

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

Helen Earlene "Beans" Risinger
Grand Rapids Chicks Collection

Collection # 160

September 2008 version

Abstract

The Helen Earlene “Beans” Risinger Collection contains material about the Grand Rapids Chicks baseball team, part of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). The League was organized in 1943 by Philip K. Wrigley, as a substitute for the missing male players who had been called to service in WWII. The League was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown in 1988. This collection focuses on Bean Risinger's own participation as a team player, beginning in 1948, at the age of 21, until the League disbanded in 1954. Risinger was a pitcher, who developed her baseball skills playing with her male relatives back in Oklahoma. She was a member of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Chicks from 1949-1954, with earlier experience as a member of the Springfield Sallies (Springfield, Ill.). She continued to live in Grand Rapids after the League disbanded, working in the medical field as a technician and doctor's assistant until her retirement in 1991. She continues today to participate in Chicks reunion events and was included as a consultant and participant in activities related to the making of the movie “A League of Their Own”, which documents the AAGPBL womens' baseball league. See also other GRPL archival collections related to the Grand Rapids Chicks.

Official Website for the All American Girls Professional Baseball League
<http://www.aagpbl.org/>

Collection #: 160

Accession #: 1990.30; 1999.032; 2000.049 ; 2001.054; 2002.019 ; 2003.003; 2004.004- ;
2005.085 ; 2006.025a-d ; 2007.xxx

Donor: Helen Earlene Risinger

Span dates: 1943-present

Processor: Original processing, Aaron Shroll, February 1993.

Additional processing & finding aid revisions, R. Mayne, May 2000-2006.

Inventory, Betty Gibout, Spr. 2000

Box Summary, Marcella Beck, Sept.16,2000.

Size: 1.5 cu.ft.

Subject: Risinger, Bean ; Risinger, Helen Earlene ; Grand Rapids Chicks.

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
1	Biographical	slim
2	Ephemera & Publications.	Standard
3	oversized	gray lid/w label slot 3.5x11.5x17.5
4	untitled	gray full lid 3x17x21
5	untitled	gray full lid
6	oversized & images	Slim legal

Added 9/11/2006
FF.XV.B Posters & oversized clippings

Note: Look for smaller better fitting box/boxes for the scrapbooks in Boxes 4 & 5.

Related Collection and Websites

Coll. 058 Grand Rapids Chicks Collection
Coll. 121 Marguerite King Moran Collection. Scrapbooks
Coll. 125 Robinson Studio Collection. Chicks Series.

Northern Indiana Center for History
<http://www.centerforhistory.org/aagpbl.html>

Turner Classic Movies. "League of Their Own"
<http://www.turnerclassicmovies.com/thismonth/article/?cid=456>

Scope and Content

The Grand Rapids Chicks baseball team was one of fourteen unique women's baseball teams representing fourteen different Midwestern cities. The teams played from 1943 to 1954. The wooden wall plaque in the collection is from 1953, a pennant victory year for the Chicks. The baseball cards picture players from the AAGPBL and indicate where they played as well as their statistics. The scrapbooks contain newspaper articles and memoirs from Risinger's tenure with the Grand Rapids Chicks. The photographs include a view of the Bigelow Field fire on July 16, 1952, and a few images of Woody English. The newspaper articles concern Risinger or the Grand Rapids Chicks. Game programs include a special program from spring training in Cuba in 1947.

Biography

Helen Earlene "Beans" Risinger was born in the small town of Hess, Oklahoma, daughter of Lizzie and Homer Risinger, on March 20, 1927. Her nickname "Beans", was given her by her father, due to her fondness for pork and beans, a staple of the family diet. She first learned the sport of baseball from her father, who played for the local town's team against the teams of other neighboring communities. She continued to play the sport with and against her adult male relatives through high school, and was often found on the pitching mound.

Although she had a love for basketball, she completed for a chance to play for the AAGPBL in Oklahoma City in 1947, after seeing a notice for tryouts in that city's newspaper. Her pitching skills attracted the attention of the League managers during the tryouts, and Risinger was offered a position in 1947. However, it is not until the following year, encouraged by League player Shirley Jameson, that she signed a contract with the Springfield Sallies in 1948, at the age of 21. Low attendance caused the Sallies to fold after that season. During the early part of 1949 Risinger toured with the Americanas, an exhibition team which was playing at that time in South America. Later in 1949, she signed a contract with the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Chicks. She remained with the Chicks until 1954 when the league disbanded.

Risinger was an outstanding pitcher. A right hander, standing at 6' 1", her most memorable game was when she struck out Sammy Sams of the Kalamazoo Lassies with the bases loaded to win the playoffs for the Grand Rapids Chicks in 1953. During the regular seasons Risinger maintained an ERA under 2.40 for five consecutive seasons.

The Grand Rapids Chicks baseball team won the league championship in 1947 and 1953 and a league pennant in 1948. Elwood "Woody" English took over for Johnny Gottselig in May of 1952 as coach for the Grand Rapids Chicks, and stayed there for the remainder of the league's existence. In 1988, the AAGPBL was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Encouraged by the Chicks team physician, Dr. Blackburn, Earlene "Beans" Risinger took college courses to become medical technician during the winter months. She went to x-ray school at Butterworth Hospital. Then, when the League disbanded, Beans continued to live in Grand Rapids working in the office of an orthopedics surgeon, and continuing in this field until her retirement in 1991. She continues today to participate in Chicks reunion events and was a consultant for the movie "A League of Their Own", which documents the AAGPBL womens' baseball league. See also other GRPL archival collections related to the Grand Rapids Chicks.

Beans died July 29th, 2008, in Hess, Oklahoma, where she has returned to live near her family in later years. Obituary at 160-1

Series Descriptions

These series were defined June 4, 2004 to provide a better understanding of the various segments of this growing collection.

Series I. Biographical Materials & Correspondence

Includes articles or documents about Risinger's life.

Series II. Ephemera.

Includes baseball cards, play programs, flyers, and other miscellaneous advertising or information articles, as available.

Series III. Publications

Includes booklets, magazines articles and newspaper clippings related to the team, the league in general or other league players. These publications are both national and local in scope. While the local news clippings include articles contemporary to the active era of the league, most of the other publications are from the 1980 to the present, documenting the history of the league.

For articles specific to Beans Risinger, see Series I.

Series IV. Scrapbooks.

Three scrapbooks document the years 1950-1952.

Series V. Photographs

Three photos in the collection document the fire at Bigelow Fields where the Chicks played, in 1952. Images of the coach and a couple of team photos are included.

Series VI. Posters.

Two posters are included, both from 1992, related to promotional activities, and/or from Risinger's work related to the "League of Their Own" movie.

Series VII. Realia.

A 1953 wall trophy is included in this collection. While the Archives does not collect Museum objects, small real objects are sometimes include in support of the other collection materials, and for possible exhibit purposes.

Series VIII. Moving Images (added Aug. 30 2006)

A videotape "Grand rapids Sports Hall of Fame" from Fox 17 TV was added in August 2006.

Contents

Box Folder Description

1	1	<p>Series I. Correspondence & Biographical information</p> <p>Biographical info on Risinger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Earlene “Beans” Risinger” Statement by Risinger for an unidentified source. “What did the All-American Girl’s Baseball League do for Me? ...”• “Making it as an All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Player” / by Burna Cole. Altus Times, Altus, Oklahoma. Aug. 9, 1999. Photocopy of newspaper clipping, with image of Risinger.• [Women’s Sports], Dec. 1982. Letter to the editor, pg. 5. 2 copies. Photocopies. See a copy of the original letter as they sent it in Box 1 folder 1.5 below.• “Meet Beans Risinger” Grand Rapids Herald, July 6, 1949. 2 copies. Photocopies• “Former Chicks remember other years as baseball season opens” Grand Rapids Press. Apr. 15, 1962. Includes of Risinger and other former players as medical technicians. Original clipping• “Chicks’ ‘Beans’ in lineup for mall’s sports card show” Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 2, 1992. Photocopy, Laminated by donor. [See also poster from this event listed below] 2004.040• Baseball Historian.Com entry http://www.baseballhistorian.com/html/american_heroes.cfm?page=170• AAGPBL Interview : Earlene Risinger. From The Diamond Angle, the Eclectic Baseball Magazine n.d. http://www.thediamondangle.com/archive/july01/risinger.html• “Beans' Risinger: An All-American Pitcher in the AAGPBL's Postwar Years / Jim Sargent. c. 2005 AAGPBL. http://www.aagpbl.org/articles/biographies.cfm?ID=9 Note: This is a different version of the next article, original published in Grand River Valley History, v. 16, 1999, below.
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Series I. Correspondence & Biographical information

- 1 1 Biographical info on Risinger continued ...
- Beans Risinger: All-American Pitcher / by Jim Sargent. Grand River Valley History, v. 16, 1999.
 - Helen Earlene "Beans" Risinger / Joyce M. Smith.
<http://www.aagpbl.org/articles/biographies.cfm?ID=12>
 - Risinger fastball gives chicks second straight / Roscoe D. Bennett. May 12, 1952. Color laser copy of unidentified newspaper clipping (GR Press or Herald?)
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
 - A Memorable Game. RE 1953 Final series game, Chicks vs Kalamazoo Lassies. Source unknown. Chicks catchers reminiscence.
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
- 1 1.3 Swinging for the Fences / by Barbara Beal Schmid. Michigan History. May/June 2003
2006.025 Added 3/17/2006
- 1 1.5 Correspondence.
Letter to Women's Sports, Oct. 1, 1982. From Beans Risinger and Marilyn Jenkins. RE: David Young's article "Season in the Sun".
See Box 1, folder 7 for actual article.
- 1 1.2 Helen Earlene "Beans" Risinger Obituary. Grand Rapids Press, July 31, 2008. Includes photos.
D6 Obituary article
B6 Obituary
Added 7/31/2008

Series II. Ephemera

- 1 2 Baseball Cards, 1943-1954.
Orange packet (20)
Green packet (18)
Blue packet (20)
+ 2 photocopied sheets
- 1 3 Flyer. AAGBL Cards. Sharon Roepke & Daniel Barber, ca. 1988.
Also lists the publication "Diamond Gals", and is housed in the same
folder with that publication.
- 2 1 Programs
● Grand Rapids Chicks vs Ft. Wayne Daises.[1950?]
● 1951
- 2 2 Programs. 1947 Abril 27 a' 4de Mayo . Gran Stadium de la Habana
● Fort Wayne vs Grand Rapids
● Muskegon vs Grand Rapids
- 2 3 All American Girls Professional Baseball League, 1943-1954. Souvenir
Program, Ft. Wayne, 1986 (2)
- 2 4 Women in sports Leadership Conference. Feb. 7-8, 1983, Sheraton
Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Michigan. Sponsored by the Michigan High
School Athletic Assoc. Special Guests for the WISL Reception on Feb. 7
were members of the AAGBL.
+ Folder, Empty. MHSAA. Women in Sport Leadership.
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
- 2 5 Invitation. Reception for Earlene "Beans" Risinger, Hess, Oklahoma.
at the Oklahoma Sports Museum, Guthrie, April 21, 2002.
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
- 2 5 AAGPBL, Players Assoc. Dinner invitation, Sept. 9, 2001, Grand Rapids
Hilton.
2002.019B Added 2/26/2002
- 2 5 Pre-Game Script. Colorado Rockies. Pre-Game Script, Sept. 10, 1979.
"Beans" (Community).
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006

Series II. Ephemera continued ...

- 6 2 The Springfield Sallies. [Greeting card with image, including Risinger, of the Springfield Sallies, n.d.
Blank inside; historical data on the back. All American Girls Professional Baseball League #048.
2002.019 Added 2/26/2002
- 2 6 Folder only. Empty. A-A. GPBL. America's Classic League. All American Girls Professional Baseball League. Player's Association, Inc. Bean's name written inside cover. Image of unidentified player on the back.
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
- 2 7 True Major Leaguers: the All American Girls Professional Baseball League : an exhibit from the AAGPBL Collection, The Northern Indiana Historical Society. Leighton Gallery, South Bend, In. Aug. 5, 1993-Jan. 16, 1994.
2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
- 2 7 Leagues of Their Own : a Michigan "Summer of Sports" Exhibition, Van Andel Museum Center, Feb. 1-Sept. 1, 2003. Flyer.Bean participated in the Aug. 9, 2003 event "Tales from the Dugout: the Women of the all-American Girls Professional Baseball League" listed in this program.
2006.025 Added 3/17/2006

Series III. Publications

Books

- 2 19 Don't Die on Third / by Rosemary Stevenson, with W.C. Madden.
Monticello, In. : Madden Enterprises, 2006. Inscribed to Risinger by
Stevenson, who played for the Grand Rapids Chicks in 1954.
- 2 15 Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan, Adrian to Ypsilanti : the
teams & the ballparks of the Wolverine State from the 1880s to the present
/ by Marc Okkonen. Thunderbay Press ; Grand Rapids : Dickinson Press,
printers, 1997. Pg. 58 = Grand Rapids.

Booklets

- 1 3 Diamond Gals : the story of the All American Girls Professional Baseball
League / by Sharon L. Roepke. C. 1986 by AAGBL Cards, 2nd ed. 1988.

Periodical & Web articles

- 3 x **Life Magazine, June 4, 1945.** v. 18, no, 23. Sports. Girls' Baseball : a
feminine Midwest league opens its third professional season, pg. 63-66.
Includes an image of all of the players of the league for the year on pgs.
64-65. Lots of signed advertising art in this issues as well. No other GR
association is apparent.
- 2 8 **Women's Sports, Oct. 1982.** pg. 48+ "Season in the Sun" / by David
Young.
- 2 9 **People, Aug. 17, 1987.** pg. 77+ "This Mother Could Hit" / by Helen St.
Aubin as told to Todd gold.
RE: Article on former AAGBL player who's son is pro baseball star
- 2 10 **Glamour, May 1989,** pg. 99 "Women right now : Women who play
hardball"
- 2 11 **Smithsonian v., 20, no. 4, July 1989.** pg. 88+
"When the diamond was a girl's best friend" / by Jack Fincher. (2 copies)
- 2 12 **St. Joseph Valley Record / Northern Indiana Historical Society.** v. 5, no.
1, **Summer 1993.** The South Bend Blue Sox.
- 2 13 **Museum (Public Museum of Grand Rapids) Summer 1994.** The Girls
of Summer. p. 8-11.
2006.025B Added 4/7/2006
- 2 14 "In a League of Her Own" / David Spaner. **The Jerusalem Report. Nov.**
14, 1996. pg. 31
- 2 16 Jean Faut : South Bend's All-American All-Start Pitcher" / Jim Sargent.
Apr. 4, 1998. From the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League,
Website. <http://www.dlcwest.com/~smudge/jeanfaut.html>

Series III. Publications

Periodical & Web articles

- 2 17 Doris Sams / Jim Sargent. Webpages. All American Girls Professional Baseball League, 1943-1954. May 19, 1998 print.
<http://www.dlcwest.com/~smudge/dorisams.html>
The site is still there, but probably not this article.
- 2 18 **Memories and Dreams, v. 25, no. 4, Fall 2003.** pg. 9+ “All-American Girls Claim Their Place in History” / Sue Macy 2004.040 6/4/2004

Clippings [oversized]

- 6 1 Newspaper articles, 1945-1991. Photocopies.
[Further processing needed]
- 2 20 **Guthrie News Leader**, Guthrie, Oklahoma. **Apr. 16, 2000.** (3) Re Bean’s visit there. See also invitation at 160-2-5
- 1 1 **Oklahoma Almanac, 2005/2006.** Entry for Helen Earlene Risinger “State of Champions”. pg. 13. Color laser photocopy.
2006.025 Added 3/25/2006

FF.XV.B

Newspaper sections/clippings. Oversized.

2006.025D Added 9/7/2006
Grand Rapids Newspapers

1. Remember the Grand Rapids Chicks? 1945-1954. “Those Were the Days” column by Gordon Harrington. In the **Interpreter, July 29, 1971**, pg. 7. Section w pg. 7-14 presented.

Grand Rapids Press

2. **Apr. 15, 1962.** Former Chicks remember other years as baseball season opens / Eleanor Pettersch. [Dup.?)
3. **July 9, 1982.** Calling all Chicks” / By Bob Becker. First-Ever Reunion Hatches Priceless Baseball Memories.
4. **June 17, 2001.** “Chicks rule as first team in GR Sports Hall of Fame”. GR Press. Sports Section. + Laminated clipping of same.
5. **March 17, 2002.** GR Press, Flair Section. Who's Who among area Women : suffragist fought for rights until the day she died / by Kathy Rush. RE Emily Burton Ketcham. Also features Beans & Nancy Mulnix. See images of these two on page J2.
6. **July 28, 2005.** Chicks gather at museum to honor former player / by Dean Holzwarth. Includes the same image used in June 17, 2001 article above.

Series III. Publications

Non-Grand Rapids Newspaper.

7. **Kalamazoo Gazette, Aug. 24, 2004.** "TODAY" section. "A Reunion of the own : former pro women baseball players gather here to commemorate 50th anniversary" / by Martin Heinritz.

8. **The News Sentinel, Fort Wayne, In. Section F. June 26, 1992.** Tear sheet. "They're back at the Plate" & "Despite the sports cliches, 'League' is a solid hit. "League of Their Own" era. Includes a cameo picture of Beans, and 4 others + also front page of the newspaper provided, no other Chicks info. Found.

9. **South Bend Tribune. Aug. 7, 1993.** Metro Edition. "Baseball stars come out for a night of their own" / by Kathy Borlik. RE the AAGPBL. 50th Anniversary celebration. Front page & A2.

Series IV. Series Scrapbooks

4 x Scrapbook 1, 2, 1950-1951.
5 x Scrapbook 3, 1952.

Series V. Photographs.

6 3 Bigelow Field fire. 1952. Grand Rapids Press Library photos. (3)
1. Woody, Ziegler, Inez Voyce Looking at charred remains
2. Fire ablaze with 2 firemen
3. Fire ablaze with little remaining.

3 x Night game at Bigelow Field. n.d.
Enlarged digital image, annotated with signatures of three players, including "Beans" Risinger's.
2006.025 Added 3/17/2006
Oversized.

6 4 John Rawlings photos. [1952] (2)
1. Robinson Studio photo. Rawlings standing with group seated on bleachers.
2. Spielmacher photo. Rawlings in uniform, with crowd and unidentified man throwing out the ball.

- Series V. Photographs continued ...**
- 6 5 Robinson Studio Photographs, n.d. (3) 1999.032
Added 11/20/2001
1. Twila Shively, Pat Keagle, Philomena Francisco.
 2. Teeney Petras in uniform
 3. Team photo with group seated on steps at unidentified location
 4. Betty Wicken
 5. Connie Wisniewsk
 6. YoYo Liellet
 7. Mid Earp
 8. Audry Haines
 9. Thelma Granbo
 10. Doris ?
 11. Elsio Wingrove
 12. Twila Shively
 13. Teeny Petras
 14. John Rawlings
 15. Ruth Lessing
 16. Pat Keagle
 17. Alma Zegeer
 18. Alice Haylett
 19. Vera Whitman
 20. Philomena Francisco
- 6 6 Aug. 26, 2000. AAGBPL Milwaukee Reunion. Bird's eye view of players standing in a "V" shape, on the field. 2 color laser copies. 2001.054A Added 11/20/2001
- 6 8 Sculpture, Dedicated to the AAGPBL, May 15, 2006, at Cooperstown, N.Y. Baseball Hall of Fame. (1 color snapshot) May 26, 2006 "Frame 12". Images shows a woman in the act of swing a baseball bad. Sculpture sits outside, in the garden new the library.

- 6 7 **Series V. Photographs continued ...**
Unidentified B/W team group photo, perhaps of
Grand Rapids Chicks. AAGPBL
2001.054B Added June 18, 2001(Oct 30 2001):
- Unidentified.
 - Beans Risinger
 - Jayne Bittner
 - Pepper Paire
 - Gabby Ziegler
 - Mo Silvestri?
 - Doris Satterfield
 - Inez Voyce?
- FF.XV.B **Series VI. Posters.**
Nov. 7, 1992. Mall promo poster, with image of Bean's as a GR Chick
pitcher.
See Box 1, Folder 1 clipping for more information.
2004.040 Added 6/4/2004
- FF.XV.B Collage Poster created by Mary Smitter, and given as a
remembrance to her friend Beans Risinger, 1992.
Items document Bean's participation in events surrounding the movie "A
League of Their Own". Includes a movie poster, and newspaper clippings
showing the stars, including one with Beans standing next to Madonna.
2005.085 Added 10/19/2005
- 3 x **Series VII. Realia**
Wall trophy, 1953.
1990.030
- 175-UT9-135 **Series VIII. Moving Images (added Aug. 30 2006)**
Grand Rapids Sports Hall of Fame / Fox 17 WXMI
2006.025C Added 8/30/2006
Item is housed with Coll. 175 videotapes.