager on May 30. In the month that Keller was the leader of the Colts, the club improved slightly, however it was still in last place in the Virginia League standings with a 12-20 (.375) record.\textsuperscript{41}

Rube Oldring had gained fame while he was teammates with Chief Bender on Connie Mack's championship winning Athletics. Richmond's baseball fans became familiar with Oldring's abilities during the 1919 season when he was the player-manager of the Suffolk team. In his first few weeks at the helm of the Colts, Oldring made several personnel changes with the hopes of strengthening the ballclub. In his efforts to secure talent, Rube established a player loan arrangement with Bender who was the manager of the baseball club in Reading, Pennsylvania. Although the Colts did win more often under Oldring, he was not able to change the complete fortunes of the club. The Richmond

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., April 21, 1922.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., April 27-28 and May 29-30, 1922.
team finished the season in last place with a 49-68 record (.419). Wilson won the season title with a 68-52 (.567) record.42

While the 1922 season did not suffer the controversies and disagreements of the previous seasons, the prospects for a 1923 version of the Virginia League were very grim at the close of the 1922 season. The season proved to be a financial disaster for all teams. Richmond and Norfolk reported being able to “more than” break even. The other clubs were not as fortunate. In May of 1922, poor attendance in Rocky Mount prompted the owners to offer their team to Lynchburg. The Hill City, citing the “shaky” financial condition of the existing clubs, declined the offer. Rocky Mount was able to stay in the league when the circuit’s directors voted to have gate receipts shared by the visiting and home clubs rather than going solely to the home team.43

The Richmond Club was not immune to financial trouble. In mid-July, the stockholders met to discuss the team’s state of affairs. According to the schedule, the Colts were about to embark on a four week period (July 15-August 17) in which they would have only three home games. Attendance had been rapidly declining and a prolonged absence of the home team was likely to decrease interest even more. After the other league operators refused Richmond’s plea to alter the schedule, the local owners questioned the value of continuing their investment in baseball. Since they took control of the club in 1921, the stockholders had invested over $74,000 including the land and construction of a ballpark and had yet to see a positive return on the investment. The

42 Ibid., April 29, 1919, May 30, June 1, 6, 8, 30, July 1, 9 and September 7, 1922.
43 Ibid., May 30, June 4 and September 7, 1922.
owners reasoned that since a $2,000 bond had been pledged to the league, it would be wise to play out the season.\textsuperscript{44}

About two weeks after that decision, a change in the ownership structure of the Richmond Colts was announced. The present structure had the Richmond Baseball Club, Inc. with Jake Wells, president, McGinnis Hatfield, vice-president; H.U. Ebel, treasurer and W.B. Bradley, secretary and business manager as owners of both Mayo Island Park and the Virginia League baseball franchise rights in Richmond. In the new structure, the corporation sold the franchise rights and players of the Richmond team but retained ownership of Island Park. The president of the new baseball franchise was James E. Crass. Crass had been a substantial shareholder in the previous ownership group and had been one of the investors that purchased the Richmond Climbers of the International League from Jack Dunn in 1916. In the new ownership structure of the ballclub, Rube Oldring expanded his role with the Colts. He became one of the new shareholders, continued as field manager and assumed the role as business manager.\textsuperscript{45}

In the months before the 1923 season was to start, the Virginia League once again faced threats to its existence. Although all six clubs made a commitment to the continuation of the league, threats by other leagues seeking to add Richmond and Norfolk and the troubled sale of Newport News made the 1923 season seem unlikely. Being the only financially stable clubs in the circuit and the largest centers of population in Virginia made the cities of Richmond and Norfolk attractive to circuits seeking southern

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, July 20 and 21, 1922.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, August 3, 1922.
expansion. Earnest C. Landgraf proposed one such league. Landgraf’s first involvement with baseball in Richmond occurred during the failed outlaw United States League’s lone season in 1912. Landgraf had been the owner of the Richmond Rebels franchise. After that league folded, he had returned to the northeastern states and remained active in various leagues and cities in Organized Baseball. In 1922, he presented a plan for a “North and South” League (also referred to as the “Atlantic League”) that would potentially feature several teams in Eastern Pennsylvania, such as Allentown, Harrisburg, York, Lancaster or Easton, Trenton in New Jersey, Wilmington in Delaware, and Richmond, Norfolk and possibly Portsmouth in Virginia. The newspapers in the three Virginia cities were all anxious for a higher classification of baseball. Despite the encouragement of the press to abandon the Virginia League, the owners of the three teams pledged that they were committed to the idea of the Virginia League. They stated that they would only seek other league affiliation if H.P. Dawson could not sell his Newport News franchise and the Virginia League could not exist as a six-club circuit.46

Dawson was having difficulty finding a buyer for the franchise rights. He announced his intention to sell the rights in July when the Richmond stockholders were contemplating quitting the season. At the time, he expressed a desire to purchase the Richmond franchise if he could sell the Newport News club. League officials hoped that Petersburg would be encouraged to acquire the rights to the vacant franchise. However, baseball men in that city passed on the opportunity. Dawson and the league then turned

46 Ibid., July 9 and 11, September 6, 7, and 12, November 22, and 26, December 12 and 19, 1923 and January 2, 1923
their attention to Wilmington, North Carolina. It seemed as if interests in that city would accept the franchise, but the offer was declined. Kinston, North Carolina inquired about the franchise, but league moguls questioned that city’s ability to support Class B baseball. After nearly six months of attempting to move the franchise, Petersburg finally accepted the Virginia League on January 13, 1923, and the Goobers were once again part of the circuit.\textsuperscript{47}

With the sale of the Newport News club, James E. Crass and H.P. Dawson were able to announce the sale of the Richmond club to Dawson. The \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch} reported in November 1922 that a sale agreement had been reached, but that it was contingent upon the Newport News sale. Dawson’s first action as owner of the Richmond Colts was to announce that David Robertson was signed to manage the club. Robertson had played with the New York Giants and had a busy sporting goods store and insurance business in Norfolk. Dawson also announced that he was leaving his position with the Seaboard Airlines Railroad in Portsmouth and was accepting another position with the company that would allow him to live in Richmond and focus on the ballclub in the spring and summer months.\textsuperscript{48}

Under Robertson’s leadership, the first year of Dawson’s ownership of the Colts was extremely successful. The club finished with nine victories in the last ten games, including a 17-5 walloping of the Rocky Mount Bronchos in the last game. The fantastic

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., July 21, November 2, 9, 10, and 26, December 8, 12, and 19, 1922 and January 2, 4, 6-7, 9, 13, and 14, 1923.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., November 19 and December 20, 1922 and January 13 and 14, 1923.
finish left the Colts in a frustrating situation: only .001 behind the Wilson Bugs. The Colts had 71 wins and 53 losses (.573) while Wilson won 70 games, but lost only 52 (.574). The Colts were not ready to concede the pennant and appealed to Virginia League President Moye that Wilson and Rocky Mount should be compelled to play the rain-cancelled game from the last week of the season. His ruling, with the backing of Mike Sexton, president of the National Association of Baseball Clubs, was that Wilson, as the home team, had the prerogative to decide if the game should be replayed. G.T. Fulgham, owner of the Wilson club chose not to play, recognizing that a victory meant little, but a loss would cost him the pennant.

Dawson then made a second appeal, this time in an attempt to have one of Richmond's losses discounted. In reviewing the schedule, it was discovered that the Colts and the Petersburg Trunkmakers had played each other one game more than they were scheduled. The extra game was the result of a rain-delayed game being played while Mr. Pleasants, the official scorekeeper for the Petersburg club, had been ill. During one of the Richmond and Petersburg series in August the game was played, however Pleasants did not receive a copy of the score report. When the clubs then met in the first week of September, he advised the Petersburg ownership that the two clubs had a postponed game to play. Dawson contended that the "extra" game, a Richmond loss on September 4, should not count in the standings. Moye ruled against the Colts, and the Bugs captured the 1923 Virginia League championship.49

49 Ibid., September 3-14, 1923.
In September, President Moye announced that he would not seek re-election at the league’s winter meetings. His principle reason for resigning his position was the lack of co-operation among league owners. “Not for ten times the salary now paid would I again consent to serve.” Dave Robertson had a similar impression of the Virginia League and announced his retirement as Colts’ manager. He cited the poor handling of league affairs as his reasons for not wanting to remain affiliated with the VL. Richmond owner H.P. Dawson was also outraged at the management of league affairs and threatened to sue the Wilson club and President Moye.  

When the league’s winter meetings began in the first week of January, the attitudes of all three men had changed. W. S. Moye cited that his two years of experience placed him in a better position to run the league than any other candidate. He was selected for a third term as league president. Dave Robertson indicated his desire to return to the Richmond Colts, but the club released him on December 13, 1923. He was later hired to manage his hometown Norfolk Tars. H. P. Dawson had filed an injunction against the Wilson Bugs to prevent them from receiving the gate receipts from the championship series that pitted the Virginia League pennant winner against the South Atlantic League champion. When the VL Board of Directors voted Wilson as the rightful title-holder, Dawson dropped his claim to the title.  

With the pennant controversy and league presidency decided at the January meeting, the Virginia League members were able to concentrate on preparations for the

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50 Ibid., September 13, 20 and 21, 1923.
51 Ibid., December 14 and 31 1923 and January 6 and 7, 1924.
1924 season. H.P. Dawson named Jack Onslow, a former big league catcher for the New York Giants and Detroit Tigers, as player-manager. On the field, the Colts featured two players from Cuba. Angel “Bing” Arragon played with Richmond when the club was in the International League in 1915-17. He then played briefly with the New York Yankees before returning to the minor leagues in Toledo. He came back to Richmond in 1920 and became a fan favorite as the team’s third baseman. In the off-seasons, Arragon continued to play on Cuban all-star teams that participated in barnstorming tours with major league all-stars. The other Colt who hailed from Cuba, Jose Ramos, was signed to play in the outfield in 1922. Ramos also proved popular with the fans and enjoyed a career with the Colts that lasted through the 1925 season. The right side of the infield was anchored by Hal Waefer at first base and Guy Lacy at second. Joining Ramos in the outfield were Al Malonee and mid-season acquisition Stanley Stack. In addition to Onslow, Tommy Abbott served as backstop. The pitching stars were Frank Dodson, Joe Maley and Benson “Lefty” Brillheart.52

That combination of players secured the 1924 pennant for Richmond. The club won 76 games and lost 59 (.563) and edged out runner up Portsmouth 75-60 (.555). Similar to the controversy that tainted Wilson’s claim to the 1923 pennant, Richmond’s championship was marred by games not played on account of rain. As the Virginia League entered the last week of play, the Colts held onto a one and a half game lead over Portsmouth. The Richmond club was scheduled to play three games at Portsmouth and

52 Ibid., October 14, 1920 and February 20, March 2, April 7, 17-18 and September 16, 18 and 20, 1924.
then finish with three games at home against Wilson. The Truckers finished the season with three scheduled games against Rocky Mount and one postponed game against Norfolk. Rain however canceled all three games between Richmond and Portsmouth. Richmond was only able to manage a single victory in the three games against Wilson. Portsmouth won the first two games, but lost both of its games on the final day. Richmond earned the pennant by a two-game margin. Frank Lawrence, Portsmouth owner, appealed to H.P. Dawson to play a three game series to decide the pennant. Dawson refused, citing, "If I had been given consideration in the past, I would be disposed to accept the challenge." Lawrence recognizing that league rules that took the pennant from Richmond the previous season now supported the Colts claim to the flag and conceded the title to Richmond without continued protest. "The fates were against me. Congratulations." 53

For the first time since the Virginia League was founded, the league appeared stable going into the off-season. The Petersburg franchise was once again for sale, but this time there were several cities including Danville, Lynchburg and Kinston vying for the rights to the vacant franchise. After Kinston, NC was accepted as the league’s sixth city, the Board of Directors considered expanding the VL to encompass eight ballclubs. However, bids from groups in Petersburg and Danville were rejected as "too vague." In December, William G. Bramham, the president of both the South Atlantic League and the Piedmont League was unanimously selected to replace Moye as president of the Virginia

League. He then served as president for all three leagues. The directors of the VL were excited for the future of the league in 1925.\(^\text{54}\)

On the field, H.P. Dawson did little to disrupt the pennant-winning lineup. Many of the players from the 1924 squad returned for 1925. The most significant change occurred in the field management of the club. Jack Onslow left Richmond to become a coach with the Pittsburgh Pirates, where he helped guide the team to the World Series. Dawson had difficulty finding a manager and decided to open the season running the club himself. After a few weeks, he turned the managing duties over to field captain and second baseman Guy Lacy. After three weeks, Lacy relinquished the managing duties so that he could concentrate on his playing. Dawson resumed management for a brief period, and Lacy was once again placed at the helm. Under Lacy’s guidance, the club broke out of a pack of four teams that were grouped within five points of each other on August 22 and claimed the league flag for the second consecutive season. The Colts push to the front was keyed by a sixteen-game winning streak that ended when Portsmouth pitcher Joe Paetz no-hit the Colts for a 5-1 victory. The Colts finished the year at 79-54 (.594) and Portsmouth was the runner-up with a 74-59 (.536) record.\(^\text{55}\)

The team’s championship record was earned by outstanding individual performances. Otis Carter set a Virginia League record by hitting 41 home runs during the season. He then belted three more in the championship series with South Atlantic League champ Spartanburg. Hal Waefer won the league’s season batting title with a .398

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\(^54\) Ibid., December 13-5, 17-18 and 21-22, 1924.

\(^55\) Ibid., September 13 and December 27, 1925.
batting average. Strong performances sent four players to a higher classification. Carter and Manager Lacy were sold to the New York Giants, the Yankees recalled left-handed pitcher Ben Shields and Jose Ramos moved up to a Class A ballclub. The Richmond fans were also pleased to see the return of Richmond native and middle-infielder, Eddie Mooers. Mooers had first played with the Colts in 1917. He then went on to play in the International League for several seasons. After he bought out his contract, Eddie retired from professional baseball and returned to Richmond. He had remained active in the local amateur leagues and came out of retirement during the middle of the season.\(^{56}\)

The Colts consecutive claims to the Virginia League pennant continued in 1926. The team earned the Virginia League pennant by finishing with an 83-68 (.556) record. Troy Agnew replaced Onslow as the player-manager. However, on July 19, health concerns forced him to announce that he was resigning his post. On July 23, Agnew turned over control of the league leading Colts to Rube Oldring. Oldring managed the team to the pennant. As in the previous season, outstanding individual performances helped the ballclub. Stanley Stack eclipsed Otis Carter's home run record by hitting 44 round trippers during the season. Six Richmond players finished with batting averages above .309 and four pitchers finished with at least 17 victories. Two local heroes played significant roles on the club. Pitcher Taylor "Deacon" Joliff, a graduate of the University of Richmond, won four games in the last eight days of the season. Eddie Mooers became

\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*, September 13 and December 27, 1925 and February 16, 1927.
recognized as a team leader. In fact, many of the other managers in the league regarded Mooers as the keystone of the Colts’ success.\textsuperscript{57}

In addition to seeing winning baseball, the Richmond baseball fans enjoyed a new grandstand on Mayo Island. The original wooden grandstand and bleachers were destroyed by fire in June 1923 when a fan carelessly dropped a cigarette stump on a “waste heap under the stands.” Within two weeks of the incident, a new grandstand was erected; however, the new facility provided limited seating. It was not until the winter of 1926 that a new steel grandstand was constructed. The new facility increased seating capacity to 6,000 and featured opera-style seats in the grandstand. The club utilized the occasion of the new construction to honor one of Richmond’s first baseball heroes, Edward Christopher “Pop” Tate, by renaming Island Park as Tate Field. After his tenure in the major leagues, Tate continued his baseball career by playing, managing and umpiring in the minor leagues. When his baseball days were over, Tate joined the Richmond police department and delighted baseball fans with appearances on the policeman’s amateur team.\textsuperscript{58}

Despite winning the pennant and opening a new ballpark, the 1926 season can not be considered a total success. Yes, the Colts captured the pennant for the third consecutive year, but the team also saw a decline in attendance. The ticket prices remained stable with grandstand tickets at 75 cents, covered bleachers 65 cents, general admission 50 cents, colored bleachers 35 cents and boys admitted for a dime, but fans

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., January 6, April 1, July 20-22, September 16, 19 and 26 and December 26, 1926.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., September 20, 1907; August 14, 1910; December 30, 1923; March 28 and April 4, 1926.
came to the park in decreasing numbers. Part of the declining attendance was explained as a result of the increased popularity of golf as a recreational activity. However, H.P. Dawson reasoned that the primary cause of the decrease was the location of the ballpark. Poor seating and limited parking accommodations were to blame. Despite the construction of the new grandstand, Dawson wanted to move the club into a ballpark located in the West End, even if he had to build one himself.59

Dawson also reasoned that a new ballpark under his ownership would not only increase attendance, but would allow him to increase his operating revenue. In a park under his ownership, he would have complete control of concessions and fence and scorecard advertising, something he did not have at Mayo Island Park. Operating expenses would also be reduced in terms of baseball cost. The new park would not lose balls to the river, as the one on the island was prone to do. To further reduce his financial risk, Dawson sold half-interest in the Richmond club to prominent Newport News businessman George S. Barnes. Barnes’ career had been in hardware and building, but he had also been active as a local baseball executive. The two partners announced plans to buy the Raleigh, North Carolina franchise in the Piedmont League. Both men owned equal share in each franchise with Barnes serving as the principle operator of the Richmond franchise and Dawson running the Raleigh club. The two men unveiled plans to build a 10,000-seat steel beam and wooden-plank park on Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad land near the corner of Roseneath Road and Broad Street under a

59 Ibid., April 15, 1925; April 13 and December 26, 1926.
ten-year lease arrangement. Despite having awarding a contract to Allen Saville to grade the land, construction of the grandstand was never started. Dawson and Barnes needed City Council to approve the closing of “C” Street, a small and disused street in the area. Closing of the street would allow for a park with field lines of 325 down the right field line, 400 to center and 350 down the left field line. Without the street closing, the area proposed for the ballpark was too small. By late January, Council had not closed the street, leaving little time to build a park for the upcoming season.60

Another impediment to building a new ballpark was the stability of the Virginia League franchises. While finding a site was the primary concern, Dawson and Barnes did not want to invest money in construction until they were certain that the field would actually be used. On December 17, 1926 the Richmond Times-Dispatch printed an article that stated that four of the six VL franchises were “undecided” about the prospects for baseball in 1927. While finances of their own club worried them, many of the league moguls were also concerned that Richmond, the largest city in the league, was struggling to attract a popular following. Throughout the winter months, Wilson, Kinston, Petersburg, and Portsmouth all threatened to give up on the VL. Near the end of January, Kinston threatened to quit the VL and Wilson, not wanting to be the only North Carolina based franchise, began making overtures to join the Carolina-based Piedmont League. Virginia League officials began looking into the prospect of a league composed only of Virginia cities and proposed plans that varied from continuing as a four-club circuit to

60 Ibid., November 10, 17, 20 and December 26, 1926; January 16, 1927. Later in the season, Barnes assumed full ownership of the Colts.
expanding the VL into Roanoke, Lynchburg or Danville. After negotiations continued with the Virginia cites for several weeks, Kinston sought re-instatement of its franchise. By March, the moguls had restored the Carolina franchises and the VL continued with the same six teams as in the previous season. The moguls even expressed the statement that the turmoil of the off season had increased popular interest in the VL and attendance figures were expected to be high. With the league’s franchises in place, Barnes charged W.L. Cherry, the Colts’ team secretary with negotiating with W.B. Bradley and the other owners of Tate Field for lease arrangements. Those negotiations were delayed by the suicide shooting death of Jake Wells, the principal owner of the ballpark corporation. His brother Otto Wells assumed control of much of Jake’s business interests, including Island Park. 61

On the field, the Colts hired Eddie Mooers as player-manager. Mooers’ promotion to manager marked the first time that a native Richmonder managed the local franchise. Returning stars included Al Malonee, Stanley Stack, Hal Waefer, Jose Ramos and Taylor Joliff. With so many returning stars and the selection of Mooers as manager, many people expected the Colts to capture their fourth straight league pennant. In the season opener, the Colts and the Petersburg Bronchos battled to a 3-3 tie in an eleven-inning game that was halted by darkness. That outcome was indicative of the season to come. The Colts finished with a 65-65 record with an even .500 winning percentage.

61 Ibid., December 17, 1926; January 23, 25-28, February 4- 8, 12, 14 and March 7, 14, 17 and 18, 1927. Wells, suffering a severe depression for several months, shot himself in North Carolina. In addition to his baseball ventures, Wells owned several hotels, amusement parks, and vaudeville and movie theaters. His prosperous career was built upon the concept of providing wholesome family entertainment.
Mooers had resigned his role as manager on June 30, and had been replaced by Lewis McCarthy, former catcher for the New York Giants. Mooers claimed that the strain of running the auto dealership he started with his brother a few years earlier and managing was too much. He continued as a productive player for the Colts. When McCarthy took over, the club was fourth in the league with a 32-35 record. The final record qualified the club for third place in the circuit. The Portsmouth Truckers secured the pennant on September 3 with over a week left in the season and finished at 76-52 (.593). Petersburg finished in second at 72-61 (.541).62

Immediately after the VL season came to a close on September 10, 1927, the prospects for 1928 were gravely in doubt. When George Barnes was questioned about the league status, he remarked that he could not comment as several moves that “might change the entire league status, particularly affecting the fortunes of the Richmond club” were being contemplated. Within a month it was apparent that the Virginia League would not return. Barnes announced that the Richmond team was scaling back on its payroll, would not retain many of the veteran players, and along with Ted Willcox’s Norfolk club would join the Class C Piedmont League. The proposal for the two Virginia clubs to join the six North Carolina clubs would allow the circuit to move up to B class, however, the plans fell apart over monetary disputes. The Carolina franchises wanted the Virginia teams to shoulder the majority of the transportation costs for travel into the Virginia cities. In response the Virginia franchises entertained offers from northern baseball men,

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62 Richmond Times-Dispatch, January 16, February 16, April 14, July 1 and 2 and September 4 and 11, 1927.
led by Earnest C. Landgraf, for inclusion in a league that planned to feature teams in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Carolina reaction was to vote against expansion of the Piedmont League into Virginia's largest cities. In the end, the new league with the Pennsylvania and New Jersey cities did not materialize. Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg and Portsmouth resurrected the Virginia League and opened play as a four-team circuit on April 19, 1928. 63

On the eve of Opening Day, *Times-Dispatch* sports editor, Robert Harper, commented that the 1928 season of the Virginia League was a “test year for professional baseball” in Richmond and the other regional cities. If the teams are successful in terms of attendance and gate receipts, then the four team league would likely be able to expand to other cities in the state or perhaps Richmond and Norfolk would be able to finally join a league with other teams on the Atlantic seacoast. Failure would likely end baseball for several seasons in the capital. In his article, Harper noted that many fans felt that in order to revive interest in the professional game in Richmond, the city should be without a team for a season. Harper hoped that this scenario would not become the reality. Much to his chagrin, the Virginia League failed to complete even half of the season and was disbanded on June 5, 1928. 64

The Virginia League had no real chance for success. Inclement weather forced the cancellation of many of the early season games and sloppy play discouraged fans

63 Ibid., September 12, 14, November 27 and December 5-7, 13, 16, 18, 25, and 26, 1927; January 10, March 11 and 15, April 15, 18, and 19, 1928.

64 Ibid., April 18, June 4 and 5, 1928.
from attending the games that were played. With the poor attendance, the moguls in Petersburg, Portsmouth and Norfolk often threatened to move their franchise to other Virginia cities, thus increasing the public's disinterest in the ball games. In an attempt to revive interest in the Colts, Barnes released manager Olin Perritt and signed former Colt skipper and future Hall of Famer Albert "Chief" Bender. Bender's previous appearance with the Colts was in 1919 when he guided the franchise in the second half of the season. Bender was signed on May 21, but he had to complete his season as manager of the U.S. Naval Academy baseball team and could not report until Monday, June 4. It was hoped that his presence in a Richmond uniform would revive baseball interest throughout the Virginia League. League moguls even agreed to re-arrange the schedule to better accommodate Richmond's signing of Bender. However, Richmond and the VL did not get the opportunity to realize the impact of the former major league star. The Portsmouth and Petersburg teams dropped out of the league after their games on Saturday, June 2. Richmond and Norfolk planned two weeks of games with each other while an alternate league could be found. The Piedmont League refused to accept the two clubs and William Bramham, informed the clubs that after the Virginia League had disbanded their contracts with the players were no longer valid. The series between Richmond and Norfolk ended after just two games. 65

During the brief season, the Colts amassed a 15-27 (.357) record and were tied with Petersburg at the bottom of the league standings. Norfolk had the best record at 26-

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65 Ibid., May 22, 23, 27, 28, 30 and June 3-6, 1928.
13 (.667) and was one game ahead of Portsmouth at 25-14 (.641). In the two exhibition games with Norfolk, the Colts won the first game 4-2 in Bender’s managerial debut in Richmond. The next day, the Norfolk Tars evened the series with a 7-6 victory in a game that described the teams as “battling as if the championship of the world were at stake.” The failure of the Virginia League ended Richmond’s longest succession of consecutive seasons with professional baseball, and the city would now be without a professional team until 1931.66

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66 Calisch, “Birth of Baseball in Richmond,” Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 10, 1939, 3; Blake, “Roots: Parks, Leagues, Names are All that Change,” Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 16, 1985; Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 3-6, 1928.
While 1931 marked the return of the professional game to Richmond, it also can be regarded as the most turbulent year in the city’s baseball history. Most of the turbulence is attributed to disputes that forced ownership changes several times during the season. These disputes necessitated several changes in field management and even forced a change in the location of home games. In efforts to keep fans interested in the ballclub, gimmickry was utilized to bring them to the ballpark. The season also introduced lights and night games and explored the concept of Sunday baseball.  

Credit for Richmond’s entry into the Eastern League in 1931 largely goes to William B. Bradley. It was through his efforts that Richmond and Norfolk were selected to join Albany, Allentown, Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Springfield in the Class A Eastern League. Bradley had employed former Colt manager Ray Ryan as his business manager. Unfortunately for Bradley, Ryan managed to force Bradley out as director and re-organized the Richmond Baseball Corporation with Charles A. Somma, a Richmond “theatrical man,” serving as president and Ryan maintaining the post of business manager. Despite the maneuverings of Ryan, Bradley entered into a lease agreement with the corporation and allowed the team to use Mayo Island Park as its home field.  

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1 Richmond Times-Dispatch, January 3, 1932.  

2 Ibid., April 26-28, 1931 and January 3, 1932.
Shortly after the season started, the difficulties arose. Somma resigned from the corporation, leaving Ryan in control of the Richmond club. The club was in financial difficulties and on Memorial Day, the Richmond Hotels Corporation and the Investment Holding Corporation of Norfolk acquired warrants to secure the gate receipts and much of the team property, including uniforms, and equipment. The team was forced to play the games in the ensuing week in borrowed uniforms. To add to Ryan's financial woes, Ryan and Bradley entered into a bitter dispute over concession revenues. The disagreement led to court filings and forced executive director of the league, Fred J. Voos, Jr., to ask Ryan to relinquish the club to league control in early June.³

The league directors, in association with Henry Staples and Dr. William H. Parker, members of the Richmond City Chamber of Commerce recreation committee, sought a local buyer. If one could not be found, the league would sell the franchise to an interested party in Portland, Maine. The Chamber of Commerce was able to raise subscriptions for most of the necessary $10,000 to maintain the franchise in Richmond, but still needed the $5,000 league deposit. Charles Somma re-entered the baseball picture and posted the $5,000 guarantee, thus regaining the rights as principle owner of the club. He admitted to knowing little about baseball, but cited "civic duty" as the guiding force for his action. Immediately after acquiring the club, he announced that he had entered into an agreement with Colonel John A. Cutchins and the City Stadium Corporation to play the remainder of the home schedule at the newly constructed West End stadium. He

³ Ibid., June 4, 6, 8, and 11, 1931 and January 3, 1932.
then released Fred "Cy" Williams as the manager. Under Williams, the club had posted a 13-29 (.309) record, was solidly the last place club and had just lost its ninth straight game. Second baseman, Bob Murray, was selected as interim manager and guided the club to victory in his first game. The next day Ray Ryan was selected as the team's manager, but after being booed and hissed by the Richmond fans in his first game, he resigned. Murray was then selected as the manager.

The club was able to proceed through the last week of June before being besieged by more difficulty. On June 26, it was reported that Somma was in a "receptive mood" to sell the club. Ray Ryan and a partnership group in Providence expressed an interest, but Somma wanted the last place franchise to remain in Richmond. On July 4, the Chamber of Commerce, with league approval, once again acquired control of the club. The club was incorporated as Richmond Colts, Inc., with Dr. William H. Parker as president, Henry L. Staples, vice president, Luke Fairbank, treasurer, C. C. Michie, secretary, John Fairbank, counsel and Bob Murray retained as manager. This group finally brought stability to the club's 1931 management fiascoes.4

While the early part of the season was marred by ownership disputes the last place club suffered from an unusual identity crisis. When the ballclub was initially organized as the Richmond Baseball Corporation, Somma and Ryan had not presented a nickname for the franchise. The city's two local papers each ran contests to determine the common name for the baseball team. The Richmond Times-Dispatch selected "Byrds" from its fan

contest, while the *Richmond News Leader* chose the moniker “Rebels.” After several weeks, the club ownership encouraged the newspapers to end the confusion created by the two names, and the name Colts was restored in mid-June.5

On the field the Colts performance was horrible. The early season difficulties were epitomized by the nine game losing-streak that forced the firing of Cy Williams as manager. To the Colts benefit, the league operators voted to create a split-season. The Hartford franchise had such a commanding lead and several clubs, in addition to Richmond, were struggling financially that the moguls decided that a split season could help revive interest in the games. The first season ended on July 4 with Hartford the champion at 45-17 (.726) and Richmond the bottom dweller at 24-39 (.381). Hartford claimed the second half flag as well (53-23, .697). Richmond moved up to seventh (31-38, .449), and Norfolk finished in last place (30-41, .423). The Colts secured the seventh place finish by defeating Norfolk in the last two games of the season.6

Low attendance and rainouts hampered the Colts financial situation. In efforts to increase attendance, the Richmond Colts, Inc. resorted to gimmicky exhibition games in early September. On September 1, the Colts played their scheduled afternoon game with the Hartford team. Later in the evening the club played host to the traveling House of David ballclub. The House of David club traveled with a portable lighting system. The lights were situated atop fifty-foot retractable poles, and the entire system could be erected in about two-hours time. This game was the first lighted night game to be held in

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Richmond, although not the first game the Colts played under lights. The New Haven club had lights at their facility. Night games proved to increase attendance by providing more people with the opportunity to attend the game after work. As a result, many other teams, including the Colts were investigating the addition of lights. The House of David team was known for its talented players, their pre-game “Pepper Games,” and their bushy beards. In addition to its bearded members, the House of David team featured retired major league pitcher and clean-shaven Grover Cleveland Alexander. The Colts won the game 8-4 before a crowd of 5,000 curious spectators.\(^7\)

Later in the same week, the Colts played host to the Hollywood Girl Stars, a female traveling baseball team. The Stars’ team started in the Hollywood studios. It was discovered that during their spare time between pictures, many of the girls working at the studios organized baseball games. Several of them decided to secure a coach and with assistance from Irish Muesel, a former player with the New York Giants, the girls trained for two months. After progressing better than expected, it was decided that they should take to the road. Although the Hollywood Girls were known more for their beauty than their ball-playing ability, the Stars were able to win 39 of the 91 games against male baseball clubs in their fifteen-week road trip. In Richmond, the Girls added another victory in a less than serious game that was described as “not much baseball, but good fun.”\(^8\)

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\(^7\) *Ibid.*, August 31 and September 1-3, 1931.

\(^8\) *Ibid.*, September 3 and 4, 1931.
Richmond’s entry into the Eastern League forced the city to confront the idea of Sunday baseball. Richmond like most other southern cities had active blue laws against Sunday work activity. Most of the leagues in which a Richmond team had participated prohibited Sunday ballgames; it was only when the team played in the American Association and the Atlantic League was the topic even a question. During Richmond’s membership in those leagues, the Richmond team was able to avoid playing Sunday games at home, but did have to play some Sunday road games. 9

With the merger of the National League and the American Association in 1892, the major league policy of Sunday ball was dictated according to local law and individual team policy. Midwestern and western cities were the first to accept Sunday ball. By the 1890’s nearly every professional team in this region was in a locality that allowed the practice. While conservatives fought Sunday games in the courts, most cases ruled against the blue laws. Many of the decisions were “based upon sociological evidence that reflected popular tastes and demands rather than legal precedence.” The struggle for Sunday ball in the cities in the northeast faced a society that dated its blue laws to the American colonial period. Baseball promoters and Sabbath protectors waged their battles in the courts and statehouses. Baseball interests finally earned victory in New York in 1919. The state legislature voted into law a provision that allowed local governments to decide if they would permit professional baseball on Sundays between 2 and 6 PM. Many localities, including New York City, quickly passed this permission. In the first

9 Riess, Touching Base, 134-136; Seymour, The Early Years, 92-93; Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 7, 1884.
season of Sunday games, crowds at the Polo Grounds and Ebbets Field averaged over 20,000 spectators. The combined attendance at both stadiums on May 4, 1919 was over 50,000.\textsuperscript{10}

The northeast's other major cities allowed Sunday games several years after New York: Boston, 1929, Philadelphia, 1933 and Pittsburgh, 1934. While the large cities struggled to attain Sunday ball, many of the mill towns in Pennsylvania, such as Reading, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, allowed Sunday games before 1920. Baseball was seen as a means to attract workers and was used as a form of social control. In New Jersey, the rules governing Sunday ball were almost as lenient as the Midwest. Sunday games were played here as early as the 1890's. Professional teams located in New York and eastern Pennsylvania would often schedule Sunday games in New Jersey ball yards in order to circumvent their local restrictions.\textsuperscript{11}

The South was perhaps the last region of the country to permit Sunday baseball games. Richmond's story is typical of many of other southern cities. The first scheduled semi-professional Sunday game in Richmond was to be played on Sunday, April 16, 1890. At the time, Richmond was not affiliated with a professional league and promoters of the "Richmonds" ball club were anxious to secure a league membership. Various clubs throughout the mid-Atlantic region were brought to Richmond for exhibition games.

When the club announced that the Kensington Club of Philadelphia was scheduled for games on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Island Park, the \textit{Times-Dispatch} wrote that

\textsuperscript{10} Riess, \textit{Touching Base}, 136-150; Richmond \textit{Times-Dispatch}, May 5, 1919.

\textsuperscript{11} Riess, \textit{Touching Base}, 136-150.
although Sunday games are common in mid-western cities, they are “an evil practice and one that should and would be frowned upon.” The article continued that the “general statute law of Virginia prohibits Sunday playing. Section 3799 of the Code of 1887 specifies: ‘If a person on a Sabbath day be found laboring at any trade or calling . . . except in household or other work of necessity or charity, he shall forfeit $2 for each offense.’” The next day’s paper reported that the “baseball managers yield gracefully to the public sentiment,” and the Sunday game was not played.\(^\text{12}\)

In 1897 when Richmond and Norfolk joined the Atlantic League, they had been the only southern cities in the circuit. Most of the northern clubs allowed Sunday ball, and the league’s directors permitted official games to be played on Sunday. In the creation of the schedule Edward G. Barrow, league president, noted that the Virginia cities would not be required to host Sunday games, but would have to play them when they were visiting the northern teams. In the 140 game schedule the Richmond Bluebirds received six scheduled Sunday games.\(^\text{13}\)

Richmond did not directly confront the topic of Sunday ballgames until 1921. The playing of a Sunday game was considered by Virginia League and league president William Bradley as means to allow a rain cancelled game to be played. The game would be free to the public and scorecards would not be sold, although the game would count in the league standings. Bradley called a special meeting of league owners to discuss the proposal. Richmond Mayor George Ainslie refused to comment until after the league

\(^{12}\) Riess, Touching Base, 153; Richmond Times-Dispatch, April 3-4, 1890.

\(^{13}\) Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 27, 1897.
Chieof Police Sherry stated "that as no admission is being charged, he could see no reason that the game would not be allowed." While Commonwealth's Attorney Wise simply referenced section 4570 of the Code of Virginia. The code reads the same as the Code of 1887 except that the fine was now quoted as being "not less than $5."

After his announcement, Bradley received so many letters from the public arguing against the proposal that he dropped the issue without presenting it to the directors for a vote.\(^\text{14}\)

In 1922, Portsmouth and Newport News players had engaged in a game in an explicit attempt to test the state's blue laws in court. The game was advertised throughout the week as an official league game. Scorecards were sold at various locations in downtown Portsmouth and Norfolk, and complimentary game tickets were given to purchasers. Club owners were notified that players would be arrested after the first inning. As a result, both clubs only sent nine uniformed players to the field, and club officials were waiting at the station to post bail for the arrested players. After the arrests, club officials stated that "as amateurs are able to play in the state and take up collections and the violation of the Sunday law is in general in other directions, they will fight to have the measure against baseball declared invalid." The *Times-Dispatch* noted that the Virginia League teams are indeed in violation of the law as baseball players "are working at the only trade they know." Amateurs can play games, including games at Mayo Island

\(^{14}\text{Ibid., June 29-30, 1921.}\)
Park, as they are professionally employed in other trades and only play baseball for the enjoyment of the sport.\footnote{Ibid., June 26-27 and September 10, 1922.}

Without receiving legal satisfaction from the Portsmouth and Newport News game in 1922, VL officials attempted another game in 1925. This time the Richmond club played Portsmouth in Portsmouth on May 17. Similar arrests and five-dollar fines were assigned to the players. The clubs appealed the guilty convictions, and the case was ultimately decided by the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. In a 3-2 verdict the justices ruled against baseball. The majority opinion written, by Judge Jesse F. West, stated that while anyone, including professional players, could play ball on Sunday, the players could not engage in a contest at the request of club officials. In that instance, players violate the Sunday labor laws. In explaining the decision, Judge West wrote that in the previous legislative session, the state’s lawmakers denied a bill that would have permitted Sunday professional sports. The Court noted that “this is an indication of legislative policy in Virginia.” Commenting on the courts ruling in his column, sports editor Robert Harper noted that the split court should provide incentive for proponents to increase their efforts to fight for legislative changes.\footnote{Ibid., January 21-22, 1927.}

The topic of professional Sunday baseball did not have opportunity to reappear in Virginia until 1931. Since most of the teams in the Eastern League were located in regions that had been allowing Sunday ball for several years and in some localities, for decades, Sunday games were sanctioned by the league. Both Richmond and Norfolk
participated in Sunday contests in their road schedules and neither team was scheduled to host a Sunday game. However, the two Virginia teams did engage in two Sunday games in Norfolk. Both of the Sunday matches were make-up dates for rainouts. The first occurred on June 28 and the second on September 6. In both games, admission was not charged, and fans were encouraged to make donations. Neither game featured public uproar or even received much notice in the *Times-Dispatch*.17

The turbulent year of 1931 prompted the Richmond Colts, Inc. to announce that they were dropping the franchise after unsuccessfully attempting to establish a working agreement with a major league club. Fred Voos once again intervened to insure that the Eastern League franchise remained in Richmond. On December 30, 1931 he regained control of the franchise. Within a week plans were secured for Eddie Mooers to purchase the Richmond Colts. In the early 1920's, Mooers and his brother had founded the Mooers Motor Company and as a result, this ballplayer was in a financial position that allowed him to own a baseball club. In his purchase agreement, Mooers made lease arrangements with Otto Wells for the club to return to Island Park. Bobby Murray was retained as manager.18

With Mooers as player-owner, the Richmond club did not suffer the internal problems of 1931. However, the league itself could not escape financial ruin. In early July, the Brooklyn major league club announced that it was withdrawing support for the Hartford franchise, the New York Giants declared that it was going to cease supporting

17 Ibid., June 28-29 and September 4-7, 1931.
18 Ibid., December 25, 26, and 31, 1931; January 4-6, 1932.
the Bridgeport club and Allentown indicated that it was ready to fold. On July 17, the league announced that it was disbanding at the close of that day’s games. The Colts won both of their games and finished with a 45-37 (.549) record and third place in the league standings.\(^\text{19}\)

Eddie Mooers retained control of the Richmond Colts after the Eastern League failure and secured a 1933 berth in the Piedmont League. In Eddie Mooers and the Piedmont League professional baseball in Richmond found the stability that it had lacked since its introduction fifty years earlier. Mooers owned the club until supporters of the International League and a higher classification of baseball forced him out of the city in 1954. His Colts continued to play in the Piedmont League throughout his ownership. The club won league flags in 1935 and 1940. In 1933 Mooers had lights installed at Island Park and introduced night baseball to Richmond. The Mayo Island ballfield remained the home field until fire destroyed the grandstand in 1941. After the 1941 fire, Mooers built his own ballpark in the West End. The Colts played at Mooers Park from 1942-1953.\(^\text{20}\)

After Eddie Mooers’ tenure as Richmond’s baseball magnate, the International League provided the city with continued baseball stability. The Baltimore franchise was moved to the city in 1954 and remained for ten years. That club was known as the Richmond Virginians (commonly called the Vees) and was a minor league affiliate for

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the New York Yankees. The club was moved to Toledo for the 1965 season and Richmond was without professional ball for a season. The National League Milwaukee Braves moved to Atlanta for the 1966 season. The Braves then transferred their International League franchise from Atlanta to Richmond, and the Richmond Braves have continued to thrill fans into the 2000 season.²¹

Postscript

Baseball has long been romanticized as America's National Game. In the modern era of free agency, player strikes, discussions of television revenue and corporate luxury boxes and franchise relocations, it is evident that the baseball is not a game, but a business. Nostalgia presents the early history of the game in a romantic fashion. Bygone eras are remembered as times when the players participated for pride and the passion; it was just a game. However, when viewed without the romanticism, it is evident that baseball has been a business venture from the earliest days of professionalism in 1869. Harold Seymour's, *Baseball: The Early Years*, indicates that even in the amateur era of the 1840's-1860's the formation of baseball clubs was not a means for simple exercise, but was a measure for aspiring minded men to attempt to elevate status. As the clubs discovered that the populace enjoyed watching the contests, these enterprising individuals realized a profit could be made from the game. Baseball has been about money and business interests have directed the development of the professional game.¹ Several historians have addressed this topic, with some of the most explicit being Robert F. Burk in *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920* and Steven A. Riess in *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era*.

¹ Seymour, *The Early Years*, 15-42.
The story of Richmond's history with baseball is a typical example of the relationship with the game. In this history, the early period reflects many of the same issues that are seen in modern baseball. There was instability as competing interests fought for control of baseball's fortunes in the city. If the team did not generate enough profit, it was moved to another city or a new ballpark was built. There were frequent changes in ownership as competing interests such as the trolley companies fought to earn not only the profits from the gate receipts of those attending the game, but also the street car fare for getting them to the game. Even those without a direct financial interest in the baseball team looked to baseball as a representation of the community and it served as a means of promoting the city and its various industries. Baseball in Richmond has very much been about business. The early period was about its growth and was marked by instability. As the game became established, there has developed stability in its ownership, its league affiliation and its place within that community.
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Books


Scott Patrick Mayer

The author grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio during the championship years of the Big Red Machine. Under the influence of a father who enjoyed the game of baseball and the experience of growing up in a city with one of the most talented teams in baseball history, Scott developed a passion for the game. Another passion that evolved during childhood was the study of American history, especially the colonial period. This interest was encouraged by family vacations to historical sites throughout Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina, West Virginia and Virginia.

He graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1992 with a Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in marketing. An internship in the Office of Undergraduate Admission provided the impetus for a career path in college admission. Shortly after graduation, he moved to Easton, Pennsylvania taking a position in the admission office at Lafayette College. In 1994, he moved to Richmond to begin life with his wife Kimberly, a teacher at St. Christopher's School. While beginning graduate studies in history at the University of Richmond, he remained active in college admission by reading applications for William and Mary. In 1997, he took a position in the Office of Admission at the University of Richmond. Life outside of the office and classroom are shared with Kimberly and the girls, Maggie and Abbey (the family Dachshunds). The family can often be found travelling, attending ballgames, digging in the garden, cooking, reading and working on the model railroad.