

**TOMBERG RARE BOOKS**

**PIONEERS IN THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S BASEBALL**

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE AND EPHEMERA;

with a focus on the Racine Belles of the All American Girls Baseball League

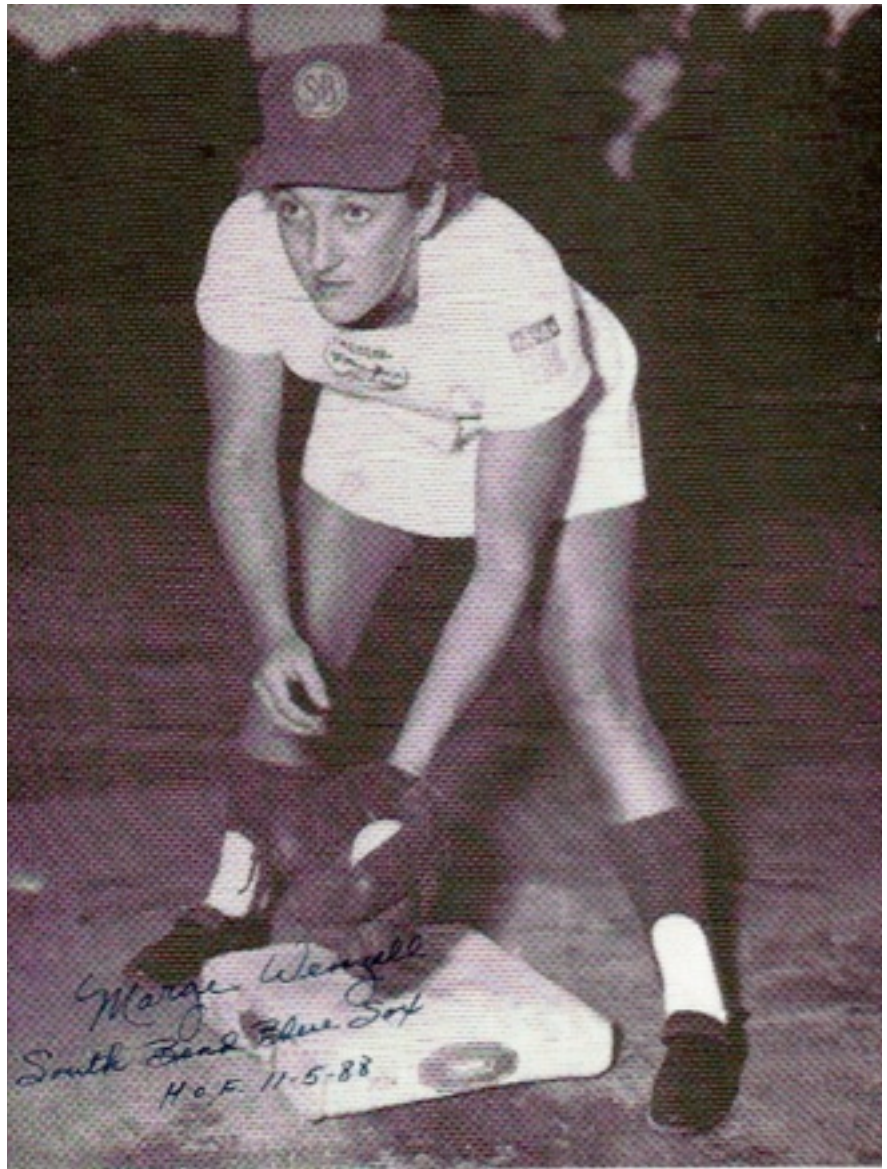




## OVERVIEW

The history of women in baseball is a crucial one to understand because it parallels the rise and fall of the women's liberation movement throughout the history of the United States.

Women's participation in baseball is a result of social, political and economic factors that provided women the opportunity to step outside traditional roles and to participate in baseball.

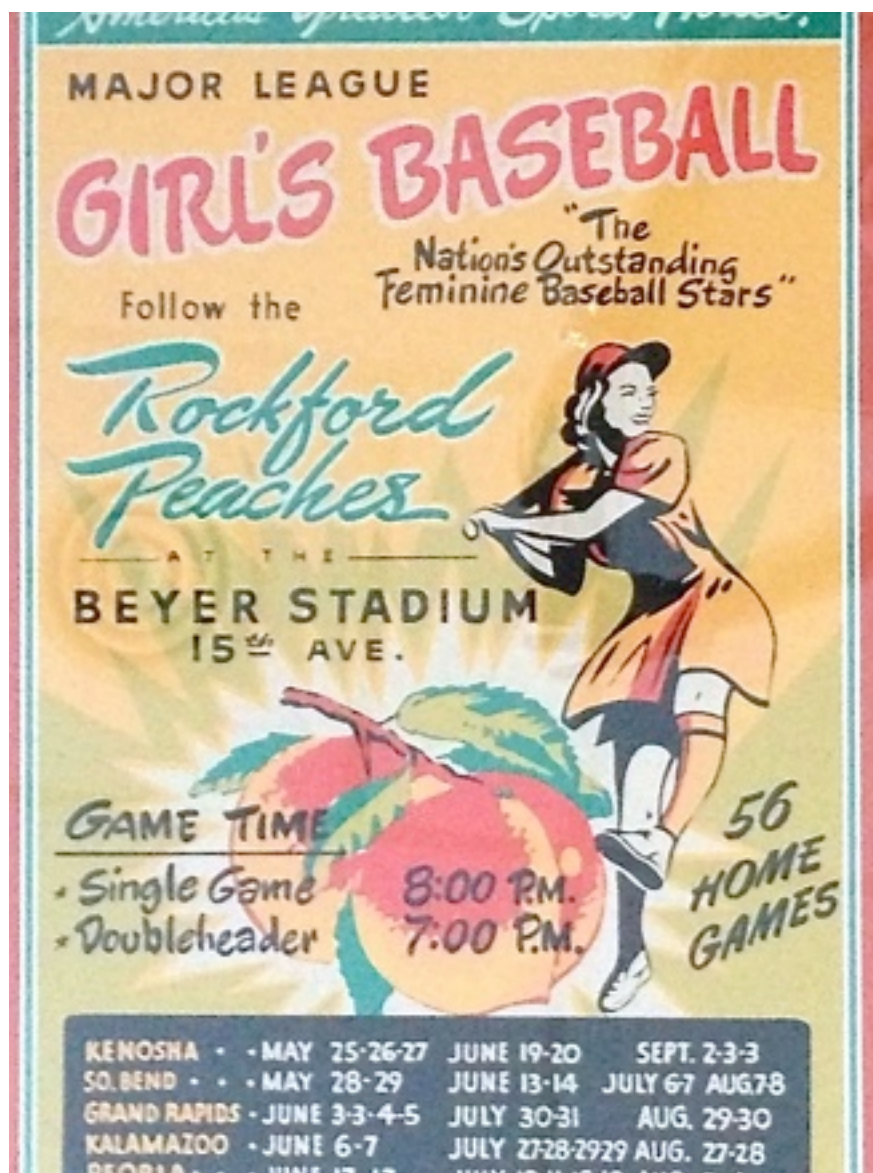




## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Pioneers in the History of Women's Baseball Collection dates from the early mid 1800s to the 1970s, and includes photographs, press photos, team photographs, game programs, scorecards, tickets, postcards, schedules, posters, newspaper articles, magazines, and a note, all highlighting the many women and teams that were an integral part of the history of women's baseball.

The ephemeral nature of the primary sources of the collection are rare and quite scarce due to the quasi-neglect in which women's baseball was held by commercial and media channels.



PIONEERS IN THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S BASEBALL:  
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE & EPHEMERA;  
with a focus on the Racine Belles of the All-American Girls Baseball League

**\$8,500**

**DETAILS**

**14 black and white photos of pioneering women in early baseball.** Photos between approximately 7 x 8 ½ to 14 x 11 ½ inches, all very good to near fine.

**1946-1948 AAGBL Racine Belles Photographic History of Team & League**

121 original photographs approximately between 2.5 x 3.5 inches and 3.5 x 5 inches. Most of the photos are of the players in action, depicting members in uniform within ballpark. Identifiable players: Eleanor Callow, Edie Perlick, Pepper Paire, Betty Emry, Betty Russell, Sophie Kurys, Dodie Barr, Heather Black (bat girl), Eleanor Dapkus, Jo Russell, Jo Walmsley, Jo Winter, Maddy English, May Hutchinson, Irene Hickson, Ruby Stephens, Donna Cook, Betty Trezza, Connie Wisniewski, Margaret Danhauer and Claire Shillace

**1949 Racine Belles Team Photograph (7.5 x 9.5 inches)**

-detailed information identifies the back row (left to right): Mildred Wilson (chaperone), Joyce Westerman, Marge Pieper, Marnie Danhauser, Erma Bergmann, Joanne Winter, Eleanor Dapkus, Leo Murphy (manager)  
Middle Row (left to right): Irene Kotowicz, Sophie Kurys, Dorothy Stolze, Madeline English, Edie Perlick, June Peppas  
Front Row (left to right): Bat girl, Helen Cook, Irene Hickson, Betty Trezza, Bat girl, Lois Cook

**1950 Racine Belles Team Photograph (3.5 x 5 inches)**

-Norm Derringer, Dolly Pearson, Beverly Hatzell, Gloria Cordes, Anna Mae O'Dowd, Erma Bergmann, Ruby Heafner, June Peppas, Joanne Winter, Sophie Kurys, Madeline "Maddy" English, Irene Hickson, Edythe "Edie" Perlick, Eleanor "Ellie" Dapkus, Doris Shero, Betty Trezza and Barbara Berger

**1945-1950 AAGBL Game Programs and Scorecards**

- 1945 Grand Rapids Chicks at Racine Belles (minor wear at top from being glued in an album, not affecting text, unscored)
- 1946 Racine Belles at Rockford Peaches (unscored)
- 1946 Racine Belles at Kenosha Comets (minor damage from being removed from album, unscored)
- 1947 Fort Wayne Daisies at Racine Belles (autographed by Betty Trezza & Sarah Lonetto, back damage from being in album)
- 1948 Peoria Red Wings at Racine Belles (autographed by Faye Dancer, scored)
- 1948 Racing Belles, unscored (minor damage from album removal)
- 1950 Muskegon Lassies at Racing Belles (unscored, corner coupon clipped off cover, also served as a yearbook)

Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox – many sponsors

-1950 Merchants delivery Racine Belles Foldover Pocket Schedule

**1946 Framed Autographed Photograph of Sophie Kurys**

-signature fading, reads: "Best wishes, Sophie Kurys"

**1946-1947 AAGBL Racine Belles Autographed Photographs**

-27 photographs signed by members of the AAGBL – mostly the Racine Belles

-Sizes approximately 2.5 x 3.5 inches to 5x7 inches

**1947 Racine Belles Tickets**

3 different tickets including prices

**1947 Christmas Belles Ticket Pack Cover**

-the stapled top of a pack of tickets for the 1947 AAGBL. Pack given to player Marie Pelk.

**1947 Racine Belles Coaching Postcards**

-3 stapled together addressed to Marie Pelk of Racine Belles. These were practice schedule postcards with reminders for times and dates.

**1948-1949 Kenosha Comets Team Issue Photographic Cards**

-5 cards printed on thick stock. This is as close to period baseball cards as existed. 4x5 inches (Audrey Wagner x 2, Helen Callaghan, Christine Jewett and possibly Irene Kotowicz.

**1949-1950 Racine Belles Schedules**

-1949 Baseball schedule. 8 page foldout includes schedules for Racine Belles, Kenosha Comets, Milwaukee Brewers, Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox – many sponsors

-1950 Merchants delivery Racine Belles Foldover Pocket Schedule

**1948-1951 Newspaper Weekly Magazine Inserts with AAGBL articles and photographs**

-August 22, 1948 Parade Magazine – front cover, pg. 19-21 on AAGBL

-July 31, 1949 This Week Magazine (The Milwaukee Journal) – pg. 4-5, 8 on AAGBL

-July 15, 1951 Graftic Magazine (Chicago Sunday Tribune) – P. 6 and 11 on AAGBL

**June 15, 1950 Original Girls Baseball Magazine**

-includes photographic evolution of the size of the baseball, rosters and history

**1946-1949 Racine Belles Journal Newspaper clippings**

-8 articles, including illustrations and photographs of players

**1945 Life Magazine**

-two piece printed photograph of all AAGBL players from the Fort Wayne Daisies, Grand Rapids Chicks, Kenosha Comets, Racine Belles, Rockford Peaches and South Bend Blue Sox

**PROVENANCE**

A majority of this collection comes from Marie Pelk of Racine. Pelk was an exceptional Racine multi-sport athlete who later became a successful Racine Belles minor league player.



## HISTORY

Most people think of baseball as a man's game. Very few are aware that thousands of women have played baseball in the United States as early as 1866. The history of women in baseball parallels the rise and fall of the women's liberation movement throughout our history. Social, political and economic factors throughout history have provided women opportunities to step outside traditional roles and participate in baseball. Although women in the U.S. have made significant gains in access to resources, power and prestige, including amateur and professional sports, baseball lags behind on the inclusion of women and girls. This ideological justification for exclusion is based on cultural presumptions of female physical inferiority that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains strong today.

The paternalism of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century assumptions of women's natural physical and mental inferiority was met with hostility by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Seneca Falls, New York convention of 1948 that marked the emergence of the first-wave feminist movement in the United States. By the 1880s, baseball was entering its Golden Era and women wanted to be more than fans; they wanted to play ball.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century American women did not have the right to vote; could not own property after marriage; could not divorce; and could not receive an education. It was not considered proper for women to engage in competitive sports and wear functional clothing. Their participation was in complete antithesis to the role of the ideal woman. Envisioned as the weaker sex, women were seen as biologically frail and in need of protection. Having children was the primary function of married women and the "true" woman was expected to devote her life to her husband and to motherhood. With this accepted gender-role ideology and concept of gentility, it seems incongruous that women actually played baseball during the Victorian era. But it was during this time that American society was undergoing rapid social and economic change as the result of industrialization, urbanization, massive immigration and the depression of 1873. The women's suffrage movement, the establishment of women's colleges, technological changes that provided women with more leisure time and the changing medical attitudes about health and fashion opened the door for women in baseball.

In their struggle for equal rights, women turned to female colleges. Vassar was founded in 1865 and the founders of these first women's colleges endorsed the new medical ideas about advocating exercise for women although they advocated a cautious approach to women's athletic activities. Intercollegiate sports were banned. But women could play baseball. The **Vassar** Resolutes even had uniforms, although cumbersome in nature; long-sleeved shirts with frilled high necklines, belts embroidered with the team name, RESOLUTES, wide floor-length skirts, high button shoes and broadly striped caps.



In all societies, clothing is imbued with symbolic meaning signaling social status, power and appropriate roles. Among women involved in the first-wave feminist movement, bloomers were a symbol of freedom from restriction and a broader agenda for social inclusion. The emergence of a feminine athleticism that included some women playing baseball was part of a broad social revolution in the U.S. associated with modernity. With the transition to industrial capitalism, new ways of working arose with people working outside the home in a variety of worksites that employed both men and women. These changing economic relations of production generated new contexts for the construction of gender in the home, workplace, colleges and in other public political events associated with the first-wave feminist movement. Private baseball clubs existed at this time but promoters realized by as early as the 1860s that attractive women playing ball against men would attract large crowds. The first women to play baseball for pay took the field in 1875, but nobody considered them professional ballplayers. It was more for entertainment and by the 1890s the novelty of watching women play miserable ball had worn off and the public wanted to see skilled women players competing against men's teams. But this was the precursor to the first professional female baseball players, the Bloomer Girls of the 1890s. The professionally mixed gender, barnstorming teams

that appeared during the 1890s and lasted through the 1930s were called Bloomer Girls, after Amelia Jenks Bloomer, a pioneer suffragette and advocate for less restrictive women's clothing. Playing baseball in heavy skirts was difficult for women who wanted to excel. On these teams, women played well and received good pay for doing so. These teams offered a space for participation by lesbians and other single women who rejected the normative dependence on men inherent in marriage practices at the turn on the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Boston Bloomer Girls and the Western Bloomer Girls were two of such serious teams that played between 1890-1920. The **Western Bloomer Girls** were immensely popular. In 1912 they faced the Watervliet,



Michigan team on opening day in the town's new ballpark and the crowd was the largest of the season. One such player was **Alta Weiss** and when news spread of the "Girl Wonder" who could pitch, the semipro Vermilion Independents, in Lake Erie signed her on. Weiss's father purchased a semipro team, the Weiss All-Stars that featured Alta as the star pitcher. These early pioneers challenged the Victorian image of femininity. They were instrumental in dispelling the myth perpetuated by American Society of the "true" woman. These women were agents at a historical moment, the Progressive Era, when women were beginning to negotiate the rigidity of Victorian gender separation. Their bloomer uniforms provided them with the freedom of movement to play baseball efficiently, safely and modestly.

Not every adventurous female joined the Bloomer Girls teams. Jackie Mitchell posed the first real challenge to professional baseball as a male preserve. Mitchell attracted the attention of

scouts when playing for a girls' team. She signed a contract with the Chattanooga Lookouts, a Double A minor league team as the second woman to sign a minor league contract. At an exhibition game against the New York Yankees, Mitchell struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, causing a media sensation. However, Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis claimed that baseball was too strenuous for women and voided Mitchell's contract.



Landis' decision also immediately affected another woman athlete, **Mildred "Babe" Didrikson**, who was perhaps the greatest woman athlete of her time. She pitched about 200 games for the House of David barnstorming team in 1934 and as a promotional gimmick in exhibition games. Landis's decision eliminated any possible career for Didrikson in organized baseball. She turned to women's golf, dominating the sport until her death in 1956. Such exhibition players like the Bloomer Girls, Jackie Mitchell and Babe Didrikson emerged during the Progressive Era and lasted until the Depression and World War II. The Victorian gender constructions were challenged by greater numbers of women moving into the public domain as workers, political leaders and participants, college students and athletes. Women's participation in baseball was one outgrowth of these larger forces of social change.

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were professional women players, umpires, owners and sportswriters. Their names are on the crumbling pages of forgotten newspapers and their stories are waiting to be told. But by the mid-1930s, bloomer girl baseball, which had lasted for nearly half a century, gave way to softball. No national organization promoted baseball for women and three generations of women who had played the real thing watched in dismay as the country pushed women into softball. By 1940, there were no signs of women in baseball at all. But women would play ball again.





World War II was another historical moment when constructions of feminine gender identity were negotiated. After the U.S. entered the war, many occupations that were previously limited to men were now open to women, including baseball. In 1943, Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs and chewing gum magnate decided to form a woman's league since he feared that major league baseball would be suspended due the number of men enlisting in the army. A women's golden age of baseball unfolded and the era of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball league between 1943 and 1954 was born. The leagues ideology was of a "socially acceptable athletic femininity" so the prevailing gender constructions of male and female bodies were not greatly challenged. The women played on exclusively homosocial teams in a homosocial league of their own. Even when the Class B Florida International League, a minor men's league team, tried to buy the contract of **Dorothy "Dottie" Kamenshek**, the best player in the history of the AAGBL, the Rockford Peaches' team owner refused, illustrating how women's athleticism was to be controlled; the Rockford Peaches couldn't lose her and the owner felt that women should play amongst themselves.



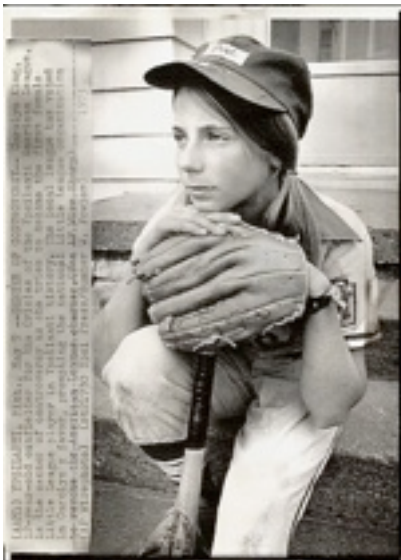
In the interwar years and those following WW II, women were expected to play baseball with high levels of competence and competitive motivation all while conforming to rules that governed their femininity on and off the field. This was an attempt to emphasize that the players were not being masculinized by baseball. The stereotype of the lesbian athlete was full blown and extreme homophobia and gender conservatism was characteristic of the postwar era. So Wrigley imposed on the players his beliefs (and that of society as a whole during this era) that sports were a masculine exercise, not a gender-neutral one, and that women who were great athletes had to counterbalance their participation in such a masculine endeavor by intensifying their feminine aspects. The female ballplayers had to attend charm school, learn how to apply and wear makeup, learn how to sit, walk, stand, talk and were required to wear makeup and have long hair at all times. The women put up with it because only by doing so could they play baseball for a living. Playing baseball instilled courage and confidence, so that when the game was over, a large number of these women went on to become doctors, lawyers, teachers – professions beyond their means and expectations before their baseball careers. It fostered camaraderie beyond friendship and to this day many rely on one another for support (Gregorich 88).

The League teams were located in the Midwest war production cities (Kenosha, Racine, Springfield, Rockford, Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, South Bend). The support by many female fans is significant and essential to the player's successful transgression into male athletic space. The women on the AAGBL changed forever the concept that women cannot play baseball. But by 1954 the era of the AAGBL ended. The League had reached its peak by 1950, in spite of the close connections between the teams and their local communities. Women and men were expected to resume their traditional roles after the War. Television diminished attendance at baseball games. Access for women into organized baseball remained unattainable. This golden age of women's baseball was erased from baseball history until recently. The much needed publicity surrounding the AAGBL was received with the popularity of the 1992 film *A League of their Own*. The



players understood the League's marketing plan to attract people by insisting on impractical uniforms that focused attention on the women's exposed legs or sexual attractiveness (different from the Bloomer era) and to keep them attending ball games by displaying athletic skills. These women attempted to negotiate the confines of an externally controlled construction of femininity. It would be another 40 years before an all-women's professional baseball team was backed.

The years between the demise of the All American Girls Baseball League in 1954 and the rise of integrated Little League in 1974 was a period of stagnation for women in baseball. **Toni Stone** spent one year in the Negro League majors and the one woman, who was signed by a minor league team, was banished from the game forever.



From the moment women first played baseball for pay up through the mid twentieth century, women's endeavors in baseball moved along three converging paths: sexually integrated baseball teams such as the Bloomer Girls; individuals who joined men's teams, like Alta Weiss and Jackie Mitchell; and the sexually segregated teams of the All American Girls Baseball League. Each path lead to an end but for a variety of different reasons: funding during the Great Depression, roadblocks by the commissioner who declared baseball too strenuous for women and the path of sexual segregation, which reached its dead end when the television emerged and every radio commercial, magazine ad and television show persuaded American Society that the woman's place was in the home.

Girls were interested in playing Little League during the 1960s but the 1951 rule barring girls from the league still existed. The social struggles of the 1960s and the second-wave feminist movement brought to public attention the multilayered social and cultural effects on institutionalized sexism in our society. As a result, Title IX was passed in 1972 barring discrimination against girls and women in educational institutions and in sports and helped bring about the start of changes in public opinion regarding the meaning of femininity and roles of women in the public sphere. In 1973 the Little League Baseball Inc. revoked the charter of an Ypsilanti, Michigan little league team because it allowed twelve year old **Carolyn King** to play on its team. A suit prevailed This case is significant because Little League dropped its boy only policy and even petitioned Congress for an amendment to its charter declaring that girls can play. Although Little League began to see the writing on the

wall, they resisted changes until they lost the suit filed against them one year later by N.O.W. (National Organization for Women). Bernice Gera became an umpire in organized baseball but only after the courts determined that her civil rights had been violated by exclusion. Christine Wren took the same route after the door was opened. The business end of baseball has opened up many opportunities for women but the playing fields remain off-limits. With the hard-won victory that finally opened the Little League to girls in 1974, thousands of girls have shown their interest in baseball. However, when they reach their teens, girls are still pressured to switch to softball. Although Title IX protects those girls and women with athletic talent seeking to play on men's middle and high school teams, there are clear emotional costs to doing so.

The game of baseball is closed to women not because women can't play but because the men in power do not want women around. Baseball has a long history of constructing power structures and supporting legitimizing ideologies that exclude women from participating as players, umpires and sportscasters. The nation's pastime is a team sport. Team play fuses individual elements into something that transcends the sum of its parts; that brings fans to their feet, inspires writers. In baseball, there is room for the other half of the human race – the hidden past of women at play proves this. Women have been traditionally hired to play baseball as a gate attraction – a way to draw crowds and make money. But they had to be good ballplayers to keep the fans coming. There are girls and women out there in T-ball or little league – on a high school team; but to enter organized baseball they need the support and encouragement of fans everywhere – and the knowledge that there are more behind her – women players whose presence on the field will truly make baseball our national pastime.





## SOPHIE KURYS

“FLINT FLASH”

Sophie Kurys was one of the original Racine Belles who stayed with the team throughout its 8-year existence. Batting leadoff, Kurys helped Racine win the AAGBL’s first championship series. Her 201 stolen base record is unequalled in baseball history. In the 1946 Shaughnessy Series, Racine faced the Rockford Peaches; it was one of the closest matching games for sheer drama until the 7th game of the 1991 World Series. Sophie Kurys was elected Player of the Year as she was the leading scorer and hitter; and elected to the All-Star team for four straight seasons, 1946-1950.



## HELEN CALLAGHAN

of the Minneapolis Millerettes  
An outfielder, Callaghan led the league in batting with a .299 average. Kelly Candaele, one of her five sons, wrote *A League of Their Own*, the documentary that inspired the Penny Marshall film of the same title.



## JUNE 15, 1990 ORIGINAL GIRLS MAGAZINE

Includes a photographic evolution of the size baseball, teams rosters and baseball history



## 1946-1948 AAGBP RACINE BELLES

Photographic History of Team & League. 121 original photographs. Between 2.5 x 5” to 5 x 7,” most of which are 2.5 x 3.5 inches.

## FAYE DANCER

One of the “California girls,” that made up the roster of the Minneapolis Millerettes, one of two teams added during the second year of the AAGBL. Exuding great confidence, Dancer played in the women’s opener against the Rockford Peaches. Although the Millerettes lost the fifteen-inning thriller, the extra innings won them the nickname, “Marathon Millerettes.” Dancer had star status with the fans. A true character and exhibitionist, she was one of the most fun-loving players in the league. She received the name, “Tiger” reflecting her enthusiastic antics that were meant to make games fun for the fans. Not just a clown, she also played her heart out. Dancer retired in 1950 because of a ruptured disc and chipped vertebrae, sustained when making a diving catch. She also played on the Peoria Redwings from 1947-1950. Noted for stealing bases and power-hitting, she was second behind Sophie Kurys in stolen bases.



Sorry, I don't have  
cards to sign. But I  
did find this card someone  
must have made for me.  
You are lucky I found  
it. Hope your best friend  
enjoy it. Maybe you can  
have a copy made for her.