

# RICKWOOD TALES

## Rickwood Calendar 12/6/19 to 3/11/20:

- **Dec. 14:** Crimson Tide Memorabilia Auction, Rickwood Field, 9:00-11:00 a.m. <https://rickwood.com/events/the-alabama-football-memorabilia-auction/>
- **Jan. 25:** National SABR Day lunch, Jim 'N Nicks in Homewood, 12:00 p.m.
- **Jan. 31:** ABF Lead-off Dinner with Andruw Jones, *The Club*, 6:30 p.m.
- **Feb. 1-2, 8-9 & 15-16; March 7 & 11:** Miles College baseball games at Rickwood (Day games – see website for times)
- **March 7:** The 17th Annual Southern Association Conference, Rickwood, 9:00 a.m.

## SAVE THE DATE!

The 2020 Rickwood Classic has been scheduled for:

**Monday, June 8, 2020.** First pitch is at 12:30 pm. We'll see you at the ballpark!



## REMEMBERING ART CLARKSON

The Friends of Rickwood mourn the loss of Art Clarkson, who died in Birmingham on October 7, 2019 at the age of 78. Clarkson spent his professional life as a tireless promoter, owner, and general manager of sports franchises throughout the United States.

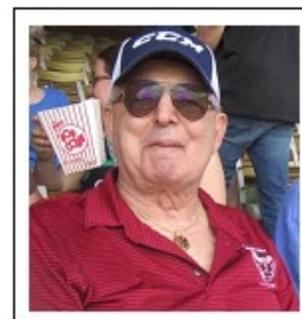
When the A's left Birmingham following the 1975 campaign, baseball fans and Rickwood Field suffered five long summers without a professional franchise. Clarkson was working as a general manager for another minor league club when he traveled to Birmingham to evaluate the possibility of bringing professional baseball back to the Magic City. He found Rickwood's gate locked, but scaled a fence to get in. Standing at home plate, the rich history of the ballpark left him in awe; and he made his decision.

Clarkson's ownership group acquired the Montgomery Rebels and moved the team to Birmingham for the 1981 season. One of his first decisions was to restore "the Bar-

ons" nickname, which the club had used from 1901 to 1965. He also refurbished the ballpark, and added a new scoreboard to replace the old one, which had been removed years earlier.

Clarkson's Barons captured Southern league crowns in 1983 and 1987 at Rickwood Field, which were the final titles won at America's oldest ballpark. At a Rickwood Field SABR chapter meeting in 2016, Clarkson entertained attendees with stories about those years, including the time when Rickwood's sprinklers mysteriously caused a "rainout" giving the Barons' worn-out pitching staff a reprieve during the '83 playoffs.

Although he loved Rickwood, he realized the many challenges in the day-to-day operations made a move inevitable. On August 30, 1987, the Barons played their final regular season game as tenants of Rickwood Field. Thanks to Art Clarkson, every fan at the park received a certificate of attendance.



Art Clarkson enjoying the 2018 Rickwood Classic

Clarkson was instrumental in getting the Hoover Metropolitan Stadium constructed. He moved the team to the suburbs in 1988. Over 30 years later, on October 22, 2019, his celebration of life was held at the Met, appropriately during the first game of the World Series.

At the Met, the Barons won a Southern League title in 1989.

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## JERRY MALLOY NEGRO LEAGUE CONFERENCE RETURNING TO BIRMINGHAM, JUNE 11-14, 2020

The Society for American Baseball Research and the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter are pleased to announce that the prestigious Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference will be held June 11-14, 2020 in Birmingham. According to SABR, "since 1998, the Mal-

loy Conference has been the only symposium dedicated exclusively to the examination and promotion of black baseball history. The conference is open to baseball and history fans of all ages." Birmingham last hosted the conference in 2010. This year's edition coin-

cides with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro National and Negro Southern Leagues. Researchers and authors from across the country will be visiting Birmingham to attend the event. Our March newsletter will have more details.

# ART CLARKSON TRIBUTE

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Clarkson's three championships are the second most for an owner in Barons' history behind only A.H. "Rick" Woodward's five titles from 1910-37.

In 1991, Clarkson sold the Barons to Suntory International. Birmingham sportswriter Wayne Martin recalled that months before the sale, a minority owner's widow offered her share of the Barons to Clarkson for the modest price of the original investment. Putting aside his own self-interest, he suggested she hold onto her shares a while longer because "something is about to happen." When he later sold the Barons, she made substantially more money — 25 times her asking price — thanks to Clarkson's generosity.

At the 2006 Rickwood Classic, the Birmingham Barons announced the induction of Art Clarkson into the club's hall of fame.

Clarkson stayed active in Birmingham sports, as he relocated an East Coast Hockey League team from Cincinnati to Birmingham in 1992 and successfully ran the team as the Bulls until 1997. He then left Birmingham and owned several arena/indoor football franchise in Huntsville, Green Bay, Wisconsin and Colorado before finally retiring.

However, he never really retired. In 1981, Clarkson had returned the Barons to Birmingham. In 2017, he did it again as he moved another hockey franchise to the area and rebranded them "the Bulls" [the original Bulls had moved after the 2000-01 season]. He was the Bulls' managing partner until the late spring of 2019, when he stepped down for good.

On August 18, 2010, Rickwood Field celebrated its

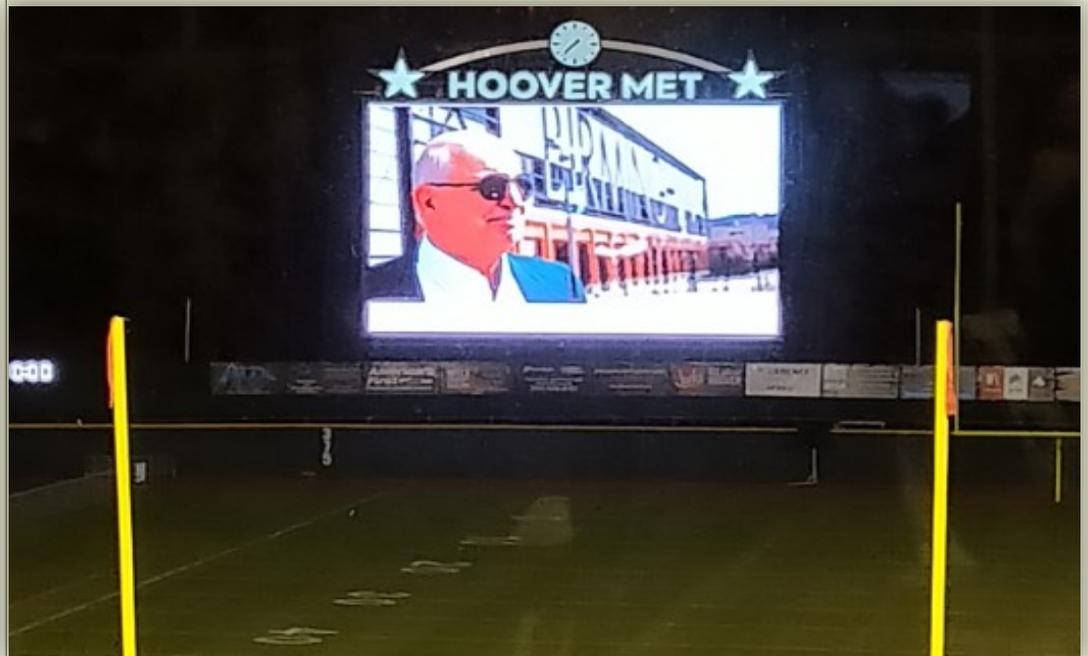
100th birthday. Although a rainstorm soaked the field, which scuttled a scheduled exhibition game, this did not dampen the spirits of those in attendance. One of the speakers that day was Art Clarkson, who told stories and shared his memories of the park that was his baseball home for 7 memorable seasons.

His connection to Rickwood never ended as he regularly attended the Classic and appeared at the annual Southern Association Conference, which is held every March at the ballpark.

Art Clarkson was a true Friend of Rickwood, and his legacy will remain an indelible part of the history of the ballpark, which he helped save.

- Jeb Stewart

*"Art Clarkson was a true Friend of Rickwood and his legacy will remain an indelible part of the history of the ballpark, which he helped to save."*



Clarkson smiling down on "The House that Art Built" during the celebration of his life

## REMEMBERING ALLEN FARR

The Friends of Rickwood lost a true friend as Allen Farr unexpectedly died on Saturday, March 16, 2019 at the age of 72. Allen had a great desire to help his community and the Birmingham area. He did so through several organizations, but his biggest passion was preserving Rickwood Field. He was a founding member of the Friends of Rickwood.

Allen was a 1964 graduate of Ensley High School and attended Auburn and Vanderbilt, earning a degree in Electrical Engineering. He worked for many years at Alabama Power and was a line crew supervisor with the utility.

From his professional training and experience, Allen was invaluable at solving any electrical problems at the ballpark. He was always patient, kind and willing to help anyone. Allen Farr epitomized why our organization is named "the Friends".

Former executive director David Brewer's poignant eulogy of Allen brought tears to many in attendance at Allen's memorial service. David recalled:

*Our dear friend was so dependably there, and so infinitely helpful, that a world without Allen Farr had never occurred to me.*

*Allen was a unique individual, and a one-of-a-kind friend. His extraordinary intelligence, keen analytical skills, and remarkable talents combined to bring a unique perspective to any conversation or problem at-hand, whether it be electrical engineering, political analysis, social discourse, civic affairs, or even music ... I absorbed only a small fraction of his intelligence and talent; I am today vastly wiser and more-skilled than before [for having known Allen].*

[This story will be concluded in the next issue]

- Joe DeLeonard

## MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH RICKWOOD FIELD

By Dan Weinrib

My parents Mike and Louisa first met on a blind date in 1957. Their mutual love for baseball led to their own love for each other. This past June, they celebrated 60 years of marriage. You can truthfully say that my own love of baseball is genetic.

As long as I can remember, baseball has been a part of my life. My favorite memories as a kid are the innumerable times I attended Cincinnati Reds home games with my grandfather, Reuben Herzfeld.

The first time I ever heard of Rickwood Field was in the summer of 1996. I had just moved to Birmingham and was working downtown. A colleague left work early to go to the first ever Rickwood Classic. Despite being a baseball fan, I did not go because of pressing job duties. Look-

ing back, I wish I had.

By 2000. I was a rookie high school baseball umpire. One Sunday, my local chapter supervisor was divvying up umpiring assignments.

"Who wants Woodlawn versus Mountain Brook tomorrow?" Owen Butts asked. Another umpire and I eagerly raised our hands.

"It's at Rickwood."

Oh, I thought. I went home and Googled "Rickwood Field". That's when I first learned about its rich history. Normally on game day, I get to my assignment 30 minutes before first pitch. On that particular Monday, I arrived an hour early. I slowly walked around the outside perimeter then the warning track, just to soak everything in. I instantly fell in love with the place. It definitely is hallowed ground.

Later that summer I attended my first Rickwood Classic, and I haven't missed one since.

In 2002, I became the newly elected Jefferson County Tax Assessor. During my transition to public office, I met county attorney Charlie Wagner and quickly bonded with him over baseball. Either in 2003 or 2004, he asked me for a favor.

"Dan, I'm on the Friends of Rickwood board," he started. "My (teenage) son Kurt and I are working the manual outfield scoreboard. Will you help us?"

He did not have to ask twice!

After I had volunteered for scoreboard and other duties for a couple years, the Friends of Rickwood board invited me to join them.

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*"Allen Farr epitomized why our organization is named 'the Friends'."*

## LOVE AFFAIR

[Continued from page 3]

I still work that scoreboard every year during the Classic. I also launched and still maintain FOR's Facebook page.

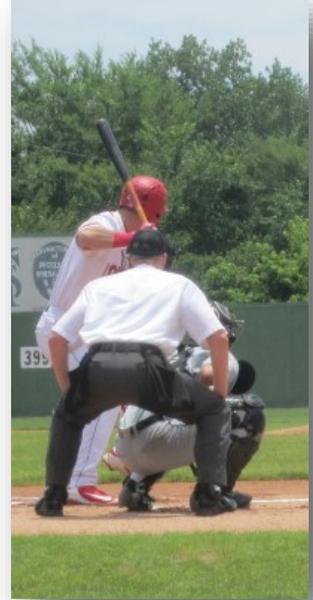
Rickwood Field is more than just America's oldest professional baseball park. It is a living tribute to the intertwined themes of change and continuity here in Birmingham, as well as throughout Alabama and our country. Rickwood also remains a popular venue for our community.

Over the years, the ballpark has hosted concerts, weddings, birthday parties, con-

ferences, reunions, and even jousting contests!

To this day Rickwood occupies a special place in my heart. It is indeed a love affair, the only one that my wife Karen has given her approval to. As a FOR member, I will continue to do my part to keep our favorite 109-year-old ballpark going for another 109 years.

*Dan Weinrib is the city clerk in Tarrant. He joined FOR's board sometime in the mid-2000s. If he ever wins the Powerball, he plans to buy the Cincinnati Reds.*



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## DID YOU KNOW?



The Rickwood Classic is the signature annual event for the ballpark, but the ballpark hosts between 160-175 baseball games a year (college, high school, travel ball, and amateur games). Rickwood's regular business hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you would like to schedule a group tour on the weekend, please contact Clarence Watkins with the Friends of Rickwood at [Cwatkins5@charter.net](mailto:Cwatkins5@charter.net) or on Facebook.

## 2019 WAS MEMORABLE AT RICKWOOD

America's Oldest Ballpark had a busy 2019. On February 1, Miles College opened its home schedule with a 7-0 win over Morehouse. The Golden Bears maintained a tremendous home field advantage and finished the season with a Rickwood-home record of 12-5. The sound of bats hitting baseballs was heard all spring as Rickwood again hosted Birmingham's high school baseball teams.

On March 2, The 17th Annual Southern Association Conference was well-attended at the ballpark. This year's theme was the Dixie Series.

On May 29, the 23rd annual Rickwood Classic attracted over 7,000 fans to the venerable park to see the Barons play the Montgomery Biscuits. The Barons looked sharp in their 1910-era throwback uniforms, but lost to Montgomery, 9-4. Former big leaguer and manager Lou Piniella was the special guest for the Classic and joined U.S. Senator Doug Jones in throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. Piniella then signed

autographs in Rickwood's conference room.

Following the Classic, virtually every weekend was filled with baseball: former Major League player and coach, Ron "Papa Jack" Jackson hosted two weekends of instructional camps for urban youth; high school "All Star" Travel Teams from all over the state came to Rickwood to play every available weekend; two weekends of American Legion Tournaments brought teams and families from throughout the Southeast; and, in June, Jill Vedders, the wife of Pearl Jam front man Eddie Vedders, toured Rickwood and purchased a Ron Santo glove for his man-cave. Clarence Watkins later remarked, "You never know who is going to show up at Rickwood!"

October brought the Scott Green Tournament from New York with adult teams from the entire eastern seaboard; Rickwood hosted a bicycle jousting fundraiser for Redemption Cycles, which provides bicycles for needy people; and a Baseball Birthday

Party was held. Back in 2018, the Tennessee Vintage Baseball Association played an 1865-rules exhibition game at the ballpark. The Association, which is located in Nashville, scheduled a return trip for April 20, but the game was rained out and rescheduled for October 26. Unfortunately, the makeup game was cancelled due to heavy rain. Hopefully the Association will make plans to schedule another vintage game in 2020.

Despite the rain, Rickwood held its Annual Baseball Card Show, which was well attended. Local author Bill Plott was there to sign his latest book, *Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962*.

The old ballpark has had a busy year indeed.

**Happy Holidays from  
The Friends of Rickwood!**

- Rick Woodward, III

*"You never know who is  
going to show up at  
Rickwood!"*

## BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

The Friends of Rickwood is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by making a donation to the Friends.

We have four levels of membership for individuals and each level will receive a certificate, a window sticker, and 10% off Rickwood merchandise: (1) Level 1 is a "Little Leaguer" for a \$10 donation; (2) Level 2 is a "Rookie" for a \$25 donation; (3) Level 3 is a

"Veteran" for a \$50 donation (and also gets a patch); and (4) Level 4 is a "Gold Glover" for a \$100 donation (and also gets a Rickwood shirt).

To donate, please visit <https://rickwood.com/donate-to-rickwood-field/> or write us at:

**The Friends of Rickwood  
Rickwood Field  
1137 2nd Ave West  
Birmingham, AL 35204**



The Friends of  
Rickwood

Rickwood Field  
1137 2nd Ave W  
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205-999-5742

Email:  
[cwatkins5@charter.net](mailto:cwatkins5@charter.net)

We're on the Web.  
[https://  
rickwood.com/](https://rickwood.com/)



<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood/>



## THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY

### Rickwood non-fiction

- Allen Barra, *Rickwood Field: A Century in America's Oldest Ballpark* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).
- Ben Cook, *Good Wood: A Fan's History of Rickwood Field* (Birmingham, AL: R. Boozer Press, 2005).
- Timothy Whitt, *Bases Loaded with History* (Birmingham, AL: R. Boozer Press, 1995).

### Birmingham Barons, Black Barons, and Rickwood-related books

- Allen Barra, *Mickey and Willie: Mantle and Mays, the Parallel Lives of Baseball's Golden Age* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2013).
- Black, Art, *Showdown at Rickwood: Ray Caldwell, Dizzy Dean, and the Early Years of America's Oldest Ball Park* (Birmingham, AL: Blue Rooster Press, 2017).
- *Bittersweet Goodbye: The Black Barons, the Grays, and the 1948 Negro League World Series*, edited by Frederick C. (Rick) Bush and Bill Nowlin (Phoenix, AZ: SABR, 2017).
- Larry Colton, *Southern League* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2013).
- Chris Fullerton *Every Other Sunday* (Birmingham, AL: R. Boozer Press, 1999).
- James Hirsch, *Willie Mays: The Life, the Legend* (New York: Scribner, 2010).
- John Klima, *Willie's Boys* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).
- William J. Plott, *The Negro Southern League* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015).
- William J. Plott, *Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019).
- Larry Powell, *Black Barons of Birmingham*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009).
- Rob Trucks, *Cup of Coffee: The Very Short Careers of Eighteen Major League Pitchers* (New York: Smallmouth Press, 2003).
- Clarence Watkins, *Baseball in Birmingham* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010).
- Gaylon H. White, *Singles and Smiles: How Artie Wilson Broke Baseball's Color Barrier* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

### Compilations

- John Pahigian, *101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out* (The Lyons Press, 2015) .
- Robert and Jenna Santelli, *The Baseball Fan's Bucket List: 162 Things You Must Do, See, Get, and Experience Before You Die* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers, 2010)
- Doug Wedge, *Baseball in Alabama: Tales of Hardball in the Heart of Dixie* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2018).

### Reference & League History

- Bill O'Neal, *The Southern League: Baseball in Dixie, 1885-1994* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1994)
- Marshall Wright, *The Southern Association in Baseball, 1885-1961* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002).

### Rickwood-Related Fiction

- J. Mark Hart, *Felder's Choice* (Birmingham, AL: Jack of Hearts Publishing, 2017).
- Walter Dean Myers, *The Journal of Bidy Owens, the Negro Leagues, Birmingham, Alabama* (Scholastic, Inc., 2001).
- Chuck Stewart, *Angels at Rickwood* (Circuit Drive Publishing Co., 2009).

