

## FOCUS BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

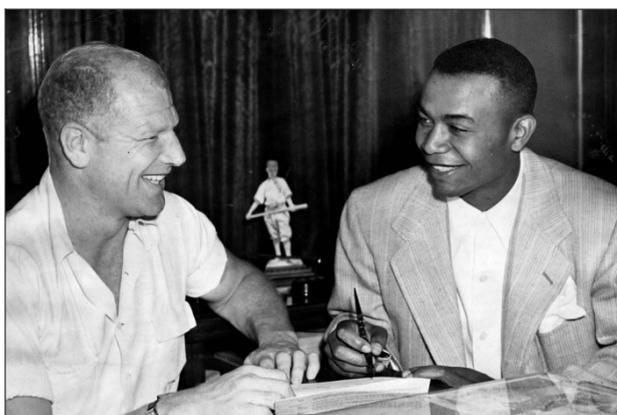
Expanded coverage in the **Chicago Tribune** Chicagoland report**“He was a man of imagination ... and easily the greatest innovator of his time.”**

— Bill Veeck, writing in his autobiography about his father, William



TRIBUNE PHOTO

As Cubs president from 1919 to 1933, William Veeck, seen with wife Grace and son Bill, retooled Wrigley and built pennant-winning teams.



After buying the Indians, Bill Veeck signed Larry Doby, the first black player in the American League and a future Hall of Famer.



NUCCIO DINUZZO/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Night Train Veeck, great-grandson of William Veeck, and others back the Hall of Fame bid in a video: [chicagotribune.com/veeck](http://chicagotribune.com/veeck).

# Going to bat for a legend's dad

## Historians want William Veeck, who like his son reshaped baseball, to join Bill in the Hall of Fame

By **JOHN OWENS** | Tribune reporter

Mary Frances Veeck fondly remembers the occasions when her late husband, Bill, would reminisce about his father, William Veeck.

“I always loved hearing Bill talk about his father, and he would talk about him quite often,” said Veeck, now 91 and living in a South Side retirement home. “The lessons Bill’s father taught him were invaluable, and they stuck with him for the rest of his life. Bill was very proud of being his son.”

Bill Veeck, of course, was one of the most important executives in Major League Baseball history, helping end racial segregation in the sport, putting the ivy on the Wrigley Field walls and pioneering such innovations as the “exploding scoreboard” at Comiskey Park and singing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” during the seventh-inning stretch.

For this storied career, Veeck was inducted into baseball’s Hall of Fame in 1991, five years after his death at age 71. Now historians are ramping up a campaign to add Veeck’s father to the hall because of his accomplishments as a Cubs executive, including his pioneering role in banning gambling, promoting Ladies Day, proposing interleague play and instituting sweeping reforms in how the major leagues are run.

The campaign for the senior Veeck will be launched Thursday in Chicago by Dr. David Fletcher, president and founder of the Chicago Baseball Museum, at a symposium on the Veecks at the Chicago History Museum.

Conference participants will be Fletcher, baseball historian Paul Dickson, Chicago historian Timuel Black, sports journalist Ron Rapoport, filmmaker and former Veeck Jr. colleague Tom Weinberg and others.

Veeck Sr., who built the last great Cubs dynasty of pennant-winning teams, died of leukemia in 1933 at age 56.

“Sadly, his career wasn’t as long as it could have been, but what he did in a short time is phenomenal,” said Fletcher, whose museum is in the organizational stages. “He basically saved baseball after the Black Sox scandal (in which White Sox players threw the 1919 World Series). He was able to reorganize basically a cottage industry into a major entertainment industry by having consolidated leadership through one commissioner.”

“William Veeck was at the forefront of a new movement to make the baseball park a place where women and families would feel comfortable,” added Dickson, whose biography of Bill Veeck, “Baseball’s Greatest Maverick,” was released this year. “If nothing else, William Veeck helped democratize baseball.”

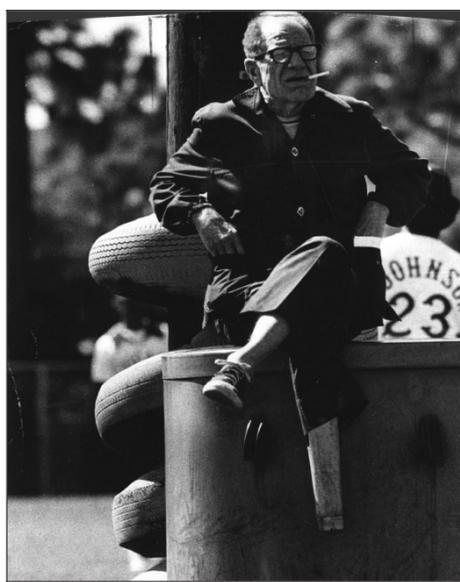
The Hall of Fame’s new Pre-Integration Committee will meet in December in Nashville, Tenn., to come up with a list of induction candidates from 1871 to 1946. A vote on induction will take place next year. “We will be out there actively campaigning” for Veeck Sr., Fletcher said.

It won’t be easy, according to Roland Hemond, who worked as a general manager under Bill Veeck when he owned the White Sox from 1976 to 1980. Hemond, a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame’s Golden Era Committee, which considers players from 1947 to 1972, said the voting process can be a political one.

Veeck Sr. “will have to have some champions on the committee,” Hemond said. But Hemond, who heard Bill Veeck talk about his “Daddy” many times when they worked together at Comiskey, said he believes Veeck Sr. belongs in Cooperstown. “Just from hearing what Bill said about him, you got the impression that he was an extension of what his father started,” Hemond said.

Indeed, Veeck Jr. gushed about his father, which is apparent in “Veeck as in Wreck,” Bill’s legendary autobiography written with sportswriter Ed Linn.

“Unlike me, my father was far too dignified a man to pull promotional stunts. ... But he was a man of imagination ... and easily the greatest innovator of his time,” wrote Veeck, who said his father first proposed a “round robin” of



TRIBUNE PHOTO

Bill Veeck takes a smoke break while watching his White Sox practice during spring training in 1977.

### William Veeck

**1876:** Born in Evansville, Ind.**1918:** William is hired by owner William Wrigley Jr. as the Cubs vice president and treasurer. He becomes team president the next year.**1920:** Persuades baseball owners to name Chicago-based federal Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis as commissioner, establishing a system for overseeing the integrity of baseball that stands today.**1921:** Leads baseball executives in banning clubhouse gambling.**1925:** Hires minor league manager Joe McCarthy to manage the Cubs; McCarthy would manage the Cubs to National League pennants in 1929 and 1932, before winning seven World Series with the New York Yankees.**1933:** Officially proposes that major league teams play 32 interleague games each year. His son Bill said William originally came up with the interleague idea in 1922.**1933:** Veeck dies of complications from leukemia.

### Bill Veeck

**1914:** Born in Chicago.**1934:** Begins working for the Cubs as an office boy. He also helps out Wrigley Field’s other tenant, the Bears.**1941:** Leaves the Cubs and buys the minor league Milwaukee Brewers.**1946:** Veeck buys the Cleveland Indians. The next year, he signs Larry Doby as the first African-American to play in the American League. The team wins the World Series in 1948.**1951:** Veeck buys the St. Louis Browns. As a promotional stunt, he has 3-foot-7-inch Eddie Gaedel pinch-hit in a game.**1959:** Veeck buys the Chicago White Sox; the team wins the American League pennant that year.**1961:** Veeck sells the White Sox.**1975:** Veeck saves the White Sox from moving to Seattle by organizing investors to keep the team in Chicago in December.**1981:** Veeck sells the Sox to current owners Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn.**1986:** Veeck dies in Chicago.

interleague games in 1922 at the halfway point of the season. Major League Baseball didn’t formally adopt interleague play until 1995.

Despite having only a third-grade education, William Veeck became established in Chicago as a journalist in 1902, working first with the Chicago Inter-Ocean and Chicago Chronicle, before becoming a popular sportswriter under the pseudonym “Bill Bailey” with the Chicago American.

Veeck’s incisive stories on the 1910-era Cubs and his private conversations with new Cubs owner William Wrigley Jr. led to Veeck Sr. being named the team’s president in 1919.

Shortly after that, he began a spirited campaign to get rid of gambling, which was prevalent in baseball at the time. Dickson said Veeck Sr. believed and implied in his newspaper reports that certain members of the Cubs may have accepted bribes to throw the 1918 World Series, which they lost to the Boston Red Sox.

In the wake of gambling scandals, William Veeck proposed that a single commissioner oversee the major leagues to replace the three-man commission that then ruled, according to his son. Veeck Sr. also suggested that the commissioner be Chicago-based federal Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, a friend of Veeck Sr.’s, who assumed the job in 1920 and held it until his death in 1944.

“Veeck knew about gamblers being present in the park, and there was only so much he could do about that,” Dickson said. “But he wanted to make sure that with regards to bribing players, it was a river that no one should cross.”

By the mid-1920s, Veeck Sr. was established as one of baseball’s leading executives. But even before then, William Veeck aimed to make Wrigley Field more of a family-oriented setting. He instituted the first Ladies Day there in 1919, where women got in free on select game days, a promotion that lived on at Wrigley into the 1970s.

Veeck Sr. also worked with William Wrigley to modernize Wrigley Field, double-decking the stadium in the mid-1920s, which helped give the structure the look that it has today.

He and William Wrigley pioneered broadcasting Cubs games regularly on the radio, beginning in 1923 on WMAQ.

“All the other teams were adamant against broadcasting games, believing that it would take away from their gate,” said Tim Wiles, director of research for baseball’s Hall of Fame. “But Veeck thought it would be great advertising for the Cubs. It turned out not only to be great advertising, but also another great revenue stream for the owners.”

As a result of these marketing and broadcast innovations, attendance increased by 117 percent for the Cubs at Wrigley during the 1920s, while other teams saw only a 27 percent attendance spike during that time, according to the late historian and journalist Warren Brown, who wrote a book in the mid-1940s about the Cubs’ early years.

“Veeck’s motto was: We want you to be safe, comfortable and happy in the ballpark, and that wasn’t the way many owners thought of it,” Wiles said. “Most owners wanted to get people through the gates and weren’t concerned with the overall experience.”

Veeck Sr.’s final great accomplishment was building the pennant-winning Cubs teams of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Behind stars acquired by Veeck Sr. — Hack Wilson, Charlie Grimm, Rogers Hornsby and others — the Cubs won the National League pennant in 1929, 1932 and 1935. Even the 1938 Cubs pennant-winning squad had some players acquired by Veeck Sr., including Grimm.

“Just the fact that he was able to get any Cubs team to win a pennant is impressive to me,” said his great-grandson Night Train Veeck, 26, an account executive in sales for the White Sox.

He is the fourth generation of Veecks to work in a Chicago major league front office. His father, Mike, worked under Bill with the White Sox in the 1970s. (Night Train got his name in tribute to Dick “Night Train” Lane, a defensive back for football’s Chicago Cardinals in the 1950s.)

Night Train said he will support any efforts to get his great-grandfather in the Hall of Fame. “Of course, I’m biased,” he said. “But he seems very deserving of the honor.”

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