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George William Castone: An Integrated Baseball Life at the Close of the Nineteenth Century

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George William Castone: An Integrated Baseball Life at the Close of the Nineteenth Century

Mark E. Eberle

Although most professional baseball clubs of the late 1800s were racially segregated, there were exceptions. Some integrated clubs were members of minor leagues, as they existed before the modern minor league system was organized at the beginning of the twentieth century. A few of these integrated minor league teams represented towns in Kansas. In 1886, Bud Fowler, a native of upstate New York, played second base for the “Topeka Club” in the Western League. Fowler was the only black player on the team. A decade later, three black ballplayers from Kansas were members of integrated teams in the Kansas State League. Bert Wakefield played for his hometown team (Troy) in 1895 and served as its captain after the white captain was released. Monroe Ingram (Coffeyville) played for Emporia’s league teams in 1896 and 1897, while Bert Jones (Hiawatha) played for Atchison in the Kansas State League in 1897 and 1898.¹

During this period, there were also integrated minor leagues in Colorado (1889) and Nebraska (1892). Two black players, George William Castone and George H. Taylor, played in both leagues. The 1880 federal census recorded that the 12-year-old Taylor was born in Kansas but living in Denver, where he was “one of the best ball players that ever graduated from the corner lots of this city.”² He has no known connection with Kansas baseball, my area of interest, so Castone is the focus of this narrative. Little has been written about him other than contemporary newspaper stories. One exception is a journal article about the integrated 1892 Nebraska State League written by Gregory Bond in 2004.³ However, enough information is available in contemporary sources to support a reasonably complete narrative of Castone’s baseball experiences from 1886 through 1893 and document his place in the early history of integrated baseball.

1867–1883: Beginnings

George William Castone was born near the town of Salem in the heart of the Missouri Ozarks, about midway between Springfield and St. Louis. Though records vary, his death certificate listed his birthdate as January 25, 1867. “G. W. Castone” was also listed as three years old in the 1870 federal census for Dent County, Missouri. His mother, Martha Bressie, was born about 1840, the daughter of a slave owned by her father, Ephriam Bressie. He was one of the earliest white settlers in Missouri, moving to the area in the early 1800s.⁴

In February 1866, Martha married Falis H. Castone. In census records, his birthplace was listed as South America, or more specifically as Patagonia or Paraguay. He was born about 1840 and immigrated to the United States in 1850. He was living in Nelson, New Hampshire in 1861 when he enlisted in the Sixth New Hampshire Regiment of Volunteer Infantry. He served a three-year enlistment with the regiment and was discharged near Petersburg, Virginia in November 1864.

The marriage between Falis and Martha did not last. They were divorced in 1873, but Martha retained custody of their son. Martha referred to him as William, and that was the name he used until 1892, when he started to use his first name (see the Appendix). The reason he made this change is unknown. According to city directories and records for William at Kansas State University, Martha lived in Leadville (and perhaps Denver), Colorado during the 1880s. At some point, she returned to Salem, Missouri, where she passed away in 1910. Martha Bressie Castone was buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery.⁵

Falis also left Missouri. In 1880, he was listed in the Cherokee census as a teacher in the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). He then moved to Kansas, where he was recorded in the 1885 state census at Parsons, but he soon made his way north to Osage City. He continued to move within Kansas and nearby states, remarrying more than once. Interestingly, during the last week of February 1888, while Falis was living in Osage City, there was an unclaimed letter waiting for William Castone at the post office in Emporia, about 25 miles to the southwest. In addition, Osage City is only 30 miles south of Topeka and 40 miles southwest of Lawrence, where William played baseball during 1886 and 1887.⁶ Perhaps this was just a coincidence, but it places the father and his son, now a young man, close to each other, at least geographically. Falis Castone passed away in 1915 in Kansas City, Kansas. His grave in Woodlawn Cemetery has a white military marker that simply notes his name and service with Company E of the Sixth New Hampshire Infantry.

1884–1886: Colorado and Kansas

Other than his birth and infancy in Salem, nothing is known about George William Castone prior to 1884, when he turns up in Leadville, Colorado. Records at Kansas State University noted that he attended school at “Denver Col.” in 1883 (at about age 16), but no corroborating information has been found. In March 1884, “The colored ladies of Leadville returned the many favors extended by their gentlemen friends, on Thursday evening, by giving them a grand ball at Turner hall.” A list of 50 “gentlemen and their escorts” included “Miss Sarah Flowers and Mr. William Castone.” The 1885 city directory for Leadville included the entry “Castone William, col’d, porter, Athletic Club,” which had been founded in March 1884.⁷ William and his mother lived at 412 Spruce Street, two blocks west of the 1879 Tabor Opera House, currently undergoing restoration.

During the 1880s, Leadville had several baseball teams associated with businesses or clubs, as well as informal “picked nines.” Castone might have played for one or more of these teams, but his name was not on any rosters I found in local newspapers from 1884 and 1885. Leadville also had a town team named the Blues, which was first organized in 1882 and played for several years against teams from Colorado Springs, Denver, Pueblo, and elsewhere. Castone did not play for the Blues, but in 1885, the roster of one of their opponents, the Pueblo Pastimes, included Bud Fowler.⁸ Whether or not Castone met Fowler that season is unknown, but they would soon be playing together in Kansas.

The first mention of Castone in Kansas was the inclusion of “William Castone, Leadville, Colorado” on the list of first-year students during the 1885–1886 academic year at the Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan (now Kansas State University). Why he left Colorado to attend school in Kansas is unknown. Total enrollment that year

was 428 students (273 freshmen), and Castone was one of 50 students from other states, territories, or countries. The college operated on the quarter system, with three terms and a summer break. According to university records, Castone attended classes only during the third term, beginning in March 1886. At the time, tuition was free, and the cost of textbooks during the entire first year was about \$12 (equivalent to \$335 in 2018). His mother, who still worked at a laundry in Leadville, was listed as his “Means of Support.” Records at the school indicated he was 18 years old, but he apparently had just turned 19. Applicants for admission had to pass a test covering “reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic including percentage and interest, geography, and elements of English grammar.” However, “Applicants of mature age who, for lack of advantages, are unable to pass the full examination may be received on special conditions.”⁹ Castone had high scores in spelling and writing, skills he would later use as a correspondent in the *Sporting News*. The college records listed his “Proposed Business” interest as telegraphy.

Required courses during the first year included math, English, bookkeeping, US history, botany, industrial training (for example, carpentry), and two terms of drawing. The first-term course in “geometrical drawing” was a daily study in drawing shapes and involved the use of watercolors. During the second-term course in “freehand drawing,” students were “led to recognize the facts, relations and principles involved in the apparent form of the object” and “to note the distribution of light, shade, shadow and reflection on the same.”¹⁰ Because Castone entered during the third term, he did not take either drawing course. These two courses have nothing to do with playing baseball, but their content might have benefited Castone’s later endeavors. Instead, he took courses in arithmetic, English grammar, geography, writing, and carpentry.

The academic year ended in early June 1886, and by the end of the month, Castone was on the roster of the Topeka Athletics, composed mostly of white players. In newspapers, he was listed as the third baseman under the spellings Caston, Caestone, and Kastone, but he also pitched part of a game lost to the Emporia Blues. While Topeka’s minor league team consisted entirely of professional players, including Bud Fowler in 1886, the Athletics “consisted largely of amateurs.” It is noteworthy that the top two clubs in Topeka in 1886 were both integrated, although that arrangement did not continue in subsequent seasons. In addition to Castone, the Athletics had at least two other black players on their roster for some of their games—a local player named James Hightower and Bud Fowler.¹¹

Later in July, Castone was the winning pitcher for the integrated team in Concordia, Kansas when they defeated teams in the smaller communities of Jamestown on Thursday and Hollis on Friday. In their first game of the season a week earlier, Concordia defeated the team from Macyville, but individual players were not mentioned. Concordia had a population of only about 3,000 people, but local boosters decided to support a baseball team of professional players organized by J.A. Simon, who also managed Simon’s Comedy Company, a touring theatrical group. At the beginning of August, Simon relinquished management of the baseball club to prepare for the Comedy Company’s upcoming tour.¹²

After their first three games, Concordia hosted the town team from Delphos on Thursday, Saturday, and Monday. Delphos won all three contests, and Castone took the

losses in the second and third games. Concordia newspapers did not blame him, however. “If [Concordia] could have secured some one [sic] to have taken in all of Castone’s curves, the boys would have come out victorious.” Another newspaper noted that Concordia’s new catcher had trouble because “Castone pitches a hard ball and is very erratic in his delivery.” Most accounts of Concordia’s baseball games lack detail, but the games with Jamestown, Hollis, and Delphos—and possibly the game with Macyville—seem to have been the only ones in which Castone played for Concordia.¹³

On August 26, the Treasurer of the Concordia Base Ball Association published the club’s expenses and income. The report listed Castone’s salary as \$28.25 (equivalent to \$788 in 2018). Only two salaries were higher (\$30.00 and \$41.15), but there is no way to compare the salaries accurately on a per game basis. Another item in the report was the cost to board players in Concordia. To this end, most of the payments were made to Mrs. D.C. Wilson for \$63.05 (\$1,758 in 2018), Barons house for \$41.50 (\$1,157 in 2018), and Revere for \$21.40 (\$597 in 2018). Local boosters also contributed funds to Mrs. Wilson for boarding players, but that money did not pass through the treasurer. The club paid an additional boarding cost of 75¢ (\$21 in 2018) to local barber P.W. Nelson in the name of Castone, who presumably was not allowed to live with the white players.¹⁴ A Kansas baseball team was more likely to be integrated than other enterprises in the community.¹⁵

It is unknown what Castone did during August after leaving Concordia. He might have returned to Topeka, but he did not appear on the published rosters of the Athletics. On September 4, a Lawrence, Kansas newspaper reported the local black club—the Eagles—had “a new pitcher, W. Castone of Topeka. He is a very swift and effective pitcher.” He pitched the Eagles to victory over the Novels, a black team from Kansas City, Missouri. The Novels then disbanded and their catcher, Frank Maupin, joined the Eagles. He would prove to be a catcher who could handle Castone, and the two would be an effective battery for several clubs in the coming years. After defeating the Novels, Castone pitched for the Southern Kansas “railroad boys,” a white team, in their first win over the Lawrence town team, also composed of white players. They were “very much elated over their victory.” On September 14 and 15, the Eagles played a pair of games against the Topeka Athletics and shortstop James Hightower. The Eagles, featuring the new battery of Castone and Maupin, lost the first game, 10–9, in 12 innings. The following day, the Eagles evened the series, winning 5–4 in 10-innings behind the battery of Bud Fowler and Frank Maupin.¹⁶

At the end of September, the *Lawrence Evening Tribune* reported a plan to organize a high-quality black baseball team.

[T]he colored men [in Lawrence] will organize a nine composed of the best colored players and travel extensively through the states, playing exhibition games. This will be the only professional colored base ball club in the west. It will consist of such players as [James] Hightower and [Bud] Fowler of Topeka, [Frank] Maupin of Kansas City, one man from St. Louis and several professionals from different parts of the country. ... They could compete with the league nines, and could probably make money for the managers. The colored men have proved their ability to beat the best Amateur nines in

Kansas, and could organize a nine that would be “worthy of the steel” of any organization in the country.¹⁷

Castone, the “swift and effective pitcher,” was not among the players mentioned, but as it turns out, the plan came to naught. However, the proposal presaged talented barnstorming teams based in nearby Kansas City during the early twentieth century, such as the All-Nations and Kansas City Monarchs, both managed by J.L. Wilkinson.¹⁸

In the meantime, Castone and Maupin were the battery for the Lawrence Eagles in three games in as many days during early October against the white town team in Lawrence. The town team won the first game, 7–4, but the Eagles came back with a 10–9 victory in game two. The third and deciding game was an easy victory for the town team, 9–2. No box scores were published, so it is impossible to assess why the Eagles lost so decisively in the third game. The numbers of strikeouts were reported, however, and Castone rang up 18, 10, and 9 batters in the three games.¹⁹ With that, his college education and his first season of baseball in Kansas came to a close.

1887: From Lawrence to Kansas City, Missouri

Castone’s 1887 season got off to an early start. During April, he and Maupin were the battery for the Lawrence town team in a series against a team from the state university (now the University of Kansas). “They played their usual fine game,” and the town team easily won the first three games. In game four, Castone and Maupin played for the university, but the town team was again victorious. Castone also umpired a game between two fraternities at the university. Baseball fever ran high, and there was talk of Lawrence joining the Kansas State League. In mid-April, a local newspaper even suggested, “It is probable that Castone and Maupin will sign with our club.” Whether black players would have been allowed on league teams is unknown. Lawrence chose not to enter the league, because it would have only four far-flung teams, making travel costs prohibitive. On April 27, “the colored battery” left for Kansas City, but they were invited to return to Lawrence on July 4 to play for the town team against the Wyandotte (Kansas City, Kansas) Reds.²⁰

What Castone and Maupin did during May and June is unknown, but on June 29, the *Kansas City Star* carried an announcement on the front page that exuded confidence to the point of bravado. “A colored base ball club has been organized and is ready to meet any club in the United States. Challenges may be forwarded to the Kansas City Maroons, 1832 Holmes street.” From July through September, the Maroons played—and usually defeated—black clubs from nearby cities, including the Atchison (KS) Lone Stars, Leavenworth (KS) Leapers, and Lexington (MO) Black Stockings. Castone and Maupin comprised the Maroons’ star battery. For the few games in which the numbers of strikeouts were reported, Castone’s tallies ranged from 11 to 17. In a game against Leavenworth, another pitcher for the Maroons surrendered seven runs in the first inning. Castone relieved him in the second inning and did not allow a hit the rest of the game, as his teammates rallied for a 10–7 victory.²¹

In addition to the clubs from other cities, the Kansas City Maroons played local black teams, such as the Twelfth Street Athletics, whom they also defeated. One game between

the Maroons and Athletics was played for a side bet of two bats and gate receipts.²² Bats and balls were much less plentiful in the early years of the sport.

Having little trouble defeating the area's black clubs, the Maroons' manager wrote to the *Kansas City Star* that his team "would like to play the [white] Beaton club for \$25 and gate receipts" (equivalent to \$697 in 2018). The following day, the manager of the Beaton Base Ball Club of Armourdale (now part of Kansas City, Kansas) provided an indirect but clear reply. He challenged "any amateur base ball club either in Kansas or Missouri," but "no colored clubs need apply."²³ Segregation on the baseball field was stricter in Kansas City than in Topeka, Concordia, and Lawrence. However, some white clubs in Kansas City, and even some minor league teams, would later play the city's top black clubs.

1888: Denver, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, and Beyond

Castone probably overwintered in Kansas or Colorado. The last week of February 1888, a letter was waiting for him at the post office in Emporia, Kansas, about midway between Kansas City and Wichita. However, the spring of 1888 found him in Denver, where he pitched for amateur teams in May. "Castone, a well-known colored pitcher, assisted the Pastimes. ... The trouble with the Pastimes was that they had no catcher to back up Castone." He also pitched for the Evan & Littlefield team in the local amateur league. At the end of May and continuing through June, Castone pitched for the Denver Solis baseball club. On May 31, they defeated Colorado Springs, 16–12. Many runs in these games were unearned, so a score was not necessarily a true reflection of a pitcher's performance. "Castone was the gem of the visitors [from Denver], his effective work in the box from beginning to finish, and the manner in which he yielded the willow, was greatly admired by all." Castone struck out 20 batters. In late June, the Solis defeated Idaho Springs, 22–6. "The feature of the game was the battery work of Castone and [George] Taylor of the Solis." Castone struck out 18.²⁴

In July, Castone rejoined the Kansas City Maroons. He continued his pitching dominance over teams in the region, with one exception—the Springfield (MO) Reds. The Reds had been the bane of Kansas City clubs for more than a decade, and in 1888, they defeated the Maroons in three of four games. Little information about the players was reported for the first three games, but a box score was published for the fourth contest. After losing the first two games in Springfield, the Maroons had taken the first game in Kansas City, giving them an opportunity to even the series behind their star battery of Castone and Maupin. Yet, the Reds won, 13–7. Castone's performance was inconsistent. He struck out 12 and surrendered only one base on balls, but he gave up 15 hits. Compounding the 16 base runners he allowed, Castone was charged with three wild pitches, and Maupin had six passed balls. Altogether, the Maroons committed 13 errors and the Reds 15. The Reds' pitcher struck out 13 Maroons. Overall, it was not an exhibition of fine baseball skills. In the Maroons next game, an easy win over the Lexington Black Stockings, Castone played right field.²⁵

By the beginning of August, Castone had moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he joined an otherwise white barnstorming team referred to simply as the Salt Lakes. This

professional club warmed up for a tour through the Northwest by playing three games against a team of local amateurs named the Nationals. Castone won the first game, 12–2. The following day, he started in center field but came in to pitch with the Salt Lakes down 8–2 after three innings. “It soon became evident that [Castone] was all that had been claimed for him.” He allowed only one more run, while the Salt Lakes mounted a rally. However, the Salt Lakes were still down, 9–8, in the top of the ninth inning. With Castone and two other runners on base, the next batter hit a triple, giving them an 11–9 lead. Castone then held the Nationals scoreless in the bottom of the ninth. “To-morrow fans will have the opportunity to see Castone, ‘the Kansas City terror,’ as one of the boys dubbed him yesterday.” He and the catcher for the Salt Lakes were to play for the Nationals, while the Nationals’ battery played for the Salt Lakes.²⁶ The detailed game summary contained racially tainted praise for Castone not uncommon at the time.

The last game of base ball ... came off yesterday in the presence of a fair turnout, particularly of ladies, and resulted in a victory for the Nationals. Perhaps it should be said that it resulted in a victory for Castone, for it is pretty certain that whichever side he played on would have beaten. The scheme of reversing the batteries and having the tricky coon and Straub act for the Nationals ... was an interesting one. ... The result was that the coon mowed down the Salt Lakes in the same scythe-like way that he chopped off the Kids.... Result 12 to 6 for Castone.²⁷

Gate receipts for the series with the Nationals had been low, so the Salt Lakes were anxious to start their barnstorming tour. The first stop was Ogden, Utah. Castone started two games in right field but came in to pitch the last four and five innings of these games, respectively. The Salt Lakes won the first game, 8–2, and played to an 8–8 tie after 10 innings in the second. The outfield in Ogden presented an interesting challenge to the fielders. Several hits that might otherwise have been caught went for extra bases, because they landed in trees on the margin of the field.²⁸

In Montana, the team from Helena wired the Salt Lakes to stop in Butte, and they would meet them there for their first game. Only six of the Helena players ended up making the trip, so the Salt Lakes loaned Castone to Helena, who also picked up two players from Butte. Castone hit a homerun for Helena in the first inning, but the Montanans provided little in the way of competition. The Salt Lakes won the first game, 10–4, followed by two wins in Helena, 12–6 and 9–4. Castone sat out the second game and pitched in the final contest.²⁹

The Salt Lakes continued their trip west to Portland, Oregon, where they played the Willamettes.* The games were more competitive, but the Salt Lakes had the better series, despite losing the first game, 7–4. Castone pitched the first five innings, striking out five, but he was moved to center field in the sixth inning after a rough fifth. Salt Lake gave up six unearned runs that inning on only one hit. A complaint by the Willamettes apparently rattled Castone and the rest of the Salt Lakes.³⁰

* The team name (pronounced wil-LAM-ettes) was taken from the Willamette River that flows north into the Columbia River at Portland.

Castone ... had been jumping about in the box like a grasshopper and Umpire Haggemiller's attention being called to the infraction of the rules, compelled him to be more legal in his delivery. This action seemed to rob him of his effectiveness, for the Webfooters immediately got on to his delivery and hammered the ball all over the field. In the [sixth] inning Castone was succeeded by Blanchard, who pitched to the end of the game, and kept down the hits.³¹

The Salt Lakes regained their composure and played better in the remaining games, defeating the Willamettes, 7-1, 6-1, and 5-3. Castone played right field in the second and third games, but he pitched a complete game in the finale.³²

From Oregon, the Salt Lakes traveled south to California, where they met their stiffest competition. They lost three games to as many California teams in San Francisco. Playing their first game against the Haverlys in a rolling fog, the Salt Lakes lost, 7-1, managing only a single hit. Castone played center field, in the first game but pitched in the next two games, which were much closer. Adjusting to the fog in the second game against Oakland, the Salt Lakes lost 9-7. "Castone, a young man with a dark, 4-11-44 complexion, good speed, curves and some headwork, put them over the plate for the Salt Lake players."* Castone struck out only four batters but surrendered just two earned runs. In the third game against the Pioneers, he pitched another complete game, a 6-4 loss. He had six strikeouts and allowed only one earned run.³³

The trip was poorly managed and consequently was not a financial success. Most of the players—no longer a truly organized team—returned to Portland, where they again played the Willamettes, losing 10-1. Castone usually played in the outfield when he was not pitching, but in this game, he started at shortstop and came in later to pitch. Several Salt Lake players decided to remain in Portland, but Castone was not among them. Nonetheless, he had taken the rare opportunity to travel widely through the northwestern United States, playing for an otherwise white professional baseball team, the sort of experience few, if any, black ballplayers could claim during this time.³⁴ He would be a bit more sedentary the next few years, but his experiences would be no less noteworthy.

1889: Aspen and the Colorado State League

Castone overwintered in Denver, where his residence was listed in the 1889 city directory as 2829 Blake Street, just a few blocks down the street from the modern-day ballpark, Coors Field. At the end of February, a notice appeared in Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*. "William Castone, who filled the box so effectively for the Solis nine of this city last season, is open for engagement in the Colorado league. He is stopping in Georgetown and is in good condition."³⁵

The Aspen club of the Colorado State League, a minor league, soon signed Castone. The league was included in the National Agreement, which protected teams from losing

* The number sequence 4-11-44 was considered lucky in a gambling lottery known as "policy" and later as the "numbers" game. Numbers, usually ranging from 1 to 78, were drawn, and a group of three correct numbers was known as a gig (Sweeney 2009, page 73).

players to other members without compensation. Club jumping was a problem for independent teams. Five teams comprised the league—Aspen, Colorado Springs, the Denver Solis, Leadville Blues, and Pueblo Ponies. Joining Castone in Aspen was George Taylor. He occasionally caught, but he primarily played first base and left field. It was still too early in the year to expect suitable baseball weather at the high elevation in Aspen (8,000 feet / 2,438 m), so the team headed down to the plains for practice in Denver. Castone, “the prince of Colorado pitchers,” and Taylor warmed up by playing for the Denver Solis in exhibition games against Pueblo and Colorado Springs. After rejoining Aspen, they played in exhibition games against the Denver team in the Western Association, an interstate minor league. Perhaps not surprisingly, Aspen lost its games against the top Denver club. Nevertheless, the *Aspen Chronicle* praised Castone’s pitching performance, pointing out that Denver was “only able, by hard work, to scratch out five hits from this promising young twirler.” The exhibition games continued through early April, with the final games played on the new baseball grounds in Aspen.³⁶

Aspen opened their league schedule on April 17 in Colorado Springs and played on the road until May 8. They struggled away from home and did not win their first game until April 26. They seemed to play better in Aspen and Leadville, the only league town above them in elevation (10,151 feet / 3,094 m), but below them in the standings through the first week in May. On May 2, two of Aspen’s pitchers, Castone and Mann, returned home ahead of the team because they were injured during a game in Pueblo. Fortunately, the upcoming game in Leadville was postponed because of snow. On the following day, the “grounds were not in the best condition and the weather was somewhat cold,” but Aspen won the game. While the weather constituted a challenge for spring baseball in the mountains, the elevation could work to the favor of the locals. When the team from Colorado Springs arrived in Aspen for their first game on May 8, some of the players had “not become thoroughly acclimated and naturally [found] the altitude slightly [disadvantageous].” Colorado Springs had just lost to Leadville, 25–3, in six innings. Three inches of snow fell overnight in Aspen, but the sun melted it in time for the game. However, Colorado Springs won, 14–10. At high elevation, a batted ball can fly farther, and the *Aspen Chronicle* reported part of their team’s trouble was that the players “were seized with the mania to knock out three baggers and home runs.”³⁷

Overall, Aspen played better at home, and by May 27, they had climbed to second place, with a record of 16–9, still trailing Pueblo (18–7). To help their cause, a subscription paper was circulated around the courthouse for money to purchase “one dozen of Spalding’s base ball bats to be presented to the Aspen State League base ball club.” Money also changed hands in the form of gambling. After Aspen came from behind in the ninth inning to defeat first-place Pueblo, it was reported that more than \$2,000 (equivalent to \$55,770 in 2018) changed hands on the results of the game. (Aspen and Leadville were founded on productive silver mines.) On May 28, the *Aspen Chronicle* ran a notice on the front page, signed by the members of the ball club, thanking “Lou Tomkins and other gentlemen who presented us with ten dollars (\$10) apiece at the conclusion of the Aspen-Pueblo series.” Aspen won the series—three wins, no losses, and one tie through 11 innings. Castone was

the winning pitcher in two of the games. After an exhibition game on Decoration Day (Memorial Day), Aspen would head back out on the road.³⁸

The ball games in early June would share space in newspapers with stories about the devastating Johnstown flood in western Pennsylvania, in which more than 2,000 people lost their lives. In July, it would be stories about a murderer in London known as Jack the Ripper. There was trouble in the league as well, though of much less consequence. On June 4, it was announced that the fourth-place Denver Solis (11–18) had disbanded. This left four clubs in the league and made it necessary to adjust the schedule. The league also decided to hire two full-time umpires (one for each game) at a salary of \$100 per month (equivalent to \$2,790 in 2018), plus railroad expenses. Up to this time, the home teams had arranged for umpires, which led to squabbling. Aspen continued to play better at home than on the road, but in the end, it mattered little in terms of the league standings. First-place Pueblo and then last-place Leadville dropped out. By the end of July, the league was down to Aspen and Colorado Springs, and the latter was reported to be \$5,000 in debt (equivalent to \$139,400 in 2018). The Aspen squad held a benefit game on July 10, in which they split into two teams and shared in the gate receipts. Players on the winning team also received \$5 each (equivalent to \$139 in 2018). The amount raised was not mentioned, but it was not “as much as the boys deserve and should have had.” During the second week of August, a series of five games in Aspen between the home team and Colorado Springs was scheduled as a fundraiser. Aspen won the series, three games to two, but the proceeds from gate receipts were said to be disappointing.³⁹

In official league games for which I could determine with reasonable certainty if Castone was the pitcher of record, he had 10 wins and 9 losses, most of those wins coming in the first half of the season. For some reason, Aspen carried four pitchers, which is extravagant for a rural minor league club. Castone rarely played in the field on days he did not pitch, although pitchers usually filled other positions on these teams to minimize the roster size and the corresponding expense in salaries. Keeping in mind that Aspen had enough players to field two nines for their benefit game in July, large rosters might have contributed to the financial troubles experienced by the clubs. Having four pitchers on the roster limited the number of games Castone pitched, although I suspect the 19 games I found for him are an incomplete record. The league’s other black player, George Taylor, played in most games for Aspen and was frequently praised for both his hitting and his fielding, especially after he moved from first base to left field.

Following the benefit games with Colorado Springs, Castone and his teammates found spots on other teams in Colorado. In early September, Castone received the blame for Georgetown’s 10–9 loss to Idaho Springs. “Castone of the Georgetown club, it is claimed, threw the game by his indifferent playing and much indignation prevails. Had he played his usual game the Idaho boys would have been badly beaten.” The complaint was not lodged against his pitching performance, however. Castone played center field and second base. Known for his pitching rather than his hitting and fielding, he had one hit in four at bats and made two errors. As late as the end of October, Castone was playing for a picked nine in Denver against Saden’s Electrics.⁴⁰ According to the 1890 city directory for Denver,

Castone found work during the offseason as a waiter and lived at 1758 Curtis Street, just south of today's Coors Field. However, his time in Colorado was nearing an end.

1890–1891: Lincoln Giants

It began in March 1889, when A. Plummer organized the Beacon Base Ball Club in Omaha, Nebraska. Plummer claimed to have “once [been] connected with the famous Cuban Giants, of Hoboken, N. J., and in those days put up a great first base.” He planned to do the same for the Beacons, in addition to being the team's manager. He signed local players, as well as others recruited from Kansas and Missouri. His efforts were summarized under the newspaper headline, “Plummer's Pounders.” Pounders they were not. In May, they lost to the town team in Grand Island, Nebraska by the embarrassing score of 32–1. It did not get much better.⁴¹

Consequently, the club was reorganized with new management and a few new players. It was also given the name Lafayettes, who continued to play out of Omaha and nearby Council Bluffs, Iowa. By mid-June, it was reported that, “The Lafayettes [had] been playing a tour throughout the state during which time they ... won eight out of eleven games.” They lost game number 12 to the team from Fremont, Nebraska, but the local newspaper praised the visiting club, who had several players “laid up for repairs.” The newspaper also mentioned the team's management. “The Lafayettes are owned by a stock company composed of L. J. Morse, Pres.; Chas. Fairfax, Vice Pres.; Cotter Duncan, Treas.; Will Pope, Sec. and R. T. Baldwin, who plays right field, manager. These gentlemen are all colored boys and are running their organization quite successfully.”⁴² I am unaware of any effort to document the record of the Lafayettes, but the small number of scores I saw suggest a much improved club following its rough start as the Beacons.

In 1890, William M. Pope, secretary of the Lafayettes' stock company, undertook the task of building a new professional baseball club based on the 1889 organization. The *Detroit Plaindealer* reported the news on January 3. “A professional Afro-American base ball club has been organized in Omaha, Neb., for the season of '90 with a capital stock of \$5,000 all paid in [equivalent to \$139,426 in 2018]. The club will be known by the name of the 'Lafayettes,' and has engaged William Lewis the best known Afro-American player in the West as manager.”⁴³

From the beginning, Pope's plans extended beyond just a more competitive barnstorming team of black players. In the spring, he visited boosters in eastern Nebraska cities to see what they “would do toward getting up a base ball team and joining the State league.” There was no state league yet organized in Nebraska, but Pope was trying to get the ball rolling in Beatrice, Columbus, Fremont, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, Lincoln, and Seward.* Pope proposed taking his revamped Lafayettes from Omaha–Council Bluffs to either Fremont or Lincoln as their representative in the league—a black club in an otherwise white league. As an inducement to Fremont, he mentioned that he had

* Beatrice is pronounced be-AT-tris. Kearney is pronounced CAR-knee. The second “e” in Kearney resulted from an uncorrected misspelling of General Stephen W. Kearny's name when the post office was established.

strengthened the Lafayettes by getting rid of some players and bringing in experienced replacements, which included William Castone, Frank Maupin, John Patterson, John Reeves, and George Taylor. All five would figure prominently in Nebraska baseball during the next three years. In response to the proposal to host a black professional team, the *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune* voiced support for the Lafayettes.⁴⁴

It is reported in base ball circles that the Lafayette colored club, of Omaha, will establish its headquarters in Fremont this season and organize a state league. Those colored boys are not only good ball players, but they are gentlemen as well and Fremont promises right now not to be ashamed of the representation they will give the city among the base ballists of the state. They'll fly the pennant.⁴⁵

The endorsement reflected an underlying prejudice toward the players' skin color, but the reference to them being "gentlemen" was probably also directed at their profession. Newspapers of the time often railed against players, especially hired players, who used foul language, kicked (argued), and fought during games, as we shall see.

Pope's efforts to organize a state league did not bear fruit, though the effort continued through May.⁴⁶ The Lafayettes moved to Lincoln, not Fremont, and began their season in early May with a series of three games against the Omaha Reserves, "partly composed of Omaha professionals" (the team's name was actually the City Steam Laundrys). Prior to the first game, Lincoln's *Nebraska State Journal* praised Castone. "William Castone, who will pitch to-day, led the pitchers of the Colorado state league last year with the Aspens. What he cannot do at bat he makes up in the [pitcher's] box." Castone surrendered only two hits in the opening game, a 15–2 victory for the Lafayettes. In game two, Castone and Maupin started in the outfield but became the battery in the third inning, with Omaha leading, 10–0. Omaha scored only one run off Castone, as the Lafayettes rallied to win 12–11 in 10 innings. In the top of the tenth inning, with two outs and Omaha runners on first and third, Maupin displayed his skills as a catcher. The runner at first base "played off too far and a pretty throw by Catcher Maupins [sic] retired the Reserves." The third game was postponed by rain, which gave new pitcher John Reeves of Kansas City time to arrive for the game. With Reeves and Maupin forming the battery, Castone played in left field. After the Lafayettes defeated the Reserves for the third time, 5–3, the *Nebraska State Journal* proclaimed, "The Lincolns are hereby christened the 'Giants,'" and the name stuck.⁴⁷

It was a good start for the new professional club in Lincoln. New uniforms for the Giants were expected in late May—blue with maroon stockings, belts, and caps—and again in early June—black with white stockings. However they were attired, Castone and Reeves served as a good pitching tandem for the Giants. The *Nebraska State Journal* provided thorough coverage of the Giants, including box scores for most games. I found reports for 37 games played by the Giants: 28 wins and 9 losses.* In these games, Castone's record was 14–5, and Reeves was 13–3 (a pitcher named Bullock also won a game and the Giants forfeited a game). One of Castone's losses was to the Omaha minor league team in the

* On July 27, the *Nebraska State Journal* reported the Giants had a record of 39–6.

Western Association. The Giants had more hits than Omaha (9 vs. 6), but they also had more errors (12 vs. 1). The final score was 11–5, but just how many of the runs scored by Omaha were unearned was not reported. Similarly, Reeves lost to the Denver team in the Western Association, 12–3.⁴⁸

Despite having a good record, the Giants' season was not without its challenges. For some reason, the Giants arranged games with few white town teams. Excluding teams from Lincoln and Omaha, I found Giants' games only with the towns of Fremont (one game), Kearney (five games), Nebraska City (one game), and Ulysses (seven games), as well as the team from the Genoa Indian School (two games). As would become obvious, some Nebraska town teams opposed integration on the baseball diamond, while others accepted it.

The major problem for the Giants was financial support. On June 9, a group of supporters organized a team to play the Giants in a benefit game to help raise funds for the club.⁴⁹ How much they raised was not reported, but it was not enough. On June 28, the *Nebraska State Journal* broke the unfortunate news.

To-day's game will be the last shake out of the box. The Giants will disband this evening according to Manager Castone's statement on account of poor support. Agent Pope has departed for greener fields and unless the enthusiasts of Lincoln show a willingness to keep the team together the boys will do the same. This state of affairs is to be regretted, as the team is composed of gentlemen who have put up exhibitions of ball playing equal to the best.⁵⁰

The club won the game, shortened to seven innings by rain. Then "Captain Castone disbanded his team and discharged the lot." Castone had been named captain of the Giants in late May, and a week later, he assumed the duties of the team's manager. The captain ran the activity on the field during practices and games (as with today's managers). The manager arranged games and took care of other business responsibilities. Despite assuming these additional duties, Castone still pitched and played other positions on days Reeves pitched. Castone put a lot on his shoulders in an attempt to make the Giants a success. When the team disbanded, he traveled to Omaha, where it was rumored Pope wanted to move the team and take them barnstorming. Meanwhile, back in Lincoln, "A company [was] being formed for the purpose of seeing the Lincoln Giants through in their financial difficulties." The following day brought news of a reprieve.⁵¹

The Giants are once more on their feet. Every player in the team yesterday signed an agreement to the effect that they were no longer in the employ of Mr. Pope and agreed to form a new organization on the co-operative plan. They certify that this action was taken because their salaries were due and unpaid. Mr. Castone was elected manager and will continue to act as captain for the present.⁵²

Castone gave up management of the club to another player, Ed Carr, two weeks later. In the meantime, the Giants hosted the white Haverlys from Kansas City. One of the Haverlys' pitchers was a young John Kling, a Kansas City native who would later enjoy a

13-year career as an outstanding catcher in the major leagues, mostly with the Chicago Cubs.* The Giants won two of the three games against the Haverlys in Lincoln. Kling was the losing pitcher in one of the games and showed his frustration. The *Nebraska State Journal* accurately predicted better days ahead for the young player. “Pitcher Kling permitted his temper to get the best of him at one stage, and the guying of the spectators did not improve matters. He will get over it if he sticks to the diamond a few years longer.”⁵³

Following these games, there was a rumor that the Giants had again disbanded, and remnants of the club would meet Maupin in Topeka to tour Kansas and Missouri. Just what caused the trouble was not clear in newspaper stories, but it apparently involved the same lack of funds to pay salaries. The situation was resolved, at least in the short term. “Several prominent lovers of the game have rendered substantial aid and with a subscription list in circulation which has been liberally signed everything looks favorable for the club.” Castone advertised the Giants in the *Sporting News* in the hopes of arranging a tour through “Iowa, Illinois and farther east.”⁵⁴

First up for the Giants, though, was a trip to Kansas City for a return match with the Haverlys and games with the Kansas City Maroons. The Giants easily defeated the Maroons, whose star players—Castone, Maupin, and Reeves—now played for Lincoln. However, the games with the Haverlys did not go well, and racism was a factor. The Haverlys won the first game, 7–4, but not without cheating, according to a Kansas City newspaper. In the eighth inning, with the Giants down two runs, Taylor reached first base safely, followed by Carr, who reached on an error. Patterson’s hit scored Taylor. Maupin was up next, and his hit scored Carr, tying the game, but as Patterson approached home, he “was interfered with by several Haverly men, who got in his way and even held him till the catcher got the ball. The umpire called Patterson out and refused to alter his decision.” The Giants were likely still upset and discouraged in the ninth inning, when they surrendered four runs, giving the Haverlys the win. In their second game a few days later, the Giants walked off the field in the eighth inning to protest decisions by the local white umpire, forfeiting the game to Haverlys, 9–0.⁵⁵

Returning north, the Giants lost a game in Missouri Valley, Iowa and defeated the team from Nebraska City, Nebraska. Then the club disbanded again on July 26, and this time, there would be no reprieve. The financial support was just not there. On August 1, a benefit game was played between an amateur team (the Lincoln Domestics) and a picked team of players from the state university (University of Nebraska) that was bolstered by Castone and four other Giants. The proceeds were given to “Dad Brown,” second baseman for the Giants, to pay for his travel to Washington, DC, where his mother had fallen ill. “When the Giants were disbanded Brown was left without a cent.”⁵⁶

The Giants scattered after the team disbanded. Some joined other clubs. John Patterson played third base for the Omaha City Steam Laundrys (Reserves), the white team that opened the Giants’ season. Castone reportedly received an offer to play in

* When he was not playing in the major leagues, John Kling ran a billiard hall and dealt in real estate in Kansas City. He owned the minor league Kansas City Blues from 1933 to 1937 and eliminated the policy of segregated seating at Muehlebach Field during those years (Anderson 2001).

Dubuque, Iowa, but I do not know if he did. The *Nebraska State Journal* acknowledged his importance to Lincoln baseball that season. “Since the Giants have disbanded Pitcher Castone is preparing to leave the city. The wonderful record made by this club during the season is due principally to the work of Mr. Castone, as his record will show.” By the end of August, Castone was back in Denver, but not for long.⁵⁷

Shortly before Christmas 1890, Castone returned to Lincoln “for a few days,” at the end of which, the *Nebraska State Journal* reported the reason for his visit.⁵⁸

Wm. Castone, the promising young pitcher, and for a time manager of Lincoln’s semi-professional colored team—the Lincoln Giants—has returned to the state and is interesting himself in the state league project. Mr. Castone is prepared to secure a team, the players comprising in the main those connected with him last season, strengthening it where needed, and will locate it in some city ambitious to become a factor in the state league, either managing it himself or allowing some one [sic] else to take the responsibility. The state league project is a good one. Mr. Castone may be addressed at Lincoln.⁵⁹

What Castone proposed was the same arrangement Pope had floated a year earlier for a professional black baseball team to be included in a much talked about but yet to be organized Nebraska State League.⁶⁰ Castone continued to promote his offer in January 1891 through local newspapers, but he also took his efforts to the pages of the *Sporting News*. He advertised the Lincoln Giants as available to represent some city, preferably in a Nebraska State League, at an expense of not more than \$600 per month (equivalent to \$16,730 in 2018). Castone supported his offer by mentioning the Giants’ record in 1890 (as 40–5) and listing the batting averages of the players. In Kearney, he estimated a cost of \$500 per month (equivalent to \$13,940 in 2018).⁶¹

It was May before talk about reorganizing the Lincoln Giants continued, but obtaining financial backing was again proving difficult. Talk of the state league had also subsided during the spring, though it did not stop completely. On June 4, the Giants’ former battery was still looking for an opportunity to play. “Castone and Maupin of last year’s Lincoln giants will form an excellent battery for any club in need of such. They are unengaged and may be communicated with by addressing William Castoche, [sic] Lincoln.”⁶²

Castone rekindled his efforts to reorganize the Giants as part of a Nebraska State League in June, and talk supporting the league briefly returned to newspapers. After “a short tour of the cities which he thinks give promise of supporting such an enterprise,” Castone’s proposal to locate the Giants in Kearney received the endorsement of the *Kearney Daily Hub* and a group of local “base ball enthusiasts.” The proposed league’s potential teams included Beatrice, Blair, Fremont, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney (the Giants), Nebraska City, and Plattsmouth. In the meantime, Castone and Maupin played for the Lincoln Musees, helping them defeat the team from Nebraska City twice. Once again, however, the league failed to materialize. On June 24, the *Kearney Daily Hub* sighed, “Nothing has been heard lately from manager Castone of the Lincoln Giants, and it is feared that Kearney’s base ball prospects have gone glimmering.”⁶³

It was about this time that the Lincoln Giants were finally reorganized, with Carr, Castone, Maupin, Reeves, Taylor, and latecomer William Lincoln among those returning from 1890. They arranged to play games on Sundays at Cushman Park. At the time, it was three miles beyond the Lincoln city limits, far enough away that the ban on Sunday baseball was not enforced. Their first game was against the Omaha Nonpareils during the Fourth of July celebration at Cushman Park. Maupin was sick in Kansas City, and Carr and Taylor had not yet arrived. The Giants' jumbled lineup lost, 7–3. However, the season had finally begun, and the Giants rebounded on Sunday to defeat the Nonpareils, 7–6.⁶⁴

Lincoln had a minor league team in the Western Association in 1891, so there were no box scores for the Giants' games as in 1890, but the *Nebraska State Journal* still reported line scores and other information. The Giants played 26 games, winning 18 and losing 8. Five of those losses came in the first nine games, before all of the players returning from the 1890 team had arrived. Most of the team's games were played outside Lincoln, and they reported that, "as a rule," they were treated very fairly. One exception was Hastings, but the Giants were not the only team to complain about their treatment there.⁶⁵

The last game for the Giants was August 16, when they defeated the Burlington Railroad team from Plattsmouth, 5–3. Money was still a problem for the Giants, and Plattsmouth took advantage of the opportunity to sign Maupin and Lincoln to play for them. Other Giants soon moved on, as well. Castone hoped to restore the team, but his efforts were unsuccessful. It was also reported that Castone wanted to sign with the white team in Hastings. The captain of the Hastings club, Ulysses S. Rohrer, reportedly telegraphed Castone, "Have no use for you."⁶⁶ It would not be the end of Rohrer's confrontational relationship with black ball players, in general, and Castone, in particular.

At the beginning of September, Castone joined the town team in Fremont, who also signed Carr, Lincoln, Maupin, and Taylor. The Giants now comprised half of Fremont's roster. Castone arrived at Fremont in his baseball uniform, ready to play that afternoon, and he was taken straight to the ballpark. Their opponent was Hastings. Behind the battery of Castone and Maupin, Fremont easily won, 15–5. Castone then played third base for Fremont in a 9–7 victory over Hastings. Rohrer lived up to his reputation as a "kicker," complaining during the games about the umpire and even his own players. In fact, he punched the umpire in the second game. The *Fremont Tribune* nicknamed him "Roarer."⁶⁷

After those two games, Maupin returned to Kansas City, and Lincoln might have done the same. Castone and Taylor also left Fremont to join the team in Beatrice. Their first opponent was Fremont, whom Beatrice defeated in three of four games. At the close of the series, the team from Fremont disbanded. Then Beatrice hosted the team from Hastings in a three-game series. The opposing pitchers in the first game were Castone and Rohrer. As in Fremont, Castone pitched well, and Beatrice easily defeated Hastings, 16–1. If the words in his telegram to Castone—"Have no use for you"—were not throbbing in Rohrer's head, they soon might be. Hastings took the second game, 3–2, with Castone in right field for Beatrice. Castone returned to the mound in game three. He and Beatrice again defeated Hastings with no difficulty, 19–3. On the basis of their victories over Fremont and Hastings, Beatrice claimed the mythical state championship.⁶⁸

Their season was not quite over, however. Beatrice traveled to Hastings for a three-game series. It ended early. Beatrice lost the first game to Hastings, 7–6, and complained of such ill treatment by Rohrer and local businessmen that they returned home. Hastings showed up at their diamond the next day in their uniforms and had themselves declared the victors by forfeit, 9–0. That would give them a 3–2 record against Beatrice during the late-season series. Accordingly, they claimed to be state champions. Beatrice disputed the claim and was supported by the *Fremont Tribune*, which reported that Beatrice was the third team to be treated shamefully in Hastings. The other two teams were not mentioned, but one was likely Fremont and the other might have been the Giants. To settle the question, Beatrice challenged Hastings to a three-game series on neutral ground in Lincoln. Initially, Beatrice offered to play for \$100–500 (equivalent to \$2,789–13,943) and all gate receipts. When no reply came from Hastings, they changed the bet to \$100 from Beatrice and \$1 from Hastings, and all gate receipts given to the winner. Instead of accepting the challenge, the Hastings team opted to disband. Still looking for a game, Beatrice defeated the Omaha Nonpareils, 8–5, in 10 innings. Castone struck out 20 batters while pitching a complete game, apparently his last of 1891.⁶⁹

1892: Nebraska State League

During the first two months of 1892, calls were again made for a state league in Nebraska. Having minor league teams in the Western Association from both Omaha and Lincoln in 1891 was seen as “sort of a damper” on efforts to organize a state league that year. If Lincoln was now to have a team in a state league, Castone was the only person known to be interested in managing that team. Once again, he took his case for a state league that included the Giants to the pages of the *Sporting News*.⁷⁰ Opposition to Castone’s plan was immediately voiced by Ulysses Rohrer in Hastings.

Manager Rohrer of the Hastings ball team received a letter yesterday from William Castone of Lincoln, requesting Rohrer to send a representative to the state league meeting to be held at Lincoln February 20. Rohrer, upon receipt of the letter, consulted a number of the fans as to the advisability of sending a representative. There seems to be strong opposition here [in Hastings] to entering the state league if colored players are to be permitted to play in any of the teams. Hastings stands ready to put a team in the Nebraska state league, providing it is composed entirely of white players. The people here say they witnessed too much dirty work by colored players last season.⁷¹

To rationalize his racism, Rohrer was laying blame on the Lincoln Giants that the Giants and the teams from Beatrice and Fremont had laid on him in 1891. Rohrer was not alone in his views, however. To appease him, William Houseworth of Lincoln wrote to Rohrer, stating there would be a meeting February 20 to discuss forming a baseball league, but he emphasized that “the meeting called by him would be separate and independent of the one called by William Castone.” The meeting was later postponed to March 1.⁷²

In the meantime, an article in the *Nebraska State Journal* reported Houseworth's efforts to organize the league and a team in Lincoln, which might include Castone. "Steps are being taken for the organization of a local team and communication is now being maintained with a number of players of known ability. Castone recently declined to sign with the Cuban Giants, a noted colored team, in anticipation of the organization of a team here at home." In addition to Castone, lists of available players for league teams included former Giants Ed Carr, Frank Maupin, John Patterson, and George Taylor. No mention was made of the Giants joining the league intact, but Castone once again offered to take the team to Kearney, and the *Kearney Daily Hub* again endorsed the plan.⁷³

The meeting on March 1 included representatives from Beatrice, Fremont, Grand Island, Lincoln, Norfolk, and Plattsmouth. Hastings and Kearney were still not committed to joining. Castone and Houseworth were both present as representatives from Lincoln. Newspapers in Nebraska reported on the discussions at the meeting and the decisions made—league fees, team salary limits of \$550 per month, hiring independent umpires, choosing uniform colors unique to each club, and other aspects of running the league. The league would seek protection for player contracts under the National Agreement.⁷⁴

In the March 12 issue of the *Sporting News*, Castone described the organizational meeting for the Nebraska State League and noted that the Lincoln Giants would not be a member. However, he hoped to join one of the teams, probably Lincoln. By this time, Beatrice had already signed Taylor, and Plattsmouth had signed Maupin and Patterson, and would soon sign John Reeves. Bud Fowler signed with the Lincoln Browns. He had expressed an interest in signing with the Plattsmouth team in February 1891, but no league was organized that year. After Fowler signed, Castone, who had been in Omaha, also signed a contract with Lincoln. In response to that announcement, the *Lincoln Weekly Herald* wrote as though signing Castone was essential. "Manager Houseworth of the Lincoln ball team has signed Castone to pitch. It would seem that we are going to have some ball this season, after all." Thus, the proposed six-team league had three integrated clubs.⁷⁵

The six black players mentioned are known to have played on integrated teams in the 1892 Nebraska State League. National Baseball Hall of Fame member King Solomon "Sol" White—a black player, manager, sportswriter, and historian during the late 1800s and early 1900s—also listed "B. Holmes" as a black third baseman for the Fremont club. A player named Fred Holmes, usually abbreviated as F. Holmes in newspaper accounts, was signed to play third base for Fremont, but neither Gregory Bond nor I found any information in contemporary sources to indicate whether Holmes was black or white. Thus, whether or not there was a seventh black player and a fourth integrated team in the league remains an open question.⁷⁶

In Hastings, there was still considerable opposition to joining the league because black players would be permitted. However, they eventually relented and replaced Norfolk, which was excluded to keep the league at six teams and to reduce the costs of train travel among the cities. The schedule was set to run from May 1 through September 15, but trouble for the league began almost immediately. The Lincoln Browns did not survive two weeks. Rain forced the postponement of early games, and insufficient funds was given as

the cause of Lincoln's demise. However, some people also suggested Lincoln hoped to regain a team in a higher level league (they did not). In mid-May it was reported, "The remains of the Lincoln team start for their future home in Kearney to-night." Castone and Fowler were among the Lincoln players who signed new contracts with the management of the Kearney club. The league remained at six teams, but the schedule had to be redone to provide the most efficient travel arrangements.⁷⁷

Resettled in his new baseball home, Castone was to alternate pitching duties with Bob Pender, but Albert Hopp was soon hired to share the load, because Pender's arm was sore.⁷⁸ I was unable to verify all of the games in which Castone pitched, but of the 21 league games I found in which he was clearly the pitcher of record (some for Lincoln), he had 10 wins and 11 losses. On days he did not pitch, Castone played in the outfield, usually right field. Some of the games he lost were close, such as a 5-4 loss to league-leading Beatrice. Others were blowouts. On a stop in Lincoln en route to Plattsmouth for a game, Castone, Fowler, Pender, and catcher Frank Fear reported that Kearney was getting a new pitcher. "Hopp's arm is still shy and Castone has been overworking himself." As an example, Castone won both games of a doubleheader against Plattsmouth on June 2.⁷⁹

The games Castone pitched that garnered the most attention in newspapers were those between Kearney and Hastings. It seems likely that he also anticipated these contests more than the other games. Perhaps he felt it too much before the first game, which Castone lost in Hastings, 9-0. Rohrer played shortstop for the home club. "The fact that Castone was advertised to do the twirling this afternoon brought out every fan in the city to the ball park, notwithstanding the unfavorable weather." Two weeks later, however, Castone turned the tables in another 9-0 game. "Hastings experienced her first shut out of the season to-day, and Castone was the lad to do the work. He had not forgotten the reception he received the last time and he was on his nettle. Hastings made only three lonesome hits." The following day, Castone pitched in relief part way through the ninth inning of a 9-7 loss for Kearney, but it was unclear who surrendered the winning run to Hastings. Two weeks later, Castone again led the defeat of Hastings, 6-2, giving up only four hits and no earned runs. Rohrer did not play. Newspapers typically referred to Castone as "colored," but the summary for this game was an exception. "Kearney has a handsome pitcher named Castone, and the way this gentleman of Spanish descent mowed down Hastings' imported ball tossers with his invincible drop was a marvel to all."⁸⁰

The Nebraska State League did not complete its schedule. As described by Gregory Bond, racial dissension and other factors caused the league to fold, but it was a slow death. Fremont was the first to go on June 20. Money was a problem, but they also complained about Rohrer's roles as a player and manager in Hastings while serving as league secretary. "As the secretary of the league [he] has general charge and control of all league umpires[;] this condition of things is manifestly unfair." Plattsmouth likewise withdrew on June 26.⁸¹

The four remaining teams agreed to continue playing within the league. However, changes made to restructure the league led Beatrice to withdraw on July 5. One of the changes included the guaranteed payments made by Beatrice to visiting teams. They were raised to \$40 per game because of higher travel costs for the other three teams when they

played there. The other teams would still pay only \$25, even though the cost for Beatrice to travel to these towns would presumably be higher. The change in guarantees was withdrawn, but Beatrice had had enough. With only three teams remaining, Grand Island decided to leave the league on July 9. The *Beatrice Daily Express* then mockingly invoked Rohrer's part in the league. "Grand Island has formally withdrawn from the state league. Kearney threatens to do so, and from present indications all that will be left of the league in another week will be Col. Rohrer. And won't he be a roarer?" Hastings vowed to remain as long as there was a team to play, but by July 14, they, too, had disbanded. Kearney officially disbanded the next day, but not without taking a final shot at Hastings. "OH YES! Hastings was going to stay in the league as long as there was a team to play with. But Kearney is still waiting for Hastings to come up and play those three games scheduled for this week. Kearney ... has quit only because there is nobody to play with. See you all later."⁸² After all the time and effort expended by Castone to promote the organization of a Nebraska State League, it seems fitting that his club would be the last one standing.

Some of the towns whose league teams disbanded chose to organize less costly, independent town teams, and during late July, Castone floated the idea of reorganizing the Lincoln Giants. He sought \$250–300 to equip the team and expected to arrange games with teams from Leavenworth, Topeka, St. Joseph (MO), and Omaha, in addition to town teams in Nebraska. He reported that several players had agreed to play for the Giants, including Fowler, Maupin, Patterson, Reeves, and Taylor. "This aggregation could put up good ball." However, nothing came from the attempt. The last mention of Castone in Nebraska that season came in early August, when he was to umpire a game during the Lincoln Social Club picnic at Cushman Park.⁸³

1893: Cuban Giants

The Cuban Giants of New York (and nearby cities) was a black barnstorming team that had a successful run as an independent baseball club, beginning in 1885. The team also played in the Middle States League in 1889–1890 and the Connecticut State League in 1891. None of the players was from Cuba. The name was said to be a marketing tactic to accommodate white teams not entirely comfortable playing a black club by suggesting they were from another country. The Cuban Giants were organized for the 1893 season in April with some of the prominent players of the era on the roster, such as middle infielder Frank Grant and pitcher George Stovey. The roster was reasonably stable through the summer, but some players left the club during the long season, including Stovey.⁸⁴

As early as January, the team's owner, J.M. Bright, announced that he had "secured the services of four players from last year's Nebraska League." However, no names were mentioned and none appeared on the roster through the spring. It was late June when former Lincoln Giant John Patterson joined the Cuban Giants. Initially, Patterson played shortstop for the Cuban Giants, but he later moved to left field. After he had played a month in the Northeast, the *New York Sun* praised his baseball skills. "Patterson, the Cuban Giants' new short stop, has proven to be a strong acquisition."⁸⁵

Castone joined the Cuban Giants at least as early as July 7, when he won an 11-7 decision against the Middletown (NY) Asylums. The team's name referred to the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital, which included baseball as a treatment to improve mental health beginning in 1888. The hospital sponsored a team that played on the hospital grounds into the 1890s. Castone had been hired, along with pitcher Frank Miller from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to fill the Cuban Giants' depleted pitching staff. Castone played for the club through at least mid-August. The Cuban Giants won most of their games in 1893 (nearly 90% of more than 100 games played, including all of their games in August). Likewise, Castone apparently won more games than he lost, based on the few box scores I found. Castone also played in the outfield during at least one game, alongside Frank Miller.⁸⁶

After defeating the team in Corning, New York, 13-2, the Cuban Giants received an unusual bonus from the host city. "The Cuban Giants occupied the boxes at the opera house last night through the courtesy of the Redding-Stanton Opera company, who announced previously that the winners of the ball game yesterday would be given free admission, and could occupy boxes."⁸⁷ This was certainly a different world than Castone was used to playing in while he was in the West. When and why he left the Cuban Giants is unknown, but it apparently marked the end of his baseball career.

1894-1967: After Baseball

Castone enjoyed opportunities on the diamond that were unavailable to all but a few black players at the time (Table 1). He played on two integrated minor league clubs, alongside George Taylor in Aspen and Bud Fowler in Lincoln and Kearney. Castone also toured large parts of the nation to play baseball. He barnstormed in the Northwest with an otherwise white team, and he traveled through the Northeast with the famed Cuban Giants. Castone managed and captained the Lincoln Giants, one of the first professional black baseball clubs in the country's heartland. It was the reputations earned by Castone, Taylor, and three of their Giants' teammates—Frank Maupin, John Patterson, and John Reeves—that gave them the opportunity to play on integrated teams in the Nebraska State League. For two years, Castone worked diligently to take the entire Giants team into the minor league, only to have his efforts thwarted by opponents of integration. These events alone make his professional life noteworthy, yet he had a second passion.

After the 1893 season, G.W. Castone moved to Chicago, where he lived at 2454 State Street in February 1894. Later that year, he was mentioned as a coachman for Fernando Jones, whose barn was "at the rear of No. 1834 Prairie avenue." In 1895, George W. Castone was listed in the city directory for Evanston, Illinois as a butler at 1558 Ridge Avenue. In December 1898, he married Mary Graff, a German immigrant, in Chicago. They would have four children: Eugene William, Ellen, Isabelle, and Anthony. Some of the records from this period list George's birthplace as Chicago, but federal censuses and other documents clearly contradict that. When Martha Bressie passed away in Salem in April 1910, her son, whom she referred to as William, came down from Chicago to attend her funeral and serve as administrator of her will. Martha left most of "her money and personal property, after funeral expenses," to his three oldest children (Anthony had not yet been born).⁸⁸

Table 1.—Partial list of teams on which George William Castone played baseball. He played for other teams on occasion to bolster their rosters for specific games.

Date	Team	League	Integrated
1886	Topeka (KS) Athletics		●
	Concordia (KS) town team		●
	Lawrence (KS) Eagles		—
1887	Lawrence (KS) town team		●
	Kansas City (MO) Maroons		—
1888	Denver (CO) Solis		●
	Kansas City (MO) Maroons		—
	Salt Lakes (UT)		●
1889	Denver (CO) Solis (<i>exhibition games</i>)	Colorado State League	●
	Aspen (CO)	Colorado State League	●
1890	Lincoln (NE) Giants		—
1891	Lincoln (NE) Giants		—
	Fremont & Beatrice (NE) town teams		●
1892	Lincoln Browns/Kearney (NE)	Nebraska State League	●
1893	Cuban Giants (NJ)		—

After the birth of their fourth child in 1911, the Castones moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where city directories from 1914 into the 1930s listed George’s occupation as a waiter at various establishments. It was in St. Paul that his story took an unusual turn, at least for a ballplayer. As reported in newspapers in 1914, Castone had a talent for painting. Some articles included a photograph purported to be a profile of Castone.⁸⁹

George W. Castone, a waiter at the Ryan hotel in St. Paul, is to realize his life’s ambition, namely to go abroad to study art. Castone, while following his trade, has spent his spare time with the brush and palette and his efforts have attracted the interest and attention of a prominent St. Paul man who advanced the nucleus of a fund to send him abroad to develop his talents. He is expected to leave for Italy in a short time.⁹⁰



Although this educational opportunity would have been welcome news for George, it created problems for his family. In 1916, a Swedish-language newspaper in Minneapolis, *Svenska Folkets Tidning* (*Swedish People’s Newspaper*), reported that he had neglected his family to pursue art in Chicago, and Judge Orr was ready to send him to jail. His wife interceded, and he was placed on probation for five years. George also promised to provide for his family in such a way that they did not suffer distress.⁹¹

It was during this time that Castone entered at least one painting in a competition for black artists at the Exposition and Celebration to Commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Negro, which was held in Chicago in August and September

1915. The painting by “G. W. Castone, Chicago,” was awarded second place among the still-life entries.⁹² In the 1920 federal census, his occupation was listed as “Artist at home,” but in the 1930 census, his occupation was given as “Waiter” in a restaurant, as it was listed in several St. Paul city directories through the years. In 2015, the Minnesota Historical Society purchased one of Castone’s oil paintings. The 30-inch by 40-inch painting of the Mississippi River from 1914 is titled “River Scene.” Now you know why there is a landscape painting on the cover of this baseball monograph.

Mary Castone was in New York when she passed away in March 1942. She was buried in Detroit, Michigan, where two of their children, Isabelle and Anthony, lived. George Castone died in Minnesota at St. Paul–Ramsey Hospital on January 16, 1967, after battling pneumonia for 10 days. On the death certificate, his birthdate was listed as January 25, 1867, indicating he passed away just nine days before his 100th birthday. The certificate listed his mother as “Marth [sic] Bressie,” but his father was incorrectly given as “George Castonia.” His birthplace was identified as Joplin, Missouri, which is about 170 miles southwest of Salem, where he was likely born. George William Castone, an accomplished base ballist and painter, was laid to rest at Elmhurst Cemetery in St. Paul (Section 7, Row G, Grave 185).⁹³

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- ⁸⁵ *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, 18 July 1893, p 3. • *Jersey City News*, 1 July 1893, p 4. • *Middletown Daily Times*, 30 January 1893, p 7. • *New York Sun*, 24 April 1893, p 4; 26 June 1893, p 6; 31 July 1893, p 6. • *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 April 1893, p 16. • *Princeton Union*, 23 February 1893, p 2. • Bond (2004).
- ⁸⁶ *Jersey City News*, 1 July 1893, p 4. • *Middletown Daily Times*, 8 July 1893, p 7; 1 August 1893, p 7. • *New York Sun*, 1 August 1893, p 4. • *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 July 1893, p 3; 9 August 1893, p 3. • *Philadelphia Times*, 26 July 1893, p 6; 29 July 1893, p 6; 9 August 1893, p 6; 11 August 1893, p 6. • *Pittsburgh Press*, 7 September 1893, p 5. • Overmyer (2011).
- ⁸⁷ *Elmira Gazette*, 4 August 1893, p 8.
- ⁸⁸ *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 4 February 1894, p 13; 10 September 1894, p 8. • *Chicago Tribune*, 8 December 1898, p 5. • *Salem Monitor*, 21 April 1910, p 5; 9 May 1912, p 8. • *Salem Post*, 19 June 1919, p 6.
- ⁸⁹ *Denver Star*, 2 May 1914, p 1. • *Minneapolis Tribune*, 1 March 1914, p 8 (quote). • *Reading Times*, 9 March 1914, p 6 (photo). • *Wichita Beacon*, 7 March 1914, p 2. • Du Bois (1914).
- ⁹⁰ *Minneapolis Tribune*, 1 March 1914, p 8.
- ⁹¹ *Svenska Folkets Tidning*, 12 January 1916, p 10.
- ⁹² Anonymous (1915, page 23).
- ⁹³ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 18 January 1967, p 23. • Minnesota Department of Health, Section of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death, Number 1967-MN-002626. • Interactive Map and Records of Elmhurst Cemetery, St. Paul, Minnesota, <http://elmhurstcemetery.org/MasterMap.asp> (accessed 22 January 2019).

Appendix

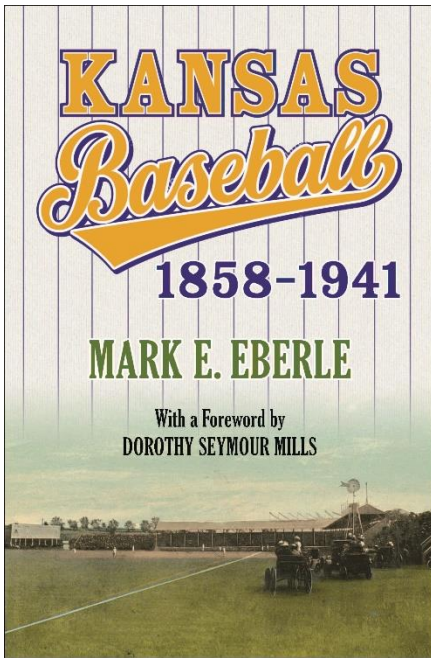
Selected documents and newspaper articles that mention George William Castone from 1867 to 1967. In 1892, he stopped referring to himself as William Castone and began using George W. Castone. His mother still referred to him as William in her will in 1910.

Year	Source and Location	Notes
1870	Federal Census, Dent County, MO	"Castone M R"; Castone "G W [age] 3"
1884	<i>Leadville (CO) Daily Herald</i> , 30 March 1884, p 4	"The colored ladies of Leadville" gave a ball. "The following is a list of the gentlemen and their escorts: ... Miss Sarah Flowers and Mr. William Castone...."
1885	City Directory, Leadville CO	"Castone William, col'd, porter, Athletic Club, r. 412 N. Spruce"
1886	Twenty-third Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the State Agricultural College of Kansas, 1885-1886	Page 10: Students, First Year, "William Castone, Leadville, Colorado."
	<i>Concordia (KS) Republican-Empire</i> , 26 August 1886, p 3	Concordia BBC Treasurer's Report: "W. Castone [salary] ... \$28.25"
	<i>Lawrence (KS) Daily Journal</i> , 4 September 1886, p 3	Lawrence Eagles "new pitcher, W. Castone of Topeka"
1888	<i>Emporia (KS) Weekly News</i> , 1 March 1888, p 4	"List of letters advertised at the Emporia post office ... Castone, William"
	<i>Salt Lake (UT) Daily Herald</i> , 7 August 1888, p 5	"Castone, the colored pitcher from Kansas City...."
	<i>Deseret Evening News (UT)</i> , 1 September 1888, p 4	Letters "Remaining in the Post Office at Salt Lake City, Utah ... Castone W"
1889	City Directory, Denver, CO	"Castone William, col'd, r. 2829 Blake"
	<i>Aspen (CO) Chronicle</i> , 28 May 1889, p 1	Roster for Aspen (Colorado State League) included "W. Castone."
1890	City Directory, Denver, CO	"Castone William, col'd, waiter, r. 1758 Curtis"
	<i>Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln)</i> , 4 May 1890, p 3	"Will Castone, pitcher in the Colorado state league," to play for the Lafayettes (Lincoln Giants).
	<i>Sporting News</i> , 12 July 1890, p 5	Note was signed "W. Castone, Manager, Lincoln Giants, Lincoln, Neb."
	<i>Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln)</i> , 29 December 1890, p 2	"Wm. Castone, the promising young pitcher, and for a time manager of Lincoln's semi-professional colored team—the Lincoln Giants...."

1891	<i>Nebraska State Journal</i> (Lincoln), 4 January 1891, p 3	“William Castone of base ball fame is again in the city working in the interest of the Nebraska league project.”
	<i>Kearney</i> (NE) <i>Daily Hub</i> , 25 January 1891, p 5	“Wm. Castone, of the phenomenal colored players, the Lincoln ‘Giants,’”
	<i>Sporting News</i> , 31 January 1891, p 2	Note about Castone wanting to find a city for the Giants to represent in the Nebraska State League was signed “Wm. Castone.”
	<i>Nebraska State Journal</i> (Lincoln), 14 June 1891, p 2	“William Castone, manager of the Giants, the colored team that Lincoln had in the field last year...”
	<i>Sporting News</i> , 8 August 1891, p 6	Castone signed a note about the Lincoln Giants “W. C.”
	<i>Beatrice</i> (NE) <i>Daily Express</i> , 19 August 1891, p 4	Telegram: “U.S. Rohrer [sic], Hastings: Maupin and Lincoln have signed with Plattsmouth. Would like to pitch against them. Answer. Wm. Castone.”
1892	<i>Nebraska State Journal</i> (Lincoln), 6 February 1892, p 6	“Manager Rohrer of the Hastings ball team received a letter yesterday from William Castone of Lincoln...”
	<i>Sporting News</i> , 13 February 1892, p 5	Castone lays out the case for a Nebraska State League, which would include the Lincoln Giants, and signs the article “George W. Castone.”
	<i>Kearney</i> (NE) <i>Daily Hub</i> , 24 February 1892, p 3	“A letter was received by the Hub yesterday from Geo. W. Castone manager of the famous Lincoln Giants...”
	<i>Sporting News</i> , 12 March 1892, p 1	Castone details the organizational meeting for the Nebraska State League and signs the article “Geo. W. Castone.”
	<i>Nebraska State Journal</i> (Lincoln), 24 April 1892, p 12	“George W. Castone” signed to pitch for Lincoln in the Nebraska State League.
	<i>Nebraska State Journal</i> (Lincoln), 21 June 1892, p 5	“Kearney has a handsome pitcher named Castone, and the way this gentleman of Spanish descent mowed down Hastings’ imported ball tossers with his invincible drop was a marvel to all.”
1893	<i>Jersey City</i> (NJ) <i>News</i> , 1 July 1893, p 4	“The Cuban Giants ... have signed three new players, Castone, of Kansas City; Patterson, of Nebraska and Milton, of Pittsburg [sic].”
	<i>Fremont</i> (NE) <i>Tri-Weekly Tribune</i> , 18 July 1893, p 3	“J. W. Patterson and Castone, who were members of the late lamented Fremont baseball league team, are playing this season with a semi-professional team in New York city.”

- 1894 *Chicago (IL) Inter Occan*, 4 February 1894, p 13
Chicago (IL) Inter Occan, 10 September 1894, p 8
- 1895 City Directory, Evanston, IL
 1898 *Chicago (IL) Tribune*, 8 December 1898, p 5
- 1910 Martha Castone, Will Records, Dent County, MO
 Salem (MO) *Monitor*, 21 April 1910, p 5
- 1912 *Salem (MO) Monitor*, 9 May 1912, p 8
- 1914 City Directory, St. Paul, MN
 Minneapolis (MN) *Tribune*, 1 March 1914, p 8
- 1915 History and Report of the Exposition and Celebration to Commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Negro ...
 Page 23: "Awards and Prizes Given on Paintings, Drawings and Ceramics ... Still Life (Oil), ... Second Honorable Mention, **G. W. Castone, Chicago**"
- 1916 *Svenska Folkets Tidning* (Minneapolis, MN), 12 January 1916, p 10
 "George Castone" threatened with incarceration for neglecting his family while he pursued art in Chicago.
- 1917 *St. Paul (MN) Appeal*, 22 December 1917, p 3
 "Gopher Lodge No. 105, Elks, had a big initiation last Tuesday night. The gentlemen who entered the antlered herd were: ... **Geo. W. Castone**...."
- "G. W. Castone, No. 2454 State" replied to a puzzle in the newspaper.
 An unemployed coachman "was found dead in Fernando Jones' barn, at the rear of No. 1834 Prairie avenue, at 10 o'clock yesterday morning by G. W. Castone, Mr. Jones' coachman."
 "Castone George W 1558 Ridge av butler"
 "The County Clerk issued permits to wed to the following couples yesterday, the parties living in Chicago where no place of residence is given: ... **George W. Castone, Mary Graff** ... [ages] 31-27"
 "To my son **William Castone** I bequeath the sum of one dollar"; the remainder went to his children.
 "Mrs. Martha Castone (collored [sic]) died at her home in this city Tuesday evening of gastritis [sic]. She was about 70 years old. **Her son is expected here this evening from Chicago** and funeral services will be held tomorrow."
 "Estate of Martha Castone, deceased, **William Castone**, administrator, final settlement."
 Castone "Geo waiter 526 Charles"
 "George W. Castone, a waiter at the Ryan hotel in St. Paul, is to realize his life's ambition, namely to go abroad to study art. Castone, while following his trade, has spent his spare time with the brush and palette and his efforts have attracted the interest and attention of a prominent St. Paul man who advanced the nucleus of a fund to send him abroad to develop his talents. He is expected to leave for Italy in a short time."
 "George Castone" threatened with incarceration for neglecting his family while he pursued art in Chicago.
 "Gopher Lodge No. 105, Elks, had a big initiation last Tuesday night. The gentlemen who entered the antlered herd were: ... **Geo. W. Castone**...."

1919	City Directory, St. Paul, MN	"Castone Geo W waiter r 689 Carroll av"
1920	Federal Census, St. Paul, MN	"George Castone"; Birthplace: "Missouri"; Father's Birthplace: "South America"; Mother's Birthplace: "Missouri"; Occupation: "Artist"; Industry: "At home"
1930	Federal Census, St. Paul, MN	"George W. Castone"; Birthplace: "Missouri"; Father's Birthplace: "Paraguay"; Mother's Birthplace: "Missouri"; Occupation: "Waiter"; Industry: "Restaurant"
1932	City Directory, St. Paul, MN	Castone "Geo W (Mary K) waiter Minn club h300 N St Albans"
1967	<i>St. Paul (MN) Pioneer Press</i> , 18 January 1967, p 23 obituary	"CASTONE—George, 689 Carroll Ave., Jan. 16th. 99 years old. Father of Mrs. Isabelle Tucker and Anthony (Tony) Castone, of Detroit, Mich. ... Interment Elmhurst Cemetery."



You can learn more about the early history of baseball as played by local teams in Kansas in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of nine towns still playing baseball in the state’s oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.