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Fairground Days: When Worcester was a National League City (1880-82)

Charles Brian Goslow

On the Worcester campus of Becker College, on the courts of the Worcester Tennis Club, and among the residences of Somerset and Roxbury Streets, are the ghosts of one of baseball's earliest professional teams, as well as the site of the Worcester agricultural fairgrounds. From 1880 to 1882, the property, bordered by Highland, Sever, Cedar, and Agricultural (now Russell) Streets was the home field for Worcester's National League baseball franchise.

The twenty acre tract was large enough to include space for cricket, tennis, plowing matches, and any number of sports and games. Its exhibition hall housed the team's offices, and it was joined by barns, stables, and sheds, and enclosed by a white wooden fence. The site was also known as the Driving Park, and its half-mile track for horse trotting was one of the fastest in New England.¹

In 1879, local sports enthusiasts convinced Frank C. Bancroft, "the prince of baseball managers," to manage its National Association team. Investing one hundred dollars of his own money, Bancroft closed his New Bedford business to give his full attention to the club and to "afford the citizens of Worcester an innocent summer's amusement which here [in New Bedford] is patronized by the elite of the city." This was the same audience the Worcester Baseball Association wanted to attract to their games, and in their attempts to do so they prodded Worcester Mayor Charles B. Pratt to serve as the team's president. "The

1. Franklin P. Rice, Dictionary Of Worcester and Its Vicinity (Worcester, 1889), p. 6; A. W. Hyde, Worcester — Its Past and Present (Worcester, 1888), p. 163; New York Clipper, March 26, 1881; Elbridge Kingsley and Frederick Knab, Picturesque Worcester, Part 1 — City and its Environments (Springfield, 1895), p. 38.

gentlemen interested are determined that business should be conducted on business principles, and surrounded by influences which will command the respect of all classes," the *Daily Spy* reported. "Every effort will be made to so conduct the game that it will be as popular here as in Boston, where it is patronized by the best people in the city." While Pratt served as a figurehead, much of the franchise's groundwork was done by *Spy* reporter Freeman Brown.²

The team leased the agricultural grounds for the entire year, avoiding problems of previous years when it hosted numerous boys' clubs and scrub players whose actions and conduct irritated the residents of homes bordering the park on the east. One neighbor had complained that hangers-on could not be controlled, as they cut fences, trespassed on private grounds, and made obscene remarks that could be heard throughout the area. The *Daily Spy* came to the team's defense, stating that the problem was "clearly a matter within the province of the owners and the police to suppress, and for [which] those who manage the ball team are in no way responsible." Rights to the field were acquired for \$500.³

"The Worcesters," as the team was best known, were well supported by the city and the press. A series of articles containing pictures and biographies of the players was presented in the *Evening Gazette*. This action was so successful that the publication, stating that it had exhausted most of its back supply of papers, printed a special supplement honoring the club.⁴

While professional baseball had anchored itself in Worcester, the National Association did not fare as well, with only five of its nine teams completing the season. Worcester finished the season,

2. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, January 16, 1880; *Worcester Daily Spy*, February 26 and March 1, 1879; *New York Clipper*, March 8, 1879; Michael Moore, "Early Worcester Baseball History," (1988), draft provided by author. Moore is documenting the social background of local individuals connected with the sport's early years.

3. *Worcester Daily Spy*, March 7 and 10, 1879.

4. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, July 26, 1879. Sometimes called the "Brown Stockings," the Worcesters have incorrectly been called the "Ruby Legs," perhaps due to an erroneous reading of the July 26, 1881, *Boston Herald* headline: "Boston's ruby-legged veterans polish off Worcester's jewels."

counting exhibition games against National League clubs, with a record of twenty-six wins and thirty-one losses. Looking to fill the spot created by the expulsion of the Syracuse Stars, the association applied for membership in the National League.⁵

On February 3, 1880, Worcester was admitted to the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs, joining Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Providence, and Troy in the four year-old league. The *New York Clipper* wrote: "The new club team in the league is one which promises to make the contest for the pennant a lively one, if we are to judge from the results of the games the Worcesters played with the League clubs in 1879." The baseball association's officers immediately started working to secure the necessary funds to operate the team. They sold three thousand tickets to a walking match at Mechanics Hall, and received a boost from a benefit combination dramatic entertainment and concert by the Hyer Sisters.⁶

As pre-season practice neared, John Lee Richmond, a Brown University senior who had pitched a no-hitter for Worcester against Chicago in 1879, was practicing in Providence with catcher Albert Bushong. While Richmond had planned to help his collegiate team repeat its national championship of the previous season before reporting, Bancroft convinced him to join the team for the season opener.⁷

Worcester's outfield featured team captain Alonzo Knight, whose popularity, the *Clipper* said, was "surpassed by no other member of the professional fraternity"; twenty-one year-old George A. Wood, who led the National Association in batting in 1879 and held the world record for the longest throw, a verified 122 yards; and Harry Stovey, who led New Bedford with a .308 batting average in 1879, winning him an enviable reputation as

5. John Richmond Husman, "J. Lee Richmond's Remarkable 1879 Season," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of American Baseball Research, Providence, R.I., July 6, 1984. This research paper preceded his story using the same title (see note 17); Spalding's Official Baseball Guide (Chicago 1880), pp. 78-81.

6. Worcester Evening Gazette, February 4, and March 9 and 25, 1880. The Gazette frequently used reports from out-of-town papers. Troy tried to deny Worcester's entrance into the league, preferring the admittance of natural rival Albany.

7. *Ibid.*, March 15 and 16, 1880.

one of the country's best players. The infield was composed of third baseman Arthur Whitney; shortstop Art Irwin, who had played for the Aetnas of South Boston before joining the Worcesters in 1879; twenty-five year-old second baseman George Creamer, a quiet and unassuming player from Philadelphia with an unblemished reputation as a fielder; and Charles "Chub" Sullivan, an unequalled first baseman and a source of much entertainment when he ran the bases. His affable nature made him a favorite of the sport's patrons and cityfolk alike. Catching duties were shared between Albert Bushong and Charlie Bennett, who had been called "the greatest of the age" in Louisiana.⁸

Frank C. Bancroft opened a "Baseball Emporium" at 34 Pearl Street. The store was well-supplied, and it served as the "baseball headquarters" during the season. Those with the means could purchase stock in the team, at a cost of twenty-five dollars per share. Each share carried with it a season ticket to all of the games, and included reserved seat privileges.⁹

On April 7, a shorthanded Worcester squad traveled to New Haven for a game with "the Yales," who defeated them by a score of 11 to 7. Weather conditions were so uncomfortable that the players took the field wearing their overcoats. The following day, nearly 2,000 people turned out at the Fairgrounds, to see the Worcesters defeat Harvard by a score of 9 to 5. According to the *Gazette*, the behavior of some of the spectators left much to be desired.

The absence of police allowed the crowd to throng the diamond, and gave a chance for such unpleasant interruptions as a disgraceful fight over a bet, in the center of the grandstand, one man being thrown headlong down the seats and another having his head mashed with a bottle.

8. *Worcester Aegis and Gazette*, August 23, 1879; *Worcester Evening Gazette*, February 17, June 16, July 12, August 4 and 11, and November 17, 1880. The *Clipper* featured individual players, with woodcut drawings of their likenesses. The *Gazette* reprinted the articles when space allowed.

9. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, March 30, 1880; *Worcester Daily Spy*, April 5, 1880.

Perhaps looking to set a good example for the fans, the players vowed to abstain from any dissipation that might injure them as players and socially.¹⁰

As April came to a close, mammoth posters prepared by the League, featuring a full-length picture of a "batsman" at the plate, appeared throughout the city, advertising the opening games against Troy. Putnam and Davis, at 389 Main Street, sold ladies season tickets for \$9, and individual game tickets for ladies cost four for a dollar. According to the *Spy*, the team's directors felt that "the presence of ladies in the grandstand and in carriages outside the track gave character to the sport." General admission to the grounds cost fifty cents, with boys under the age of thirteen allowed in for a quarter. Several suburban railroads made arrangements to provide transportation to the games. A fan in Holden or Oxford could purchase a round-trip ticket, including admission to the game, for 75 cents; from Webster it cost 85 cents, from West Boylston 90 cents, from Oakdale \$1.00, from Sterling \$1.10, from Clinton or Princeton it cost \$1.25, from Gardner \$1.35, and from Winchendon it cost \$1.65.¹¹

The Fairgrounds, according to the reports of a Providence newspaper, was

a rough broken field, remarkable for its pits and mounds, perfect traps for the unacquainted. The infield was hobby [difficult], making it impossible for strangers to calculate anywhere near correctly for the bounds of the ball Time and again they [The Providence Greys] would run the way they thought the ball would bound or roll, and found too late their calculations were wrongly made, and that the sphere was rolling far out into the field or else making caroms into acute angles.

The same newspaper added that outfielder Paul Hines was last seen "knee-deep" in a hole, while trying to chase a fly ball. In response to the detractors, the field was returfed and it was

10. Worcester Evening Gazette, April 9, 1880; New York Clipper, April 24, 1880.

11. Worcester Evening Gazette, April 27, 29 and 30, 1880; Worcester Daily Spy, April 10 and 27, 1880.

hardened with the city's four-horse roller. As a result of these efforts, the field was declared to be equal to anything in the country.¹²

Nearly 1,000 people braved forty degree temperatures to see the league opener on May 1. The Worcesters wore uniforms made of white flannel with brown trimmings, brown stockings, and leather shoes made by Mr. E. M. Cundall of Worcester. Despite belting John Lee Richmond's pitching for ten hits, Troy could only manage a single run, while the locals, paced by the hitting of Harry Stovey and George Wood, scored thirteen.¹³

Spectators traveled to the Fairgrounds by horse-drawn street cars, entering its Sever Street gate through a turnstile secured from the Centennial Exposition which had been held in Philadelphia in 1876. The fans usually watched the game from a large wooden grandstand. Fans arriving in private carriages entered through a special gate before parking their vehicles outside the driving track's southern border, which served as the outfield fence.

On game days, a large flag, which had been presented to Bancroft by his New Bedford friends, flew from the flagpole at Agricultural Hall. The telephone company provided a subscriber service for fans wanting to know the latest results. Reports of the Worcesters' games cost twenty-five cents for league games and ten cents for exhibitions. Fans could also read the latest scores on a bulletin board in front of Louis Friendly's clothing store, at 417 Main Street.¹⁴

Worcester temporarily moved into first place on May 10, after an exciting win over the defending champion Providence Grays. With the locals down by three runs in the top of the ninth inning, the streetcar "hacksmen" outside the park began to yell, "Right away downtown for ten cents!," and many of the spectators headed home. After loading the bases, Worcester tied the score when the visiting center fielder fell over a hill while running backwards to catch what should have been an easy fly ball. That was one of the benefits of playing on a field that also was the

12. New York Clipper, February 7, 1880; Worcester Evening Gazette, April 22, 1880.

13. Worcester Evening Gazette, April 19 and May 4, 1880.

14. Worcester Daily Spy, April 8 and 14, 1880; Worcester Evening Gazette, April 30, and May 1 and 15, 1880.

scene of plowing matches. The crowd reacted wildly, leaving the grandstand to amass against the track fence, as the game went into extra innings. In the tenth inning, Creamer singled in Sullivan and Irwin, and then when Providence was at-bat, Richmond retired the side in succession, and the locals left the field with a rewarding 10 to 8 win.¹⁵

The excitement reached the city's classrooms, with the *Gazette* reporting that

One of the public school teachers asked her pupils to name some of the most prominent citizens of Worcester. There was silence for a time, but finally a little fellow, evidently posted on the "topics of the day," piped out, "Chub Sullivan."¹⁶

Worcester dropped out of first place three days later, when Chicago defeated Buffalo. The following day, Arthur Whitney hit the first home run in team history, but in a losing effort as Boston scored twice in their final at bat for a 6 to 5 win.¹⁷

While the locals worried about winning games, Richmond crammed for his final examinations at Brown. He tested in the morning, took the 11:30 train to Worcester, pitched in the afternoon, and caught the 6:30 back to Providence, where he studied late into the evening. He told the *Gazette* he was "taking one consideration with the other." A crowd of 1,400 was present at the Fairgrounds on May 15th, to see the locals defeat Boston 6 to 3. One noisy spectator insulted the umpire, who complained to Bancroft. The umpire marched along the front row of the grandstand and into the seats, with the policeman on duty. The umpire identified the heckler, who was quietly removed from the park, to the applause of some of the spectators.¹⁸

The largest crowd of the season, 2,731, attended the May 29 game against Cincinnati, but their encouragement was not enough,

15. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, May 10, 1880.

16. *Ibid.*, May 11, 1880.

17. *Ibid.*, May 14 and 15, 1880.

18. *Ibid.*, May 17, 1880.

as the locals lost by a score of 8 to 2 and the team fell into third place. Only 371 fans saw Worcester bounce back in the following game, and only 300 saw the Worcesters regain second place two days later, as Richmond pitched his second consecutive shut-out. Of the contrast in attendance, the *Gazette* said, "It was yet another instance of the uncertainty of all doubtful matters."¹⁹

One lady wrote the *Gazette*, complaining of dirty conditions at the ballpark:

If there was less tobacco than ant shells, and dirt of all kinds, and a little more neatness in the care of the grandstands, I think more ladies would attend the games. But now we must risk ruining a dress or a cloak if we go. Give us ladies better care and your reward will be in a better attendance.²⁰

On Saturday, June 12, Richmond's train from Providence was delayed, and he took the field against Cleveland on an empty stomach. Neither team had a runner reach first base until Richmond singled in the fourth inning. In the fifth, Irwin singled, moved to second when Bennett was given a base on balls, and scored when an easy ground ball by Whitney was bobbled by the second baseman. A brief shower delayed the game with one out in the bottom of the eighth inning. When play resumed, Richmond quickly retired the Cleavelands, who failed to have a single runner reach first base. On that date, June 12, 1880, at the Fairgrounds in Worcester, John Lee Richmond pitched the first perfect game in the history of professional baseball.²¹

Much excitement filled the park four days later, when league leading Chicago came to town, and 1,726 locals shouted and waved hats and handkerchiefs in a state of pandemonium

19. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, May 31 and June 1 to 4, 1880.

20. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1880.

21. *Ibid.*, June 14, 1880. Richmond's great-grandson, John Richmond Husman, has superbly documented this game and other highlights of his great-grandfather's career. See "J. Lee Richmond's Remarkable 1879 Season," *The National Pastime*, (Winter 1985); "Baseball's First Perfect Game," *Toledo Magazine*, (May 10-16, 1987). In addition to Richmond's feat, Husman covered the careers of Frank C. Bancroft, Charlie Bennett, and Harry Stovey, in *Nineteenth Century Stars* (1989).

throughout a ten-inning contest lost by Worcester by the score of 7 to 6; it was to be the first of three defeats. With a record of thirteen wins and thirteen losses, the Worcesters headed west, sharing a train with the teams from Cleveland and Cincinnati.

Boosted by the early adjournment of the Democratic National Convention, a crowd of 1,200 saw Worcester win the first game of a three-game series in Cincinnati. The largest crowds of the season turned out in Chicago, where the Michigan Avenue hosts won all three games. Four thousand spectators saw the weekend opener, while 2,000 fans attended each of the two weekday contests. Worcester left Chicago fourteen games out of first place.

Injuries began to plague the squad. Alonzo Knight had a fever, Arthur Whitney a sore leg, Albert Bushong split his hand, and John Lee Richmond, who had pitched in all but three of the league games, began to complain about being overworked. He secured his rest, after Buffalo's Bisons belted twenty-seven hits in two games. The crowds at the bulletin boards back home left disgusted as the team lost eight games in a row.²²

Despite the slump, a group of local fans, who were anxious to see the team play, traveled to Boston on July 10. Pitcher Fred Corey allowed only a fifth inning single enroute to a 3 to 0 victory. In the final game of the series, Boston's Thomas Bond jumped on Whitney's lame leg, stating afterward that he wished it would have been broken, and that he would slap the injured player's face when he got the chance.²³

Attempts to ban the sale of alcohol at league games brought a loud response from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, which vented some of its anger toward "Puritanical Worcester":

It is not liberal Cincinnati by a jugful, and what is sauce for Worcester would be wind for the Queen City. . . . Deprive Cincinnati people of the privilege of getting beer during a game of ball, and 50 percent of the attendance would cease . . . we drink beer in Cincinnati as freely as you drink milk, and it is not a mark of disgrace either.

22. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, June 16, 17, 23, 28 to 30, and July 6 and 7, 1880.

23. *Ibid.*, July 12 and 15, 1880.

Suppose you take Chub Sullivan aside, and let him talk the matter over with you.²⁴

But Sullivan had become ill with a high fever, rumored to be the effect of alcohol consumption. Other players came up with sudden fevers, although they usually recovered for the following game. Bushong was fined twenty-five dollars by the team's directors, for "derelictions from duty."²⁵

A ten-game homestand began on July 17, including games against Cleveland, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Buffalo. One umpire resigned rather than face the racket of the Worcester crowd. "Chub" Sullivan was replaced by William Tobin, but the former Albany player was so decidedly off at one practice that he was released immediately, and Harry Stovey was moved to first base. John Lee Richmond regained a bit of his "glitter" by winning three straight games against Cincinnati, bringing the club's record up to 23 wins and 23 losses, the last time it would reach the .500 mark. After losing two out of three games to Buffalo, Worcester headed west. Sullivan, still suffering from a fever, remained in his Waldo House bed, with little hope of returning to play in 1880.²⁶

The Cleveland players boasted that they would drive Richmond from the pitcher's mound. On two consecutive afternoons, they were right. Bancroft successfully implemented a rotating pitching schedule, with Richmond pitching to left-handed batters and Corey to right-handers, and Worcester won the next three games of the series with Cleveland. In Buffalo, James "Bud" Galvin continued his season-long mastery over the Worcesters, by pitching a no-hitter. Back home in Worcester, fans were worried because the team's directors had not signed any players for the next season. Meanwhile, amateurs were playing in the ballpark. Four hundred people attended a game for men who weighed two hundred pounds or more, and the local police force played a game, partially umpired by "Chub" Sullivan, who was given the proceeds from the game, to help pay his medical expenses. The

24. Worcester Daily Spy, July 31, 1880.

25. Worcester Evening Gazette, July 17 and 20, and October 14, 1880.

26. *Ibid.*, July 21, 26, and 28 to 31, and August 2 and 3, 1880.

team returned east on September 4, but it could not play at home as the grounds were being used for the State Agricultural Fair. Arriving in good spirits, Bancroft said that "The team had been able to make both ends meet," despite small crowds in Buffalo and Cincinnati.²⁷

A large number of people took advantage of a \$1.75 excursion train to Providence, but some of the fans' conduct brought an ill response. The *Providence Journal* declared: "The worst feature of the game was the outrageous conduct of a number of half grown men from Worcester who not only hissed everything that was not decidedly according to their ideas, but made ungently and entirely uncalled for remarks." Although the *Gazette* reported that "The local enthusiasts are ball hungry," only small crowds attended the season's final home games. Only one hundred spectators saw Worcester, led by a home run by Art Irwin, move ahead of Boston into fifth place on the season's final day, by beating Providence by the score of 5 to 1. Worcester finished the regular season with a record of 40 wins and 43 losses. Before disbanding for the winter, the team played some exhibition games in New York State. The season finally ended on October 15, with a benefit game to defray "Chub" Sullivan's medical expenses. He had recovered enough to play, and he even got two hits.²⁸

The team finished the season with \$3,000 in its treasury, and its directors confidently predicted that a successful season was forthcoming. However, financial wizard Bancroft announced his intention to manage in Buffalo, before resigning to help Detroit secure a National League franchise. Most of the 1880 team was re-signed, along with Michael Dorgan of Providence, who was named as the team's captain. Warren (Hickory) Carpenter, formerly of Cincinnati and a successful team in nearby Grafton, was signed to play third base, Peter Hotaling, who had played in Cleveland, and Lewis Dickerson, from Troy's 1880 squad, filled out the roster. The *Providence Star* reported that the salary total for the Worcesters was just \$10,000, making it "A good nine for

27. Ibid., Aug. 13 to 16, 21, 26 to 28, 30, September 4, 1880.

28. Ibid. September 3, 6 and 17, October 1 and 18, 1880.

the money."²⁹ Fred Corey remained in Worcester to manage the skate room at Bigelow Gardens during the skating season.³⁰

The directors announced that the pre-season training period would be spent in actual work, with practices held in both the morning and the afternoon. The pre-season practices were to be treated as business, not a "picnic," as too often had been the case. The directors also hinted that they would supervise the players' choices of lodging and boarding places, in the hope that the team would be better disciplined than it had been during the previous season.

A frigid cold wave swept the city in early April, and no home games were played until the twentieth. The Worcesters went to New York to play the Metropolitans, before returning for games with Harvard, Yale, and Holy Cross. Despite showing some signs of his old self, "Chub" Sullivan was asked not to play until he fully recovered, and he was replaced at first base by Harry Stovey. Peter Hotaling, who hit over .600 in pre-season games, was named as the team's starting right fielder.³¹

A "superior" Worcester squad opened the league season on April 30 against Troy, with 700 fans in the Fairground stands, on a cold and raw afternoon. Careful baserunning led to four runs, John Lee Richmond shut out the visitors on three hits, and the locals were off and running. After five consecutive road wins, happy crowds at the Harrington Corner bulletin boards became a familiar sight. Worcester took a perfect 8 and 0 record into Chicago's Lake Front Park. Down 3 to 1 after five innings, the hosts, backed by 3,000 screaming fans, pulled to within one run in the sixth inning, and won the game in its final at bat. Led by Dickerson's five hits, Worcester bounced back to disappoint 2,500 Chicagoans, 7 to 1, before losing the series finale by a score of 10 to 3.

Taking a one game lead into Buffalo, the Worcesters were again bested by "Bud" Galvin. The team fell from first place in Cleveland, as Richmond surrendered twenty-three runs in losing three straight games. Freeman Brown, the team treasurer, and

29. *Ibid.*, October 6, 16, and 25, November 17, 1880; January 5 and July 13, 1881.

30. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1880.

31. *Ibid.*, April 2 to 29, 1881.

Michael Dorgan became involved in a conflict of authority, while several members of the team were not speaking to John Lee Richmond.³²

The largest crowd in team history, 3,652, visited the Fairgrounds on May 30 for a game against Detroit, which featured several members of the 1880 Worcester squad. Before the game, umpire Doescher called Charlie Bennett to home plate, took him by the hand, and said a few complimentary words on behalf of his local admirers, before presenting him with a \$150 gold watch. Worcester won the game, 8 to 4, with Irwin and Creamer each getting two hits. Only 550 fans turned out for the series' final two games, which may have been for the best as Richmond and Corey were pounded unmercifully. Worcester went on to lose thirteen out of seventeen games, falling three and a half games behind league-leading Chicago.³³

The Worcesters fell into a third place tie, after losing twice on July 4, in front of 5,600 fans in Detroit. One Worcester resident who attended the games wrote the following:

In the afternoon the Worcesters were fairly beaten, but if you had been a spectator at the forenoon game, you would have thrown up your hands in holy horror, and made up your mind never, never to again pin your faith on the certainty of anything connected with baseball. . . . Pray for us.³⁴

Back at the Fairgrounds, nine lawyers and nine businessmen played a game for the benefit of the "Poor Children's Excursion Fund." The event was advertised throughout the city by a horsecar containing a band, with placards announcing the event.³⁵

After losing three more games in Chicago, the Worcesters returned to New England, where a good number of fans from the city "went down the river" to Providence, to "eat clams and take in

32. Ibid., May 2, 6, 16, 18 and 19, 21, 26, 27, 30, 1881.

33. Ibid., May 31, June 2 and 3, and July 3, 1881.

34. Ibid., July 5 and 8, 1881.

35. Ibid., July 12, 1881.

the game" against the Grays. Richmond allowed only four hits enroute to a 1 to 0 victory. Nearly 500 people turned out on July 19 for the first home game in almost a month, but their enthusiasm died down three days later, when Creamer juggled an easy double-play ball, allowing Boston to score the winning run and sending more than seven hundred fans home in disgust. On July 26, the Bostons corked Richmond's delivery for fifteen hits, enroute to a 9 to 6 win. Richmond received a letter from the team's directors, warning him about "laying balls on the bat" and "giving bases on balls." After Providence got fourteen hits in the following game, Richmond asked for his release and he returned to Providence to practice medicine. By August 5, Worcester was in last place, twelve games behind first place Chicago.³⁶

Fans frequently complained about the way the team was coached on the bases. A game against Providence was lost, for instance, when Dickerson was held at third base on what should have been a home run. In an attempt to change the team's direction, the directors suspended Michael Dorgan, named Harry Stovey as captain, added the position of manager to Freeman Brown's duties, and reinstated John Lee Richmond. After a pep talk from Mayor Charles B. Pratt, much optimism prevailed. The enthusiasm did not spill into the streets, as chilly conditions for a game with Providence did not attract enough spectators for a count. The following day, the weather warmed up, but the *Gazette* said it was "perhaps the dampest, slowest, most unsatisfactory game" ever played at the grounds, with a heavy rain thickening into fog before becoming what resembled a Scottish mist. The field was slippery, and both pitchers constantly powdered the ball with sawdust to keep it dry. By the fifth inning, Worcester had taken an 8 to 0 lead, but then disaster struck from which the team, and the franchise, never recovered. After reaching base on a single, Art Irwin tried to steal second, but instead he slipped and fell awkwardly over the bag, breaking a small bone in his right ankle. He was replaced for the duration of the game by Martin "Flip" Flaherty, who owned a local sports-shop. Richmond weakened in the final innings, and the

36. *Ibid.*, July 16, 18, 20, 23, 27 and 29, and August 5, 1881.

demoralized Worcesters, which also lost the services of Dickerson, lost by a score of 9 to 8.³⁷

Worcester lost the final two games of the homestand, which everyone seemed glad to see end. In one game, Stovey, who had made some erratic throws and who muffed an easy throw, was jeered by the crowd. He responded by asking, "Don't you people like my playing?" Rumors of imminent player changes spread through the city, and the *Gazette* stated that "The man who starts all these rumours ought to be found, so that a monument could be erected and he put under it."³⁸

Worcester had ridiculed the small receipts they had received in Troy, but for their three-game set in Worcester, Troy earned only \$108, which equalled their hotel bill.³⁹ After a two win and seven loss road trip, Manager Brown notified seven of the eleven players on the team that their services would not be required after October first. They also learned that "Chub" Sullivan had died of lung fever caused by consumption. In his memory, the team wore mourning emblems on their uniforms.⁴⁰

Advertisements in the *Gazette* read that "The End's Approaching," and only a few people attended a game with Buffalo. President James Garfield died on September 19, and the Fairground's flag was lowered to half-mast for a game with Detroit. The teams met on the morning of his burial, to avoid coinciding with his funeral. However, the *Chicago Tribune's* local correspondent was ordered not to report on the season's final series in Worcester, on the grounds that the club had disgraced itself by playing on that day.⁴¹

September ended with "The First vs The Last." On the twenty-ninth, Worcester won for the last time in the 1881 season, with home runs by Hotaling, Stovey, and Carpenter. In the season finale, 267 spectators saw Chicago garner nineteen hits off Richmond, enroute to an 11 to 4 win. The Worcesters finished in

37. Ibid., August 17 to 19, 1881.

38. Ibid., August 20 and 24, 1881.

39. Ibid., August 25, 1881.

40. Ibid., September 13 and 25, 1881.

41. Ibid., September 15, 20 and 28, 1881.

last place, with a record of 32 wins and 51 losses, 23 games behind first place Chicago. Dickerson led the team in batting with a .316 average, followed by Hotaling, at .306. At a league meeting at Saratoga, Dickerson and Dorgan were blacklisted, along with eight other players, for habits of drunkenness, insubordination, and general "crankiness." Suggesting possible favoritism by the league, the *Gazette* questioned why two Chicago players were not suspended, "in light of their condition at one of Worcester's more renowned watering holes at 2 a.m. on the morning of September 30."⁴²

At its January meeting, the team directors announced that they would take action to avoid the difficulties of the 1881 season:

Dissensions, dissipation, and flagrant abuse of confidence by some of the players brought about these results. Professional baseball is now reduced to a business problem, and to be successful the same principles must be applied to its management as are applied to any well managed and successful corporation, woolen mill, or machine shop. . . . There is no doubt with a winning nine Worcester will give first class support to baseball.⁴³

Freeman Brown, who had been elected treasurer of the National League, in an act seen as an acknowledgement of Worcester's value as a league city, was named the team's executive director. He reported sizable additions to the club's bank account, which started the year at \$1,600, through the selling of "little books" of season tickets to subscribers of new shares of stock.⁴⁴

Harry Stovey was the first to re-sign for the 1882 season, followed by George Creamer and Fred Corey. The team secured the services of Jacob Evans, an outfielder who had played with Troy, and outfielder John Hayes. After some hesitation, John Lee Richmond and Albert Bushong also re-signed, and Fred Mann, a

⁴². Ibid., September 28 and 30, October 1, 7 and 16, and November 3, 1881; *Spalding's Official Baseball Guide* (Chicago, 1882), p. 101.

⁴³. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, January 5, 1882.

⁴⁴. Ibid., December 10, 1881; March 15 and 29, and April 10, 1882.

local amateur, was signed to play third base. Thomas H. Bond, who had pitched for the Bostons, was signed to back up Richmond and Corey.⁴⁵

Bushong returned to the city as a full-fledged dentist, Art Irwin was in good shape, apparently recovered from his broken ankle, and Edward Cogswell was chosen to captain the team. The directors closed the park to outsiders during practice, offending those supporters who were not given privileged status. Worcester won its "Fast Day" opener by a 5 to 2 score over the Beacon Club of Boston. Despite chilly conditions, 2,000 people turned out, some 700 of whom paid an extra fee to sit on one of the several hundred folding chairs the club had placed upon the grandstand. Bond allowed only five hits and no earned runs in his debut. In his first two games, Richmond was clobbered for thirteen runs by the Metropolitans and belted for twenty hits by the Harvards. Some local fans became concerned, and they speculated that the left-hander should have been practicing with the ball team, instead of coaching his alma mater.⁴⁶

By the time the season started, Thomas Bond had injured his shoulder and John Lee Richmond, admitting that he had a sore arm, requested a leave of absence. John Gibson Clarkson was secured from the Boston Beacons, and despite giving up seventeen hits, he picked up the Worcesters' first win of the season, in a wild 11 to 10 game against Boston, in front of 400 Fairground spectators.⁴⁷ Some of the spectators were mechanics students from nearby Worcester Technical Institute, who told of their visits in their 1884 yearbook:

We began to "cut" in earnest, and often the shop, about two o'clock, would be nearly empty, causing wonder on the part of the overseer as to where the boys had gone. Little he knew of the escapes to the ball ground . . . and the many hours the shop would lose on this account. But before six they would all return with the same innocent expression

45. Ibid., October 4, 5, 21 and 27, 1881, January 5 and March 1, 1882.

46. Ibid., March 27 and 31, April 1, 7 and 19, 1882.

47. Ibid., May 2 and 3, 1882.

upon their faces as if they had only been in the wood room or blacksmith shop.⁴⁸

The following game, a 17 to 7 loss to Boston, was labeled "a Worcester Waterloo" by the *Gazette*, as Corey surrendered twenty hits and his fielders committed twelve errors. Clarkson fared no better against Providence, which scattered twenty-three hits over the ballfield. After the game, John Gibson Clarkson was released, and the team engaged the services of Frank H. Mountain, who lost his first two games. Richmond returned to win his first two starts, but then gave up nineteen hits against Boston, with his fielders making fifteen errors while being battered by a cold wind and hailstones.⁴⁹

Advertised as "The Great Event of 1882," the May 30 Decoration Day game with the Clevelanders attracted 2,550 spectators, whose "growls of discontent began early," according to the *Gazette*, "and continued louder and longer than has ever been heard at the ball park." The visitors won by a score of ten to two. After playing what Buffalo manager James Henry O'Rourke called "The worst game of ball ever played by a professional team," Worcester won its last game for a long time on June 16. The *Gazette*, which had become antagonistic in its reporting, said that the final game with Buffalo would attract a crowd, as it was "an important game in the struggle for the end of the League."⁵⁰

The Worcesters headed west with a 9 and 19 record. Their place at the Fairgrounds was taken by Barnum and London's Circus, featuring the world's tallest, heaviest, and largest elephant in or out of captivity, along with the "wild men of Borneo," a "four-legged girl," "Brustad the Norway Giant," and a menagerie of animals. It would be the best entertainment at the park all year. Meanwhile, a team from Cherry Valley challenged a team of Worcester amateurs to a game for the benefit of the Worcesters,

48. Worcester Technical Institute Class of 1884, *The Antenna* (Worcester, 1884).

49. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, May 4, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, and 19, 1881. John Gibson Clarkson later achieved great success with Chicago, and in 1962 he was posthumously elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

50. *Ibid.*, May 24 and 31, June 15 to 17, 1882.

stating that they knew of no other object in greater need of charity.⁵¹

Despite a home run by Richmond, Worcester lost in Chicago, the first of thirteen straight defeats. Incensed when one of the team's board of directors sent Thomas Bond to join the club in Cleveland, Freeman Brown announced his resignation as manager. He added that a crisis in management would occur when the team, whose record had fallen to 9 wins and 28 losses, returned home. Bond was temporarily named manager, creating a conflict of authority. It was rumored that some players were not playing up to their capabilities, hoping to force the team's disbandment so they could get the opportunity to sign with another team. The *Troy Times* offered another explanation for Worcester's poor performance, noting: "If several members of the Worcester club keep as late hours in other cities as they do in Troy, one main cause for their numerous defeats is readily explained." A special stockholder's meeting was held on July 14, and Mayor Charles B. Pratt unsuccessfully tried to resign as club president. A restructured board of directors chose John C. Chapman, who had previously managed Holyoke in the National Association, to direct the team. Chapman was given complete control over the operation of the team, but the change did not reverse the team's direction.⁵²

A large party went to Providence to see a game with the Grays, which the *Gazette*, now doubtful of the professional capabilities of its home team, claimed "will in time become too difficult for the Worcester team." The hardest hitting of the season was seen one evening in downtown Worcester, when residents were awakened by a loud brawl between outfielder John Hayes and two Chicago players. Back at the Fairgrounds, small crowds of under 400 fans became the norm. John Lee Richmond, now the target of hissing by spectators, was suspended after Cleveland scored twenty-eight runs in two games. The fans were more charitable toward Albert Bushong, passing the hat to pay a fine he received for arguing with the umpire. Only 325 people

51. Ibid., June 20 and July 6, 1882.

52. Ibid., June 21 and 30, July 7, 24 and 25, 1882.

turned out for the final game of the homestand.⁵³ The hard times did not discourage the team from having fun, as the *Gazette* reported on a gathering at the park before the players headed West:

In the afternoon they made sport, and sent up a mammoth kite with four balls of twine, first marking the kite with their names and a request for the finder to notify them of its alighting at Cleveland. The ascension was made off the agricultural grounds with perfect success. When the twine broke, the kite was off in a southerly direction.⁵⁴

On its final western swing, Worcester lost three straight to "Bud" Galvin in Buffalo, while Larry Corcoran pitched a no-hitter against them in Chicago. When they returned home for their final five games, the Worcesters found themselves sharing the city's attention with Denholm's and McKay's new department store. They also found themselves without a league. At a secret meeting in Philadelphia, Worcester, along with Troy, was frozen out of the National League, which announced that the two had resigned. Stating that the patronage in each city was not large enough to cover the visiting teams' expenses, the Detroit representative, who had been working to change the league's membership, nominated New York and Philadelphia as replacements. Despite its poor showing in 1882, Worcester's directors had planned to field a team in 1883. The *Clipper* said that "It was simply a question of business whether two non-paying cities should be continued in the partnership when two paying cities could be secured to take their place."⁵⁵

Letters, telegrams, and visitors began to flow to the Worcester players, offering several of them good engagements and

53. *Ibid.*, July 22 and 24, August 19 and 25, 1882; *Philadelphia Record*, August 24 and September 2, 1882.

54. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, August 26, 1882.

55. *Ibid.*, September 6, 8, 11, 21, 23 and 26, 1882; *New York Clipper*, September 30, 1882.

"big money," with fair employment being guaranteed for the rest. The *Gazette* reported that "The club will have just enough money to pay its debts, and with that action, League ball playing in Worcester will be at an end!" The players, worried about the team's cash flow, began to talk of "eating snowballs," and they hoped for good crowds at the remaining games. On September 25, the Worcesters won for the final time, by a score of 4 to 3, over Providence, with Frank H. Mountain defeating Charles ("Horse") Radbourne. Cold temperatures greeted the doomed franchises, Troy and Worcester, for their final three games. Only three dollars in admissions were collected for the September 28 contest, and the gate-keeper counted only eighteen in attendance on September 29, 1882, for Worcester's final major league game. The Worcesters lost by a score of 10 to 7, ending with a record of 18 wins and 66 losses, 37 games behind first place Chicago.⁵⁶

On December 6, 1882, Worcester (along with Troy) officially resigned its membership in the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs, which put the city on its honorary membership roll. While many baseball historians have stated that the Worcesters were the predecessors of the modern-day Phillies, a result of the rights to the franchise having been sold to two Philadelphia businessmen, sporting goods manufacturer Alfred J. Reach and Pennsylvania lawyer and politician Jon I. Rogers, a newspaper report from the period told a different story. According to the *Philadelphia Record*, "Mr. Reach was compelled to take the Philadelphia club into the league, otherwise there would be a league club formed in this city (to compete with his team), which would throw out the league alliance clubs (whose games were a major source of income for Reach)."⁵⁷

In 1884, a final attempt was made to revive Worcester's interest in professional baseball, but after half a season, the new team was disbanded. In 1888, the Fairgrounds was replaced as the standard location for games, but it remained in use for other

56. *Worcester Evening Gazette*, September 25 to 30, 1882.

57. *Ibid.*, December 7, 1882; Allen Lewis, "100 Years of Baseball: A Phillies History," *Philadelphia Phillies 1983 Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 45; *Philadelphia Record*, October 7, 1882. In July of 1882, the *Philadelphia Times* reported that it had been decided that Philadelphia would replace Worcester, but it did not indicate the source of that information. See *Worcester Evening Gazette*, July 21, 1882.

events until 1898, when the property was sold to developers for \$185,000.⁵⁸

58. Charles Nutt, History of Worcester and Its People (New York, 1919), II: 1122.
This book documents the city's relationship with the sport from pre-1860 to 1916.