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Baseball and Boosterism: Henry W. Grady, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Inaugural Season of the Southern League

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by David A. Martin entitled "Baseball and Boosterism: Henry W. Grady, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Inaugural Season of the Southern League." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Robert J. Norrell, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Lorri Glover, Ernest Freeberg

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Ernest Freeberg

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Anne Mayhew
Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

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Baseball and Boosterism:

Henry W. Grady, the Atlanta *Constitution*, and the Inaugural Season of the Southern League

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David Allen Martin
August 2006

Dedication

This is dedicated to those who have played instrumental roles in my academic and personal development. I owe too many debts to my family for their constant encouragement and love. I also could not have completed this endeavor without the influence of John Melnick, Sherry Earl, James Russell, Robert J. Norrell, and Allison.

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Abstract

This study will examine the ways in which southern civic boosters fused the inaugural season of the Southern League of Professional Baseball with the promotion of their respective cities in 1885. Evidence for this work comes primarily from the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Chattanooga Daily Times*, and the *Nashville Banner*. Articles from these newspapers are put into context with Paul Gaston's *The New South Creed* (1970). Henry Grady is the primary focus, as he was the archetypical New South booster.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Baseball Boom, 1840 - 1885: A Cultural and Commercial Phenomenon	5
Chapter Two: Henry W. Grady: The Man and the New South Creed	19
Chapter Three: The Southern League and the <i>Constitution</i> : A Progressive Establishment and its Mouthpiece	30
Chapter Four: Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta: Comparing the SL Coverage of the <i>Banner</i> and the <i>Daily Times</i> to the <i>Constitution</i>	42
Conclusion:	62
Bibliography:	65
Vita:	68

Introduction:

On a fair, mid-May Saturday afternoon in 1885, about 3,000 baseball fans crowded into the stands at Atlanta's Athletic Park to catch their first glimpse of a Southern League match. The season was already two weeks old, the home team just in from a successful road-trip. Excitement filled the air as the opposing pitcher strolled to the mound to hurl the game's first pitch. The first Atlanta batter hit a slow dribbler to the shortstop and was easily retired. Surely the visiting fans from Macon, three trainloads worth, made a great cheer for this. Goldsby, a star center fielder, stepped up next for the home team. He ripped a line drive through the infield to claim the Atlantas, a fitting name for the Atlanta team, first home hit. The crowd went wild as he stole second, putting himself in scoring position. Everyone in the park anticipated the first run of the game, but neither the catcher nor the third-baseman delivered a scoring hit. So went the first half inning of Southern League baseball in Atlanta.¹

Sitting among the masses, as he always did, Henry Woodfin Grady, managing editor of the Atlanta *Constitution*, scribbled down meticulous game notes. James Holliday, Grady's secretary, sat next to the newspaperman helping him record all the action. After the game, which the Atlantas won, the two men walked a short distance to Grady's home and constructed a summary to be put in the following day's edition of the *Constitution*.² The next morning subscribers opened their paper to find not one but two reports of the contest, league standings, rundowns of every other match in the association,

1 Atlanta *Constitution*, 10 May 1885.

2 Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South* (New York, 1943), 225.

and scores from around the country. In 1885, the *Constitution*, Atlanta's most read paper, devoted two full columns to baseball news in its weekly circulations, a column-and-a-half to Southern League write-ups. Daily editions contained extensive coverage as well. Though baseball experienced a boom in popularity in this era, such devotion in print seems a bit extreme. So why did the sport, more specifically the Southern League, receive so much attention? And why did Henry Grady, a partner at the paper and famous promoter of the New South, take such personal interest in the game?

The answer to these questions rests in Grady's fervent commitment to the New South movement. He dreamed of a South that enjoyed economic, industrial, and progressive advancements shared by the rest of the nation. But in the immediate post-Reconstruction years, this seemed, at best, to be wishful thinking. Undeterred, Grady devoted his entire career to the promotion of his region. He preached to thousands and wrote to millions about the wonders and potential of his homeland. In the mid-1880s, he bragged to the country of all that the New South had to offer. Noting that professional baseball teams and leagues had become desirable civic commodities throughout the United States, Grady moved to take advantage of the popularity of the sport. Working with city boosters and entrepreneurs, Grady helped create the first professional baseball circuit in the South in 1885, the Southern League. Then, using the pages of the *Constitution*, he quickly began boasting the region's newest progressive amenity.

John DiMaglio writes in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* that the creation of the Southern League “was an obvious example of boosterism.”³ That, however, is about as much attention the subject has received. No one has produced a work looking at the link bridging boosterism to baseball. This study attempts to do just that. It is a specific study examining the efforts Henry Grady took to wed his two passions: baseball and the New South. The tie that binds this relationship is the *Atlanta Constitution*, Grady’s renowned newspaper and the herald of the New South movement. In it, baseball got much attention, and the Southern League provided a material example of the South’s progressive nature.

This work is also an answer to the call issued by Steven A. Riess for more scholarship dedicated to the relationship between sports and various themes in American history. In “The New Sports History,” he suggests a list of topics to which historians need pay more attention, one of these being the dialogue between sports and urban boosterism. He argues that this type of work has been ignored for a long time because of “intellectual snobbery.”⁴ This may be true if we take, for example, this quote by historian Carl B. Cone in 1979: “I wrote some sports history forty years ago, but strictly as an extra-curricular interest . . . These publications could not be seen as brownie points to influence tenure, promotion, or merit decisions. I would not have dared include these writings in my dossier; they might be counted against me as indicative of a young assistant professor

3 John E. DiMaglio, *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 1211.

4 Steven A. Riess, “The New Sports History,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (September, 1990), 311-25.

who was not seriously engaged with the discipline of history as it was understood.”⁵ But snobbish sentiment subsided enough for scholars in the next decade to produce a wealth of new studies designed to give athletics a more important role in the American experience. My writing here is an attempt to add to this trend, to show professional baseball’s hand in the building of the New South.

“Boosterism and Baseball” is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is a brief history of the baseball boom. Here, with a focus on the cultural and commercial aspects of the game, it will be shown how and why the sport became the most popular pastime by the 1880s. Chapter Two explains Henry Grady’s fame and the New South Creed. This section is essential because it demonstrates why he assumed the critical position to link baseball to boosterism. Chapter Three reveals how Grady used the *Constitution* to promote the league and bring it in line with his public relations efforts. And finally, Chapter Four compares the *Constitution*’s coverage of the inaugural season with the leading Chattanooga and Nashville newspapers. This chapter shows how different SL city presses treated their teams in different ways, and that the league meant one thing to Atlanta, another to Chattanooga, and something else to Nashville.

5 Carl B. Cone, “Sports History with a Kentucky Bouquet,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 77(Autumn, 1979), 276.

Chapter One:

The Baseball Boom, 1840-1885: A Cultural and Commercial Phenomenon

To understand the history and significance of Henry Grady's Southern League (SL) venture, it is essential to examine developments in and around the sport going back to the antebellum era. Baseball evolved greatly from its origins as a fraternal avocation in the 1840s to the professional status it claimed in the 1880s. Many alterations effected the mechanics of the game itself. For instance, the distance between the pitchers mound and home plate changed many times, as well as the size and shape of a bat. More important, however, reforms in the organization of the sport reflected shifts in social and cultural norms. Robert Wiebe and like-minded scholars describe this era in United States history as one of "crisis," when Americans struggled to find their respective places in a changing socioeconomic landscape.³ Throughout this period baseball wove its way into the fabric of mainstream culture, and as baseball historian Benjamin Rader claims, "serve(d) as one of the sinews that held American society together."⁴

When Henry Grady hatched the idea of creating the Southern League, the popularity of baseball could not be rivaled anywhere in the United States by any other sport. Only college football might have offered a challenge to its supremacy, but it was still a decade away from its own popular boom. In the mid-1880s, baseball reigned as the king of sport. Virtually anyone of any social station possessed both access and means to

3 Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967). See "Communities in Crisis," 44-75.

4 Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana and Chicago, 1992), xvi.

participate in the national pastime. Transportation innovations moved fans to games with ease and sped teams from city to city to perform daily in front of growing crowds. Newspapers nationwide reported results of games near and far to an expansive readership, while everyone from congressmen and senators to coal miners and street-cleaners took in semi-professional or professional games. Baseball assumed such an ordinary existence in late nineteenth-century life that Millie McCreary, a black teacher in the Baptist Seminary of Atlanta, makes reference to her routine attendance at games in her diary.⁵ That an African American woman frequented matches, living the segregated South, attests to the broad appeal and easy access to the sport. However, this love of baseball had not always a national commonality. For quite some time the bulk of the American population frowned on the sport. Over time this attitude changed, and the popularity of the game can be attributed to the attempts of a younger generation of men trying to find a common bond in the industrial Northeast during the 1840s.

The story of modern baseball begins in the streets of New York City in the mid-nineteenth century. Though it is debatable when baseball crystallized into the sport recognizable by our present-day standards, it obviously matured beyond its schoolyard status by midcentury. A host of baseball scholars note the creation of the New York Knickerbocker Base Ball Club in 1845 as the first coherent baseball organization. This club did not exist as a mere athletic association; it operated, primarily, as a social binder

5 Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 71-2. Taken from the Millie McCreary Diary, 28 Sept. 1895 - 25 April 1896.

using games as events to bring members together. The structure and function of the Knickerbocker club provided a model for innumerable other units to replicate.⁶

New York City, at this time, served as the industrial heart of America. Immigrants from every direction flooded Gotham. The population influx combined with rapid industrialization to create an unfamiliar setting for many residents, especially young artisans and clerks. Wiebe notes that as “more people clustered into smaller spaces, it became harder to isolate the individual.”⁷ Such a situation spawned a generation of men who struggled to find life meaning or gain a sense of community. Baseball clubs, commonly referred to as “fraternities,” filled this void.

The men who formed the Knickerbockers did so to afford themselves a feeling of belonging amid an ever-changing environment. At that time, the sport remained outside the Victorian American mainstream as it drew fire from a number of critics. The established middle-class proved to be the harshest opponents of baseball. In his study *Sport in Industrial America*, Steven Riess finds that they considered the ball-and-bat game, along with other “contemporary sports, to be time-wasting, immoral, and debilitating.”⁸ To the contrary, the younger middle-class of the 1840s took their game and their clubs seriously. Aside from playing contests, the Knickerbockers and similar associations scheduled suppers, formal balls, and other social festivities. Underscoring the secondary role baseball played with this fraternity, it should be noted that potential

6 Rader, 3-4.

7 Wiebe, 133.

8 Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Wheeling, 1995). See “Sport and the Middle Class,” 57-66.

brothers could gain membership only by election of the some two hundred existing members. Considering a roll-call of roughly two hundred names, it is hard to believe that all those involved possessed superlative baseball skills. More plausible is the assumption that they shared a common social status.

By the mid-1880s fraternity-style ball clubs began springing up across the country, mostly in port cities where merchants introduced the sport along with their goods. New Orleans was the first southern locale to show a great interest in baseball. Articles from the summer of 1859 report games being played at the Delachaise Grounds between members of the Louisiana Base Ball Club. The contests resembled modern schoolyard games, captains choosing their teams from members in the group. These scrimmages seem to be the first locally organized contests, as the *Daily-Picayune* refers to them as the “inauguration of this noble and manly game.” New Orleans experimented more with baseball than any other town below the Mason-Dixon line before the Civil War. The population of New Orleans appears to have been attracted to the sport as a social binder, like those in the Northeast. However, considering that New Orleans did not boast an impressive industrial sector, it can be concluded that the popularity of baseball was due to its novelty, rather than as a social necessity.⁹

So, for nearly a decade, groups of young men played ball games at places similar to the Delachaise Grounds outside New Orleans and the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey, in front of few eyes, save their own. Occasionally they scheduled matches against

9 New Orleans *Daily-Picayune*, 30 July 1859, 20 August 1859.

other fraternities, but for the most part, the Knickerbockers, and other clubs, played for their own amusement and for the company of friends. That is, until the boom hit.¹⁰

Many generalized answers have been given to explain the skyrocketing popularity of baseball in the Northeast during the decade preceding the American Civil War. Ted Vincent, in his study of American Sport, offers as good an explanation as any when he writes that the game “generated from below as one answer to the crying need for organized social activity in the new urban setting.”¹¹ The boom took hold of the lower classes and younger middle-class. By the time Confederate troops opened fire on Fort Sumter, over two hundred junior and senior teams played ball in the metropolitan New York area. Touring teams of skilled amateurs traveled through much of the East Coast attracting sizable crowds at every stop. The New York Mutuals claimed elite status among white ball teams, while the Pythians of Philadelphia and the Uniques of Brooklyn battled all-black nines for bragging rights as the preeminent African American squad. Fraternity clubs still played, but as baseball seeped out from an exclusively artisan/clerk setting, the sport took on a new dimension.¹²

While the explosion of baseball’s popularity can be attributed to the industrial influence of nineteenth-century New York City, its change from a social pastime to a commercial enterprise can also be linked to that great metropolis. The commercialization of the sport began in 1862 when William H. Cammeyer decided to capitalize on his

10 Rader, 3.

11 Ted Vincent, *The Rise and Fall of American Sport: Mudville’s Revenge* (Lincoln, 1994), 2.

12 Rader, 5-10.

fellow New Yorkers' passion for the game. Aware of the fervor surrounding certain matches of interest, Cammeyer made an enterprising move. He filled his ice-skating pond in Brooklyn with dirt, leveled the surface, built a fence around the grounds, and erected a set of grandstands that at capacity seated about 1,600 fans. He named the facility "Union Grounds" and promptly began hosting games. The genius, and risk, of this venture was that Cammeyer began charging admission to contests played at his park. The gamble paid off as baseball devotees paid cash to attend the events. Soon thereafter, entrepreneurs around the region began following his lead by building parks wherever available realty existed. This theme in baseball history is referred to as the "enclosure movement," and it forever changed the way people played and watched the game.¹³

Not long after the enclosure movement took root, it became virtually impossible to attend a game of significance without paying some admission fee. Rader writes that the movement seemingly ended the fraternity aspects of the game as it "subordinate(d) fraternal concerns to commercial obligations." To make money, enclosure forced social ball clubs to schedule more games outside their respective social organizations, and they "began to recruit members more on the basis of their playing skills rather than their general sociability." This trend continued through the Civil War and in the immediate postwar years. Soon after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the best players on the most successful teams garnered subsidies for their athletic contributions. Such compensations normally took the form of a "paying job that required little or no actual work," whose schedules never interfered with play. A prime example of job patronage is

13 Ibid, 15-6.

the 1867 Washington Nationals - a fitting town for a good example. Nearly all the players on that team, by far the best in the capital city, held jobs with the federal government that allowed plenty of time for baseball. Two years later, the Cincinnati Red Stockings took professional baseball to a previously unheard-of level. The 1869 team became the first "all-salaried" nine. The team was organized by local businessman Aaron Champion "to bring national recognition to his city."¹⁴ Every player on the Red Stockings earned a paycheck for their services. The organization lured the best players in with the promise of cash, and the result astonished followers of the game. No team beat the squad from the Cincinnati that year, and only once did a game end in a tie. The success of the 1869 Cincinnati nine ensured copycats as it became obvious that to beat the best, you had to pay the best.¹⁵

Rader says that the professional teams existing after the Civil War fanned the "fierce fires of local tribalism" more so than the fraternal clubs ever did. The success of the Red Stockings inspired cities across the country to field representative squads of paid players. Local boosters noted the attention given to the Cincinnati squad by the press. Over 200,000 people came out to see the team as it traveled, thrashing every opponent it met. Each time the name Red Stockings came up, the city associated with it also appeared, much to the pleasure of the team's founder. In an era when localities vied jealously for attention, in hopes that it would bring good fortune, civic boosters rushed to

14 End of fraternity in Rader, 16, 21-24. Booster Aaron Champion in Steven A. Riess, "Professional Baseball and Social Mobility," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Autumn, 1980), 236.

15 Ibid, 16, 21-4.

assemble top quality ball clubs. The logic of these boosters was simple: Create a great team and beat clubs from other cities; the more wins we get, the more press we get; as our boys gain notoriety, so will our town. Fans enthusiastically turned out to cheer on their teams. To many attendees, much more than a game hung in the balance; a town's fate might also be at stake.¹⁶

Boosters correctly moved to try to capitalize on baseball's surge in popularity. Since its local explosion in the New York vicinity, the sport enjoyed an enormous spectatorship nationwide. Edward Ayers writes in *The Promise of the New South* that the war increased Southerners exposure to the game as "Confederate troops learned baseball from Union adversaries and northern travelers and emigres brought the sport with them into the postwar South." Baseball found a warm reception in the South because it "fit well with a longstanding Southern fascination with physical display and competition."¹⁷ Baseball quickly took root throughout the region transcending age and social lines. The first recorded game in Fayetteville, Tennessee, pitted the area members of the Ku Klux Klan against a team the local newspaper referred to as "nine carpetbaggers."¹⁸ Earlier in Virginia, university students in Charlottesville organized an intramural league by the war's end, while in Richmond fifteen adult teams and a dozen junior clubs were competing by the close of 1866.¹⁹ Everyone wanted in on the action.

16 Ibid, 24, 26-7.

17 Ayers, 311.

18 George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in the Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton, 2003), 116.

19 Ibid, 117.

Three post-Civil War developments led to the mass popularization of baseball. First was a revolution in the press. Before the Civil War, most newspapers devoted print only to business and politics. Any other “news” failed to make the paper, or it found space in the margins. In the 1830s, though, the *New York Sun* and the *Philadelphia Ledger* began the unusual practice of randomly covering sporting events. These reports appeared to be scarce and normally saved for championship yacht or horse races. However, as advances in telegraphy mounted, correspondents sent reports of events across the wires with great speed; accurate accounts of games began filling the columns of many dailies by midcentury. As this trend continued and the popularity of baseball grew, the baseball writer became the star of the news staff. By the mid-1880s prominent newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, proudly reported baseball results and related events throughout each in-season edition, sometimes giving big stories front page space.²⁰

The second development was in transportation innovations. Steven Reiss tells that railroad and trolley car advancements were “crucial in facilitating” the rise of baseball. More efficient railroad lines decreased travel time, making it easier for rival squads to square off. This promoted a sense of community pride as fans regularly witnessed their town’s baseball prowess compared to others. Within the city, trolley lines “greatly increased access to sporting facilities.” As lines became more sophisticated and reliable, more people made it to the fields to watch contests. Streetcar companies realized benefits of catering to the baseball craze, and many “subsidized clubs, owned teams, and built ballparks at the end of their routes.” Quoting a study by Ted Vincent, Reiss writes

20 Reiss, *Industrial America*, 29-30.

that “in the late nineteenth century, transit firms in seventy-eight cities were financially involved in professional baseball.”²¹

The final element in the wide-ranging popularization of baseball is the shift in middle-class attitudes toward the sport. In the 1840s, as noted earlier, the older and more established spheres of the middle-class frowned on almost all sports. According to Riess, most of this class lived by the Victorian norms of the day: “hard work, providing for their families, and making the home the center of their lives.” To them, baseball distracted from these values. This unfavorable attitude changed toward the close of the century; those who comprised the young middle-class in the 1840s matured, and a new, popular sport creed claimed that “physical exercise would provide sedentary individuals with a substitute for the lost rustic world of vigorous agricultural work and fresh air.” At a time when fears of social effeminacy troubled the American mind, the sporting arena became an outlet for males to nurture the “lost” traits naturally associated with their sex. Baseball thus underwent a significant public relations overhaul. Once vilified by circles in the middle-class, the sport moved on to enjoy a new status as a perceived conduit to a healthy life.²² Sports, in general, offered men of the late-nineteenth century an opportunity to display their manhood. As Gail Bederman attests in her study of race and gender, “the power of Victorian manliness eroded” and many middle-class men began to identify with what was once seen only as a “rough working-class masculinity.”²³

21 Ibid, 33-6.

22 Ibid, 57-9.

23 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995), 16-20.

The result of these developments in press, transportation, and attitudes, was a far-reaching increase in baseball popularity by the 1880s. It moved out of the confines of industrial America and worked its way into every town and hamlet. Baseball's terrain was expansive, and though mainstream culture latched onto it tightly, some worried the sport had become too popular. In the South, Sam Jones stood as the most redoubtable opponent of the game. During the late nineteenth century, Jones arguably held the title of the most influential evangelist in the United States. His tours in the South attracted enormous crowds and transcriptions of his sermons made the pages of many weekly papers. His stance toward baseball was clear as he once admonished a congregation that "when a fellow gets twenty-one years old and chases a ball like a fice chasing chickens, then it is time to get hold of him."²⁴ An account of one of his sermons in Augusta, Georgia, which Henry Grady attended, makes more obvious his feelings about the pastime: "When he got through with baseball . . . it looked like a whipped rooster after a two hours fight." In that same sermon, "robbers, burglars, and murderers grew to be very respectable folks compared with baseball players."²⁵ A few shared similar sentiment in the South. An Atlanta seminary professor urged his class that "the Baptists must save the world" because "the Presbyterians are ruining the world by teaching it baseball." And an Alabama man worried that the professional status of the game might result in a "large lot

24 Ayers, 311. Taken from Raymond Rensi, *Sam Jones, Southern Evangelist* (Athens, 1972).

25 *New York Times*, 16 January 1887.

of professionals” who only “know how to strike with a bat.” He then suggested that there “should be a limit to such things.”²⁶

But such worries proved unfounded and warnings fell on deaf ears as baseball fever spread into an epidemic. Taking advantage of “urban rivalries,” Rader writes, “an assortment of civic boosters, small-time entrepreneurs, and politicians organized” teams and leagues in the 1860s and 1870s. The first governing body that gained acclaim was the National Association of Professional Baseball Players, created in New York before the 1871 season. This association floundered for several years because of its inability to regulate the many players it represented. In place of this failed conglomerate came the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876. The name of this league speaks to its emphasis on teams. The league “sharply restricted the number of clubs that could join, took steps to curb player freedom, and sought . . . to present itself as a fortress of Victorian propriety.” The National League (NL) gained a reputation as the premier circuit in the country and cities tried desperately to gain representation with a squad. For six years the National League functioned as the sole “major” league. All the best players filled the rosters of NL teams and the game attained a higher level of respectability because of the strict standards imposed by the association’s governing body. In 1882, however, the NL’s claim to baseball domination took a hit by a challenging upstart league.²⁷

26 Ayers, 311. Taken from the Millie McCreary Diary, 1 Oct. 1895, and the John Hardy Curry Diary, 24 April 1894.

27 Rader, 35-7.

The second “major” league, the American Association of Baseball Clubs, served as the cultural antithesis of the National League. The founders of the American Association (AA) “sought to tap into a large pool of potential baseball fans who had been abandoned by the NL’s ostentatious capitulation to Victorian” benchmarks. The “Beer Ball League,” as it came to be known, catered to an audience that cared little, if any, for proper standards of the day. League games were played on every day of the week, including Sundays, and spectators enjoyed alcoholic beverages in the stands. NL officials scoffed at these two selling points of the AA since they observed the Sabbath and abstained from spiritous drinks. But no number of upturned noses could discount the high ticket sales of the American Association in its inaugural season. Together, the two competing leagues supplied baseball to the whole of white society. The NL rendered service to the bluebloods, and the AA provided entertainment to the bluecollars.²⁸

Once the two leagues, the NL and AA, solidified themselves as the standards in baseball associations, cities tried with all their might to enter teams in their standings. Any notable late nineteenth-century metropolis was expected to claim institutions such as museums, colleges, symphonies, and public parks. Also, they were to have at least one major league team. In smaller cities local boosters tended to have “more modest ambitions” with their nines. A representative squad in these places served as “an index of the community’s progressive nature.”²⁹ Thus, in keeping with the trend set by their northern and western brethren, cities throughout the South organized professional teams

28 Ibid, 46-8.

29 Riess, *Industrial America*, 26-7.

to prove their ability to keep pace with the popular American mainstream while satisfying the hunger for sport and competition among their own populations.

Chapter Two:

Henry W. Grady: The Man and the New South Creed

Of all southern cities in the 1880s, Atlanta, Georgia, proved to be the most progressive and willing to cooperate with contemporary American standards. Over the course of just a few decades, the city blossomed from a modest crossroads to the most influential commercial center below the Mason-Dixon line. In his comparative study of postbellum southern cities, Don Doyle writes that enterprising Atlantans realized how “ideally suited” their town rested after the war, and they moved to “take advantage of the great shifts” in the economic situation of the South.³⁰ While these men kept busy organizing the infrastructure of an ever-expanding municipality and surrounding region, Henry Grady made sure their efforts caught the attention of the rest of the nation. His goal, as a dedicated promoter of the New South and Atlanta, was to project an image of his home as a land of limitless opportunity and promise. To reach this end, Grady spent his most productive years giving speeches and writing articles vaunting the South’s accomplishments and potential. The country recognized Grady as the mouthpiece of the New South movement, and Grady recognized the movements of the country. In 1885 he understood the importance of establishing a league of baseball clubs in the Southeast. Having fallen victim to the sport rage himself, Grady still possessed enough sense to notice the payoff of jumping on the bandwagon. He wanted to get in, not simply for personal entertainment value, but for the prestige of Atlanta and his South. But before we

30 Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990), 39.

can look at Henry Grady's promotion of the Southern League as a booster effort, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the man, his New South convictions, and his influential standing. After laying this foundation, it will become more obvious why he so effectively embodied the nexus of southern boosterism and baseball.

On a cold winter night in December 1886, Henry Grady stood in front of a speculative audience at an elite New York City gala. One of the few southerners ever invited to speak before this illustrious crowd, the New England Society, Grady that evening delivered the most famous speech of his career. With his "New South" monologue, the thirty-six-year-old editor from Atlanta so impressed the assembly, which included the likes of General William T. Sherman and J. Pierpont Morgan, he instantly became known as the authority of the young southern movement. That triumphant address, however, did not launch the crusade for which he is remembered. Instead, it simply served as an oratorical depiction of a well-established trend practiced by civic-minded optimists in the old Confederate states.³¹

The term "New South" is a bit ambiguous today. Since its inception, it has been assigned a variety of definitions and functions. Some refer to it as a place, while others use it to signify an era. However we choose to employ the phrase in the twenty-first century, those of Grady's school used "New South" with a concerted, specific purpose. To them, it represented a new society, raised from the ashes of military defeat and occupation. It was a conscious parting with the backward ways of the antebellum years

31 Harold E. Davis, *Henry Grady's New South: Atlanta, A Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1990), 175-8.

and the creation of a new order. As Paul Gaston confirms in *The New South Creed*, the nineteenth-century advocates of the New South pushed a creed which celebrated a “reconciliation of sectional differences” and lobbied for a new economy “based on industry and scientific, diversified agriculture.”³² Believing wholeheartedly in this doctrine, reformers confidently guaranteed a future where the South enjoyed equal footing with her sister states.

Those who most loudly vocalized the New South creed usually held posts at newspapers. Some owned their paper while others wrote or edited articles. Whatever the position, their mission remained constant: promote the South, applaud the South, and push her along in print. Using this tactic, they hoped to catch the eyes and pocketbooks of northern investors, while simultaneously attracting immigrant labor to the region. Though these boosters always kept the same end-result in mind, their game plan changed fundamentally in the 1880s.

The earliest postbellum advocates of a new order obsessed over the potential of the South. To them, the despondency of their homeland resulted not from the Civil War and Reconstruction. Rather, they believed the prewar economic system of single crop agriculture to be the culprit. Most of these reformists came of age during the war and, as Grady himself put it, “cared not a button” for the old ways.³³ Young authors like Grady, Francis Dawson of Charleston, Daniel Tompkins of North Carolina, and Richard Edmonds of Baltimore penned essay after essay urging southerners to abandon their old

32 Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970), 7.

33 *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 Jan. 1887.

practices and to embrace a more productive system. Concurrently, newspapers and speakers pressed Yankee and European industrialists to invest by citing an abundance of opportunities that offered safe returns. So went the New South anthem through the 1870s, but a new decade brought a new tone. As Gaston writes, by the eighties the lyrics of the song “came to be a description not of what ought to be or would be, but of what already was.”³⁴

Realizing that the key to attracting investment and immigration is to show success, boosters began claiming victories of southern enterprise and reporting fortunes made by individuals in their new land of opportunity. The “we need to” songs were banished, replaced by choruses of “Look what we’ve done!” The movement in the 1880s assumed a strong propaganda flavor as “pamphlets, articles, brochures, and books by the hundreds were sent out across the land” bragging of accomplishments.³⁵ Once Henry Grady gained control of the *Atlanta Constitution*, he turned it into the most successful newspaper south of the nation’s capitol, thus ushering the New South movement further than anyone previously.³⁶

Grady fit the bill of a New South booster perfectly. Born to a merchant father in 1850 in Athens, Georgia, Henry Woodfin Grady never experienced the “genteel leisure” of the planter aristocracy. His hometown thrived as the trading center for its surrounding farms and plantations, so he learned early-on to be a businessman. After attending

34 Gaston, 7.

35 Ibid, 75.

36 Paul Gaston offers an account of this change in the movement in “The Opulent South,” 43-80. Chapter three of *The New South Creed*.

college at the University of Georgia and the University of Virginia, the young writer took a string of jobs at various newspapers. None of his early ventures can be seen as great successes, but all the while Grady observed and commented on developments in the South while honing his journalistic talents. At the age of twenty-six, Henry joined the staff at the *Atlanta Constitution*; four years later, he purchased a quarter-share of the paper and moved into the editor's chair. By this time, Henry Grady had gained much acclaim for his writing skills as many contemporaries thought him to be an elite penman.³⁷

A flattering early twentieth-century study of Grady's writing praises his outstanding skills. Russell Terrell says that his "genius . . . so far arose above the plane of ordinary talent that it was capable of transmutation into any of the fine arts." The old Vanderbilt professor goes on to write that, had Grady lived at any other time in history, he would have practiced the art of the day. Talent like his evolved to accommodate its environs. It only made sense then, that because he was "living in the nineteenth (century), and in the South, he was an editor and orator."³⁸ Of course it can be argued that Dr. Terrell may have overstated the brilliance guiding Grady's penstrokes, but to look at his compositions is to look a fine journalism. For instance, in a column entitled "Surf-Bathing" Grady does, indeed, write of his subject, noting elements only a sculptor would have seen. Passages like "her flesh was firm and dazzling in its whiteness" and recalling that her head sat "poised like a queen's upon a swan-like neck" serve as testament to his

37 Gaston, 48-50.

38 Russell Terrell, *A Study of the Early Journalistic Writings of Henry W. Grady* (Nashville, 1927), 9.

keen sense of detail and his ability to record them in a manner lost to many of his peers.³⁹ But a deeper purpose existed in the works of Henry Grady: To Terrell, it was to heal his homeland by way of “repair(ing) the breach that was made between the North and South during the Civil War.” Terrell states that “before there can be any great work produced there must be a meeting of two forces . . . the power of the man and the power of the moment.” The “moment” in the 1880s was the possibility of the South reclaiming its lost glory.⁴⁰

Whether or not Grady was *the* man to heal this wound is debatable, but there is no doubt that he was *a* man fit for the task. Not long after he assumed the editorship of the *Constitution*, Grady moved to transform that local newspaper into the driving force of the New South crusade. When the Southern League’s inaugural season kicked off, the *Constitution* claimed the largest circulation of any daily or weekly in the South; it even hit the doorsteps of thousands of homes in the North and Midwest. Grady used his press as a beacon for the progressive South. The paper bragged on newly acquired riches, it bragged on the self-made men of Atlanta, it even bragged on itself. And in 1885, it bragged on the South’s newest achievement, the Southern League.

The Atlanta *Constitution* is the central element linking Grady’s boosterism efforts to baseball. This newspaper worked as the prime outlet for the New South movement, and when Grady bought into the paper he did so with the explicit purpose of advancing the New South Creed. In its pages, readers saw the riches of the land; its potential and its

39 Atlanta *Constitution*, 13 August 1882, “Surf-Bathing.”

40 Terrell, 33-5.

consummation. From the editing table, Grady constructed daily and weekly editions that spoke to the greatness of Atlanta and the region. His goal was to paint a picture of a society given to progress and industry, waiting for more success stories and completely capable of competing in the American mainstream. He felt the popularity wave of baseball and moved to capitalize on it. He claimed the presidency and wrote daily of the Southern League to show the South as a growing progressive entity complete with every desirable amenity.

During the 1880s only two southern newspapers commanded respect and admiration of readers outside the region: Henry Watterson's Louisville *Courier-Journal* and Henry Grady's Atlanta *Constitution*. The two papers fought for southern progress and industrialization, but their pitch varied. To Terrell, Watterson's Kentucky press practiced a more fiery method whose voice resembled that of a "politician," while Grady's approached matters in a more "statesmanlike" manner.⁴¹ The *Courier-Journal* actively engaged in partisan struggles; the *Constitution* handled situations from a distance so it might avoid placing its interests in jeopardy. Since Grady sought to please his readers, he thoughtfully wrote and published to offend few of them.⁴² This delivery, along with a number of other methods and maneuvers, helped him move his paper to a standing of respectable regional and national repute.

Henry Grady's celebrity rose so quickly, that by 1882, citizens in the Atlanta area called on him to run for a seat in the United States House of Representatives. Though

41 Ibid, 65.

42 Atlanta *Constitution*, 9 March 1881, "Carping Critics."

flattered, he refused the endorsements saying that “when I was eighteen years of age, I adopted journalism as my profession,” and “I have never seen a day when I regretted my choice.” He went on to tell his supporters that he wished nothing more than to serve his people, but he would “never become a candidate for any public office.”⁴³ His commitment to his job is obvious when one examines the improvements he made to his Atlanta paper.

Grady had a plan in 1880 when he bought his share of the *Constitution* and became managing editor. Immediately he decided to increase the size of each edition. In Harold E. Davis’s biography of Grady, finances spurred this idea; more type space meant more room for advertisements, and more advertisements paid for Grady’s next venture. Between 1880 and 1882 the *Constitution* accumulated enough wealth to expand production tremendously. High demand and growing subscription rates encouraged the partners of the Constitution Publishing Company to buy a lot at the corner of Alabama and Forsyth Streets. Here, they erected a six-story building “model for its time.” A steam engine supplied power to all the rooms, and a new Hoeing Perfect press, which cost as much as three railroad engines, printed about ten thousand full editions per hour.⁴⁴

The new home of the *Constitution* was first-rate, and its grandeur reflected the objective of the paper: the presentation of a progressive image. In just six seconds, visitors rode from the first to sixth floor in an elevator of mahogany and mirrors while clerks took new subscribers and met with potential advertisers behind tall decorated

43 Joel Chandler Harris, *Life of Henry W. Grady* (New York, 1890), 10-11.

44 Davis, 24-6.

windows. If a visitor called on Grady, he might be struck by the feeling he was walking into the lair of greatness. Stepping off on the fifth floor, he entered a massive lobby where the office boy met him. This young man would lead him through a set of glass doors into the library. Along the walls of the library stood four towering doors, each leading to an office. The guest might catch a glimpse of Joel Chandler Harris or other ranking staffers working away in these great rooms. Grady's office and consultation room opened to the right, and when the office boy let the visitor in, he was greeted with spacious views of Stone and Kennesaw Mountains.⁴⁵

The expansion of the paper paid great dividends. When Grady bought into the *Constitution* in 1880, its total subscription hung in the neighborhood of seven thousand. That was not a laughable number compared with other southern presses, but those figures paled in comparison to the paper's circulation just a few years later. In 1886, one year after the formation of the Southern League, the *Constitution* touted a subscription rate of eighty-one thousand with its weekly editions; its dailies had an impressive subscription as well. Grady and company sent out around twenty thousand sample copies on a weekly basis and advertised their product in nearly fifteen hundred other papers from Connecticut to California. Landing in every post office in Georgia and going to every state, the *Constitution* weekend edition maintained the most expansive circulation of any weekly in the United States.⁴⁶

45 Ibid.

46 Ayers, 87 and Davis, 53-4.

Constitution readers got a bit of everything from their paper. In 1885, Grady's columns included political coverage, regional, national, and international headlines, sports writeups, weather, health advice, and of course, the adventures of Brer Rabbit. Mitchell Garrett of Hatchet Creek, Alabama, describes his family's excitement when the weekly edition came: "the children looked for the Uncle Remus stories while . . . father pored over the political news and . . . mother read the paper aloud to entertain" everyone.⁴⁷ The broad range in topic selection proves Grady aimed to please the readers, but the promotion of the New South remained his principal concern. As explained previously, throughout the 1880s the method of reform-minded boosters, like Grady, was to tell of local success. Rarely anymore did they urge southerners to fall in line; more likely they told them what other southerners did to move ahead, and what they had.

The *Constitution* editor believed that "once the South had shown itself ready to carry out its platform of liberation and progressive development then . . . northern capital would be seen seeking southern investment." Modern analysis of the economic situation of Grady's South shows that, in actuality, minimal gains had been made. However, in 1885 he continued to declare victories around the region aiming to boost investor confidence and immigration. To Grady, "in so far as Atlanta was concerned, there was no longer a real need of advertising (potential) attractions;"⁴⁸ therefore, he continued to

47 Mitchell B. Garrett, *Horse and Buggy Days on Hatchet Creek* (Tuscaloosa, 1957), 41.

48 Gaston, 71-2.

publish stories similar to his “Self-Made Men” article while boasting of everything progressive in the South and his city, including his newest pet, the Southern League.⁴⁹

49 Terrell, 158-9, Taken from the *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 Aug. 1881, “Self-Made Men.”

Chapter Three:

The Southern League and the *Constitution*: A Progressive Establishment and its Mouthpiece

Professional baseball existed in larger towns and cities across the South before the Southern League's debut. Memphis, New Orleans, Nashville, Atlanta, and some other commercial centers hosted teams for decades, but no overarching body worked to meld these clubs into a cohesive organization prior to the SL. The initial meeting of team representatives proved extremely rocky. During the first forum in Atlanta in January 1885, the league split thanks to a disagreement over Augusta, Georgia's, representation. Two teams from Augusta, the Clinches and the Browns, wanted into the SL, and team representatives failed to agree on which club be admitted. When no resolution surfaced, Atlanta and a few other cities defected to create their own *Southeastern* League led by Henry Grady. The Clinches remained with Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans to compete in the Southern League. Realizing the folly of their dispute, the two leagues reassembled later in February to reach an amicable decision. After a morning of jostling, the associations decided to merge under the original Southern League banner. Teams from Columbus, Birmingham, Macon, Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, and Augusta (only one) filled the standings.⁵⁰

Grady's national reputé and love of the game made him a popular candidate for the league's presidency. Team directors surely understood the importance of giving him authority. As editor of the *Constitution*, he would obviously give the league the favorable

50 *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 Feb. 1885, 22 Feb. 1885.

press it needed for survival. To ensure its popularity, the SL required a large media outlet to provide fans with game reports, scores, transaction listings, and other baseball news. The association risked failure without an devoted mouthpiece. And the relationship offered reciprocal gains. Though Grady's presence benefitted the league, the league also fit nicely into his booster plans.

Grady knew how much print other major presses gave baseball. The popularity of the game assured the sport significant space in any paper. If the people wanted baseball news then they must have it, else they might turn to a competing paper offering more reports. With this in mind, Grady drastically increased the amount of type-space given to national and local ball affairs. His partners at the *Constitution* worried about the excessive writeups; they did not understand why so much valuable room should be given to baseball. Evan P. Howell, editor-in-chief of the paper, "became so alarmed at the size of the *Constitution* bill for baseball news" that he told Grady if "you don't stop it, I'm going to charge it up to you." Without hesitation, Grady shot back, "That's alright. Charge it. I don't care. But I'm going to have the baseball news just the same."⁵¹ Grady also knew that he must include coverage of the entire Southern League, not just the Atlanta team.

During the 1880s, it was expected that any progressive city should field a professional baseball squad. Of equal importance, that team had to be a member of a league. This proved no difficult task in northeastern cities. With two "major" leagues in operation and a third claiming major status, there appeared numerous opportunities for

51 Nixon, 202.

representation. The South's geographic remoteness from those locales prohibited any southern city from joining the established associations. To prove Atlanta's progressive status, it was not enough to write about her team; it was imperative that the squad be part of a larger organization similar to the "major" leagues. Grady probably realized as well that Atlanta's reputation would be further enhanced if it were seen as the controlling center of league operations. His presidency proved beneficial as all SL deliberations took place in Atlanta. Therefore when reading Southern League accounts in the *Constitution* and seeing that all league decision came from Atlanta, it is impossible to escape the impression that it served as the heart of the association.⁵²

Arriving a few years late to the league scene, administrators of the SL looked to the older organizations for guidance. The National League and the American Association offered two models from which the Southern League could borrow. The SL directors selected aspects of each league that best suited their needs. As for the rules of the game, the league decided to adhere to the prescripts of the American Association. This choice, made at the first official conference, played to a more exciting brand of baseball as the AA regularly experimented with more innovative measures. For example, when the AA moved to allow "free pitching," overhand delivery from the mound, the SL quickly adopted the midseason amendment.⁵³

When it came to social standards of the day, though, the Southern League chose to follow the NL's lead. Going along with more Victorian traditions, the SL refused to

52 *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 Feb. 1885 - 15 Sept. 1885.

53 *Ibid*, 1 Feb. 1885.

permit beer sales at contests and barred Sunday games. This decision is logical given the league president's commitment to the New South Creed. Essential to the success of the creed was the extermination of the old stereotype that the South was a backwater dump filled with lazy, rowdy, and uncouth inhabitants. That is why Grady continuously wrote of Atlanta's "Self-Made Men" and its industriously energized population. He wanted to show a refined side of his country, so when it came time for the Southern League to choose a cultural model to follow, it seemed fitting the directors chose baseball's "fortress of Victorian propriety."⁵⁴

Before the start of the first Southern League season, Grady drafted a bold article for the *Constitution* comparing his league to the established circuits. He listed the SL, without a game ever played, as the fourth strongest association in the country. Grady wrote that the National League took the honor of top organization, apparently because its higher ticket prices allowed teams to contract the best players. Behind the NL came the American Association followed by the Eastern League, the most recent "major" program. He wrote that the SL, in its "swaddling clothes," stood at the heels of the Eastern League. The Southern League, according to Grady, promised "to worry some of the older bodies" whose "playing strength is very little if any superior" to its own.⁵⁵ This boosteristic claim, though striking at first glance, does not seem that farfetched when looking at the rosters of SL teams, notably the Atlantas. In his history of the league, Bill

54 Ibid, 1 Feb. 1885 - 15 Sept. 1885.

55 Ibid, 1 March 1885.

O'Neal writes that every position player for the Atlanta squad in 1885, except the first baseman and one outfielder, were "past or future big leaguers."⁵⁶

A group of twelve, led by a three-chaired executive committee, composed the board of directors for the Atlantas in 1885. Following the trend of the day, few of these men claimed elite status in Georgia society. Usually, Benjamin Rader writes, investors "benefitted in direct ways from concession sales or from the location of the park" because "gross receipts . . . were closer to those of the corner saloon." The captains of industry, commerce, and finance typically abstained as "greater financial rewards" lay elsewhere.⁵⁷ The directors quickly assembled a solid team. They immediately hired G.H. Schmelz of Ohio to manage their team. Schmelz gained a respectable reputation for his work managing an American Association team in Columbus, Ohio, until its owners sold the entire roster to Pittsburgh investors. Deferring to his expertise, the Atlanta board allowed Schmelz to recruit prospects and bring a number of his former players along. Schmelz threw out practically the entire 1884 Atlanta line-up, keeping only four members from the Atlantas' previous tour. The team reported on 10 March to start practice and play a series of exhibition games against an assortment of clubs including the Indianapolis' and Louisvilles of the AA.⁵⁸ The Atlanta squad and many other SL clubs teemed with professional experience. Grady made sure to list the rosters and credentials of players in

56 Bill O'Neal, *The Southern League: Baseball in Dixie, 1885-1994* (Austin, 1994), 2.

57 Rader, 29-30.

58 *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 Feb. 1885.

the association to bolster his claim that the SL could compete with anyone. As opening day approached, Southern League teams prepared for the season.

Teams in every SL city made adjustments to their facilities and organizational structures to accommodate league play. In mid-February, Atlanta announced the sale of season tickets to all home games. For ten dollars fans claimed their own seat at the ballpark for the entire season. The directors made this move so they could purchase the services of better players during the preseason, ensuring a high-talent-level for the regular season. The club reserved five hundred seats for season ticket holders, though it is unknown how many purchased these passes. Down the road in Macon, the Sportsman Association hired local contractors to enclose their grounds so they could charge admission to games.⁵⁹ In Atlanta, Athletic Park underwent a few upgrades for the season, and the trolley lines scheduled more stops to the field.

The Atlantas had built Athletic Park, or Peters Park, before the 1884 season. The park sat at the corner of North Avenue and West Peachtree Street on the property of Richard Peters, a railroad, streetcar, and real estate mogul fervently committed to the rise of Atlanta. Today, if you stand at the site of the park you would be a short walking distance from Atlanta landmarks such as the Varsity, the Fox Theatre, Georgia State University, and the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech). According to Royce Shingleton, Peters' biographer, Henry Grady and Richard Peters enjoyed a good relationship because each "undoubtedly realized . . . the distinct role the other was playing in the New South movement." Peters owned four hundred acres of land just

59 Ibid, 17 Feb. 1885, 15 Sept. 1885.

north of the city that he developed into upper-middle class suburbs. Grady's home was in this neighborhood. Peters and his business partner, George W. Adair, owned the Atlanta Streetcar Company; once development got underway, they ran trolleys to and from Peters' valuable holdings. Peters saw the monetary benefits of building a ballpark on his land. It would immediately raise property values while he stood to make a killing off trolley fares. So the park got a few renovations, and "business boomed on the Peachtree line during baseball season."⁶⁰

Most Southern League teams assembled in early March to start practicing for the upcoming season. The Atlantas negotiated a deal with the Louisvilles of the AA to use their Athletic Park facilities for pre-season practice in mid-March. Because cold Kentucky weather prevented workouts, the Louisville squad traveled to Atlanta to begin spring training. The teams split time on the grounds, and before the major league club returned home the squads faced off in a series of six exhibition games. Much excitement swirled around the events because they offered SL followers a chance to gauge their boys against top notch opponents. The Atlantas held their own, beating the Louisvilles once and tying them in another game. Though the Kentucky team took four matches, they struggled to distance themselves, winning three by a single run. Other teams passed through during March for scrimmages; Grady wrote extensive reports of each game. If the Atlantas proved victorious, he heaped praise on their accomplishments. If they lost, he applauded their efforts while pointing to the strengths of their performance rather than

60 Royce Shingleton, *Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Macon, 1985), 180-1.

their shortcomings. Preseason *Constitution* coverage of the Atlantas assured readers that the squad was as good as any and that league play would provide sturdy competition. The overwhelming support given to the squad proves that local subscribers bought into these stories.⁶¹

The Southern League season began on 15 April. A good crowd followed the Atlantas to Augusta to watch the match between old foes. The Atlanta squad proved odds-makers right when they thoroughly routed the home team 10 to 1. The *Constitution* squealed with delight the next day, reporting that the game's outcome gave proof that the Atlanta boys would contest strongly for the pennant. The paper included scores and summaries of every other league contest, noting the talent of each squad and the great masses in attendance. The success of each match gave credence to the notion that the season of 1885 would be one to remember.⁶²

The Southern League campaign gave *Constitution* readers plenty of news to talk about, and the paper covered every game and every notable story. The first league story of importance surfaced when a few teams complained that the umpiring system of the SL was unfair. The complaint was a common one, but by the end of the first month of league play, the Macon club charged Henry Grady with conspiracy to have games thrown in favor of the Atlantas. This was a serious allegation, and Grady acted quickly to fix the situation. Southern League officials assembled in Atlanta and agreed to hire a set of trustworthy, non-biased umpires to call all league-sanctioned matches. Grady required

61 *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 March 1885 - 12 April 1885.

62 *Ibid*, 16 April 1885.

three things of these men. First, they had to have good references. Second, they had to gain the approval of all teams. And third, they had to have the ability to withstand corruptible influences. The new system did not end complaints about miscalls, but it brought a swift end to the conspiracy allegations brought upon Grady. The *Constitution* portrayed the matter as a simple misunderstanding which league officials remedied without problem. Grady did not want the full nastiness and angry tone of the dilemma to reach a national audience. Though, as a journalist, professional ethics bound him to report the story, he knew the stark flavor of the developments might tarnish the SL's reputation. Therefore, he wrote of the events as a gentleman's disagreement, which ended amicably.

63

The next big story to effect the league was the adoption of a new pitching style. Following the lead of the American Association, the SL decided in early May to allow "free pitching." With the new ruling, pitchers had the freedom to deliver the ball in any way they pleased so long as they remained in the "pitchers box." Up to this time pitchers were required to release the ball underhanded in a way similar to modern fast-pitch softball. Soon after "free pitching" became legal, most players began experimenting with an overhand delivery like we see today. The style gained much press because many people figured it would make it harder for batters to get hits. Hits and runs have always attracted people to games because they add excitement. Though some followers could appreciate a pitchers duel and a low-scoring, defensive battle, some fans seemed worried

63 Grady's alleged role in the umpiring scandal, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 16 May 1885 and Atlanta *Constitution*, 13-16 May 1885; remedy to the dilemma, *ibid*, 24 May 1885.

that the new rule would make the sport a bore to watch. To the contrary of these concerns the *Constitution* advertised that “free pitching” would take the game to new heights. Always eyeing progressive measures and showing his commitment to moving ahead, Grady and league organizers adopted the measure and promised that the new ruling would make for more exciting baseball.⁶⁴

As the year progressed clubs tried to better their records by purchasing players from other teams. The largest trade in the SL’s first season took place in Memphis in early July. The Memphis nine enjoyed few successes in the opening months of the year and hovered constantly between sixth and seventh place. Also, the team had been in trouble for supposedly selling alcohol in the stands, a desperate ploy to boost fan interest. The team board of directors released almost every player from the original roster to Kansas City in late June. In return they received most of the Kansas City line-up. Additionally they picked up two players from St. Louis and another pair from Milwaukee. In their first game in Southern League action the new Memphis roster obliterated Macon, 10 to 1. The *Constitution* concluded that the boys from Memphis “will work their way to the front rank in the race for the pennant.” Though they failed to challenge for the championship, the new team played better ball to the end of the season.⁶⁵

The last major headline of the inaugural year, besides the collapse of the Birmingham and Columbus clubs, was the death of the Atlanta player, Louis Henke. During a game against Nashville on August 15, he collided with the opposing first-

64 “Free pitching,” *ibid*, 29 May 1885.

65 Memphis trade, *ibid*, 2 July 1885.

baseman. After hitting a pitch to the third-base side of the infield he sprinted to beat out the shortstop's throw to first. The Nashville first-baseman dropped the throw, and when he lunged to grab the ball Henke rammed solidly into him. The autopsy showed that Henke died of internal bleeding from the kidney. Across the league, teams donated the proceeds from their next games to the Henke family and Henry Grady appealed for public contributions. Grady gave much space to Henke's remembrance over the next few days, often giving himself an additional bit of good publicity for his efforts in aiding the deceased player's wife and children.⁶⁶

Grady covered all these events and more, putting a favorable spin on them all. Even when there was a lack of interesting baseball news, Grady used the sports columns to further Atlanta's reputation. About midway through the season, Grady began taking advantage of the baseball page in a new way. Knowing that his paper's circulation extended far beyond the borders of the South and that baseball scores received much attention, he began placing blatant booster articles next to game reports. This can be seen with great regularity in the weekly editions because their circulation numbers were the highest and most geographically expansive. Such placements were also incorporated in daily editions, but with less frequency. For instance, the 12 July paper includes the article "Why Atlanta Continues To Grow" right next to Grady's summary of Saturday's games. The author of the article lauds the "steady improvements" of the city, its "manufacturies and new industries," the "vast number of intelligent and worthy employees," and the "elegant architecture" that "charms the eye." This article placement shows that Grady

66 Death of Louis Henke, *ibid*, 16-18 August 1885.

understood the popularity of the sports page and how baseball could be used in a variety of ways to further his booster efforts. *Constitution* readers, thus, got two shots of boosterism on one page. They saw the Southern League as a specific example of how the South kept up with every desirable amenity and then read a general report on the basic attributes that pushed Atlanta ahead.⁶⁷

When the inaugural Southern League season drew to a close, Atlanta claimed the top spot in the standings followed closely by Augusta and Nashville. Two teams, Birmingham and Columbus, failed to complete the season, but representatives from each team said they wanted to compete again in 1886. Today, if a league of eight teams finished a year with only six clubs remaining it would be judged an utter failure. In 1885, however, and according to Henry Grady, it was a success. It was an achievement because the circuit completed its first season, and also because the play of some teams, and the league in general, earned the attention of national followers of the game. The best testament to the quality of play is the fact that teams from the “major” leagues regularly stole talent from the ranks of the SL to better their own fortunes. Outsiders recognized that high-quality baseball did exist below the Mason-Dixon line. The association survived and more cities wanted in for the next season. Grady reminded his readers how great an accomplishment the Southern League was and assured them that the following season would be even better.

67 Ibid, 12 July 1885.

Chapter Four:

Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta:

Comparing the SL Coverage of the *Banner* and the *Daily Times* to the *Constitution*

Like Grady, team organizers in all the other Southern League cities used baseball as a form of boosterism. These men understood the growing popularity of the sport and moved quickly to have their towns represented in the newly formed league. The financial backers of these clubs were of the same ilk as Atlanta investors, all looking to make a solid return on their contributions. But, when reading the league writeups in the newspapers of other SL cities it becomes evident that one fundamental difference separated the Atlanta endeavor from its sister Southern League towns: Henry Grady. His understanding of the mainstream American pulse, his commitment to the New South Creed, his role as league president, and his position at the *Constitution* enabled him to plug the SL into a broader national context for a larger audience. To give them added significance, he related the feats of the Atlantas and the progress of the league to general trends outside the region.

Other papers, namely the Chattanooga *Daily Times* and the Nashville *Banner*, reported on their teams and the league in a vacuum. These papers spoke more critically of their representative squads and the events of the 1885 season. Unlike the *Constitution*, these presses had a strictly local audience and therefore related league doings in a more limited scope. After studying these regional papers two things are apparent. First, Grady had a tendency to omit and downplay many negative stories of the league, or at least relegate these reports to the margins. Second, though writers in Nashville and

Chattanooga promoted baseball, these newspapermen lacked either the vision or the means to write of their programs as anything but regional entities.

In 1885, Chattanooga, Tennessee, was a growing town with a population of about 25,000.⁶⁸ The economy revolved around the railroads because the city operated as the largest regional rail hub between Atlanta and Richmond. The newspaper, the *Daily Times*, was a very locally oriented press concerned primarily with politics, railroad news, and any notable gossip from around the area. The front page of the paper, both weeklies and dailies, caught readers up on national events and random international headlines. The remaining bulk of the paper focused on Chattanooga-specific stories and advertisements. The *Daily Times* of 1885 is a perfect example of a regional paper from a town trying to service regional needs.

Professional baseball was no new thing to Chattanoogaans when the Southern League began its inaugural campaign, though excitement ran high through the city with the prospect of more competitive play. The professional team had played at the same park, Stanton Field, for a few years, hosting teams from around the South.⁶⁹ Occasionally the Chattanoogaes, another imaginative team name, played games against major league squads in early Spring when the northern teams toured the warmer South in preparation for their upcoming season. Baseball fans in Chattanooga knew what good baseball looked like and expected nothing less from Southern League action.

68 Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 24 May 1885.

69 O'Neal, 5.

The *Daily Times* devoted daily space to baseball news. However, fans had to search the newspaper for writeups during the preseason and early regular season because editors never placed articles in the same spot. On a Tuesday the game recap might be a full column long on the second page, but the next day it could be but a brief paragraph hidden among the backpage advertisements. The editing staff surely realized their subscribers wanted sports reports, but it appears that they did not make a decision where the stories should be located until a month into the season. Even when the Chattanoogaogs secured a consistent place in the paper, they never received the same type space. Throughout the season, if the team fared well on the field their wins translated into lengthy coverage. If they struggled, which often was the case, their games received less attention. But lost games does not mean Chattanoogaogs did not hear much about their team. The ball club created enough noise outside the box score to keep the attention of the *Daily Times*.⁷⁰

Baseball fans in Chattanooga eagerly anticipated the start of the first SL season. The team played a series of well-contested exhibition games in March against some big league nines and many felt that their pitching rotation of Bill Hart, a much heralded 19-year-old rookie, and newly acquired Toad Ramsey from Indianapolis would provide a solid nucleus for the year.⁷¹ These hopes were quickly dashed, though, because the Chattanoogaogs began the season with a series of poor performances on the road, and their

70 For examples of haphazard coverage, see weekly Chattanooga *Daily Times*, March 1885 - April 1885. For structured coverage, see weekly Chattanooga *Daily Times*, May 1885 - September 1885.

71 For a brief bio of Bill Hart, see O'Neal, 3. Bill Ramsey acquisition, see Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 28 March 1885.

star pitcher Ramsey, sometimes disappearing for days, left the young Hart to pitch three or four games in a row.⁷²

The sportswriters at the paper and the players on the field soon began pinning the team's woeful record on Southern League umpires. In an April game at Macon, Georgia, the Chattanooga squad walked off the diamond in protest to an "unjust decision" rendered by the umpire. The SL fined the Chattanooga \$65 for their misconduct and ordered them back to the field for the following day's game.⁷³ This action by the league commissioners, though followed by the team, did not squash complaints of umpire miscalls. And as the season progressed, umpiring dilemmas plagued Southern League operations. The grumblings were not just a Chattanooga phenomenon. Team officials from most cities blamed crooked umpires for their team's misfortunes. Even Henry Grady's diplomatic attempts to calm the situation failed as some opposing team representatives claimed he played a role in the scandals.⁷⁴

It is much easier to point fingers and blame an external force for bad play rather than coming to grips with one's own shortcomings. In athletics, players often look to referees and umpires as a reason for their unsatisfying performances. Throughout the early days of the Southern League this truth held constant. Umpire protests filled the columns of local papers during the first part of the 1885 season. The SL umpiring system did not help the situation because local residents served as umpires for their hometown.

72 O'Neal, 3.

73 Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 18 April 1885.

74 For examples of umpire blame, see *ibid* and Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 26 July 1885. For Grady's supposed involvement, see Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 16 May 1885.

So when the Chattanoogaogs played a game in, say, Birmingham, the man calling balls and strikes could possibly be the next-door-neighbor of the Birmingham manager. League officials approved of this policy in the preseason because it seemed the easiest to implement since most of the rulesmen had been calling games in their respective cities for years. But when visiting squads began feeling routinely slighted by these officials the cry came out that umpires regularly rendered unfair decisions on behalf of their fellow residents. Team representatives claimed that it was nearly impossible to win in certain cities because of the local sentiment driving umpire rulings.⁷⁵

The most vocal opponents to the umpiring system were the players and owners of the Macon club. In mid-May that organization went beyond merely complaining of home-cooked calls and charged league officials with corruption. They argued that Atlanta umpires threw games for the home team and that Grady used his influence in the city and league to get the scores he wanted. The Macon representatives claimed that Grady refused to objectively stand by as league head, becoming fraudulently involved in bettering the Atlantas record. The charge came just a couple days after Macon departed Atlanta after a three-game set. The Macon squad came into Atlanta jockeying for first place. As their train pulled out of town just a few days later, they left behind any claim to league superiority. The Atlantas completely crushed them with consecutive solid victories and never relinquished their command of the standings. The Macons returned home with

75 Examples can be found in the Chattanooga *Daily Times* weekly editions, 18 April - 26 July 1885.

their pride damaged yet thoroughly convinced that their games in Atlanta had been stolen from them, not fairly won.⁷⁶

The Macon charges threatened to damage the validity of Southern League operations. Not only that, they stood to possibly hurt Grady's reputation as an impartial president. Complaints about miscalls were one thing; if a club felt it had been slighted, well, just wait, they would get to return home soon to enjoy some favorable calls. Things tended to even out under that system. But an allegation of conspiracy and fraud was a horse of a different color. Grady realized the severity of the situation and moved quickly to relieve the problem. Earlier in the month, when Macon and some other teams began complaining of repeated miscalls, the board of league directors met in Atlanta to discuss the issue. They decided to hire four qualified umpires and delegate them to a couple of cities each. This satisfied most of the clubs, but not Macon. The Macon organization wanted the men hired immediately, but league officials and other team representatives felt no hurry, deciding to wait until each team had the chance to play an equal number of home games under the current system. Macon saw this as a direct threat and when Atlanta, who played no home games until 9 May, routed them at Athletic Park to claim top spot in the SL, Macon cried foul play. They saw Grady's decision a week earlier as a ploy to ensure the Atlanta a successful home debut. Perhaps it was, but now the cat was out of the bag and Grady needed a quick fix.⁷⁷

76 Account of the Macon charges, *Chattanooga Daily Times*, 16 May 1885; league standings before and after Macon's visit to Atlanta, *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 - 13 May 1885.

77 The SL's decision to change the umpire system, *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 May 1885.

A few days later the Southern League selected its new umpires. The league moved speedily and chose four officials known for their fairness and noted for their expertise of the game. Two of the men hired claimed no attachment to any SL town and therefore could not be charged with holding biases. Albert Jennings and B.F. Young came to association from the Northwestern League, which was comprised of teams mainly from Ohio and Pennsylvania. The other two, Edward Cartwright and J.B. McCue, gained their positions at the recommendation of a few SL teams, each citing the men's history of even calls and impressive knowledge of game rules. Southern League officials wanted these new selections to acquire the approval of each club while subduing the popular notion that umpires were crooked and easily influenced. To limit any chance of bribery, the new recruits never knew what game they were to call until they received a telegram from league headquarters, and team presidents and managers were encouraged to write the SL regarding the "efficiency, fairness, and firmness" of the new umpires. The charges of umpiring scandal ceased for the rest of the year, but teams continued to blame them occasionally for on-the-field-problems. Even when the Chattanooga found themselves without hope of ever challenging for the pennant, a random article would appear in the *Daily Times* claiming the officials cost them a game.⁷⁸

The way the *Constitution* handled the situation varied from how the smaller local presses approached it. The Macon paper, the *American*, included scathing articles about the abuses of the umpires, which revealed the obvious anger the team felt towards the misjudgements and those who upheld those decisions. The *Daily Times* reported on the

78 *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 May 1885.

scenario in a more dispassionate tone, though they held significant ground in the heated contest. The writers in Chattanooga did not agree with Macon on the issue of outright fraud, but refused to engage with the same ferocity. They simply relayed the story to their readers and urged them to “avoid” side-choosing until the problem had been resolved. Though the Chattanooga press held the argument at an arms distance, they informed subscribers of the events.⁷⁹

In Atlanta, the *Constitution* spoke little of the allegations, instead treating them as a misunderstanding and focusing on the peaceful conclusion of the story. Grady knew that his paper claimed a more expansive readership than any other southern newspaper. The *Constitution*’s position on the umpiring scandal was the version the rest of the country would read. Only Macon residents read the *American* while only those in the immediate vicinity of Chattanooga read the *Daily Times*. So the *Constitution* included but a brief blurb about Grady’s alleged role in the events and focused more on his position as mediator in the process of selecting a new umpire program. Thus, the Atlanta paper held that the whole thing was just a small problem that the board of directors solved without incident. The young but mighty Southern League could not be hampered by such trivial matter. At least that is what *Constitution* readers got of the deal.⁸⁰

Even before umpiring matter escalated in May, the Chattanooga needed another scapegoat for their miserable play. Scandalous officials alone could not explain their problems. By late April, only a few weeks into the season, the team found itself

79 Chattanooga and Macon reports on umpiring, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 16 May 1885

80 Atlanta’s take on umpires, Atlanta *Constitution*, 3 May 1885 and 24 May 1885.

struggling to stay out of last place in the standings with a horrible .167 winning percentage.⁸¹ The *Daily Times* said that if they “don’t win some more games . . . they may expect to see something drop.” This passage is very ambiguous in that readers were not told *what* might “drop.” This riddle was solved in the following day’s edition. On 26 April, the *Daily Times* reported that the Chattanooga released their manager of one month. The organization pinned the clubs woes on skipper, Frank Monroe. The coach took the heat for his teams inconsistent play and its “disgust(ing) . . . constant defeats.” Also thrown in the mix was the report that three of the Chattanooga intentionally threw games in hopes that their losses might lead the organization to release them so they could play for other teams offering more money. Soon thereafter, an article stated that “positive evidence” surfaced that the shortstop, left-fielder, and first-baseman had, indeed, deliberately been playing badly so management would let them go. Team officials threatened that the players indicted would be blacklisted, a measure taken to make a player contractually ineligible to play for another team, if their performance did not get better. Apparently the players played sufficiently well afterwards because they remained in the boxscores. However, this could not change the outcomes of the games. The interim manager expected the Chattanooga to make a push for the pennant, as well as the new coach when he arrived, but the team continued its lousy play.⁸²

The summer months continued to offer baseball fans with plenty events to keep their interest. The *Daily Times* reported that the Memphis organization sold beer and

81 *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 April 1885.

82 April events, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 25-29 April 1885.

whiskey in the stands and that fans treated opposing teams with the most disagreeable brand of “hospitality.” The curses hurled at players by the drunken crowds drove SL teams, namely Columbus, to suggest the team be expelled for their misbehavior and violation of league standards. A few wanted Savannah to replace Memphis in the association. League officials denied this request, instead issuing a warning to the Memphis board of directors. Also, the Chattanooga took a series from their chief rivals in Nashville. This created quite a surge of fan support for the flailing club since many in Chattanooga took exception to the Nashville Americans insistence that the Chattanoogaes were just a group of “amateurs.” People resented this statement and felt that it included some civic snobbery from the capitol city. Though the Chattanooga squad remained in a distant fifth place, more sizeable crowds turned out for the next few games hoping the team could put a run together for the championship. This enthusiasm soon died out and the paper began citing losses to “hard luck.” As more defeats mounted, “hard luck” switched to “lazy” performances. Then, in early July, the team threatened “mutiny.” Many of the players wanted to be released and said that they would rather quit playing than continue on with the Chattanoogaes. Team directors warned that any mutinous player would be blacklisted; this inspired the troublesome culprits to continue playing despite a wretched .454 winning mark. And so off-the-field problems, minute successes, and general SL news continued to give baseball followers in Chattanooga something to talk about.⁸³

83 Memphis allegations, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 6 June 1885; beating Nashville, *ibid*, 31 May 1885; mutiny, *ibid*, 5 July 1885.

The heat of July brought severe fan apathy in Chattanooga along with a panic that the organization might fold. On 12 July, a column in the paper urged the city to give “proper encouragement” to the team. The writer believed that with more support the Chattanoogaogs would begin an exciting winning streak; he assured “better playing.” Perhaps the guy was unfamiliar with the idea that winning teams produce loyal fanbases. No one wants to sit in the scorching July sun, dripping sweat through their clothes to see a struggling squad put forth “lazy” efforts. The lackluster season continued on with smaller crowds filing into the stands. Three weeks later the club found itself on the brink of collapse as investors sought buyers to take the floundering team off their hands. Team officials complained that the “lack of public spirit” made it near impossible to underwrite expenses like travel, grounds maintenance, and player salaries. With a promise to drastically cut spending the team found enough last-minute local backers to stumble to the season’s finish. A few weeks later the Chattanoogaogs squeaked out an upset victory against the frontrunning Atlantas. The improbable win resulted in a temporary spike in gate receipts, enough to alleviate financial worries for a few weeks. The *Daily Times* praised the businessmen who saved the team from ruin as a testament to what local pride can accomplish. Once again, though, the team resumed their mediocre performances and completed the season in a lowly seventh place.⁸⁴

Financial straits pushed the team’s board of directors to start selling off the best players on the roster during the last month of the season. The biggest sale took place on

84 Fan apathy and threatened collapse/recovery, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 12 July - 8 August 1885.

August 29. The Louisvilles of the American Association spent the last of their schedule in a sloppy state similar to the Chattanooga. The *Courier-Journal* included harsh articles about the team. According to Watterson's press, the team had "lost their nerve" and continuously "prove(d) their inability to win anything" in their "march towards the bottom." The club needed a spark and believed that Chattanooga's Toad Ramsey might supply it. A team representative rode from Louisville to Chattanooga to propose the acquisition. The *Courier-Journal* kept a close eye on SL developments and randomly published its standings and scores of interest. Louisville officials knew full well about the miserable play and fiscal problems in Chattanooga and felt confident that they could gain the contract rights to Ramsey without much problem. They were right. Team directors quickly managed the sale of the star hurler and Ramsey immediately reported to Louisville. He made his AA debut just a week after the deal, giving a pleasant surprise to the owners of his new team. Pitching against the league-leading St Louis club, Ramsey gave up just three hits and one earned run. His supporting cast blew the game, though, by committing six errors. The paper praised his efforts in his first game against "a real base ball club."⁸⁵

The *Daily Time's* coverage of the inaugural season of Southern League baseball says much about the city's place in post-Reconstruction South. The Chattanooga's first run in the SL was no success except for the fact that they finished the schedule. Their year began with high expectations and hopes for a pennant; it ended with folks wondering

85 Ramsey, Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 30 August 1885 and Louisville *Courier-Journal*, 6 September 1885.

about the chances for another season. Through it all, the *Daily Times* reported events and encouraged locals to turn out and support the team. The paper candidly informed its readers about league news and team developments. When the club played “lazy” ball, the columns warned of consequences. When the squad triumphed, the paper celebrated with them. The *Daily Times* told the surrounding region about the Chattanooga and their place in the SL while trying to use them as a source of local pride. If the boys faltered on the field sportswriter pushed harder for more “public spirit” and “proper encouragement.” Throughout the collapse scare, the paper told Chattanoogaans that if the team went under it should be “mortifying to our city” and would put them “under the ban of a lack of public spirit.”⁸⁶ The editors knew that for the city of Chattanooga to keep pace among its regional brethren, endeavors like the Chattanooga needed to be successful, in that they were not abandoned. A failing team reflected a weak civic commitment to local projects, and nothing could be more damning to the reputation of a growing city in the late nineteenth-century South. But knowing that the readership of the *Daily Times* was localized, the editors felt no fear in printing truthful articles, warts and all. Writers had free reign to hold the population accountable to the team. Also, the problems in other SL towns were written about to make Chattanoogaans feel they were better off. Comparing the rowdies in Memphis to their own virtuous fans served to enhance civic self-image. So the *Daily Times* saw and wrote of the Chattanooga as what they really were in 1885: a regional entity that held promising potential to be used as a booster element. For this potential to

86 Chattanooga *Daily Times*, 2 August 1885.

be realized though, the city and team would need to make future adjustments. The 1885 season, in regards to the New South Creed, was a bust.

If by 1885 the New South Creed had moved past its urging of southerners to join with more modern trends and unite behind progressive entities, the *Daily Times* coverage of baseball shows that Chattanooga editors lagged behind. Whereas Henry Grady continually bragged about team and league accomplishments, the *Daily Times* plead with readers to get on board, stay on board, and to *please* get back on board. This then raises the question: Did the updated New South Creed move along evenly in all respects? Surely Paul Gaston is correct that there was a dramatic general shift in booster tactics throughout the 1880s. But when looking at how the *Daily Times* handled the Southern League venture and Chattanooga's role in it, it is plain to see that they operated from an older model. They were aware of Chattanooga's fragile position, and though desirous to gain a better footing, they did not sing a "Look what we've done!" song about baseball. They could not until the project showed at least the smallest twinkle of success. For another example of baseball and boosterism, let us look to the Nashville *Banner* and its following of the inaugural season.

Throughout the 1885 season the *Banner* gave growing space to baseball news. The paper served local and state interests with most columns dedicated to railroad and legislation stories. A few national and world headlines sprinkled the pages, but only enough to let Nashvillians know that their city did not exist in a complete vacuum. In March 5,100 people subscribed to the daily editions of the *Banner*, and its Saturday editions reached a couple hundred more; there was no Sunday weekly. The circulation of

the *Constitution* dwarfed these numbers, but the two papers aimed at two different goals. Henry Grady wanted his press to be a national standard while *Banner* editors seemed content to claim more readers than any other paper in Nashville. The mission of each newspaper is reflected in its coverage of the Southern League.⁸⁷

The first baseball article in the 1885 *Banner* appeared in early April. The aim of this column was to convince readers that the sport enjoyed a better national reputation than it had in the past, and it cited the spread of the sport's popularity to other countries like Cuba and Canada. The author of the article claimed that the heightened respectability of the game was due in large part to the "gentlemen of influence" who had taken over the management of the most prominent leagues. The result was that the game inherited the honorable "merits" of these men. A few weeks later the *Banner* reported the events of an exhibition game between the Americans, the Nashville team, and the touring Chicago of the National League. In the article the sportswriter goes at length to note the large number of "ladies present" at the park. He uses this observation as a tactic to suggest that the sport could now be witnessed by the fairer sex. It was no longer a pastime reserved for the roughnecks of the working class; everyone could enjoy a ball game.⁸⁸

During the early part of the season the *Banner*, like the *Daily Times*, could not quite figure out where baseball needed to be placed. Weekday editions included a column entitled "Diamond Dots," a random series of baseball blurbs lacking any continuity. For example, the 14 April column begins with "Crawley is playing left fielder for the

87 Circulation numbers, Nashville *Banner*, 10 March 1885.

88 Improved morality, *ibid*, 4 April 1885; ladies at game, *ibid*, 11 April 1885.

Buffaloes,” then it goes right into “Louis and Jimmie Say have been engaged for the Omahas.” After this abrupt start the score of the Chattanooga exhibition is quoted, and a few lines down they can finally find the score of the Americans scrimmage in Montgomery. Three days later the SL standings make their first appearance in the paper, but it is the only space given to baseball. The editors claim that: “for your convenience we publish the following table (standings) . . . day to day as the season progresses,” but they did not follow through on this promise. The standings only appear sporadically. Later in the month a recap of the American’s game in Memphis is given but a brief, two-sentence paragraph while the rest of the sportswriting is devoted to horse-racing. Like the Chattanooga editors, the *Banner* editors did not know where to put baseball, how to write of it, or when to give it print in the early season. Subscribers only got random scores and small articles making marginal claims like, the “Southern League contest becomes daily more interesting.” Given this evidence it is hard to tell what the powers at the *Banner* thought of the Americans and the SL.⁸⁹

Finally in early July it appears that baseball earned enough respect to get more attention. The Independence Day edition of the *Banner* includes a rundown of the previous week’s games and the current state of each team in the league. It also gives an account of the American’s most recent contest against Columbus and offers a preview of that afternoon’s matchup. From that day forward baseball received, at minimum, a half-column of writing in the Saturday editions and every game was assured at least a brief

89 “Diamond Dots,” *ibid*, 14 April 1885; first SL standings, *ibid*, 17 April 1885; horse racing, *ibid*, 21 April 1885.

summary in the weekday papers. Still though, the placement of the coverage was haphazard. The editors ensured the sport recognition, but fans had to thumb through the pages to find write-ups of the American's successful campaign.

The *Banner* shared a few similarities with the *Daily Times*. Both were local papers, neither could immediately decide what to do with the national pastime, and both spoke freely of their squad's performance on the field. The Chattanooga press routinely challenged their team and reported openly of internal problems like mutinous players. A similar state existed early on in Nashville. A mid-July article about a disappointing exhibition with the Louisvilles of the AA reveals the openness of the press. The paper referred to the game with "universal dissatisfaction," and the *Banner* warned that if there were any more contest "like that . . . exhibition games in this city will be at an end." The match took place at Sulphur Springs Park, where all American games were played. It was billed to be great contest and an estimated 4,000 fans showed up to watch the teams "cross bats." Apparently the Louisvilles did not want to risk injuring any of their star players in a non-league match, so they sent out their second squad. Upon learning this, the Americans resolved to do the same and decided to give their most inexperienced players some practice. According to the *Banner*, it was the worst game of the year and many fans decided to leave early on account of the sad play. The Louisvilles beat them badly, 10 to 1. Compounding the negative situation was the fact that to get the best seats in the shade, the organization charged an extra ten cents without warning. The article closed with the

threat that if any more stunts were pulled like those during the exhibition, the team would find itself playing in front of an “empty array of seats.”⁹⁰

Nashvillians forgave the team for the exhibition debacle and the 1885 baseball calendar ended with the Americans finishing in a respectable third place behind Atlanta and Augusta. They rewarded a solid fan turnout with a .632 winning percentage and a heated run for the pennant in the closing month of the schedule. The *Banner* increased coverage of the team’s fortunes halfway through the season, fueling the capitol city’s hunger for baseball news.

Looking at the way Nashville editors approached the American’s first Southern League stint, it seems they shared journalistic elements with both the *Daily Times* and the *Constitution*. Similar to the Chattanooga paper, the *Banner* was lost early on as to how the game should be treated. Like the *Daily Times* though, Nashville writers figured out how to incorporate baseball later in the season. Also like the *Daily Times*, the *Banner* often spoke critically of the club. But unlike the Chattanooga press, the *Banner* never really encouraged the population to get out and support the team. This points to two things. First, it reinforces the fact that a good team will attract constant fan support. This was a truth all-too-familiar to the 1885 Chattanooga. Second, it reflects a different civic attitude in Nashville towards the club than was felt in Chattanooga. The *Daily Times* pushed Chattanooga to support the organization because if it failed the city might look bad to outside observers. In Nashville however, the citizenry, as shown by the threat of

90 Ibid, 18 July 1885.

“an empty array of seats,” saw the Americans as a program that needed to earn and keep their patronage. This variation illuminates each city’s self-image.

The prevailing Nashville attitude toward baseball, as demonstrated through *Banner* writing, shows that perhaps the town was more at ease with its position as a regional power in the New South. The *Banner* reflects a more self-assured feeling. In Chattanooga the story was different. The *Daily Times* warned readers that if the team failed it would be noted and influential outsiders might think less fondly of their town and its commitment to civic projects. This worrying suggests that many in Chattanooga were desperately willing to latch on to any new progressive establishment. It must be noted that in 1885 the Southern League had yet to prove itself as a successful institution. Nashville seemed willing to wait and see if it were worth jumping on the bandwagon for, while Chattanooga grabbed it tightly, hoping it might serve as another step towards gaining a better standing in the region.

Later in the season *Banner* writing assumed a flavor similar to the prose of the *Constitution*. When the Americans proved their ability to compete in the league, and the SL convinced skeptics that it was a respectable association, *Banner* columns quickly took to bragging of the city’s involvement in the league and their team’s prowess. This style of writing is much like Grady’s work in Atlanta, and fits into the updated version of the New South Creed. The articles in the Chattanooga *Daily Times* used New South Creed methods of a decade past, but in Nashville, once editors figured out what to do with

baseball, *Banner* authorities sang a tune similar to Grady's. It just took them a while to buy into the hype.⁹¹

91 Bragging articles, *ibid*, August-September 1885.

Conclusion:

Considering the miserable success rates for professional baseball associations in the late nineteenth century, the inaugural season of the Southern League was quite an accomplishment. Teams enjoyed remarkable fan followings and, in turn, spectators witnessed talented players while fueling intense rivalries. Competition among southern cities for national and international recognition as regional pacesetters gave birth to the rivalries. Benjamin Rader's general assessment is dead on that booster elements played a major role in the spread of baseball fever. In the post-reconstruction South, city residents knew that the success of their home rested with its reputation. A winning first-rate baseball club in a prominent league could enhance that reputation in the closing decades of the 1800s.

With that understanding Henry Grady and a group of like-minded boosters organized the Southern League in 1885. These men sought to project an image of their respective locales as progressive centers complete with every fashionable amenity. Riding the crest of baseball's popular wave, they created the first professional baseball circuit south of the nation's capital. The cities bragged on their teams and eyed each other jealously. It took cooperation to build the baseball alliance, but motives were self-serving.

Like the other boosters, Grady moved to capitalize on the league. But unlike the others, he had an outlet that spoke to the masses outside the region. His association with the *Constitution* provided him a way to promote the Atlantas beyond comparison to his SL brethren. Recognizing the influential position he claimed, Grady ceaselessly heaped

praise on his home team. Since Atlanta's fate occupied his mind, he always focused on the Atlanta squad. Second in importance, he realized the significance of showing his team in a premier league. So whenever he had the chance, he wrote of the fine caliber of competition throughout the association.

The writing in the Chattanooga and Nashville papers show that the 1885 Southern League season meant different things to different locales. In Atlanta, Grady used the league in *Constitution* to show the country that his city was ready and, indeed, already competing in the American mainstream. The editors of the *Banner* were hesitant to commit completely to the SL until it was convinced of the league's quality and the team's place in it. Already sure of Nashville's prominent place in the region, the press chose to wait until the Southern League proved its value. The *Daily Times* showed that Chattanooga needed the league. Hoping to attract investment, the growing town wanted to show itself as a progressive city that could accommodate and nurture large projects. Editors at the paper saw the SL and the local team as an outlet to display this quality. When the team nearly collapsed, many in Chattanooga worried it might give an unfavorable impression. Everyone viewed the Southern League through a booster lens, but used it differently to accommodate their respective needs.

Today the Southern League is in its 121st year of operation. Though the league has experienced numerous changes, two fundamental characteristics still remain. First, many of the best players in Major League Baseball have passed through SL cities on their way up to the "big show." The league has become the training ground for elite professional performers. Modern baseball would not be the same without Southern League trained

players like Reggie Jackson, Tom Seaver, Cal Ripken, Jr., and Alex Rodriguez. Even Michael Jordan played a short stint in Birmingham. And second, just like they did in its inaugural year, boosters continue to use the league to better their fortunes and the reputation of their cities. Two perfect examples are the Chattanooga Lookouts and the Tennessee Smokies.

The Lookout's new BellSouth Park, completed in 2000, has served as a cornerstone to the downtown rehabilitation process in Chattanooga. For six months every year, baseball fans flock to the stadium, then file out after nine innings to local restaurants and attractions. Baseball has made a noticeable boom in the downtown economy, raising property values and increasing revenue across the board. In Sevier County, Tennessee, the story is very similar. The Smokies, like the Lookouts, got a new stadium in 2000. County executives welcomed the team move from Knox County with open arms. A minor league baseball organization added to the impressive list of attractions the tourist-minded area already boasted. Team owners, who also own Pilot Oil, were also pleased with the move. They purchased a plot of land just off Interstate 40, roughly 20 miles outside Knoxville, for the site of Smokies Stadium. Local officials, who wanted the team badly, offered the property for a reasonable price and worked quickly with team management to get the facilities built speedily. In front of the ballpark, on a tract bought in the same deal with the stadium land, a brand new gas station was built. And so, initially, everyone got what they wanted. Team owners lined their pockets off impressive ticket receipts and rising gas prices, while area boosters gained one more amenity to brag about. So in the twenty-first century, as in the late nineteenth, baseball and boosterism go hand-in-hand.

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