



Opening day heroes: (left to right) catcher Hal Smith, pitcher Bobby Shantz, and outfielder Roman Mejias.

The Campaign for Major League Baseball in Houston

*Clark Nealon, Robert Nottebart, Stanley Siegel
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On April 10, 1962, opening day of the major league baseball season, the Houston Colt .45s defeated the Chicago Cubs, 11-2. "Little Bobby" Shantz and Roman Mejias, two oldtimers whose better days had been spent with other teams, were the pitching and batting heroes of the game—Houston's first in the major leagues. Played in a temporary ballpark called Colt Stadium, the game was the result of a six year campaign by the Houston Sports Association to bring major league baseball to the city.

Interest in professional baseball extends back almost one hundred years in Houston's history. In 1888 Houston became a founding member of the Texas League and fielded a team until 1901 when league play was temporarily suspended. Play resumed in 1903. In 1921 the Houston Buffaloes, under the ownership of Otto Sens and Doak Roberts, started performing at West End Park where the grandstand accommodated up to 2,500 fans. Popularly known as the Buffs, the team won more than its share of league championships and forged colorful rivalries with Beaumont and Austin, as well as other cities in the league. By the end of World War I, the Texas League was about to outgrow its Class B status and the city of Houston, with a new ship channel to spur its economic development, was poised to move ahead in professional sports.

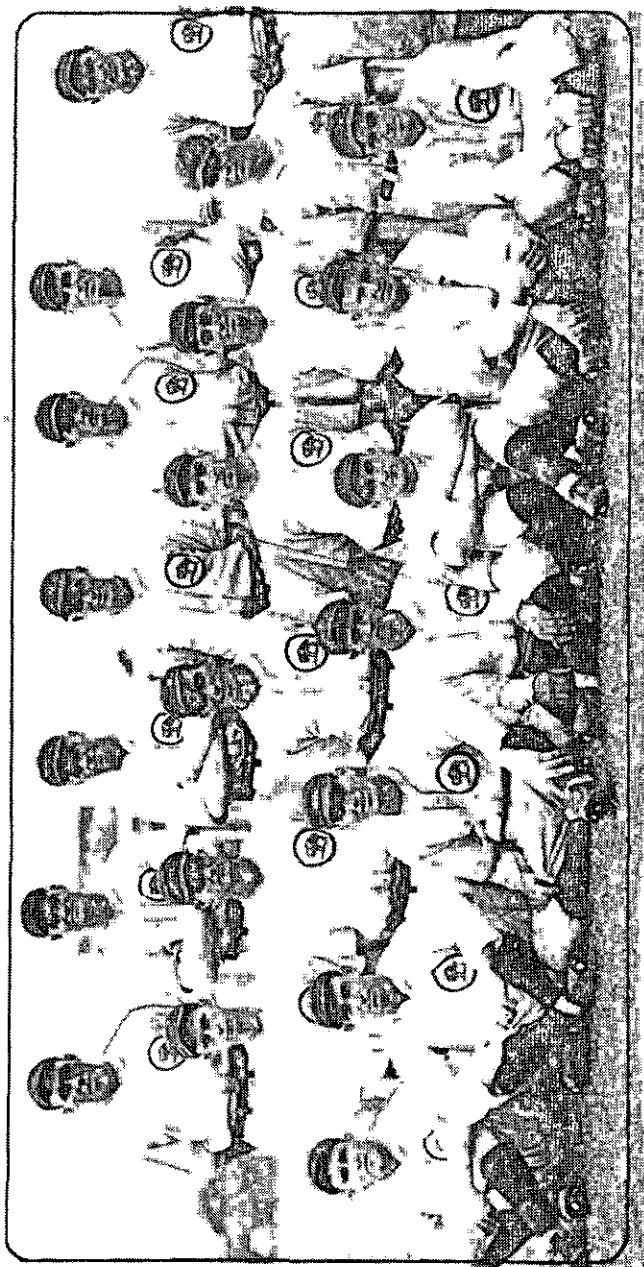
In 1920, a syndicate headed by Houston attorney John H. Crooker purchased the Houston Baseball Club from its previous owners for \$65,000. Crooker then designated Fred N. Ankenman, known locally for his manage-

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The Houston Buffaloes won the Texas League championship in 1931, the year of this picture. The team included Ducky Medwick (top row, far right), Tex Carleton (center row, third from left), and Dizzy Dean (bottom row, third from left).

ment of semi-pro and amateur ball clubs, to be the club's business manager and secretary, an association that for Ankenman lasted twenty-two years. The following year, the Texas League was elevated to Class A status, enhancing the value of the franchise. Crooker then sold his majority interest in the club in 1922 to the St. Louis Cardinals of the National League whose general manager was Branch Rickey. At this juncture in his career, Rickey's enthusiasm was directed toward the formation of a minor league farm system that would develop and feed young baseball players into the major league clubs. While the Texas League permitted working agreements between its clubs and the majors, it prohibited ownership by a major club. Nevertheless, the Cardinals bought out the other minority stockholders in 1925, placating the Texas League with the promise of a new stadium in Houston. Meanwhile, in the reorganization attendant to the Cardinals taking complete control of the club, Ankenman was named president and general manager and permitted to purchase for \$7,500 a five per cent interest in the organization, valued then at \$150,000.¹

A number of locations for the new stadium were considered before the Cardinals decided to build on approximately eight acres which had become available in the East End of town. City Council consented to close off the streets in the area and to provide ample space for free parking, and the site was acceptable to the St. Louis ownership. Architects were engaged and a Syracuse construction firm won the bid to erect the new 12,000 seat stadium. Matters progressed without any major setbacks and the ballpark was complete in time for the opening of the 1928 season. Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the much-respected commissioner of baseball, was present as a distinguished guest and to throw out the first ball. Lights for the playing field were added in 1930.

From 1928 until 1962, the Houston Buffs entertained legions of local baseball fans. Playing in Buff Stadium for the first time in the 1928 season, the local nine won the Texas League flag after a playoff with Wichita Falls. Over the years, the Buffs won other pennants, capped by back-to-back victories in the 1956 and 1957 Dixie Series. More important, as regards building an appreciative audience for eventual major league competition, were the players who first performed locally before moving on to major league careers with the St. Louis Cardinals. At one time or another, "Dizzy" Dean, "Tex"

¹The best account of the Houston Buffs is found in *Four Score and More: The Autobiography of Fred N. Ankenman, Sr., 1887-1979*, ed. Stanley Siegel (Houston, 1980). Also see William B. Ruggles, *The History of the Texas League of Professional Baseball Clubs, 1888-1951* (Dallas, 1951), and Frederick Lieb, "Like a Dream Come True, Houston Achieves Goal of Big League Ball," *1962 Baseball Guide and Record Book* (St. Louis, 1962).

Carleton, Gus Mancuso, "Ducky" Medwick, Solly Hemus, Chick Hafey, Jim Bottomley, Howard Pollet, "Pepper" Martin and many others appeared in a Houston Buffs uniform. Johnny Keane and Eddie Dyer, both of whom later won championships at St. Louis, gained managerial experience at the helm of the Buffaloes. In addition, the Buffs frequently played exhibition games with the New York Yankees and other big league teams making their way north after spring training. In 1948, a year when they only finished third in the Texas League, the Buffs drew 401,282 fans: a number indicative of Houston's ability to support a major league team.

Houston's enthusiasm for the Buffs partly reflected a surge of interest in all spectator sports following World War II. Under the tutelage of Coach Jess Neely, the Rice Owls entertained many of the nation's best football teams in the late 1940s, straining the facilities of the school's 32,000 seat stadium. In 1950, Rice erected a new stadium seating 70,000 fans and featuring state of the art design and engineering principles which proved valuable later when building the domed stadium.²

Meanwhile, speculation about major league baseball and football franchises being moved to Houston grew along with the city's population and wealth. Oilmen Glenn McCarthy and George Strake each considered acquiring franchises but neither pursued the idea seriously, though, interestingly enough, McCarthy unveiled a model of a football stadium with sliding roof panels in a presentation he made to the National Football League.³

Knocking on the Door of the Major Leagues

As events unfolded, however, George Turner Kirksey was the catalyst in bringing major league baseball to Houston. Although he lacked personal wealth, Kirksey's assets included a persistent personality and great knowledge of the intricate structure of the major leagues. He was the right person at the right time and place to organize the effort that ultimately succeeded in getting a major league franchise for Houston. In the words of his partner, Craig F. Cullinan, Jr., "Nobody could have done the job for Houston that George Kirksey did."⁴

²Herbert Allen, interview by Clark Nealon and James Tinsley, April 14, 1981, and George Brown, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, June 17, 1981, Oral History Tapes, Sports Archive Collection, Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association.

³Clark Nealon, interview by James Tinsley, 1979, and Glenn McCarthy, interview by Clark Nealon and Barbara Day, November 30, 1979, Oral History Tapes, Sports Archive Collection.

⁴Craig F. Cullinan, Jr., interviews by Nealon and Tinsley, October 8, 1979 and November 6, 1979, Oral History Tapes, Sports Archive Collection; "Statement of Craig F. Cullinan, Jr., 6/21/79" in Cullinan's personal files. All direct quotations from Cullinan are taken from these sources.

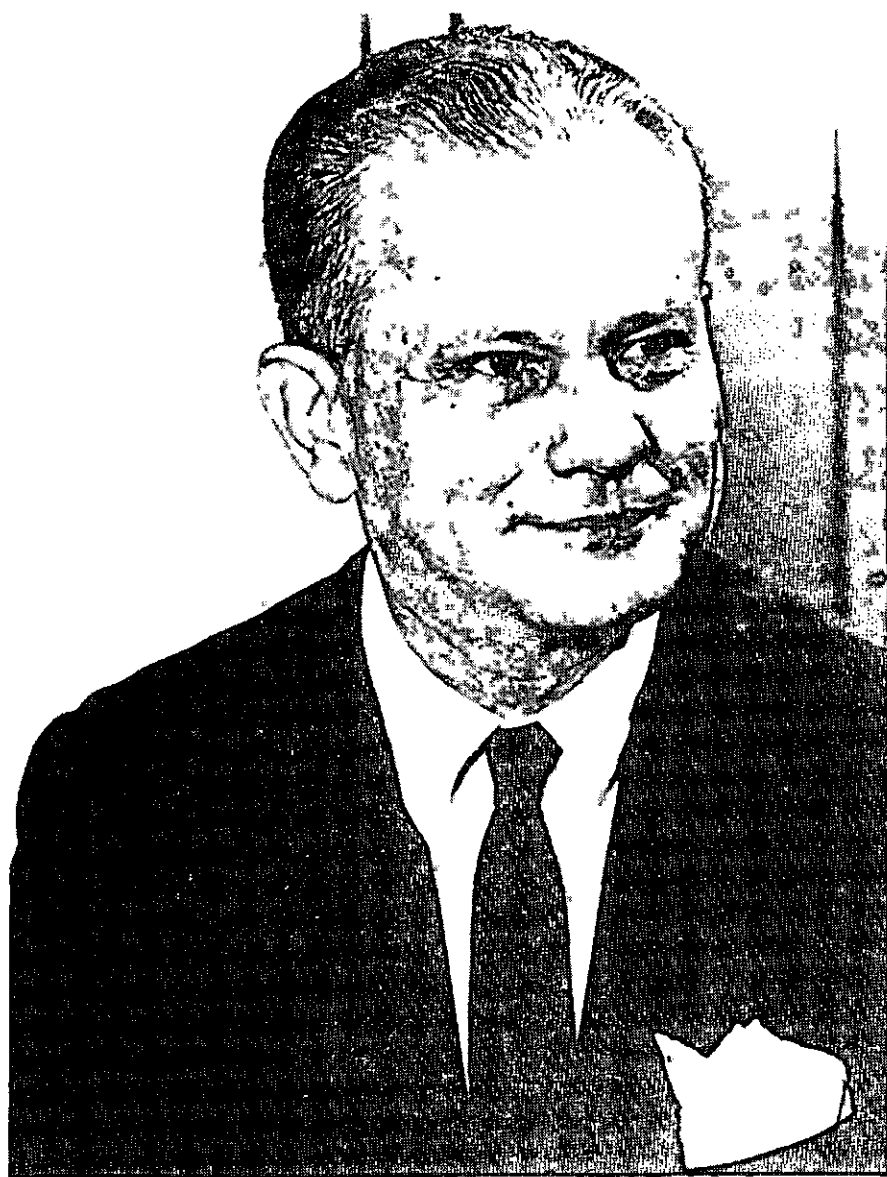
A native Texan, Kirksey was born at Hillsboro in 1904.⁵ He attended the University of Texas at Austin for two and a half years, while working part time for the Austin *American*. While he failed to earn a degree, Kirksey did act as student manager of the Longhorn baseball team and later maintained that this experience led to his life-long interest in the sport. Kirksey decided to follow a career in journalism and, after a brief time spent on the staff of the Dallas *Journal*, he went to work for United Press International (UPI) in Chicago. His rise as a sportswriter was rapid and, in the years prior to World War II, he covered most of the major boxing, football, and baseball events. He entered the Armed Forces in 1942 and worked mainly in a public relations capacity. Certainly his most important duty was to co-ordinate and supervise the work of twenty-three war correspondents who reported the facts of the "D-Day" invasion, June 6, 1944, to the people back home. Proud of his army service, Kirksey joined the Army Reserve upon the completion of his term of active duty in December 1945.

Kirksey came to Houston after the war and opened a public relations office in 1948. He struggled financially, but the business did afford him an entree into Houston's business and political community. For a short time, he did promotional work for the newly organized Petroleum Club. Foreshadowing his later activities with major league baseball, he made some money helping the Rotary Clubs organize the Little League baseball program in Houston. He also became acquainted with George Bruce, a friend of one of Kirksey's commanding officers in the armed services. Bruce was organizing a group to bid for a local television license. Kirksey helped with that project and became a minor stockholder in the television company. Bruce was also one of the original promoters of the River Oaks Tennis Tournament and thus Kirksey came to know some of the people associated with that activity. Kirksey also did some advertising work for State Senator Searcy Bracewell's political campaigns and for a church finance company Bracewell and his father owned.⁶

Virtually from the day he arrived in Houston, however, Kirksey began to talk about the acquisition of a major league baseball franchise. To all who would listen, Kirksey argued that attendance at Houston Buffs baseball and Rice University football games demonstrated a high level of sports conscious-

⁵Robert Nottebart's "George Turner Kirksey, 1904-1971" (unpublished paper, 1981), Sports Archive Collection, draws heavily on the George Kirksey Papers located in the Anderson Library, University of Houston/University Park.

⁶George Bruce, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, 1980, and Searcy Bracewell and Bob Casey, joint interview by Nealon and Tinsley, December 10, 1980, Oral History Tapes, Sports Archive Collection.



George Kirksey

ness among Houston's 1.2 million inhabitants, a population already greater than all but six major league cities and growing at a rate well above the national average. The money to buy a franchise, if necessary to move a club to Houston, was apparently available and only awaited the opportunity to be invested. Perhaps naively, at first Kirksey felt the logic of this information would be sufficient. All Houston had to do was knock politely on the door and be admitted.

Kirksey made his first serious try for a major league franchise in 1952. An attempt at that time to land the St. Louis Cardinals eventually came to nothing when the team was purchased by August A. Busch. Burdened by tax problems, the Cardinal owner, Fred Saigh, perhaps would have preferred a sale to the Houston group, but Busch's St. Louis connections and his promise to keep the team in that city proved decisive.⁷

The next year, 1953, Kirksey observed with great interest the move owner Lou Perini made in taking his Boston Braves to Milwaukee.⁸ Long a fixture in Boston, the Braves had a storied past but could not compete for fan support against the Red Sox and Ted Williams. What most intrigued Kirksey, however, was the fact that Houston's minor league team drew more fans than Milwaukee's minor league club. The conclusion was inevitable; if Milwaukee could support a major league team, Houston should be able to do so with ease.⁹ When the St. Louis Browns moved to Baltimore in 1954, Houstonians were encouraged that major league clubs were beginning to move around. On the other hand, they were apprehensive over the fact that mobility was still confined to the industrial north and midwest. Nevertheless, as it became more widely known that sentiment existed locally for a franchise, any major league team up for sale was rumored to be moving to Houston. Kirksey did what he could to keep Houston's name in the discussions, but after talks with the Cincinnati Reds and the Cubs and White Sox clubs in Chicago misfired he concluded that a more systematic and organized approach was needed, one that would demonstrate broad based community support. For help he turned to William A. Kirkland.

Bill Kirkland was George Bruce's brother-in-law and Kirksey came to know him through Bruce. Kirkland was also chairman of the board of the First City National Bank and a longtime baseball fan. As a boy growing up in Houston near West End Park, he had caught fly balls off the bats of Houston Buff players during practice. In his college days at Princeton during and after

⁷Lieb, 4.

⁸Cullinan interviews.

⁹Houston Post, May 10, 1966.



Craig F. Cullinan, Jr.

World War I, he pitched well enough on the baseball team to attract the attention of New York Giants manager John McGraw, who suggested Kirkland try out for the professional team. Though tempted by the prospect, Kirkland returned to Houston and the family bank, then the First National Bank. However, throughout the decade of the twenties, Kirkland was active as a player and manager in amateur and semi-pro baseball in Houston, including the Houston Bank League. As president of the Houston Baseball Federation, he was also responsible for finding sites suitable for amateur baseball diamonds and, with limited funds, getting them ready for play. Later, Kirkland became a trustee of Rice University and thus was involved with the construction of Rice Stadium in 1950. As president, Kirkland merged his bank early in 1956 with the City National Bank controlled by James A. Elkins, thereby creating the largest financial institution in the city. As befits one who was a sports enthusiast and a leading banker, Kirkland took an interest in Kirksey's project and late in 1956 he convened an informal meeting of some of the men in Houston who he felt might share that interest. Among those attending was Craig F. Cullinan, Jr. Pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm shown, Kirkland encouraged Cullinan to lead an organized community drive for a team. Meeting Kirksey for the first time, Cullinan quickly became an integral part of the effort.¹⁰

Craig Cullinan, born in Houston in 1925, was some twenty years younger than Kirksey. As the grandson of Joseph S. Cullinan, a pioneer Texas oil man who founded the Texas Company (TEXACO) at the turn of the century, young Cullinan was from a family accustomed to making decisions on a large scale. Graduating from Yale University, Cullinan served in the Navy during World War II and was a reporter for the *Houston Post* for a short time following the war. Later he published a newspaper in Freeport but had sold it and returned to Houston just before meeting Kirksey. A close bond quickly developed between the two men; Kirksey had the ideas and a plan to secure a major league franchise, while Cullinan had time, money, and a desire to become involved in a worthwhile civic venture.¹¹

Organizing for Action

On January 4, 1957, Cullinan presided over a meeting, again in the board room of the First City National Bank, at which plans were made to organize a \$1,050,000 syndicate that could speak for Houston and respond promptly to

¹⁰William A. Kirkland, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, September 28, 1979, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

¹¹Cullinan interviews.

HSA MEMBERS (listed in order of joining)	SYNDICATION			INCORPORATION	
	Date	Shares	Obligation	Stock	Value
William A. Kirkland	10/29/57	1	\$30,000	-	
Craig F. Cullinan, Jr.	10/29/57	3	90,000	15%	\$375,000
Aaron J. Fartel	11/12/57	1	30,000	1%	25,000
John A. Beck	01/09/58	1	30,000	1%	25,000
K. S. "Bud" Adams, Jr.	02/06/58	1	30,000	10%	250,000
Corbin J. Robertson	02/12/58	1	30,000	-	
Searcy Bracewell	02/12/58	1	30,000	-	
William R. Haynes	03/06/58	1	30,000	-	
Joseph S. Cullinan II	03/13/58	1	30,000	1%	25,000
Henry David	03/17/58	1	30,000	-	
Charles I. Francis	05/05/58	1	30,000	-	
R. E. "Bob" Smith	06/19/59*	1	30,000	33%	825,000
Jack S. Josey	07/14/58	1	30,000	1%	25,000
John H. Lindsey	*	1	30,000	-	
Patrick W. Brady	*	1	30,000	-	
Eddy C. Scurlock	*	1	30,000	-	
James A. Elkins, Jr.	*	1	30,000	-	
Earl Allen	*	1	30,000	1%	25,000
George A. Butler	*	1	30,000	-	
Roy H. Cullen	09/22/58	1	30,000	-	
Otis H. Brigman	09/27/58	1	30,000	-	
Ralph A. Johnston	*	1	30,000	-	
E. J. Gracey	*	1	30,000	-	
J. A. Gray	*	1	30,000	-	
Michel T. Halbouty	*	1	30,000	-	
Harding S. Frankel	*	1	30,000	1%	25,000
T. C. Evans	*	1	30,000	-	
Andrew Jackson Wray	*	1	30,000	-	
George Kirksey	-	-	-	2%	50,000
Roy Hofheinz	-	-	-	33%	825,000
Leonard Rauch	-	-	-	1%	25,000
TOTAL		30	\$900,000	100%	\$2,500,000

*Precise date of membership not recorded. The date assigned to Bob Smith was affixed later, when he consented to increase his commitment.

Table compiled from Cullinan Statement; HSA Syndication Agreement, Cullinan's personal files.

any opportunity that came along. Initially called "Houston Sports Unlimited," the syndicate's name later changed to "Houston Sports Association." Under the terms of the agreement, thirty-five shares worth \$30,000 each would be sold, no investor being allowed to purchase more than seven shares. When the fifteenth share was taken, the agreement would become binding on all who signed for a period of three years. However, as only a \$500 cash payment per share was required at the time of signing, each participant in effect was buying an option in that amount to invest in a major league baseball franchise if one could be obtained within three years.¹²

Following the January meeting, Cullinan confidently assumed and acted as if the requisite number of pledges could be obtained. It was not until October, however, that he and Kirkland affixed their names to the written agreement, Cullinan taking three shares and Kirkland one. The fifteenth share, acquired by Jack S. Josey, was not taken until July 14, 1958. At the end, twenty-seven names representing thirty shares and \$900,000 appeared on the syndicate agreement (see table, p. 12).

With the initial plan of the HSA accomplished, if not its formal organization, Cullinan and Kirksey set out to visit with major league club owners and officials to present Houston's case. At that time, the major leagues had a fraternal quality which caused many people to refer to the club owners as members of "the Lodge," the most exclusive club in America. It was necessary, therefore, for those seeking admission to "the Lodge" to present themselves informally and to state their cause in such a way as to inspire personal confidence and win the friendship of the owners. This was particularly important for Cullinan, as he had not been associated with baseball previously. Both men logged many hours of travel between Houston and the major league cities, and they were a familiar sight at training camps in the spring and the World Series in the fall.

As Cullinan and Kirksey made their rounds, one fact became increasingly clear. The HSA was caught in a chicken-and-egg proposition with regard to a stadium suitable for major league play. "The routine became tediously familiar," Cullinan recalled. On trips to major league cities, they would be told to "get a stadium and we will talk to you about a team." Returning to Houston, they would be told to "find a team and the city might talk about building a stadium."¹³

The solution to the problem slowly evolved, however, patterned after the experience of the Milwaukee Braves. After visiting Milwaukee County

¹²Cullinan Statement; Cullinan interviews.

¹³Cullinan Statement, 3.



William A. Kirkland

Stadium, home of the Braves, Kirksey returned to Houston and convinced Harris County Judge Bob Casey that a county-owned stadium could make money for this county just as it did for Milwaukee County. Judge Casey was sympathetic but he said the county lacked authority to engage in such an activity.¹⁴ Thereupon, Kirksey arranged a meeting of Cullinan, Kirkland, and himself with his former client, Senator Bracewell, who agreed to submit the appropriate enabling legislation. Toward the end of a special session in 1957, Bracewell successfully sponsored a local bill allowing Harris County, subject to voter approval, to issue revenue bonds for the purpose of constructing a county stadium which could then be leased to the baseball club. A provision in the bill also called for the formation of a Harris County Board of Park Commissioners to oversee construction and to operate the stadium for the county.¹⁵

Soon after the legislature passed the bill, Commissioners' Court appointed Kirkland as chairman of the board of park commissioners, along with Herbert Allen, E.B. Mansfield, Eddie Dyer, Corbin Robertson, Wilton A. Roper and Archer Romero as board members. Roper, a banker from Baytown, and Mansfield, a civil engineer from Pasadena, each added geographic representation to the board from outside the city; the other members all lived in Houston. Dyer, a former Houston Buff and past manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, was engaged in the insurance business. Robertson was an officer in the Quintana Petroleum Company and a major supporter of intercollegiate athletics at the University of Houston. Romero had strong ties with the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, a possible tenant for the facility. Both Allen and Kirkland had been closely involved with the construction of the Rice University stadium.¹⁶

The charge to the parks board differed only in scale from the scrounging around for playing fields that Kirkland had engaged in as president of the Houston Baseball Federation in the 1920s. Granted, the size difference was important; but Kirkland's experiences from those early days stood him and the county in good stead now. However, it was unfortunate for the HSA that Kirkland at this point withdrew from further active participation in that organization in order to avoid the possibility of a conflict of interest in representing the county.

The function of the parks board at this juncture was to demonstrate to the

¹⁴Bracewell and Casey interview.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Allen interview; Kirkland interview; Corbin Robertson, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, June 25, 1980, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

major leagues that Harris County was making a good faith effort to provide suitable stadium facilities. The board hired two architectural firms, Lloyd, Morgan & Jones (who had worked on the Rice stadium) and Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson to do preliminary studies on the type of facility that could be built within the constraints of revenue bond financing, and to recommend a site for the stadium. Herbert Allen, who always thought Rice had made a mistake by not putting a roof over its stadium, was an early proponent of an enclosed stadium but the expense of revenue bonds made the idea impractical at the moment.¹⁷

After considering a variety of options, the parks board tentatively settled for a "rounded-triangular shaped" stadium suitable for baseball and football. Featuring movable stands, another Allen idea, the plan projected seating for 45,000 to 100,000 fans and parking for 30,000 cars. Without naming a site, the board estimated the facility could be constructed for \$20,000,000.¹⁸ After reviewing the board's report, Commissioners' Court submitted the plan to a referendum vote called for July 26, 1958. The HSA syndicate became operational a scant twelve days before the election.

By a margin of better than three to one, the voters of Harris County approved the proposed stadium revenue bond issue. Heartened by this demonstration of public support, the parks board began to focus attention on the location of the sports center. The board instructed the architects to look for a 200 acre site accessible to all sections of the county which could be obtained without the expense of eminent domain. Three locations seemed to fit these requirements—Houston's Memorial Park, a tract of land at the intersection of Interstate 10 and Liberty Road on the east side of the city, and land off South Main that the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo owned. However, the possible loss of dedicated city park land provoked an outcry from several quarters. Ima Hogg, whose family had given Memorial Park to the city, threatened to take it back. The livestock show group also disagreed with some of the conditions regarding the use of their land. Faced with such opposition, the parks board decided to avoid controversy and defer selection of the site until a franchise was in hand.¹⁹

Meanwhile, with the stadium matter being handled by Harris County and the parks board, the HSA continued its efforts to get a baseball club. Learning

¹⁷S. I. Morris, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, January 29, 1981, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

¹⁸"Report of Harris County Board of Park Commissioners to Harris County Commissioners' Court" (June 20, 1958), 5.

¹⁹Morris and Kirkland interviews; *Houston* (September 1958): 66.

that the the Cleveland Indians had suffered a substantial drop in attendance and were beset with financial problems, the HSA made inquiries about the purchase of the club. Negotiations proceeded beyond the talking stage, but eventually the club's owners rejected a four million dollar offer.²⁰

Yet even as the Cleveland deal fell through, new developments in the major leagues dramatically altered Houston's strategy for acquiring a franchise. Walter O'Malley, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Horace Stoneham, owner of the New York Giants, took their clubs to Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively in 1957, leaving New York City without a National League franchise. A direct result of these two moves was to mobilize support in New York for another National League franchise, if necessary by expanding the league. The HSA had always considered expansion a possibility; now it seemed a probability. The HSA filed an application for admission to the National League on June 19, 1958, just five weeks before the vote in Harris County on the revenue bond issue, and then submitted a similar petition with the American League on July 2, 1958.²¹

While busily pursuing its major league objectives, the HSA tended to ignore or overlook the Houston Buffs. Although the team had some of their best years on the field in the mid-fifties, attendance declined. The Buffs and their general manager, Art Routzong, gradually came to feel that all the talk about major league baseball was to blame. In truth, televised major league baseball games eroded more fan support than did speculation about a major league club in Houston. Still, the feeling of alienation which occurred partly explains the decision of the parent St. Louis Cardinals to offer the club for sale in October 1958 for a price of \$100,000. Indirectly, the Buffs seemed to be saying that if the HSA wanted to operate a ball club, the members "ought to put their money where their mouth is."²²

Kirksey knew full well that any major league club coming into Houston would have to acquire the minor league club and indemnify the Texas League for the loss of its minor league territorial rights. The best way to keep that figure reasonable was to own the Buffs. Moreover, in unfriendly hands, the Buffs could cause difficulty in a variety of ways as the HSA pursued its ultimate goal. However, Cullinan at the time looked upon the purchase as "a license to lose money." He anticipated little difficulty in drafting major league territorial rights for Houston and he also recognized the fact that few members of the HSA wanted to own a minor league team. For these reasons,

²⁰Cullinan interviews.

²¹*Houston Post*, May 32, 1959.

²²Based on author Clark Nealon's firsthand knowledge of events.

though Kirksey "almost had apoplexy," the HSA passed up the Cardinals' offer. Years later, Cullinan admitted, "It was one of the worst mistakes I ever made in my life."²³ When the HSA faltered, the Cardinals sold the Buffs to Milton Fischman, a St. Louis financier, and Marty Marion, the retired St. Louis infielder. As events unfolded over the next three years, the HSA had ample cause to regret its mistake.

While baseball was the syndicate's primary objective, football was uppermost in the mind of HSA member K.S. "Bud" Adams. The son of a top executive with Phillips Petroleum Company in Oklahoma, Adams was wealthy in his own right from business operations in Houston. Early on, he informed others in the HSA that he wished to have the majority interest in any professional football team the city acquired.²⁴ To that end, he and Kirksey went to Miami in January 1959, to discuss with owners of the Chicago Cardinals the possibility of moving that team, valued at \$1,250,000, to Houston. Negotiations broke down, however, when the owner refused to sell control of the club to Adams. Still, talks with other football people continued, Adams and Cullinan agreeing to sponsor an exhibition game in August 1959 between the Chicago Bears and the Pittsburgh Steelers at Jeppesen Stadium. George Halas, owner of the Bears, was also chairman of the National Football League's expansion committee, but at the time he agreed to play in Houston probably the thing he was most interested in was facilitating the move of the Cardinals out of Chicago.

Two months after Adams had failed to buy the Cardinals, however, Lamar Hunt of Dallas, equally frustrated in his efforts to acquire a football franchise, suggested to Adams that they form a new football league. By July 1959, the two men announced the organization of the American Football League with play beginning in 1960. The exhibition game a month later in Houston then took on a new interest, partly because technically it was still being cosponsored by Adams, but more because Halas offered expansion franchises in the National Football League to Houston and Dallas, an obvious effort to undercut the new league. The price for each franchise was \$600,000, a condition for Houston being the use of Rice Stadium.

Out of loyalty to his new friends in the new league, and under contract to play in Jeppesen Stadium where he was making extensive improvements, Adams declined Halas' offer. Cullinan, who had been left with most of the responsibility for the exhibition game, pursued the matter with Rice officials,

²³Cullinan interviews.

²⁴K. S. "Bud" Adams, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, December 18, 1979, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

but he too gave up when Rice refused its stadium. Thereupon, the franchise Houston could have gotten for \$600,000 went to Minneapolis. The Dallas franchise was acquired by Clint Murchison, whose Dallas Cowboys ultimately forced Hunt's Dallas Texans of the American Football League to move to Kansas City. Meanwhile, Adams remained a part of the HSA syndicate, he and the general public anticipating that once the city acquired a baseball franchise, the Houston Oilers, of which he was sole owner, would be welcome tenants in the new stadium. Unfortunately, controversy over the terms under which the Oilers could use the stadium eventually divided HSA ranks.

The Continental League

After two years of unsuccessful attempts to buy or transfer a major league club, the HSA in 1959 joined equally frustrated groups from New York, Toronto, Atlanta, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, and Buffalo in a frontal assault on the two major leagues. With the leadership of William Shea, a New York lawyer heading up that city's effort to fill the void left by the departure of the Giants and Dodgers, they organized a third major league, the Continental League.²⁵ Next they mounted a political offensive in Congress that came perilously close to eliminating baseball's reserve clause and stripping away its immunity from antitrust prosecution. Within days after the vote in the United States Senate, the National and American Leagues, obviously shaken by the experience, agreed to open up "the Lodge" to expansion. It was a "time of great excitement," Cullinan recalled, resulting in Houston and New York being awarded the first two expansion franchises by the National League in October 1960.²⁶

If the impetus for the Continental League came from William Shea, the person who gave it substance was Branch Rickey. Rickey was in the twilight years of a baseball career that spanned more than half a century. His most notable contributions to the game were developing the major league farm system in the 1920s while general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, and later, with the Brooklyn Dodgers, breaking the barriers of racial discrimination in baseball. Now ending his career with the management of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Rickey saw the changing demographic trends and understood the desire and ability of regions of the country heretofore

²⁵Much of the information about the Continental League is condensed from a paper written by Robert Nottebart entitled "The Continental League: A Houston Perspective," dated December 15, 1981. Nottebart drew heavily on the George Kirksey Papers and the personal files of Craig Cullinan. Additional information came in a letter, William A. Shea to James Tinsley, August 18, 1983, now in the Sports Archive Collection.

²⁶Cullinan interviews.

unrepresented by the major leagues to have and support new teams. For some time, Rickey had been on record insisting that the best interests of baseball would be served by forming a third major league. Pointing out that the American League, the country's second major league, was organized in 1901 when the nation's population totalled only 75 million, Rickey observed that the population of the United States was now close to 180 million yet there were still only sixteen teams in the two leagues. There was an adequate pool of players in the minor leagues, colleges, and on the rosters of the existing major league clubs to stock expansion teams, Rickey declared, and plenty of potential owners with the capital to operate clubs. A third league would make the sport the "national pastime" it claimed to be.²⁷

At Shea's invitation, Rickey came to New York shortly after he retired from Pittsburgh to talk with the New York committee about their problems. Both Pittsburgh and Cincinnati had turned down Shea's offers to transfer one of the clubs to New York, and the lack of action of a special committee Commissioner Ford Frick had set up to study the expansion issue seemed equally discouraging. Soon these discussions broadened to include the HSA and other interested groups, and the idea of organizing a completely new league of eight teams was born.²⁸

Mere talk of a third major league sent organized baseball scurrying to Congress to shore up the legal defenses under which it traditionally thwarted competition. When the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1922 that "baseball is not interstate business in the sense of the Sherman Act," the major leagues became virtually immune from antitrust prosecution. This ruling also allowed baseball to enforce the reserve clause in player contracts that prevented players from negotiating as free agents with teams other than the one with which they originally signed. The reserve clause, plus their extensive farm club operations, allowed the American and National Leagues to monopolize the services of virtually every athlete in the United States who aspired to play professional baseball.

Not content to let the matter rest there, in 1959 the major leagues now sought legislation "exempting them from every form known to the legal profession for protection against anti-anything," according to Shea. Baseball's bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives with ease, but Rickey and Shea, with some help from Kirksey and Bob Howsam from Denver, managed to derail it in the Senate. Howsam's father-in-law, former U.S. Senator Edwin Johnson of Colorado, who earlier had been president of the Western Baseball

²⁷*The Sporting News* (November 26, 1958); *Ibid* (May 21, 1958): 2.

²⁸Shea letter, 1-2; Cullinan interviews.

League, prevailed upon his former colleagues in the Senate to adjourn the legislation from the Senate calendar. "By that move alone," Shea recalled, "the legislation that would have eliminated competition was held off."²⁹ Another Johnson, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson from Texas, was also becoming interested in legislation affecting baseball, thanks to information he was receiving from Kirksey and Cullinan. In addition, local groups from virtually every other state in the Union where a major city had big league ambitions briefed their Senators on the issue. The tide began to turn against the major leagues.

Sensing the new mood in Congress, the major league club owners met at Pittsburgh owner John Galbreath's Darby Dan Farm in Columbus, Ohio, and on May 21, 1959, approved in principle the formation of a third major league. Commissioner Ford Frick's announcement stated:

The major leagues recognize the desire of certain groups to obtain major league franchises, and since there is no existing plan to expand the present major leagues, the two leagues hereby declare they will favorably consider an application for major league status within the present baseball structure by an acceptable group of eight clubs . . .³⁰

Frick's reference to "clubs" rather than "cities" was an important distinction, as events subsequently proved. Two months later, on July 27, 1959, Shea announced the formation of the Continental League, composed of clubs in New York, Houston, Toronto, Denver, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. Franchises for Atlanta, Buffalo, and Dallas-Ft. Worth were named later. Each club, Shea declared, had already deposited \$50,000 with the new league to cover initial expenses; guaranteed a minimum capital investment of \$2,500,000; and promised a stadium seating not less than 35,000 fans. Although Shea would not disclose the identities of the Continental League's president and other officers, he promised they would be present at a meeting with American and National League officials scheduled in three weeks.³¹

On August 18, 1959, the meeting of league officials took place in New York's Warwick Hotel. Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick, Presidents Joe Cronin and Warren Giles of the American and National Leagues, Arnold Johnson and Tom Yawkey representing American League owners, and Bob Carpenter and Lou Perini representing National League owners were there, flanked by the distinguished Washington attorney Paul Porter, and two other lawyers. The delegation from the Continental League included Shea, Dwight

²⁹Shea letter, 2,4.

³⁰*Houston Post*, May 22, 1959.

³¹*Ibid.*, July 27, 1959; *Houston Chronicle*, July 27, 1959.

Davis, and Walter Orr from New York; Cullinan and Kirksey from Houston; Jack Kent Cooke of Toronto; Bob Howsam from Denver; and Jerry Moore from Minneapolis-St. Paul.³² The mystery and suspense surrounding the identity of the president of the Continental League was dispelled when Branch Rickey was ushered into the room. The surprised major league officials had been unaware of Rickey's part in the new league. "It was at that moment," Cullinan recalled, "that the owners knew we were for real and that we meant business."³³ As president, Rickey brought instant respectability and prestige to the Continental League insofar as the public was concerned. From those in organized baseball, he commanded attention for "knowing where all the bones were buried."³⁴

The tenor of the meeting was pleasant and free of strife. In presenting Houston's case, Cullinan stressed that both the vote in Harris County on the stadium revenue bond proposal and the commitment of the HSA members were eloquent testimony to the broad base of community support in Houston. Commissioner Frick reiterated his conviction that organized baseball was sympathetic to the new league, but he also warned his listeners that ultimate approval of the *Continental League* depended upon the votes of the sixteen clubs in the American and National Leagues.³⁵ Then Shea, known for his plain talk, came straight to the point. Did the existing leagues favor expansion, or did they prefer a third league?³⁶ Cullinan interpreted Frick's reply to be a "cautious green light for the Continental League to move ahead."³⁷ Later, writer John Lardner commented perceptively: "The major league owners said you are welcome to go ahead and fail, but be sure and bring money."³⁸

Houstonians warmly applauded the inclusion of Houston in the new Continental League. From Mayor Lewis Cutrer on down, city officials praised the action and predicted a great future for major league baseball locally.³⁹ Perhaps the editor of *Houston*, the official publication of the

³²"Minutes of Meeting of the Commissioner of the American and National Leagues and the Continental League" (August 18, 1959), 1.

³³Cullinan interviews.

³⁴*The Sporting News* (May 21, 1958): 2.

³⁵"Minutes of Meeting of the Commissioner of the American and National Leagues and the Continental League" (August 18, 1959), 156.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷Cullinan interviews.

³⁸Quoted in Cullinan interviews.

³⁹*Houston Chronicle*, July 28, 1959.

Chamber of Commerce, expressed it best when under the heading of "Going Continental" he wrote:

"Take Me Out to the Ball Game" may never replace "Texas, Our Texas," as the state song, but it seems to be getting pretty popular around Metropolitan Houston. . . . Admission of Houston to the league will probably speed up plans for a county stadium, Chairman William A. Kirkland of the Harris County Park Board revealed. "Now that we have a possible tenant for the stadium [Kirkland said], I believe the project can come to pass faster than was first thought."⁴⁰

Cullinan and Kirksey returned to Houston from New York unsure of the Continental League's ability to become more than an organization on paper, but determined to push ahead. Cullinan personally paid \$50,000 for the baseball team of Jacksonville, Florida. Former New York Giants manager Bill Terry continued as president of the club. While "it was only a lease on the Jacksonville stadium and a working agreement with the Milwaukee Braves," Cullinan said, the Jacksonville team nonetheless represented a first step in signing players for Houston's entry in the new league.⁴¹ Cullinan also began to look for a "clean-up hitter" within the membership of the HSA who could really be expected to exercise his option and commit substantial sums of money when and if the new league gained official sanction to begin play.

At this point, R.E. "Bob" Smith began to emerge as a force in the affairs of the HSA. Smith, who turned sixty in 1954, had amassed a fortune in the oil business even before he became immensely successful producing oil in Scurry County in 1949. Thereafter, he invested extensively in real estate, owning at one time an estimated two percent of the undeveloped land in Harris County, mostly on the west side of Houston. A prime mover in the early development of the Petroleum Club, Smith probably knew Kirksey when Kirksey handled promotion for the club. The two first met "for a purpose," however, in January 1958, in a meeting arranged by a mutual friend, City Councilman Johnny Goyen. In the persistent manner for which he was known, Kirksey had urged Goyen, who was one of "Smith's boys," to introduce him to Smith. An occasion presented itself when Goyen, newly elected Mayor Lewis Cutrer, and publicity man Jack Valenti were involved in a car wreck that sent Valenti to the hospital with a broken arm. Goyen alerted Kirksey that Smith was coming by Valenti's hospital room for a brief visit, whereupon Kirksey "just happened to drop by" at the same time, bringing with him the slides and graphs he had developed in making his pitch for major league baseball. An

⁴⁰*Houston* (September 1958): 70.

⁴¹Cullinan interviews.



R.E. "Bob" Smith

avid sportsman, Smith was intrigued with the presentation. While Valenti dozed off to sleep, Kirksey and Smith continued to discuss baseball for several hours.⁴²

Smith became a member of the HSA syndicate but was understood to be interested in only a minority position if a club were acquired. He became more involved when the Continental League formed, however, because of his admiration for Branch Rickey. Also, Smith owned sixty acres of land in the area off South Main Street where Kirkland and the Harris County Board of Park Commissioners were trying to block up land for the stadium. But even though Smith's money and influence loomed larger and larger within the organization, he remained a team player; Kirksey and Cullinan continued to speak for the HSA.⁴³

As a result of Smith's involvement, the name of Judge Roy Hofheinz also began to surface in conversations about Houston's plans for major league sports. A brilliant but controversial judge of Harris County from 1937 to 1944 and mayor of Houston during the years 1953 to 1955, Hofheinz formed a partnership with Smith when he left public office to manage and develop some of Smith's land holdings. Kirksey and Cullinan visited with Hofheinz, who was known to have Smith's confidence, in the summer of 1959 for the purpose of inviting Hofheinz to become a member of HSA. They hoped that he would ultimately urge Smith to take a larger financial position in the ball club and to agree to make his South Main land available for the stadium.⁴⁴

Hofheinz not only used his influence with Smith, he dispatched his law partner, W.E. James, to Washington to assist the Continental League's lobbying activities in Congress. Hofheinz was also extremely knowledgeable in matters concerning public land use and construction of municipal facilities, areas in which Kirksey and Cullinan had no experience. Therefore, as Smith became more involved in the HSA, Hofheinz began to take charge of stadium matters, something Kirksey and Cullinan readily accepted and, indeed, sought.⁴⁵ Contrary to current public opinion, however, Hofheinz came late to the struggle to secure a major league franchise, though he represented welcome tools and assets when he came aboard.

Meanwhile, the question of whether the major leagues would expand by admitting new teams to the two established leagues, or would proceed along the lines of the third league, never really left the halls of Congress. As it turned

⁴²Statement of Johnny Goyen to James Tinsley, November 12, 1984.

⁴³Cullinan interviews; Cullinan Statement.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

out, the United States Senate was the arena where the Continental League had the best and perhaps its only chance of winning its ultimate objective. Despite outward signs of progress in organizing the Continental League, there were real problems in creating viable franchises in new cities where major league clubs had never operated before. The American and National Leagues showed no sign of opening up their player pool to the new league, and once the novelty of a Continental League franchise wore off, the prospects for long term success were dim at best. After all, what fans in Houston and every other expansion city wanted to see was their team playing the Dodgers or the Yankees, the Red Sox or the Pirates, not seven other teams with traditions as brief as their own. As a cynic would say, the average fan wanted to see at least one major league team play each time he or she went to the stadium.

Cullinan later saw the magnitude of the problems facing the new league and admitted that had the major leagues not tried so hard to protect their monopoly privilege, the Continental League quite likely would have died aborning or collapsed soon thereafter. But it was organized baseball's stubborn resistance to change that permitted the Continental League to "run what became the biggest bluff in the history of professional sports."⁴⁶

Having just demonstrated enough political clout to stop the major leagues' attempts to gain absolute immunity, the Continental League took the offensive and appealed to the Senate for relief. The appeal took the form of testimony before a committee headed by Senator Estes Kefauver looking into the monopolistic practices of all professional sports, baseball included. Kefauver made no secret of his belief that baseball's exemption from antitrust regulation should be changed, and Shea and Rickey took advantage of the opportunity to press for a bill permitting the new league to draft and sign baseball players.⁴⁷ Commissioner Frick and other spokesmen for organized baseball hotly argued that tampering with the reserve clause would "destroy the minor leagues, abolish hundreds of player jobs, confiscate the Major League's investment in player talent, and provoke damaging litigation" between the clubs.⁴⁸ Tempers flared and tension mounted among baseball men who were former friends and future "brothers in the Lodge."

The bill the Kefauver committee reported out to the Senate floor (S.B. 3483) was hardly a laughing matter for the major league clubs. It provided that the Sherman, Clayton, and Federal Trade Commission Acts all applied to

⁴⁶Cullinan Statement, 3.

⁴⁷Shea letter, 2-3.

⁴⁸"Statement of Organized Baseball on Bill S. 3483," June 15, 1960, Legislative Correspondence, Cullinan's personal files.

organized baseball and it specifically condemned as an antitrust violation "any contract, rule, etc., preventing, hindering, obstructing, or adversely affecting the formation and operation of a new major league club." In the curious way legislation is sometimes written, the bill preserved the reserve clause but dealt it a crippling blow by limiting a major league club to the ownership of forty players plus sixty other players in their first four years of organized baseball. Finally, the Kefauver bill placed a seventy-five mile limit on the territory any club could claim for exclusive television or broadcasting rights.⁴⁹ In the Continental League's quest for equality, push had now come to shove.

With support from Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, the Kefauver bill came to an early vote on June 28, 1960. Assured by their lobbyist, Paul Porter, that it would muster no more than twenty votes, organized baseball was shocked when the bill garnered twice that number and failed to pass by a margin of only four votes, 41-45. Moreover, the Senate's decision to recommit the bill, rather than let it die, added to baseball's discomfort.⁵⁰ Cullinan put it best when he noted that "the narrow margin of victory must have transformed the owners' earlier consternation into something bordering on panic."⁵¹

Expansion Comes to the Major Leagues

In less than a month after the vote on the Kefauver bill, a meeting of major league owners dispelled the uncertainty about what would happen next in baseball's war. In order to get the Continental League "out of Washington," the club owners called a truce and prepared to discuss expansion. The long dormant Expansion Committee for Organized Baseball asked for a meeting in Chicago with the Continental League on August 2, 1960.

The Chicago meeting began with some posturing on both sides. Shea said the new league was prepared to forge ahead with or without the blessing of organized baseball. Walter O'Malley, speaking for the major leagues, expressed disappointment that the new league had gone to Congress with its problems and asserted that "having rocked the boat" in this fashion, it had forfeited its right to assistance from the majors. To this Shea responded hotly, blaming the major leagues for not taking the Continental League seriously.⁵²

⁴⁹Paul A. Porter, "Organized Baseball and the Congress: A Review and Chronological Summary of the Past Ten Years" (report to Commissioner Ford Frick, February 25, 1961), 34.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 38.

⁵¹Cullinan Statement, 4.

⁵²"Minutes of Meeting of Continental League with American and National League Expansion Committees" (August 2, 1960), 14, 24, 26.

Just when it appeared that the truce was about to erupt into open warfare again, Lou Perini of the Milwaukee Braves outlined a "four now, four later" formula for expansion that was ultimately accepted. The two major leagues, Perini suggested, should consider expanding from eight to ten member leagues by 1962, and then to twelve members as time and conditions warranted. In choosing the eight cities for expansion clubs, both major leagues would give preference to the cities represented in the Continental League.⁵³ Following some discussion, the Continental League representatives agreed, providing that, as Cullinan insisted, franchises would go to the Continental League club in the city selected. After it seemed a consensus had been reached, O'Malley added the following benediction for the Continental League and prophecy for the future:

When your club becomes part of either the National or American League it can be no longer a member of another league so, therefore, the Continental League should cease to exist. This might be an important move to gain votes in the respective leagues. Because when any of you gentlemen become franchise owners and members of either the National or American League, as far as we're concerned, you've been elected to the fraternity, and the initiation is a simple one, and only costs money. You will have the privilege of losing great loads of it.⁵⁴

Cullinan returned from Chicago with the scent of victory in the air. The basic issue of expansion seemed now to be settled, assuming the other major league club owners followed the recommendation of the expansion committee. The next question was when the two leagues would announce the names of the four cities receiving the first franchises. It was generally agreed that New York would get a National League club, but there were no assurances regarding the identity of the other three. Aside from the possibility that Houston might not be chosen, Kirksey feared that the owners of the Houston Buffs, rather than the HSA, might receive the Houston franchise.

After acquiring the Buffs in 1958, Fischman and Marion severed all ties with the Cardinals and operated the club as an independent in the American Association. The team performed poorly in 1959 and 1960, though it had a working agreement with the Chicago Cubs by the second year. For the HSA, however, the important thing about the Buffs were the territorial rights vested in the franchise and the fear that these rights were in unfriendly hands. These fears were realized in 1959 when the Houston investment firm of Rowles-Winston agreed to help Fischman and Marion expand the ownership to

⁵³*Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 86.

include several Houstonians, the most prominent of whom were "Rusty" Rowles and W.N. "Bill" Hopkins. Though not an investor, Eddie Dyer of the Harris County Board of Park Commissioners also became identified as a Buff supporter because of his long friendship with Marion. Soon the Buff owners challenged the right of the HSA to speak for baseball in Houston, deriding the Continental League as "pie in the sky" with no players and no standing in organized baseball. Such talk caused Kirksey to "froth at the mouth." With his usual propensity for intrigue, Kirksey spent a great deal of his time trying to keep informed about the activities of "the opposition."⁵⁵

The conflict between the Buffs and the HSA became a little more serious once the major leagues agreed to expand. Although Cullinan had elicited a promise from the major league expansion committee in Chicago to give preference to Continental League clubs, the Buffs immediately opened conversations with both major leagues and appeared to be particularly well received by the American League. Kirksey envisioned a situation where the preference for the Continental League club might be outweighed by the claims of the Buffs. Therefore, he and Cullinan went back to work visiting major league owners, anxious for the pieces to fall into place. While they worked, they mulled over the advantages of membership in each of the two leagues, assuming Houston would get a bid in the first round of expansion. Kirksey leaned toward membership in the American League because of the drawing power of the New York Yankees; Cullinan was partial to the National League because of Houston's long association with the St. Louis Cardinals and because he considered it the stronger league.⁵⁶ But like all of the Continental League clubs, Houston waited for the major leagues to make the next move.

Two months passed. Finally, at the World Series between the New York Yankees and the Pittsburgh Pirates in October, Kirksey and Cullinan decided again to take the initiative. After two games in Pittsburgh and two of the three games in New York had been played, with all of baseball's brass present but neither league having announced expansion plans, Cullinan and Kirksey went to call on Walter O'Malley. Walking through the lobby, Cullinan told Kirksey that he had just about made his mind up in favor of the National League. As Cullinan later recounted, when the two reached O'Malley's room the following conversation took place:

"Now Walter, [Cullinan said] I realize you can't make any guarantees, but no one has made a move among the Continental League owners to say 'we

⁵⁵Based on author Clark Nealon's firsthand knowledge of events.

⁵⁶Cullinan interviews.

opt for this league or that league' and we [Houston] are being romanced and courted by both leagues. If you will put on your hat as chairman of the National League expansion committee and if I can get you to recommend Houston as one of your choices, then when we go back to Pittsburgh after the game this afternoon, Houston will announce to the press and the public that it has chosen the National League and will make formal application for membership in your league."

Walter looked at me for what seemed a week, and finally with a smile and a twinkle in his eye, he said, "All right." I'm sure at that time he was thinking about all of the other possibilities that lay before the National League, but it was time for somebody to make a move. O'Malley was as much given to intrigue as Kirksey—the two of them almost made a maniac of me.

We left and went to the game and flew back to Pittsburgh in the National League plane. Then we went down to the press room and announced that Houston was going for the National League. That broke the log jam and away we went.⁵⁷

The outside world did not know of Cullinan's conversation with O'Malley and Cullinan did not know for certain when or if O'Malley would make his announcement. It was also a time of great suspense for Houston's sports-writers, waiting as they were for the biggest story of their careers to break. Clark Nealon of the *Houston Post* remembers it as follows:

Anyone who had lived with the Houston situation through those tumultuous years had to be on edge because both the HSA and the Buffs had representatives at the series, spending a lot of time on the telephone. You could almost feel that decision time was near.

Our first suspicion that something had cracked came after the second game when Cullinan had a date to go with me to dinner and a show. On the way to Western Union to file a story, we ran into Cullinan in the hallway of the Pittsburgh Hilton. Craig had his bag packed and was in a hurry to catch a plane. He explained that our plan for the evening was off, that something had happened and he had to leave. That was all.

But all the checking we knew how to do was fruitless—even through the move to New York for three games and back to Pittsburgh for the last two games of the series. Returning from New York, I walked into the lobby of the Pittsburgh Hilton and ran into Joe Reichler, then the top baseball writer for the Associated Press. We agreed that "something was up" and Joe suggested that we "throw together" and check back with each other on any developments we could learn.

About that time Joe Cronin, president of the American League, walked in the door of the hotel. We told him we felt that something was going on

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

and we'd like to know about it. Joe's answer was, "We've taken no action in the American League but I understand those other fellows [in the National League] have done something." That made both of us jump and immediately start looking for Warren Giles, president of the National League. We finally located him at the Carlton House Hotel and persuaded him to meet with us in his room. So two excited newsmen jumped in a cab and caught Giles in the middle of a sumptuous dinner in his room. Dining was almost a ceremony for the veteran executive.

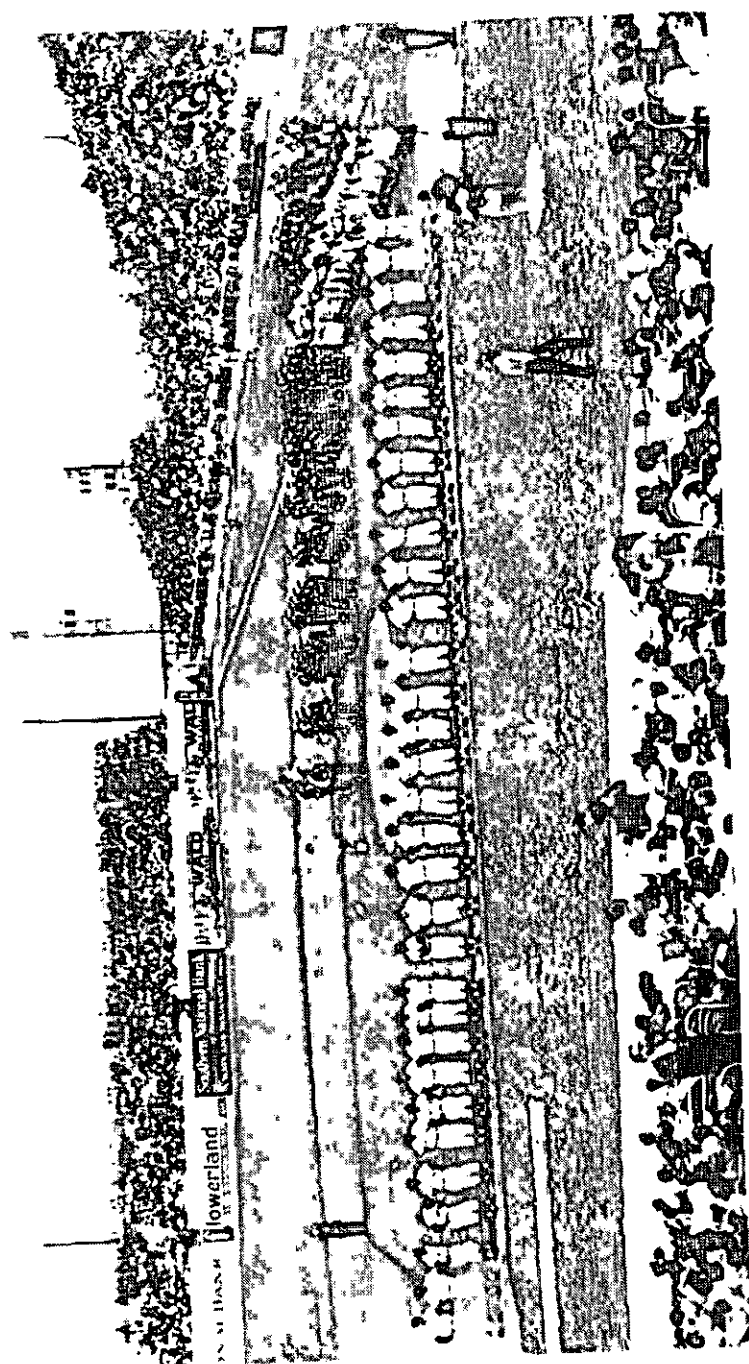
For the first time in our long experience with Giles, the personable baseball veteran seemed a little nettled with our questions. Reichler represented the New York press which had caused Giles and the National League many headaches in its clamor for a National League franchise after the Dodgers and the Giants moved west. And I represented Houston, which by then had become a jewel both major leagues wanted. In fact, Walter O'Malley, chairman of the National League expansion committee, had pointed out in New York that the Houston bid for an expansion franchise was the most complete bid proffered. And the American League expansion committee, headed by Del Webb, had held a secret meeting in New York and voted unanimously that Houston was the number one bidder among expansion groups, with its members still divided between Dallas-Ft. Worth and Minneapolis-St. Paul as a second choice.

Giles did a masterful job of neither denying nor confirming definite action by the National League but did indicate that New York and Houston were close to acceptance in the National League provided certain conditions were met. He pointed out that Houston and New York still had territorial problems to settle, Houston with the Marion-Fischman group and New York with the Yankees. An official announcement would be made at the major league meeting in Chicago, on October 16. The two of us spent almost an hour with Giles, bombarding him with questions, but could come up with nothing more definite.

But, comparing notes and impressions on the cab ride back to our hotel, we agreed that we had enough for a story that night. We telephoned Steve Perkins, then on the *Post* sports staff, and made the next morning's edition of the *Post*. Although it couldn't be proved by a definite statement, we left the meeting that night with the firm impression that Houston was in the National League. But there had been so many false starts, so much intrigue, so much rivalry between the two Houston groups, that joy had to be tempered with wariness.

The next day the National League officially confirmed the decision to offer franchises to Houston and New York with the final announcement to be made at the Chicago meeting.

Writing the story that night in the press room at the Hilton was an experience to be remembered. Kirksey was the main reason. Now Kirksey was thoroughly familiar with a couple of axioms among reporters, to wit: first, don't stand behind a writer and read over his shoulder when he's



The Colt .45s line up on the field before their first game, along with the Chicago Cubs and a marching band.

doing a story, and, second, don't interrupt his trend of thought with comments. But Kirksey was about to pop with exultation at the final success of his dream. For weeks he had been saying, "No champagne yet," when Houston had been close only to be disappointed. Now he was muttering over and over: "You can break out the champagne now!" He read every word we knocked out, cautioning about this, suggesting about that, and suggesting angles that should be covered. Then he'd go down the row of guys fighting deadlines, read what they were writing, and come back to report.

The next day came Bill Mazeroski's last-of-the-ninth homer to win the series for Pittsburgh in one of the most dramatic endings any world series ever had. And in the long walk back to the hotel through the debris of Pittsburgh's celebration of victory, it occurred to me that the home run for Houston had been hit the night before. It felt real good to be greeted with "Welcome to the big leagues" from old acquaintances on the baseball beat.

The formal action of the National League on October 17, 1960, awarding expansion franchises to Houston and New York dissolved the Continental League. In time, Toronto, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Atlanta, and Minneapolis-St. Paul also received major league franchises, either by expansion or transfer. Only Denver and Buffalo were left behind, even though the American League ultimately added six expansion teams. To those who belittled the Continental League's importance by saying it was "dead," Kirksey always replied:

If the Continental League is dead, it is the livest ghost walking the baseball orchards. What happened is this: The Continental League transformed from one league embracing eight clubs into two newer parts—four new major league clubs now and four more later. It was a wonderful solution to a difficult problem and reflects credit to the men of three leagues.⁵⁸

Putting a Team on the Field

The National League club owners' meeting in Chicago on October 17, 1960, spelled out to their two new fraternity members how expansion would take place. As all predicted, it would cost money. The League set aside 1961 as a year of preparation during which staffs were to be hired, territorial rights settled, stadium plans finalized, and players selected from an expansion player pool provided by the older clubs at the end of the 1961 season. Only the price tag for the player pool was known immediately: Houston and New York would each be required to buy \$1,750,000 worth of player talent from the

⁵⁸Houston Chronicle, August 3, 1960.

league.⁵⁹

For their part, Cullinan and Kirksey used the Chicago meeting to persuade Gabe Paul, general manager of the Cincinnati Reds, to leave the Reds and become Houston's first general manager. In a cab en route to the airport on October 24, Paul signed a three year contract. The general belief in baseball circles was that the HSA had chosen perhaps the best man available for the job. Paul had begun his career as traveling secretary and ticket manager of the old Rochester Red Wings, a Cincinnati farm club in the high minor leagues. Following that, he spent twenty-five years with the Reds, moving from publicity director to vice-president and general manager. During his tenure, the Reds enjoyed success on the field and won their share of National League pennants.⁶⁰

Gabe Paul's decision to come to Houston was partly an act of faith; the contract he signed was simply with "The Houston National League Club." The HSA had not yet formally incorporated, but on the other hand, the HSA was not yet absolutely confirmed as the holder of the Houston franchise. As befits a lodge, events were proceeding on the basis of a general understanding and nodding agreements.⁶¹

Back home in Houston, Cullinan set about the task of incorporating the HSA syndicate and providing capital for the expected franchise. Thinking \$3,000,000 would be an adequate amount of capital, Cullinan visited with O'Malley in Los Angeles only to be told more money would be needed. Arriving in St. Louis the next day to discuss the matter with the Cardinal management, Cullinan got a call from Kirksey in Houston where "all hell had broken loose." Even as they spoke, Kirksey reported, the Marion-Fischman group was in Los Angeles "huddling with O'Malley." For the ever suspicious Kirksey, the implication was clear: the Buffs were still being seriously considered for the Houston franchise. As O'Malley had not mentioned a meeting with the Buffs, Cullinan called back to see what was going on. The Dodger owner, loving the intrigue of the situation, assured Cullinan his meeting with the Buffs "was concerning other matters" and that the HSA should continue "as if it were the franchise." Cullinan was satisfied, but just to make his point with O'Malley, he drew upon his knowledge of Texas history and recalled for the Dodger owner what Sam Houston had written his friend Andrew Jackson in February 1844, when the issue of Texas

⁵⁹Cullinan interviews.

⁶⁰Houston *Chronicle*, March 19, 1961.

⁶¹Tal Smith, Administrative Assistant to Gabe Paul, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, December 3, 1981, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

annexation was hanging in the balance. On that occasion, Houston wrote: "Now, my venerated friend, you will perceive that Texas is presented to the United States, as a bride adorned for her espousal. But if, so confident of the union, she should be rejected, her mortification would be indescribable."⁶²

No doubt enjoying the analogy with sovereign powers, and not wishing to mortify, O'Malley and the National League owners approved Cullinan's capitalization plan, insisting that the New York group follow it also. The plan provided for the sale of \$1,000,000 worth of common and \$1,500,000 worth of preferred stock, and also required the HSA to borrow another \$2,500,000 from five Houston banks, each stockholder endorsing the loan for an amount equal to the stock he owned. In this fashion, the HSA raised \$5,000,000; each one percent ownership cost \$25,000 in cash stock purchase and \$25,000 in loan guarantee.⁶³

When the call went out to the original members of the syndicate for them to exercise their options to buy into the club, only nine of the twenty-seven stepped forward. Thereupon, Kirksey, Hofheinz, and Leonard Rauch were invited to participate, bringing the total to twelve. Some of those committed less than expected and Smith took up the slack by increasing the amount of stock he bought himself and, later, endorsing the bank loans attached to the stock Hofheinz bought (see table, p. 12).

Completing the corporate organization, the stockholders elected Smith, chairman of the board; Hofheinz, chairman of the executive committee; Cullinan, president; and Kirksey, executive vice-president. The nagging suspicion that Fischman and Marion might wind up with the franchise was put to rest on January 17, 1961, when the HSA bought the Houston Buffs for \$393,750.⁶⁴

Two aspects of the HSA financing deserve a close look. First, there were no "carried interests" in the capitalization. Kirksey and Cullinan neither requested nor received free stock for the years they had devoted to the cause. Nor did Hofheinz, for the several months he spent in planning for the stadium, unless one considers Smith's personal endorsement of Hofheinz's part of the bank loan to be a "carried interest." The option money that syndicate members put up went largely to pay architects and engineers for preliminary expenses related to the stadium; what remained was used for travel, secretarial, and out-of-pocket expenses. When it ran out, Cullinan

⁶²Cullinan interviews. The letter is printed in *Autobiography of Sam Houston*, ed. Donald Day and Harry Herbert Ullom (Norman, 1954), 200-202.

⁶³Cullinan interviews.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

absorbed those costs for Kirksey and himself. Once the HSA incorporated, it paid Cullinan \$20,000 in partial reimbursement for direct expenses he had incurred; still, a great deal of time and money was donated to the campaign that brought major league baseball to Houston.

The second, and more obvious, fact about capitalization is that Kirksey and Cullinan allowed Smith, and Hofheinz with Smith's backing, to emerge with firm control of the HSA. Kirksey perhaps invested to the limit of his resources, but had Cullinan made a larger investment they could have diluted Smith's dominance. Their failure to own or control as much stock as Smith and Hofheinz did not concern them at the time because the momentum of immediate events sustained their influence in the group, but it soon cost them a voice in the operation of the ball club they had worked so hard and long to secure.

With franchise in hand, the HSA turned again to the stadium issue. Several developments had occurred in the interval between passage of the revenue bond proposal in July 1958, and the National League's designation of Houston as an expansion city in October 1960. The Harris County Board of Park Commissioners moved ahead to select a site where the stadium could be built. The site the architects and park commissioners agreed upon was located off South Main Street where Smith, the Hermann Hospital Estate, and the Shamrock Hilton Hotel each had substantial land holdings. It was the responsibility of the parks board to get the landowners to agree to sell. Kirkland went first to Bob Smith, who owned 62½ acres strategically located within the site, and asked for an option to buy at \$10,000 an acre. Smith referred Kirkland to his "real estate partner," Hofheinz. Hofheinz was agreeable but preferred to trade the land for the same number of acres in the vicinity. Kirkland then negotiated a swap of the Smith land with the Hermann Hospital Estate represented by Tom Monroe. Next, Kirkland turned to the Shamrock Hilton Hotel, represented by Porter Parris, and got a similar option on 200 acres. The hotel land was part of 500 acres it acquired from Glenn McCarthy when Hilton took over the Shamrock. The hotel later sold its remaining 300 acres to Smith in a deal separate from the stadium transaction. As a result of his negotiations, Kirkland was able to set options on a stadium site for \$2,625,000, a little less than the \$3,000,000 originally anticipated.⁶⁵

As land costs lowered, however, construction costs went up. In the summer of 1960, when it appeared the major leagues would finally expand, Hofheinz invited County Judge Bill Elliott (who had succeeded Judge Casey in 1959), and architects Talbot Wilson, Hermon Lloyd, and S.I. Morris to his office on

⁶⁵Kirkland interview.

Brandt Street. There Hofheinz told the group he was agreeable to working with the architects hired by the park commissioners, but that he had been impressed with the geodesic domes Buckminster Fuller made popular, and he wanted a stadium "that would take care of baseball and football, grow grass, and be air conditioned." In this, the first of many discussions, the architects agreed that such a structure could be built; indeed, Herbert Allen had already suggested it. There were two problems, however. First, the initial cost would exceed the 1958 revenue bond authorization; second, the 5 to 6 percent interest charged for revenue bonds would make it very difficult for the stadium to generate enough income annually to retire the bonds.⁶⁶

The problem of financing a domed stadium was finally resolved, however, when Hofheinz persuaded Harris County Commissioners' Court to go back to the voters and ask approval for the County to issue \$22,000,000 in general obligation bonds bearing roughly half the interest of revenue bonds. In return, the HSA agreed to rent the stadium for \$750,000 annually for forty years, an amount sufficient to pay off the stadium construction bonds and leave the county with a debt free structure.⁶⁷ With the election set for January 31, 1961, architects prepared a model of a domed stadium that Hofheinz took to Chicago for the meeting of the National League on October 17. There, Hofheinz and the domed stadium were each introduced to the National League owners for the first time.⁶⁸

The response to the domed stadium was generally favorable, both among the club owners in Chicago and where it mattered the most: with the voters of Harris County, who agreed to place the full faith and credit of Harris County behind the bonds. Among the HSA group, Hofheinz deserves the major credit for putting the idea over, but he had a great deal of assistance from business and professional interests in Houston which heretofore had been somewhat passive in their attitude. On January 31, 1961, voters approved the issue by a comfortable majority, though by less than the three to one margin that prevailed in 1958.

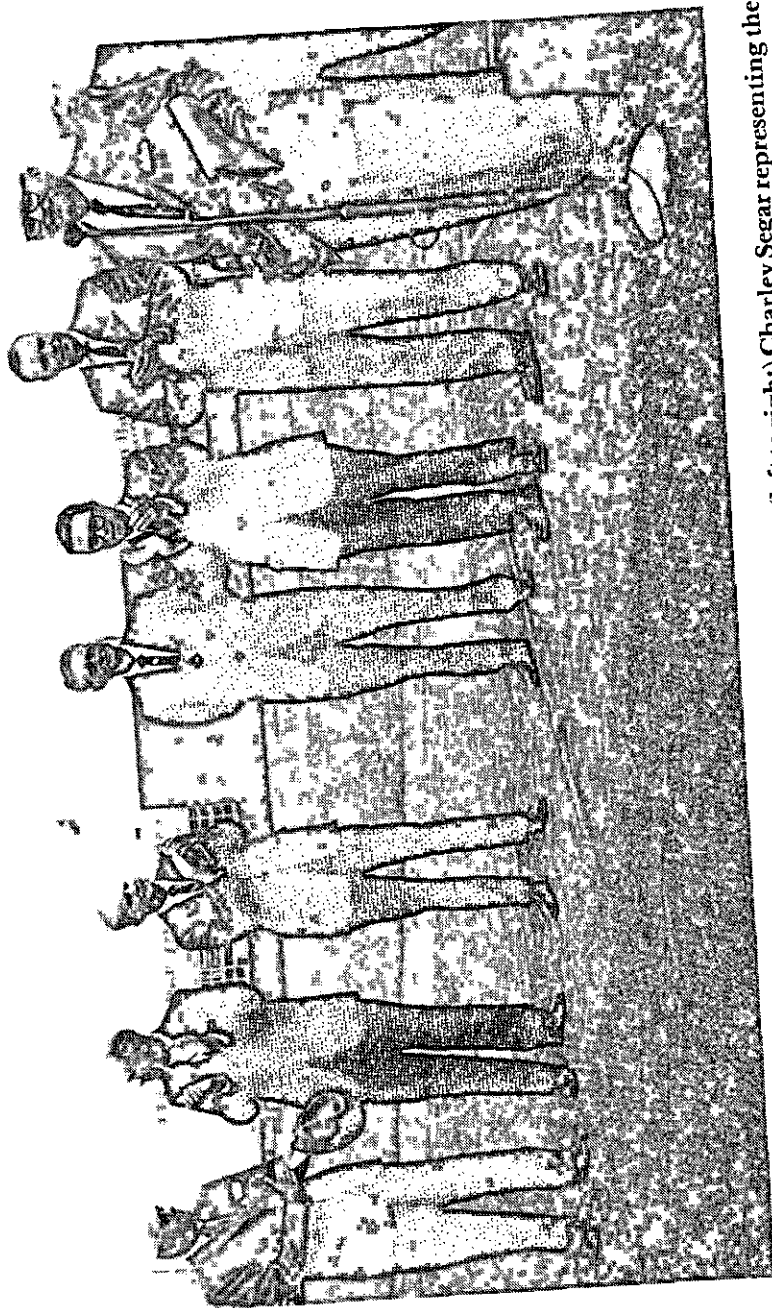
In the euphoria of victory, spokesmen for the HSA were quick to commend the wisdom of the public. "It proves once again," Cullinan stated, "that Harris County and Houston are ready for the major leagues."⁶⁹ Kirksey noted that "this is the last thing we had to do to lay the foundation for Houston's

⁶⁶Morris interview.

⁶⁷E. A. "Squatty" Lyons, interview by Nealon and Tinsley, July 7, 1980, Oral History Tape, Sports Archive Collection.

⁶⁸Morris and Cullinan interviews.

⁶⁹Houston *Chronicle*, May 23, 1961.



Applauding Houston's new major league team at its first game are (left to right) Charley Segar representing the Office of the Commissioner, Fred Fleig representing the National League, George Kirksey, Paul Richards, Roy Hofheinz, Craig Cullinan, sportswriter Morris Frank at the microphone, and Bob Smith.

major league future. Now our big task is to build a representative National League Club."⁷⁰ Smith was quoted as saying that "we must now build the world's finest stadium, a structure the envy of the world."⁷¹

One of the consequences of the passage of the bond issue for the domed stadium was the termination of the Harris County Board of Park Commissioners. For with the HSA obligated to lease the stadium directly from the county, the reason for the board's existence ceased. From 1957 until 1961, however, Bill Kirkland and his fellow commissioners had played a key role in creating and sustaining the momentum for major league baseball in Houston. The success of the 1958 revenue bond issue depended in part upon the confidence voters had in the board—confidence that was amply justified by the board's choice of the stadium site and the appointment of architects and engineers capable of designing the world's first domed stadium.

Meanwhile, Gabe Paul moved to town and set about putting together a baseball organization. The HSA headquarters moved from Cullinan's office in the Bank of the Southwest Building to the ornate two-story house on Brandt Street where Hofheinz had had offices for several years. Paul had brought with him from Cincinnati young Tal Smith, his administrative assistant. Once here, Paul installed Bill Giles in the office of public relations, hired Grady Hatton to be director of player personnel, and placed Bobby Bragan over the farm club operations of the Houston Buffs and the Jacksonville club Cullinan had acquired earlier. Harry Craft was named manager of the Buffs for their last and winning season in Houston.⁷² Finally, Paul turned to the task of working out a settlement with the American Association for the loss of its minor league territorial rights in 1962, the last hurdle the HSA had to overcome to operate a major league franchise.

Unfortunately, Paul did not stay in Houston long enough to witness the fruit of his labors. In late April 1961, he abruptly resigned and took the general manager's position at Cleveland. No official reason was ever given for his decision, but since he had come to Houston at the urgings of his longtime friend, Kirksey, Paul expected to be working for and with Kirksey and Cullinan in developing the Houston club. When it became apparent that Hofheinz was in control, however, trouble followed. Hofheinz alienated Paul by negotiating radio and television contracts and insisting that major league play begin in 1962 in a temporary stadium by the domed stadium site rather than in Buff Stadium, where Paul thought the team should play until the new

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²Tal Smith interview.

stadium was ready. Hofheinz had also redecorated Buff stadium with garish colors for the 1961 season while Paul was out of the city. According to one observer, Paul did not share "the Judge's enthusiasm for the expenditure and what it would produce at the gate." Accustomed to the Cincinnati Reds' owner, who rarely showed up at the ball park, Paul was uncomfortable with the intervention of the Houston owners, Hofheinz in particular, in what he perceived to be his management decisions. In fairness to Hofheinz, Kirksey was just as energetic, flooding Paul with notes about things to be done. Kirksey could be ignored, however; Hofheinz could not. Whatever the exact cause, Paul went to Florida to see the Jacksonville club play and called back to Houston that he was resigning.⁷³

Gabe Paul's sudden resignation raised eyebrows throughout organized baseball. There was some spillover, perhaps, in the arbitration sessions made necessary by the inability of the HSA and the American Association to agree upon a figure for the territorial rights in Houston. Craig Cullinan went to New York for a preliminary meeting of the parties to the dispute with Commissioner Ford Frick. To his surprise, Cullinan was cautioned by Frick that Hofheinz should not participate in the arbitration hearings because, as a relative newcomer to the baseball scene, he did not have the respect and confidence of other members of the lodge. Despite Frick's friendly advice, Cullinan was unable to persuade Hofheinz that he should absent himself from the arbitration session. Perhaps miffed by Hofheinz's presence and participation, the arbitration board over which Frick presided chose to award the American Association \$200,000 for its territorial rights, a sum impartial observers thought high.⁷⁴

Despite the somewhat ominous tone of the arbitration session, a letter relating to the issue from Commissioner Frick to Warren Giles, President of the National League, clearly and finally recognized the HSA as the franchise holder for a major league club. In his letter, dated October 4, 1961, Frick wrote:

You have requested advice as to whether the Houston Sports Association, Inc., is now qualified under Professional Baseball Rule 1 (a) to acquire player contracts.

According to the letters from you and the Houston Club, dated October 3, 1961, requesting arbitration under Professional Baseball Rule 1 (a), the Houston Club is a qualified member of the National League, has purchased the Houston franchise in the American Association and has agreed to be bound by the award in the arbitration so requested to

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴Cullinan Statement; Cullinan interviews.

determine just and reasonable compensation to the American Association for inclusion of the Houston territory in the National League.

In view of that firm commitment by the Houston Club. . . I advise that the Houston Club is qualified to acquire player contracts under Professional Baseball Rule 1 (a).⁷⁵

Meanwhile, Gabe Paul's departure left Houston without a general manager. Kirksey essentially stepped into the breach while he and Cullinan set out to find another man for the job. As it turned out, the new man was Paul Richards, another friend of Kirksey who was born and reared in Waxahachie, thirty miles from Kirksey's home in Hillsboro.

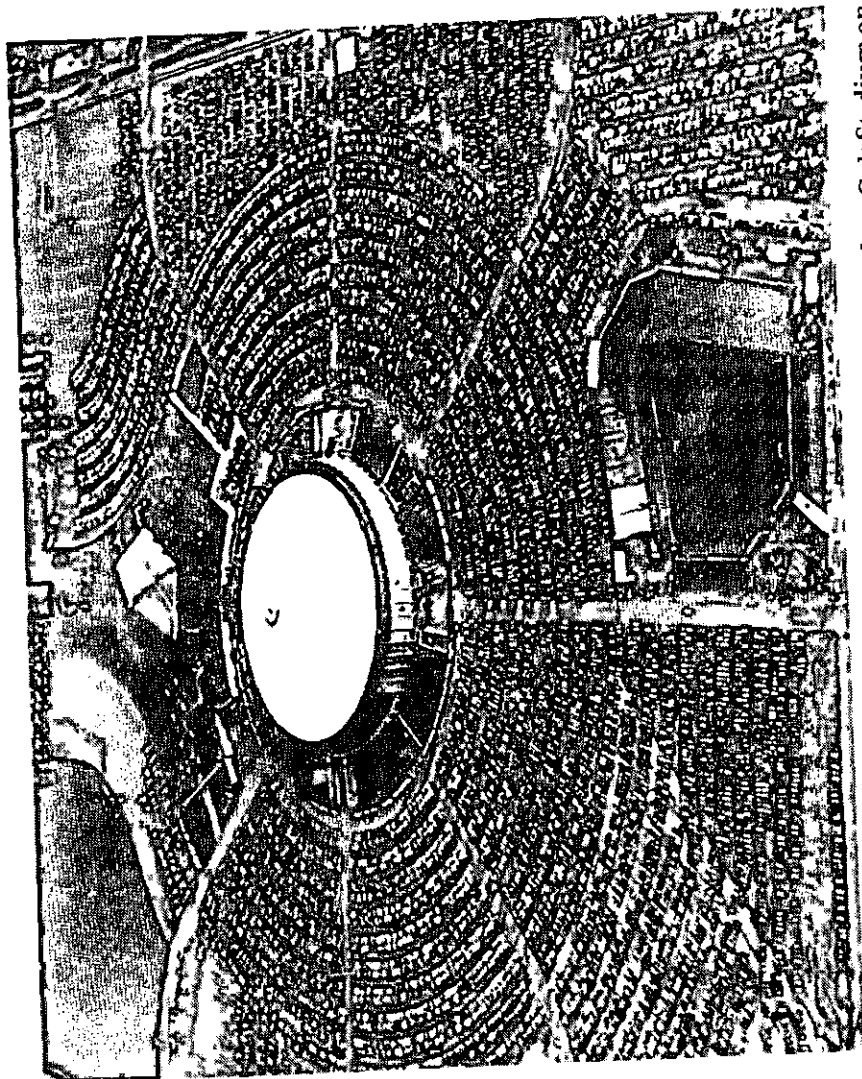
Richards was manager of the Baltimore Orioles in 1961 and his name had cropped up in discussions about the field manager's job for the new Houston club in 1962. Richards had expressed some interest in the job in the spring of 1961 when Clark Nealon of the *Houston Post* asked him what he thought about the rumors. Richards replied that he would like to come to Houston but he was not sure Houston had the kind of money it would take. When Gabe Paul resigned, there was a revival of interest in Richards. Clyde Verheyden, a Methodist minister and close friend of Bob Smith, called Richards and told him he need have no fear, that Houston had the money. As with the case of Gabe Paul, Kirksey and Cullinan negotiated with Richards. By the time of the All-Star break mid-way through the 1961 season, Richards had agreed to come, although no announcement was made until Richards finished the season at Baltimore.⁷⁶

When the announcement was made that Richards would be in charge of all baseball for the Houston club, it put new life into the Houston operation. Richards had Smith's full support and they along with Cullinan and Kirksey became "happy co-workers in the cause of Houston's baseball future." That future now had a name: the Colt .45s. In what he considered a masterpiece of logic, Kirksey reasoned that the pistol that had won the West was a fitting name for Texas' first big league team.

Shortly after Richards arrived in Houston, the National League established the player pool from which the Houston Colts and New York Mets chose the nucleus of their 1962 teams. Each of the eight established teams submitted a list of players and their prices, the Colts and Mets alternating in their selection. Richards was enraged at the low quality and high prices for the players in the pool, commenting loudly: "This is the biggest fraud since the

⁷⁵Letter, Ford Frick to Warren Giles, October 4, 1961, carbon copy in Cullinan's personal files.

⁷⁶Paul Richards, interviews by Nealon and Tinsley, February 5, 1981 and September 2, 1981, Oral History Tapes, Sports Archive Collection.



Before the Astrodome opened, the Colts played in the temporary outdoor Colt Stadium on the same lot.

Black Sox!"⁷⁷ This drew an immediate and stern reprimand from National League President Warren Giles, but most observers agreed that the older clubs in the league used the expansion draft to get rid of some unwanted and questionable talent at a handsome profit. When it was all over, Houston had chosen twenty-three players and paid approximately \$1,750,000 to the brothers of the lodge.

The Houston Colt .45s held their first spring training at Apache Junction, Arizona. With the long struggle to get a major league club operational almost over, Cullinan recalls that the full impact of what the HSA had done hit him when the players came out on the practice field with the letters HOUSTON emblazoned across their uniforms.⁷⁸

From the cactus, sagebrush, and desert of Arizona, the Colts came home to Houston to play in a temporary stadium where some of the concrete wasn't dry at gametime. As the domed stadium was still three years away from completion, and as the old Buff stadium was too small for fans and parking, Hofheinz constructed a temporary stadium on a corner of the property where excavation had begun for the domed stadium. At a cost of \$2,000,000, Colt Stadium seated 32,000 fans and featured such amenities as a "Fast Draw Club" with an ornate, old-West type bar that served "Hell Fire Stew."

Just when he thought he had overcome all the difficulties of opening a major league season in Houston, Kirksey spent one more sleepless night. The National League had sent in a special sand that umpires use to rub the glaze off baseballs before a game. It was in a can about the size of a three-pound coffee can, and it had been misplaced in the rush to get ready. Only after an all night search did Kirksey find the can.⁷⁹

April 10, 1962, marked the end of the successful campaign to bring major league baseball to Houston. Winning their first game, the Colts proceeded to sweep the three game series with the Chicago Cubs. Recalling the glory days of the New York Yankees when they dominated the American League, the irrepressible Morris Frank of the *Houston Chronicle* could be heard in the press box chanting: "Break up the Colts!"

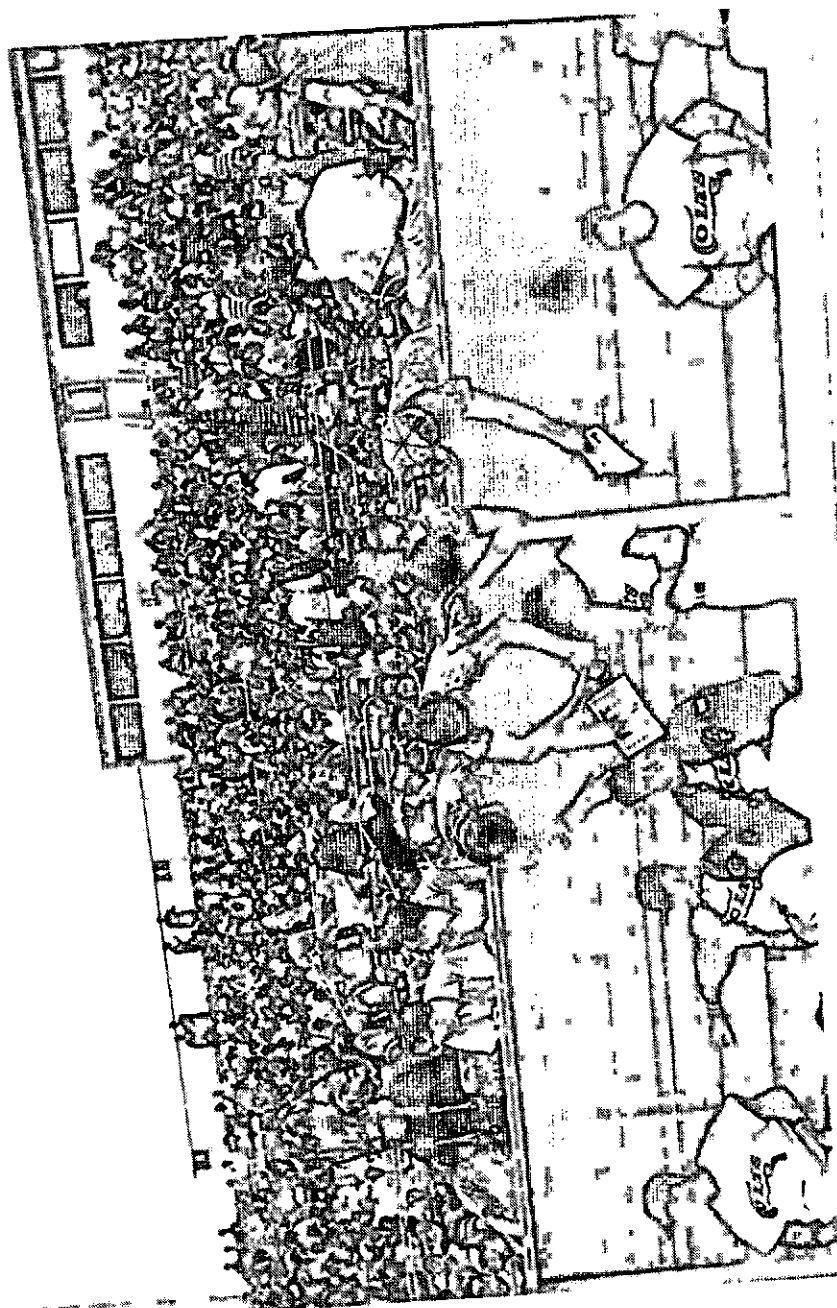
The End of the Coalition

For reasons far different than those intended, Morris Frank's humorous words were prophetic. A break up occurred, but it happened off the field among the stockholders. During the 1962 season, Craig Cullinan was

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸Cullinan interviews.

⁷⁹Richards interviews.



Houstonians show their enthusiasm at the Colts' first game.

increasingly disturbed at the amount of control Hofheinz exercised over the operation. Cullinan saw many of Hofheinz's policies as potentially disastrous, especially his encroachment on Paul Richards's management of the club. Acknowledging Smith's financial control of the franchise, at the end of the season Cullinan approached Smith directly and offered him his stock at cost upon condition that Smith also buy out any other minority stockholder who was desirous of selling. Seeing that Cullinan could not be dissuaded, Smith bought his stock and that of six others, and relieved all seven of their commitments to the local banks for HSA loans. While they each got their investment back, Cullinan observed that "not one of them asked for or received one dime in consideration for the years they had stayed with the project."⁸⁰ Nor, of course, had Cullinan.

Smith continued to let Hofheinz run the show until 1965, the year in which they changed the club's name to the Houston Astros and moved into the new domed stadium. But Smith, too, was dissatisfied with Hofheinz's management, especially his disputes with Richards, and with the Oilers over the terms under which they would play in the new stadium. Finally, in the spring of 1965, he decided to cease being the "silent partner" and demanded that Hofheinz either buy him out or sell. In a telephone conversation with Richards, then with the team in spring training, Smith expressed confidence that Hofheinz could not come up with the money. To his surprise, however, Hofheinz was able to raise the funds that gave him undisputed control of the club. Upon the completion of Hofheinz's buy-out of Smith, Richards asked Hofheinz for a release to look for another job in baseball. At the owner's insistence, however, Richards remained through the 1965 season only to be dismissed by Hofheinz in December.⁸¹

With Cullinan and Smith gone, only George Kirksey remained of those who had been in the forefront of the Houston Sports Association since 1957. With the departure of Cullinan and then of Smith, Kirksey had felt increasingly isolated. After Hofheinz's firing of General Manager Paul Richards, as players shrewdly and painstakingly acquired by Richards were blithely traded away, Kirksey believed that Houston had lost its competitive posture in the National League for years to come. Kirksey had seen enough; in June 1966, he disposed of his two per cent of HSA stock to Hofheinz. With wry understatement, Kirksey referred to his association with Hofheinz as an "illuminating experience" and then proceeded to clean out his office.⁸²

⁸⁰Cullinan Statement, 11-12.

⁸¹Richards interviews.

⁸²Houston Chronicle, May 10, 1966.

Roy Hofheinz, the last man to come aboard, now emerged as virtual sole owner of the property others had nurtured along as a civic venture since 1957. Plagued by ill health and financial difficulties, Hofheinz unfortunately proceeded to spend and pledge baseball income to finance his other schemes. His debts increased, and in 1975 ownership of the baseball club passed into the hands of impersonal absentee ownership by the General Electric and Ford Motor Credit Associations.

The Colt .45s were the result of years of hope, planning, and effort. More than any other single individual, George Kirksey made the dream of major league baseball in his adopted city become reality. However, the Colts were the result not only of Kirksey's determination, but also of the efforts of Cullinan, Smith, and the other members of the HSA; of the assistance of Kirkland and the Harris County Board of Parks Commissioners; of the support, at various times, of countless unnamed but influential individuals throughout the city; and of the people of Harris County, who gave their votes and their enthusiasm to help the dream come true.

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