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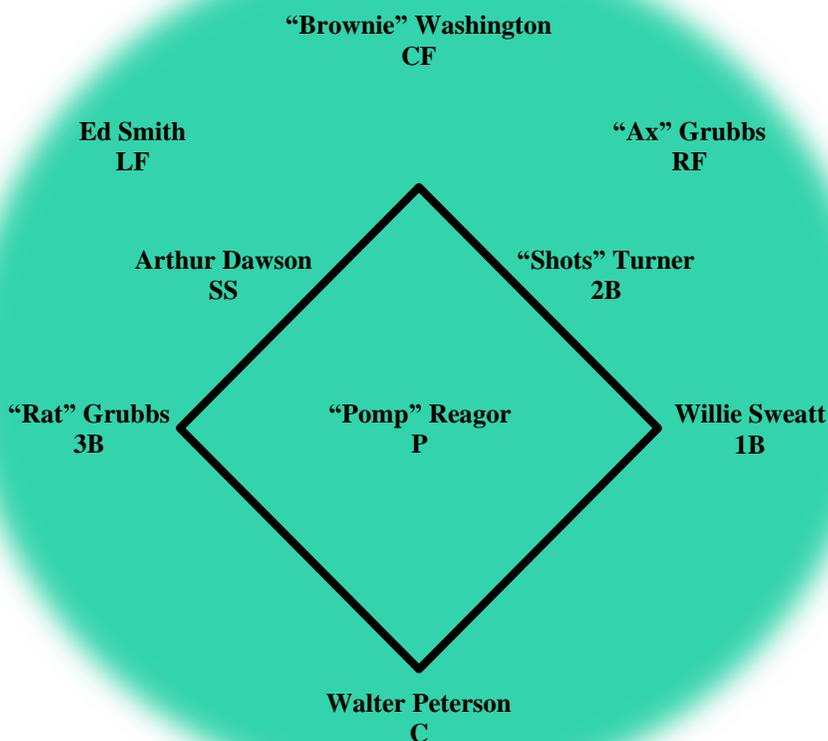
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About the front cover: Diagram of the names and positions of the Chanute Black Diamonds players who defeated the white town team (Chanute Blues) in August 1905 to claim the city championship.

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Mark E. Eberle

With brief exceptions, racial integration in minor league baseball ended at the close of the nineteenth century. Some of the last integrated minor league clubs were those in Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado. Among the black ballplayers on these clubs were George William Castone, Bert Wakefield, Bert Jones, and Monroe Ingram, whose stories have been recounted in other monographs in this series.¹

In addition to organized baseball, town teams of professional, semipro, or amateur players were typically segregated, and white teams would often refuse to play their black counterparts. However, there were exceptions.² One of the earliest examples in Kansas occurred in 1874, when the Star Base Ball Club (BBC) composed of black players from Fort Scott, Kansas, defeated the city's white Olympic BBC to claim the local championship.³ Losing to a black team did not sit well with some of the white players, and their refusal to play black clubs again was tacit acknowledgement that black players could be their equals on the ballfield.

Yet integrated town teams and contests between black and white clubs persisted in some areas during the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁴ One of these areas was in rural southeastern Kansas, where the best black players from Iola, Humboldt, and Chanute (separated by about 15 miles) played together in 1904–1906 on a single team—the Chanute Black Diamonds.* With segregation of the region's minor leagues after 1898 and the Negro National League not successfully established until 1920, most of these players never got the chance to play in either league. However, they were well known to both black and white fans where they played.

Prologue

During the late 1800s, segregated baseball teams were widespread across much of Kansas. However, black ballplayers sometimes took the field with otherwise white baseball clubs, usually in small towns, where talented players were few and the residents knew each other, regardless of race. In southeastern Kansas, the most widely known of these early players was Albert “Pomp” Reager of Humboldt, Kansas. Spellings of his surname varied in the press (Reager, Rager, etc.), but area newspapers sometimes referred to him simply as Pomp. He was born in Texas in 1872 and first appeared in newspaper stories about the Humboldt town team in the 1890s.⁵

* Black diamond was a name for coal, which was mined in the region.

In the world of baseball, Humboldt is best known as the birthplace of Walter Johnson, a major league pitcher who was among the first five players inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Johnson was born on a farm a few miles from town in November 1887. The Johnsons later moved into Humboldt, where Walter joined in games with other boys through the eighth grade. In April 1902, his family moved to southern California.⁶ Johnson is not known to have mentioned Pomp, who sometimes played for the Humboldt town team, but it seems likely he would have heard about Pomp and possibly seen him play.

Pomp's reputation as a pitcher spread to other communities in southeastern Kansas, and numerous teams, mostly white town teams, sought his services into the early 1900s. Pitchers and the catchers who could handle them were often in demand, especially for important games with rivals. Perhaps the highlight of Pomp's career came while he pitched for the Fredonia (Kansas) Reds. Fredonia hired him to pitch for the town's first nine, composed primarily of white players, for three years.⁷

In June 1900, the Fredonia baseball team talked "of getting 'Pomp' Rager, the celebrated Humboldt pitcher, to do the twirling for them in the future. 'Pomp' is a crackerjack, and it would be worth the price of admission any time to see him in the box." During his first year in Fredonia, Pomp's catcher was a resident of Fredonia by the name of Charles C. "Chalk" Garner, "probably the best all 'round base ball player in Fredonia, so the boys say." His father, "colored barber" Charles M. Garner, managed "Fredonia's mixed base ball nine." In one of baseball's untold stories, Fredonia's otherwise white town team not only had a black pitcher and catcher in 1900, it had a black business manager.* In addition to playing for the home team, "'Pomp' and 'Chalk,' Fredonia's colored battery," also played for other white teams on occasion. However, this was the only year the Garners were associated with the Fredonia town team. Sadly, Chalk died in January 1904, just short of his 28th birthday, after suffering an unspecified illness for two or three months.⁸

Pomp returned to pitch for the Fredonia Reds in 1901. His new catcher was usually another local resident named Henry Blass, who was white. As with Chalk Garner, Pomp and Blass "were hard to beat," and the duo sometimes played for other town teams. To close the season, the Reds were able to bring the barnstorming version of the Kansas City Blues minor league team to Fredonia for a pair of games. The Blues won game one, 7-2, in which Pomp played right field. In game two, Pomp pitched 12 strong innings to give the Reds a 3-2 victory. After nine innings, the score was tied 1-1. Both teams scored in the eleventh inning, and Fredonia scored the winning run in the twelfth inning.⁹

Pomp did not return to Fredonia in 1902, but the following spring, Blass and two others visited Pomp and signed him to play for the Reds at a salary of \$40 per month. On May 8, a local newspaper published a brief announcement. "Pomp's here. Play ball." However, Fredonia's attempt to field a team with a few professional players could not be sustained, and the team disbanded in July.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Pomp's services as a pitcher were still sought by area teams, though he would mostly stay close to home.

* In 1895, the Troy BBC in the Kansas State League had a black captain (what is now referred to as the manager) during part of the season, in which they won the league championship. His name was Burgess "Bert" Wakefield (Eberle 2018).

Chanute Black Diamonds of 1904–1906

The first mention of the Chanute Black Diamonds baseball club was in the summer of 1900, as the team prepared to host the Yale Hornets, a black club from a mining camp near Pittsburg, Kansas. The game was one of the activities at a celebration sponsored by the local A.M.E. Church. Pomp Reagor and Chalk Garner were the battery for the Black Diamonds, who won easily, 23–6. Pomp pitched “in good form” and hit a triple with two runners on base. The other feature of the game was the catch of a line drive by Chanute shortstop Arthur Dawson.¹¹

Dawson was born in Chanute and graduated from Chanute High School in 1899. He and Pomp Reagor had been asked to play for Chanute’s white town team that summer when the team from Arkansas City, Kansas came to town for a Wednesday afternoon game on short notice. Several of Chanute’s players were away or could not get off work. “It took some tall hustling to get nine players for Chanute.” Pomp pitched and Dawson played third base. The catcher for Arkansas City was also black. Chanute earned a 5–4 victory.¹²

The Black Diamonds played in 1902 and 1903 but received little coverage in local newspapers. Their opponents included white and black teams from other small towns in the region. The only players mentioned were Arthur Dawson, Charley Fields, and William Washington, all from Chanute. In addition, Pomp Reagor pitched for the team on occasion.¹³ Over the next few years, the Black Diamonds’ roster would be bolstered by several players from Humboldt and Iola.

In June 1904, the *Chanute Sun* reported that the club had “received new uniforms and are the first colored ball team ever in the city that act like they mean business.” They traveled to Coffeyville, Kansas, to play three games against the local black ballclub known as the Blues. The outcome of the series is uncertain. Chanute reported winning one game, while Coffeyville claimed to have won all three. Such was the nature of town team baseball, with game details reported by players or spectators. Rain proved to be troublesome for baseball in Chanute, as more games had reportedly been canceled than played through the end of June. On July 24, the Black Diamonds finally got to host a return game with Coffeyville, when “the blue uniforms with the monstrous white C loomed up on the fair grounds.” Behind the battery of Pomp Reagor and Walter Peterson, the Black Diamonds took revenge on the Blues, 18–6. No other Chanute players were mentioned by name, and the first names of the umpires—Fields and Grubbs—were not reported. In mid-August, the Black Diamonds lost a well-played game in Fort Scott, Kansas, 6–5, against the Unions, another black ballclub.¹⁴

The Black Diamonds did not have many chances to get their new uniforms muddy that summer, and their record against black clubs from Coffeyville and Fort Scott, so far as is known from newspaper reports, was either 1–4 or 2–3, though most of the games were competitive. However, the memorable event for the Black Diamonds in 1904 came on August 28.

Chanute’s white town team—the Chanute Blues—had scheduled a game with the team from Lansing in northeastern Kansas. The Lansing ballclub did not show and sent no

word they would not be coming. The largest crowd of the season had already filled the grandstand, and total gate receipts were about \$80, a sizeable sum for the day.¹⁵

Manager Clawson took in the situation, and with his useful resourcefulness hit immediately upon a plan to save the gate receipts to the wielders of the willow and at the same time furnish the spectators with the promised amusement. He declared the color line dissolved for the time being and sent for the Black Diamonds, the local colored ball team.¹⁶

The game was a pitcher's battle. Pomp Reagor and Walter Peterson formed the battery for the Black Diamonds, with "Pomp's curves puzzling [the Blues] to a highly leather-saving degree." The Blues scored the first run in the fourth inning on an error by the Black Diamonds' unnamed shortstop, probably Arthur Dawson. The inning might have been worse but for a spectacular play by right fielder Charley Fields that "won him thunderous applause from the grandstand."¹⁷

A long fly was sent over into his quarter, alighting in the ditch in which water was standing to the depth of four feet. The right fielder plunged into the water and secured the ball in time to hurl it in and put out a man who was attempting to reach home [from first base]. His clothes from his waist down were dripping with water.¹⁸

The Blues scored a second run in the seventh inning on a wild pitch to take a slim 2-0 lead. The Black Diamonds scored a run in the eighth inning to close within a run, "as the game was growing intensely interesting." The contest was called after the Black Diamonds failed to score in the top of the ninth, but not without controversy, as reported by the local, white-owned newspapers. "It was in this inning that there was the most complaint of the umpire discriminating against the blacks in his decisions." The *Chanute Daily Tribune* reported, "It is generally conceded that the Diamonds were given a shade the worst of it by the umpire in his decisions during the last inning." The *Chanute Sun* led with the headline, "The Umpire Helped Them. Game Between White Club and Black Club Yesterday Afternoon Was Obviously Unfair." Other than the umpire's bias, all three Chanute newspapers agreed it was the best game of the season between two evenly matched clubs, as summed up by the headline in the *Chanute Daily Blade*: "A Red Hot Game."¹⁹

The Black Diamonds wanted a rematch during Labor Day weekend, but the Blues had already scheduled games with another town team. Consequently, no rematch was played, which clearly disappointed the Black Diamonds. On September 18, the Blues hosted the Humboldt town team, composed entirely of local white players.²⁰

The Black Diamonds, the local team of colored players, were conspicuous by their presence on the first base line and rooted the hardest for Humboldt, probably smarting over the defeat they sustained three weeks ago at the hands of the white team. They seemed very jolly over the result of the game yesterday. [Humboldt won, 7-0.]²¹

In 1905, the Black Diamonds were quick to reorganize in April, even earlier than the Blues. Arthur Dawson was to serve as the on-field captain, but the team asked P.M. “Pete” Gorman, who was white, to serve as manager and arrange games for the team. The Black Diamonds were “preparing to do it right.”²² Not only would they play more games, including teams from Kansas City, but more information about the players would be published in local newspapers (Table 1).

Gorman was from Homestead, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. He moved to Chanute to look after family business interests in the oil fields with his father. His first love in sports seemed to be football, and he played for the Chanute Go-Devils town team. In addition, he umpired baseball games, refereed basketball games, and even boxed two rounds in an exhibition bout while living in Chanute. Gorman not only managed the Black Diamonds in 1905, he also agreed to manage the Chanute Blues.²³

Gorman wasted no time trying to arrange games for the Black Diamonds with “any team in the state regardless of color.” An attempt was made to bring in the salaried white team from Osawatomie, Kansas on April 30, but the cost was prohibitive. Instead, some of the Black Diamonds and an amateur team of local clerks engaged in a practice game “conspicuous for the number of errors.” Another game was arranged for May 7 with the J.W. Jenkins’ Sons Music Company, which was one of the top black teams in the Kansas City region during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1908, they would become the original Kansas City Monarchs before disbanding after the 1909 season. An excursion train from Kansas City to Chanute was planned that weekend, which might have facilitated the arrangements for the game. However, the Chanute Blues scheduled a game with Humboldt

Table 1.—Known members of the Chanute (Kansas) Black Diamonds baseball team in 1904–1906, with their primary positions and hometowns, where known. Newspapers provided few details about the team in 1904.

| Player | Position | Hometown | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 |
|------------------------------|-------------|----------|------|------|------|
| Jerry Campbell | | Chanute | | X | X |
| Arthur Dawson | Shortstop | Chanute | X | X | X |
| Charles “Charley” Fields | Outfield | Chanute | X | | |
| Frank Fields | Outfield | Chanute | | X | X |
| Fred “Dicker” Goodseal | | Chanute | | | X |
| Arthur “Rat” Grubbs | Third Base | Iola | | X | X |
| Lewis “Ax” Grubbs | Pitcher | Iola | | X | X |
| Walter Peterson | Catcher | Chanute | X | X | X |
| Albert “Pomp” Reagor | Pitcher | Humboldt | X | X | X |
| Ed Smith | Outfield | Iola | | X | X |
| William “Willie” Sweatt | | | | X | |
| Tom Tisdell | Outfield | | | | X |
| William “Shots” Turner | Second Base | Humboldt | | X | X |
| William “Brownie” Washington | Pitcher | Chanute | | X | X |

that day, and they had priority for use of the ballpark, forcing a postponement of the contest between the Black Diamonds and Jenkins' Sons. Although Gorman had been reported as manager of both Chanute clubs, J.B. Lowe was arranging games on behalf of the Blues.²⁴

What happened instead on that Sunday afternoon was a bit unusual. Neither the Chanute nor Humboldt clubs had fully organized. As a consequence, it became a game between two integrated teams. Black Diamonds players Pomp Reager and William "Shots" Turner played for Humboldt, their hometown club. Pomp pitched and Shots played right field. Chanute fielded three of the Black Diamonds. Lewis "Ax" Grubbs from Iola pitched, while Chanute's Walter Peterson caught and Arthur Dawson played shortstop. After losing to Humboldt three times in 1904, Chanute finally won, 12-8. Ax gave up eight runs in the first four innings before settling down. He struck out 14 Humboldt batters and contributed to the offense with a homerun. Pomp weakened after the first three innings and was replaced by Shots in the seventh inning. Chanute scored four runs in the eighth inning to break the 8-8 tie. The following Sunday, the two teams played again. This time, Humboldt came out on top, 5-2. The teams were a little less integrated. Pomp and Shots played first base and right field for Humboldt, and either Ax or Arthur "Rat" Grubbs might have played right field for Chanute.²⁵

Pausing a moment to recap, in 1899, Pomp Reager and Arthur Dawson had played for the all-white Chanute town team against Arkansas City. In 1904, when the team from Lansing did not arrive for a game, the Chanute Black Diamonds filled in against the Chanute Blues. And in 1905, the partially organized white town teams in Chanute and Humboldt bolstered their rosters with Black Diamonds players for the first two games of the season. The color line on the Chanute baseball field was hardly absolute.

The Black Diamonds finally played their first game of the season on May 21. J.B. Lowe and the Blues "consented to turn the grounds over to ... the local negro team," postponing a game with the team from Independence, Kansas. The opponent for the Black Diamonds was the Jenkins' Sons. Gorman saw to the advance publicity, which included publication of the rosters for both clubs. Rain ended the game after six innings, with the Black Diamonds ahead, 3-1. There were few hits (six for the Black Diamonds and three for Jenkins' Sons), and the game was full of good defensive plays. "The attendance was larger than at any game this season, showing that Chanute fans are not prejudiced against colored players." The city's mayor was one of the fans in attendance. One of the other fans was a little more involved in the game than he probably expected to be.²⁶

| Chanute | Positions | Kansas City |
|--|-----------|-------------------|
| Pomp Rager | ..1b |Watts |
| Jerry Campbell | ..2b |McCampbell |
| Arthur Grubbs | ..3b |Page |
| Walter Peterson | ..c |Pullen |
| Louis Grubbs | ..p |Combs, Davis |
| Arthur Dawson | ..ss |Smith |
| Will Turner | ..lf |Sturman |
| Will Washington | ..cf |Briscoe |
| Willie Swett | ..rf |Wilkins |
| Frank Fields and Ed Smith will be on the bench for the Chanute team. | | |

An innocent bystander, a negro from Cement town, had a high ball bounced off his face that the first baseman let pass. The fellow was knocked out for a while, and after he had recovered interfered with the game by abusing the baseman. The umpire, manager, Mayor Roe and others intervened and quelled the riotous spirit.²⁷

On Sunday, June 11, the Black Diamonds traveled to Kansas City to play a return game with the Jenkins' Sons. Two players from Iola did not make the trip, leaving the team with only nine men, one of whom was their injured captain. Arthur Dawson had been nursing a bad ankle "for some time," but he took the field and played "a first class game." The Black Diamonds again won, 10-7. After paying for the use of the ballpark, the Black Diamonds' 60% winner's share of gate receipts was \$118, much more than they could earn in Chanute, even subtracting the \$18 in train fare for the nine players on the excursion train.²⁸

After they returned home, the Black Diamonds learned the reason for the absence of the Iola players in Kansas City. Ax Grubbs had been arrested Saturday for vagrancy while loitering at the railroad depot. On Tuesday, he was given a substantial fine of \$55.50. He asked to pay part of the fine and then be released to earn money for the rest, but his request was denied. Grubbs had also been implicated in a separate incident, a fight, so "the judge thought [it] best to hold him and let him work out his fine on the rock pile." However, his teammates were determined to arrange his release. "The majority of the Black Diamond team has said they were steadfast in their belief of the innocence of their big pitcher." They talked of holding a benefit game or finding some other means of raising money to pay his fine. On June 16, unnamed friends paid part of the fine, and Ax was released, with his promise to pay the remainder of the fine by July 10. Part of the reason given for his release was that the person in the unrelated incident who had actually been the one to attack a man in Grubbs' presence could not be found. Later that year, one of Ax's friends was arrested on the same vagrancy charge at the depot in Chanute. On his companion's behalf, Ax argued with the police officer, "not unlike a kick on a rotten umpire," and he was also arrested. The two men were fined considerably less than in Iola—\$5 apiece.²⁹

At the end of June, Arthur Dawson was in Kansas City and watched a game between the Jenkins' Sons and the Coffeyville Clippers. While he was there, the manager of the Kansas City Unions, a rival of the Jenkins' Sons, offered Dawson and Ax Grubbs positions on their roster for the rest of the summer, but Dawson declined.³⁰

The Black Diamonds arranged to host the Coffeyville Clippers (Maroons) on July 9. Despite having a manager, it would be only the third game for the Black Diamonds. However, it rained in Coffeyville that Sunday, so the Clippers did not travel to Chanute, where the weather was fine. In the absence of black teams in nearby towns to play, the Black Diamonds returned to Kansas City for a third game with the Jenkins' Sons on July 16. This time, the Jenkins' Sons prevailed, 21-7. Arthur Dawson claimed the first of three unnamed Chanute pitchers "had turned traitor," allowing the Jenkins' Sons to score 11 runs in the first two innings. "He threw the game for the measly sum of eight dollars."³¹

Still anxious to play, the Black Diamonds arranged a game with the Chanute Blues for July 30. The Blues took the game seriously, probably remembering how tough the game had been in 1904. "[F]or the first time this season, the team is getting together daily this week and working out." The Black Diamonds were even more serious, probably remembering how they were cheated the previous year. "Captain Dawson is working his men out twice daily. Early in the morning and in the evening he has them on the ground, and when Sunday comes he expects the reward." And then the rains fell, forcing a postponement.³²

The game was rescheduled for August 13, after a contest between the Chanute Blues and Coffeyville was cancelled. The Black Diamonds continued to prepare. "They practice a great deal and go so fast that it makes a spectator dizzy." It rained again, and there was talk of postponing the match a second time. However, the rain soon ended, leaving muddy spots only at second base and right field. The umpire again tried to aid the Blues, "but he had started too late." There was no scoring after the fourth inning, and the Black Diamonds won the game, 8-5. "The Black Diamonds are entitled to the championship of the town." The summer was wearing on, but the champion Black Diamonds still hoped to arrange games with several teams, including the Coffeyville Clippers, Lexington Tigers, Ninth Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, and Topeka Giants (also known as the Page Giants after captain Gaitha Page).³³

| Black Diamonds. | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|--|--|--|
| Peterson, c | 5 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| A. Grubbs, 3b | 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Dawson, ss | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | | | |
| Swett, 1b | 5 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Turner, 2b | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | |
| Campbell, 2b | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Rager, p | 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | | | |
| Ax. Grubb, rf | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Washington, cf | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | |
| Smith, lf | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Total | 41 | 8 | 8 | 27 | 12 | 7 | | | |
| Blues. | | | | | | | | | |
| McClory, c | 4 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| O'Connor, 2b | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | | | |
| Peterson, ss | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Hulteen, 3b | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | | | |
| C. Ramsey, cf | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| J. Ramsey, 1b | 4 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Anderson, lf | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Bond, rf | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| McClintock, p | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | | | |
| Total | 38 | 5 | 7 | 27 | 12 | 9 | | | |

Struck out—By McClintock, 8; by Rager, 7. Bases on balls—Off Rager, 1. Hit by pitched ball—Campbell, 2; Ax Grubbs. Passed balls—McClory, 2; Peterson, 2. Two-base hits—D. Peterson. Sacrifice hit—D. Peterson. Stolen bases—Anderson, Dawson. Double play—O'Connor to J. Ramsey. Left on bases—Blues, 8; Diamonds, 9.

None of those games was played, although the Coffeyville Clippers were expected in Chanute for the Emancipation Day celebration on September 22. Once again, the Clippers failed to show, so a game was played against a picked team of men in attendance from Coffeyville and Independence. The Black Diamonds won, 8-3, but the game "lacked the excitement attendant upon a more closely balanced contest."³⁴ The victories over the Jenkins' Sons make one wonder what might have been for the Black Diamonds in 1905 had they played more games.

In 1906, the Black Diamonds were again the first team to begin practicing in April. Instead of a white town team, Chanute changed colors from Blue to Brown and fielded a club in the Kansas State League, a class D minor league. The league began the season with eight teams—Chanute, Coffeyville, Fort Scott, Independence, Iola, Parsons, and Pittsburg in Kansas and Bartlesville in the Indian Territory (Oklahoma). The team in Pittsburg moved to Vinita in Indian Territory, and the team in Iola moved to Cherryvale, Kansas. In July, first-place Fort Scott folded due to a lack of fan support. On July 9, a new schedule was drawn up through September 9, without Fort Scott and Vinita. As noted by the *Chanute Sun*, the Browns finished both halves of the season in "first—from the bottom."³⁵

Pete Gorman was the manager of the Chanute Browns as they prepared for the season, but he transferred the club to E.E. Shields of Kansas City in late March. However, Gorman continued as manager for the Black Diamonds. Shields began April with two Chanute league teams—one in Chanute and one in Kansas City. Their preseason exhibition games included black clubs. The Kansas City team lost to the Jenkins' Sons, 9-8, on April 22. The two squads were then merged in Chanute, where the Browns defeated the Black

Diamonds, 4–3, on April 29. The previous day, the Browns had lost to the Chanute Elks, 5–4. The Elks were sponsored by the local lodge. These preseason games foretold the poor season the Browns would experience during league play. Perhaps this explains why Shields sold his remaining interest in the team in May and returned to Kansas City.³⁶

Earlier in April, the Black Diamonds' season took a potentially bad turn when a baseball hit Arthur Dawson in the eye during a fielding exercise. It blinded him in that eye, and the doctor was pessimistic about his recovery. However, his sight returned gradually, and Dawson played shortstop in the exhibition game with the Browns a few days later, collecting two hits in five at bats. Captain Dawson had put together essentially the same team of players from Chanute, Humboldt, and Iola that had played in 1905 (Table 1).³⁷

On June 10, the Black Diamonds scheduled a game in Kansas City with the Kansas City Unions, a black club on par with the Jenkins' Sons. This was the same club that had tried to sign Arthur Dawson and Ax Grubbs the previous summer. However, the game was postponed because the Unions' new ballpark had not been completed. In the meantime, Dawson traveled to Kansas City to watch a game between the Jenkins' Sons and the Ninth Cavalry. While he was there, he arranged a game with the Jenkins' Sons for early July.³⁸

The first game for the Black Diamonds, other than the exhibition game with the Browns, was against the Coffeyville Maroons on June 17. It was a slugfest won by the Maroons, 18–17. Ax Grubbs started on the mound for the Black Diamonds, but he was relieved by Pomp Reagor in the first inning. The pitcher for the Maroons was listed as "Wickwar," possibly Frank Wickware. Wickware was born in Girard, Kansas, but his family had moved to Coffeyville by 1906. He would become one of the best pitchers of the early twentieth century after he was signed by Rube Foster in Chicago in 1910. The Muskogee (Indian Territory) Reds came to Chanute for two games on June 28 and 29. The Reds won the first game 8–6, with pitcher Ax Grubbs taking the loss. The Black Diamonds rebounded in game two, 4–3, behind winning pitcher Pomp Reagor.³⁹ Finally, the Black Diamonds were getting to play some games.

On July 1, the Black Diamonds played a white club, the Eagles, sponsored by the lodge in Chanute. The Black Diamonds won, 7–5, in 10 innings. The game marked the pitching debut of William "Brownie" Washington for the Black Diamonds. He pitched the first six innings before he was relieved by Pomp Reagor. The Black Diamonds then traveled to Kansas City for a game with the Jenkins' Sons on July 15, but rain caused the game to be canceled. The *Chanute Daily Tribune* reported, "The home boys were entertained by the members of the Jenkins Brothers' team, with whom they were to have played, and were shown a good time." In late July, a game in Fort Scott and two games against the Muskogee Reds to be played in Parsons were canceled by the hosts.⁴⁰ The unreliability of their opponents was again becoming evident.

In August, the Black Diamonds lost games to nearby white teams in Fredonia, Elsmore, and Earlton. In Earlton, the Black Diamonds did not have their full roster of regular players. Pitcher Pomp Reagor was relieved not by Ax Grubbs or Brownie Washington, but by Fred "Dicker" Goodseal. The Black Diamonds claimed they were treated unfairly by the umpires in Fredonia and Elsmore, but in Earlton, "the Chanute players say that [umpire Arnold

Libertus] gave them a better deal than they ever had away from home.⁴¹ The story of the game in the *Chanute Daily Tribune* was tainted by racial stereotypes.

By putting watermelons on first, second and third bases, Earlton won off the Black Diamonds yesterday by a score of 14 to 9. The Black Diamonds is composed of colored players. Arthur Dawson, while discussing the game with the Tribune this morning, said, "Yes, sir, that was the way they beat us. Our fellows were keen to get a run, but when they once got on a base the only way to get them off was to force them, and that was how we lost"⁴²

In September, a second game with Earlton was rained out, but the Black Diamonds again traveled to Kansas City for a game with the Jenkins' Sons. Little was mentioned about the contest except the score. The Jenkins' Sons won, 13–7, with Pomp Reagor pitching for the Black Diamonds. They later won a game against the white town team from nearby Urbana, 5–1, behind pitcher Brownie Washington.⁴³

On September 28, the Chanute Eagles and Chanute Elks played a game for the "championship of Chanute." No mention was made of the Black Diamonds, except that they had beaten the Eagles (they did not play the Elks). The Black Diamonds had played the Blues well in 1904 and defeated them in 1905. There would be no game against the top local white team in 1906. The Elks defeated the Eagles, 9–4. With the game between the lodge clubs in the books and the Chanute Browns' season ending earlier in the month, only the Black Diamonds were still active.⁴⁴

On September 30, the Black Diamonds played in Parsons, Kansas against the local black team, the Syndicates. The Black Diamonds expressed several complaints against their hosts. The manager of the Syndicates was assigned to be the umpire, and his decisions so angered the Black Diamonds that they left the field in protest in the second inning. Fans offered the Black Diamonds \$11.50 to finish the game. It was not much money, even at that time, but the Syndicates had reneged on the arrangement to pay the expenses of the Black Diamonds or pay a 60–40 split of the gate receipts. Thus, the Black Diamonds continued to play, enduring the inappropriate choice of umpire and losing, 8–0. It was their last game of the season.⁴⁵

Epilogue

The moments of success enjoyed by the Chanute Black Diamonds in 1904–1906 were based on the quality of their roster, which included the best players from Chanute, Humboldt, and Iola. It was a mix of veterans like Humboldt's Pomp Reagor and young talent like Chanute's Arthur Dawson. Pooling players from the towns allowed the club to be competitive against teams like the Jenkins' Sons. Although the total populations of Chanute and Iola were nearly as large as some of the other cities in the region (Table 2), the black communities were substantially smaller, especially in Chanute (Table 3).⁴⁶

The team reorganized in March 1907, but the players in Iola took the first steps toward organizing their own team that same month, which would reduce the talent pool for the Black Diamonds. On April 21, the Black Diamonds traveled to Iola and defeated their former teammates, 12–5. However, on May 19, they lost to a team from the Oriental Hotel,

5-3. The *Chanute Sun* assessed the state of the Black Diamonds. "The Black Diamonds formerly had a formidable bunch of willow wielders, but showed up in poor form yesterday." Later in the year, the Black Diamonds again played an Iola team at the Emancipation Day celebration in Iola on August 6. This time, the Black Diamonds lost, 8-5, but they won another game with Iola a month later, 6-5, in 14 innings.⁴⁷

The roster of the Black Diamonds was a bit fluid in 1907. The old team got together for a game against the Parsons Syndicates on June 2, which the Black Diamonds won, 12-10. The old players reunited on a few other occasions, including a game against the Yellow Jackets in Independence, Kansas on September 8, which the Black Diamonds won, 2-1.

Table 2.—Population data from federal censuses in 1900 and 1910 and the state census in 1905 for cities in southeastern Kansas mentioned in the text.

| City | 1900 | 1905 | 1910 |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Chanute | 4,208 | 9,074 | 9,272 |
| Humboldt | 1,402 | 2,328 | 2,548 |
| Iola | 5,791 | 10,287 | 9,032 |
| Coffeyville | 4,953 | 13,196 | 12,687 |
| Fort Scott | 10,322 | 12,248 | 10,463 |
| Fredonia | 1,650 | 2,255 | 3,040 |
| Independence | 4,851 | 11,206 | 10,480 |
| Parsons | 7,682 | 11,720 | 12,463 |

Table 3.—Population data from the 1910 federal census for cities in southeastern Kansas mentioned in the text. The number of voting age men includes older men unlikely to play town team baseball, while omitting older teenagers who might play on town teams. It is used here to suggest relative numbers of potential baseball players.

| County and City | Population | | % Black | Black Males Voting Age | |
|-------------------|------------|-------|---------|------------------------|--------|
| | Total | Black | | City | County |
| Neosho County | | | | | |
| Chanute | 9,272 | 427 | 4.6 | 110 | 119 |
| Allen County | | | | | |
| Humboldt | 2,548 | 85 | 3.3 | 34 | |
| Iola | 9,032 | 573 | 6.3 | 173 | 367 |
| Bourbon County | | | | | |
| Fort Scott | 10,463 | 1,047 | 10.0 | 300 | 357 |
| Labette County | | | | | |
| Parsons | 12,463 | 999 | 8.0 | 327 | 510 |
| Montgomery County | | | | | |
| Coffeyville | 12,687 | 1,309 | 10.3 | 399 | |
| Independence | 10,480 | 733 | 7.0 | 225 | 939 |

The winning run scored in the ninth inning, when the Yellow Jackets' pitcher, "Waddell" Wickwire, "went into a sulk over a decision by the umpire and slammed the ball into left field, letting Walt Peterson score from second." Although the Chanute, Humboldt, and Iola players still played together during 1907, the players from Chanute sometimes freelanced for clubs in other towns, which was not mentioned in earlier years. For example, Brownie Washington and Walter Peterson formed the battery for the Independence Yellow Jackets when they traveled to Kansas City to play the Jenkins' Sons.⁴⁸

Some of the core players for the Black Diamonds continued to play in subsequent years, but older players, such as Pomp Reagor, began to drop away.⁴⁹ The baseball careers for that generation were passing. In July 1909, as the Black Diamonds talked of reorganizing, Walter Peterson expressed a hope for the club that was more a recollection of fond memories.

Walter Peterson says the [Black] Diamonds will have a team this year that will equal the one they had four years ago, when they were at their best. The old players who will be in the game again are Peterson, [William] Washington, Arthur Dawson, Lewis McCullough, Jerry Campbell and Tom Tisdell.⁵⁰

The Black Diamonds faded, but in 1911 and 1912, some of the team's members, including Walter Peterson, Brownie Washington, and Jerry Campbell, organized the Chanute Browns, filling the roster with younger players. Washington and Peterson would again form the battery. The club returned to the name Black Diamonds in 1913. In subsequent years, the old players continued to leave the field, but Brownie Washington stayed with the team into the 1920s.⁵¹

The process of establishing a black baseball club in Iola started in 1907, but the first mention of the Iola Go-Devils came in the spring of 1908.* Humboldt sat between Iola and Chanute, so its players joined teams in both cities. Thus, former Black Diamonds Pomp Reagor and Shots Turner from Humboldt joined Iola's Ax Grubbs, Rat Grubbs, and Ed Smith on the Go-Devils in 1908. They imported a pitcher from Oswego, Kansas—18-year-old Roscoe Johnson. That same year, Iola had a minor league team in the Oklahoma-Kansas League (Class D). It was the city's last year to host a minor league club until 1946. However, the Go-Devils received their share of the press coverage from the city's newspapers. Among their games, most of which they won, the Go-Devils played the Black Diamonds three times, winning all three. The Go-Devils lost two games to other black clubs. Their first loss was to the Parsons Syndicates, a team they also defeated. The Go-Devils also traveled to Kansas City, where they lost to the newly organized Kansas City (Kansas) Giants.⁵² The KCK Giants would be a dominant club for several years.

The Go-Devils reorganized in 1909 and opened their season by defeating the Iola Boosters, the white town team. In addition to bringing back Roscoe Johnson, Rat Grubbs,

* The term go-devil referred to several pieces of equipment at the time, one of which was a device dropped into an oil well to trigger an explosion that would begin the flow of oil. Before being adopted by the Iola baseball club, the name had been used by the white football team in Chanute. At the time, cities organized town teams in both baseball and football (Eberle 2020a; 2020b).

Pomp Reagor, Shots Turner, and Ed Smith, the Go-Devils added Pomp's teenage nephew, George Sweatt, to their roster. The KCK Giants toured through Iola in July during a 54-game winning streak. The Go-Devils were shutout, 16–0. Roscoe Johnson, George Sweatt, and old Pomp Reagor shared in the pitching duties for the Go-Devils. Several of the Black Diamonds traveled from Chanute to watch the game and rooted for the Giants because the Iola club "has been all puffed up." The Black Diamonds had not reorganized that year, "because of a revival last winter. Most of the ball players were converted while the services were in progress, and they decided that they would play no more Sunday ball." However, they intended to get some of the old players back together, supplemented by some men from Dallas, Texas, who were working at the local cement plant. Their express purpose was to defeat the Go-Devils. No game was played, but two cities that had been the source of players for a strong regional ballclub were now rivals.⁵³

Both the Black Diamonds and the Go-Devils would play several more years. I wrote about the Go-Devils and their successors in *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*. The Go-Devils fielded baseball teams until 1916. In 1911, they played a five-game series with the white town team. A partition was installed in the grandstand to segregate the spectators. The Boosters defeated the Go-Devils in the fifth and deciding game, 1–0. The two clubs continued to play each other through 1915, both taking turns as the local champion. After the First World War, the Go-Devils took up softball, but a baseball team named the Ramblers was organized in the mid-1920s. Initially, the Ramblers played independently, but from 1931 to 1935, they were members of the city's Twilight League (the team would change its name through the years to acknowledge local sponsors). The league was integrated, but the teams usually were not. Ax Grubbs, a member of the old Black Diamonds and Go-Devils, served as an umpire in the league in 1929 and 1931. In 1933, he managed the Ramblers until "deposed" at the end of the first half of the season in late June. In August, Ax was appointed to a vacant position for league umpire. He managed the team again in 1934 but became so frustrated with his young players that he placed himself in right field during a game. Even at age 50, "He still has a batting eye." Ax was again replaced as manager at the end of June.⁵⁴

In Chanute, the Black Diamonds (including their time as the Browns) played into the 1930s, including games with the white town team, as well as the white teams in Humboldt and Iola. In September 1921, the Black Diamonds were unable to play a scheduled home game because the other team could not make the trip. Instead, they "played a team of Mexicans on the cement plant diamond" in a match between segregated teams that was even less common than games between black and white clubs. In a game against the white town team in Iola in 1932, the roster of the Black Diamonds included two familiar surnames from a new generation—Grubbs at shortstop and Peterson as pitcher.⁵⁵

George Sweatt, being from neutral Humboldt, left the Go-Devils to join the Chanute Browns in 1911, and he would continue to play periodically for the Black Diamonds and Humboldt Grays, the otherwise white town team, until 1921. The following year, he moved up to the Negro National League with the Kansas City Monarchs. He played with the Monarchs four years, including their trips to the first two Negro Leagues World Series in

1924 and 1925. He then spent two years with the Chicago American Giants and made two more trips to the World Series in 1926 and 1927. He was the only position player to participate in the first four Negro Leagues World Series. I have written more about George Sweatt (and his uncle, Pomp Reagor) in *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*.⁵⁶

William “Brownie” Washington stayed with the Black Diamonds into the 1920s, eventually becoming the team’s manager. In 1922, he took the opportunity to enter the Black Diamonds in an organized interstate league. Known as the Colored Western League, it could be thought of as a minor league if compared to the caliber of play exhibited in the Negro National League. When it came to leagues—any leagues—small towns had few opportunities to host a team. Prior to the Second World War, Chanute had a white minor league team in 1896, 1902, and 1906. Iola had a minor league team in 1902–1904 and 1908.⁵⁷ The invitation for the Black Diamonds to join the Colored Western League in 1922 was a rare opportunity under any circumstances.

A brief history of the Colored Western League, formally organized as the Western League of Professional Baseball Clubs, is available in *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*. Like many white minor leagues, it struggled. After an unsuccessful start, the league reorganized with seven teams—the Chanute Black Diamonds, Coffeyville Hot Shots, Independence Red Sox, Topeka Giants, and Wichita Monroviens from Kansas and the Oklahoma City Black Indians and Tulsa Black Oilers from Oklahoma. Records for the league games and standings are meager, but the Wichita Monroviens claimed the pennant over second place Oklahoma City in the league’s only season.⁵⁸ Details about the experiences of the Black Diamonds as members of the league are likewise rare. The same was true for the other two teams from southeastern Kansas in Coffeyville and Independence. The schedule of league games appeared somewhat chaotic. For example, a game the Black Diamonds expected to play in Independence was canceled because the Red Sox were playing in Wichita.⁵⁹

The Chanute Black Diamonds of 1904–1906 did not initiate integrated baseball in southeastern Kansas. Nor did integrated competition end with that team. There were no leagues that would accept them or their players. However, the Black Diamonds offered some of the best local talent a chance to excel on the baseball diamond when other opportunities to play were rare. The number of games they played might have been limited by the racism of some of the white teams and by unreliable black opponents in nearby cities, and they might have suffered from the bias of white umpires. Yet they persevered and played competitive baseball against their peers, both black and white. Composed entirely of players from three small communities in southeastern Kansas, the experiences of the Black Diamonds—and other segregated teams of that era—leave history to wonder. What if conditions had been different for these talented players?

Acknowledgements

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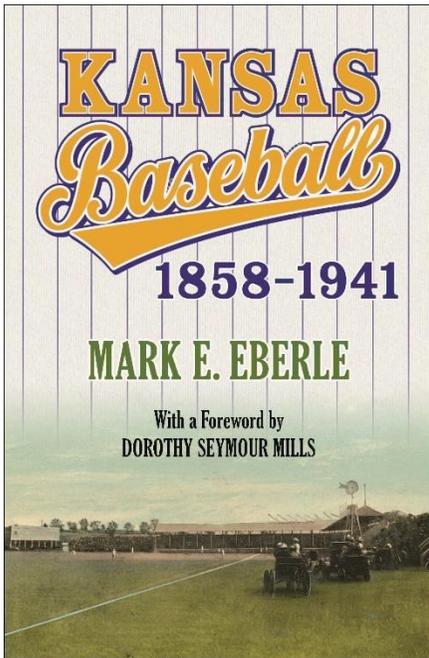
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- ⁵⁹ *Bartlesville Daily Enterprise*, 10 August 1922, p 5. • *Bartlesville Morning Examiner*, 29 June 1922, p 5; 30 June 1922, p 6; 1 July 1922, p 8; 11 August 1922, p 4. • *Chanute Daily Tribune*, 11 May 1922, p 5; 19 June 1922, p 6; 24 June 1922, p 6; 26 June 1922, p 6; 15 July 1922, p 6; 17 July 1922, p 6. • *Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 7 June 1922, p 5; 10 June 1922, p 1; 12 June 1922, p 8; 22 June 1922, p 8; 23 June 1922, p 5; 29 June 1922, p 5; 11 August 1922, p 8; 12 August 1922, p 7. • *Coffeyville Morning News*, 10 June 1922, p 5; 11 June 1922, p 5; 21 June 1922, p 6. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 8 July 1922, p 2. • *Tulsa Daily World*, 6 June 1922, p 13.



You can learn more about the early history of baseball played by early teams 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 towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.