Collection Number
BA MSS 28
BL-2367.2001

Title
Clark Griffith Letters

Inclusive Dates
1949-1951, bulk 1951

Abstract
Correspondence chiefly addressed to, and written by, Clark Griffith regarding the extension of Albert Benjamin “Happy” Chandler as commissioner of baseball in 1951. A petition in favor of Chandler signed by baseball fans and players is included along with newspaper articles on the subject.

Provenance
The collection was donated to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in 2001 by Patrick B. Petersen. Letters arranged and described by Helen Stiles in December 2003 and reviewed by Anne McFarland.

Access
By appointment during regular business hours, email research@baseballhall.org.

Preferred Citation
Clark Griffith. Letters, 1949-1951, BA MSS 28, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY

Biographical Background
Albert Benjamin “Happy” Chandler was unanimously elected commissioner of baseball on February 25, 1945, just four months after the death of long-time commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Although Chandler was elected in February, he did not begin to serve as commissioner until November 1, 1945. This delay allowed him to complete his term as Senator of Kentucky.

Although he was elected to, and signed, a seven year contract, his tenure in office only ran from 1945-1951. Discord with the owners started almost immediately. Chandler wanted the same type of dictatorial control Landis had, but the owners wanted someone to carry out the rules, not make them. A campaign to oust Chandler as commissioner was led by three baseball owners: Louis R. Perini (Boston Braves), Del Webb (New York Yankees), and Fred M. Saigh (St. Louis Cardinals). Louis Perini and Happy Chandler had a conflict over the option rule. Del Webb’s construction company had built a casino in Las Vegas for Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel and it was reported that Webb had been given an interest in the casino. Chandler had this investigated as he knew baseball could not afford another gambling scandal. Fred Saigh wanted his team to play Sunday night games. Chandler refused to grant approval for this.
During all of the strife, Clark Griffith, then owner of the Washington Nationals, stood behind Chandler’s desire to retain Landis-type control. Griffith believed that a "commissioners first duty was to the public and that he should rule with an iron hand. He should not be a puppet for the owners, and should be a supporter of the ballplayers. He should also have a legal mind and be willing to carry full responsibilities of the office." Griffith felt that Chandler was such a man, and started his own campaign to keep Chandler as commissioner.

A change in voting rules was instrumental in ending Chandler’s commissionship. After failing to receive the support of the owner’s in a secret ballot, Chandler resigned on March 12, 1951.

Despite all of the controversy surrounding his reign as commissioner, Chandler helped professional baseball integrate, sign the first television contracts for the All-Star and World Series games, and institute the players’ pension plan with the proceeds from these television contracts.

With three antitrust suits against baseball, with Chandler named as defendant, the action of the owners may have saved Chandler from even more controversy.

Sources

Scope and Contents
Letters, petitions, and newspaper articles to and from Clark Griffith, from the year 1951 regarding the retention of Happy Chandler as commissioner of baseball. Some items of note in the collection include:

Letter, February 10, 1951, from Ellis Ryan, president of the Cleveland Indians, to Clark Griffith regarding Mr. Ryan’s letter to Mr. Webb, chairman of the screening committee, requesting that Mr. Chandler’s name be included on the committee’s recommendation list which was to be presented to the league presidents on March 12, 1951.

Letter, February 26, 1951, from Philip Wrigley, president of the Chicago Cubs, to Warren Giles, president of the Cincinnati Reds, regarding his inability to submit a slate of candidates for the position of commissioner of baseball. Wrigley states that he cannot find candidates that are willing to take the position under the present conditions.

Petitions from baseball fans (and players) requesting that owners and officials of the 16 major league baseball teams reconsider their decision to dismiss A.B. Chandler as commissioner of baseball.
Shirley Povich, writing for *The Sporting News*, reports on Clark Griffith’s demand to put an end to the secret ballot. He proposes an open ballot, and informing the press and public of which owner voted for or against Chandler.

Vincent X. Flaherty, writing for *Los Angeles Examiner*, tries to shed light on why Louis Perini, Del Webb, and Fred Saigh want to oust Happy Chandler as commissioner of baseball.

**Container List**

**Box 1**

Folder 1    October 11, 1949; January 8 – February 17, 1951
  2    February 21 – March 5, 1951 and Petitions
  3    March 6 – March 10, 1951
  4    March 11 – March 13, 1951
  5    March 16 – March 24, 1951 and Clippings