

Copper City Baseball: The First Hundred Years at Bisbee's Warren Ballpark

Introduction and acknowledgments

This is the story of a ballpark located in the high desert country of southeast Arizona, in a small city that once produced a good share of the world's copper. More specifically, it's the story of a ballpark and the young men and high school boys who have played on it for the past 100 years. It's a story that has been told before in bits and pieces, but never has it been presented in anything close to its entirety.

This is the story of baseball as it was played in a small city that is representative of hundreds of other small cities and towns spread across the country where men and boys played the game. It's the story of ball players - living and dead- their fortunes, misfortunes and the contributions many of them made - and are making today - to the game on a regional and national level.

This is also the story of how a small town institution - in this case, a ball park - has continued to serve its community over the course of a century despite changing social and economic conditions.

The story of Warren Ballpark is an inspiring one, because it offers countless examples of human beings striving to perform at their highest level, trying their best to overcome any obstacles placed in their path. It's also a story of a community pulling together on numerous occasions to keep recreation and spectator sports alive during hard times.

While this is an effort to tell the story of Warren Ballpark in as complete a manner as is possible, the whole story can never be told. Records are lost, names and faces are forgotten as generations pass, and so, there are inevitable holes in the narrative.

Despite the missing pieces, much of the story remains. Many of the older players who walked up to the plate and ran out to play on the field a half-century ago or more are still alive and have been graciously willing to share their stories. Others wrote down their recollections or passed them on to family members. Newspapers covered and still cover local sports, giving researchers fertile ground for exploration.

It would not have been possible to have compiled this account without the help of many good people along the way. Foremost among them are the former players who allowed me to interview them and to share their stories: Charlie Metro, Frank Lucchesi, Pete and Danny Vucurevich, Sam Kitterman and Russ Kusmertz took the time to patiently answer questions and to help in any way they were asked. They are all true gentlemen and it is my pleasure and privilege to be able to share their stories here.

Charlie Metro and middle school teacher/baseball historian Todd Anton deserve my deep appreciation for permitting me to cite passages from their books: Charlie's autobiography

"Safe By A Mile" and Todd's historical work "No Greater Love: Life Lessons From the Men Who Saved Baseball." Both are excellent reads and well worth the price.

Family members of ball players who are no longer with us also provided invaluable assistance. Anne Henry, wife of Bob Henry (and a very fine athlete in her own right) and Edith Bynon, wife of Jim Bynon, shared photos and memories, helping to tell a more complete story. Others who lived in Bisbee and Douglas during the wonderful years of minor league baseball were kind enough to share their experiences as well. Of particular help was Nick Pavolich, who provided me with a glimpse of what it was like for a young boy to see major league ball players perform on and off the field in Bisbee during the late 1930s.

Also of great help were Luche Giacomino and Snooky Borowiec who provided me with photos of local minor league players. Like Anne Henry, Luche and Snooky were dedicated athletes – softball players and members of the Bisbee Copper Queens - whose love of sports and Bisbee has never waned. My heartfelt thanks also go to Bisbee High School Coach Mike Frosco for sharing his experiences as a player and coach. Many of the boys who played baseball at Bisbee High School over the decades have gone on to a higher level after graduation. Through the efforts of Mike and his assistant coaches, Bisbee remains a great baseball town.

My very special thanks go to Carrie Gustavson, director of the Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum and to her staff. Their generosity and assistance as I conducted research were absolutely crucial to the successful completion of this project.

Tom Mosier and Frank Barco, owners of the Bisbee Copper Kings baseball club, have been of tremendous help and extremely supportive. Their tireless efforts to promote semipro baseball in Bisbee during the past few years have given the entire community another reason to be thankful for living here. The same must be said of Butch Hammett, former field manager (and current general manager) of the minor league and semipro versions of the modern Copper Kings. The many long hours he invested in leading his teams to success since 2003 have paid off in a big way for all of us who have had the pleasure of watching summer baseball games in Bisbee.

Others in Bisbee, Cochise County and throughout the state who love and respect the game of baseball, Bisbee, and the telling of a good story have offered ideas, support and inspiration over the past year. Among them are Dan Frey, Tom Reardon, Becky Orozco and Ilona Smerekanych. There is no truer fan of baseball than John Tenney, captain of the Bisbee Bees vintage baseball team. His enthusiasm for the game as it was played and his tireless energy in promoting the game of vintage baseball has been a big source of inspiration.

Last, but not least, my biggest thanks go to my wife Judy, who has watched dozens of ball games with me and who has given freely of her extremely valuable labor, advice and support.

This work is dedicated to Russ, Pete, Charlie, Frank, Sam, Danny, Mike, Butch, Tad, Richard, Calen, Jacob, Carlos, Roy, Jess, Tony, Syd, Tuck, Clarence, Buster, Bert, Clint, Jim, Bob, Earl, Blackie, and all of the others, living and no longer living, who have played or who are now playing, the game of baseball at Warren Ballpark.

The national and local pastime

In the early years of the 20th Century baseball was truly America's national pastime. Before television and broadcast radio brought the big leagues to American homes, before listening to or watching major league baseball became a regular part of the American lifestyle, baseball teams could be found playing on fields and in ballparks in every city, town and village across the nation. From Maine to California, in Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico and the faraway Philippine Islands, wherever and whenever enough men or boys could be found to field two teams, the game of baseball would be played.

It was no different in Bisbee, AZ, where Warren Ballpark, one of America's oldest surviving professional baseball fields, has hosted many generations of ball players since its opening day in 1909 – from town teams to a variety of minor league teams, outlaw leagues composed in part of players implicated in the infamous Black Sox scandal of 1919, Bisbee High School teams and now, the semi-pro Copper Kings.

Like the mile-high historic copper mining town of Bisbee in which it sits, Warren Ballpark serves as a living museum – an authentic representation of a slower, smaller-scale and simpler world – the small-town, pre-television America captured in Norman Rockwell illustrations, where children could safely play outside after dark, where people knew and socialized with their neighbors and where men tipped their hats to ladies.

Baseball was played in Bisbee and at other locations in southeastern Arizona long before Warren Ballpark opened in 1909. Union soldiers from the California Column stationed at Fort Bowie in 1862 to protect Apache Pass from raids by Cochise and Mangas Colorado may have been the first young men to have marked off space for a ball game.

It's also likely that young cavalry troopers assigned to Camp Wallen located on Babocamori Creek and Fort Huachuca near present-day Sierra Vista played baseball games off-duty when those posts were established a few years later. As mining camps and other communities were founded in southeast Arizona during the 1870s and 1880s, so were town teams. Baseball was a popular pastime in Tombstone, Bisbee, Benson and Willcox well before the end of the 19th Century.

In 1899, the Copper King Mining Company in Bisbee sponsored a town team it christened the Copper Kings. That name would be resurrected and used for minor league baseball teams in Bisbee during the middle years of the 20th century, for Bisbee's 2003 short-lived minor league team and for the semipro town team that took the field beginning in 2007.

The first known baseball field in Bisbee was located on a relatively level piece of ground on Higgins Hill above Tombstone Canyon. Although too small for its intended purpose, it was still the best place available in the steep, rugged terrain of a mining camp where level ground was at a premium. In later years the Higgins Hill field was used for softball games. (It was there that the celebrated Copper Queens – Bisbee’s best known women’s fast pitch softball team - would play their home games during the 1940s and 50s.)

In the spring of 1908, a ball park was constructed in Don Luis, a neighborhood located between Bisbee and the border town of Naco. The El Paso & Southwestern Railroad provided a special train to take spectators out to the ball game from Bisbee and back, for a 25 cents fare. The first game played at the field in Don Luis featured teams from archrivals Bisbee and Douglas.

While the ball park in Don Luis was an improvement over the tiny field located on Higgins Hill, it wasn't what the Warren District's movers and shakers saw as the best location for making baseball available to local fans. Don Luis was out in the country, miles from Bisbee, and a good ways away from the cheaper transportation available to the residents in Bisbee, Lowell and Warren who used the streetcar line.

A ball park is born

When the suburb of Warren was platted a few miles south of Bisbee during the earliest years of the 1900s, a flat piece of ground located in the southern part of the suburb was reserved as a place to build a ballpark. The site may have been used for games even before Warren Ballpark opened in 1909.

The ballpark was constructed from lumber by the Warren Company, a subsidiary of the Calumet and Arizona Mining Company, one of the three biggest copper producers in the area at the time. Constructed for a total price of \$3,600 the facility's purpose was to provide recreation and entertainment for copper miners and other townspeople who populated Bisbee during its glory years.

Originally scheduled for June 26, 1909, opening day was postponed due to a rainout until the following day, when the Bisbee Beautiful team hosted and defeated a visiting squad from El Paso.

The Bisbee Evening Miner proudly reported the result in a front page sub-headline in its June 28, 1909 edition:

“Crack base ball team revealed to the delighted fans at the new Warren diamond yesterday when the El Paso Browns go down in defeat by a score of 8 to 3.”

From that day in June 1909 until the late 1920s, the park was used by town teams in loosely organized leagues subsidized by the copper companies or by outlaw leagues outside of what was then considered to be "organized" baseball.

In 1913 an effort was made to organize a baseball league of local teams that included the Phelps Dodge Tigers, the Warren District Grays, a team from Douglas and one from the Fifth U.S. Cavalry regiment stationed at Fort Huachuca. Despite the good intentions of baseball enthusiasts, the attempt to create a league within the boundaries of Cochise County never got off the ground

As a copper mining town Bisbee had its share (and more) of tension between labor and management. Baseball as a recreational and spectator pastime was encouraged and supported by the copper companies – the ballpark was considered to be neutral ground, where white collar workers, bosses, merchants, union organizers, muckers and drillers could all mingle, drink a little beer and forget their differences as they rooted for the home team.

That neutrality was shattered on July 12, 1917 when a posse led by Cochise County Sheriff Harry Wheeler rounded up more than 1,500 striking miners and herded them into Warren Ballpark. There the strikers, who had walked off the job to protest what they characterized as unsafe working conditions - were given a choice – return to work or be deported. Most – approximately 1,100 - chose deportation. For them, Warren Ballpark would be the point of embarkation for a ride in boxcars to Hermanas, NM and permanent banishment. The Deportation remains a passionate and controversial subject in Bisbee to this day.

Not all outlaws rode horses

Outlaw baseball came to the southwest during the “Roaring ‘20s.” Two leagues – the Frontier and Copper Leagues – provided employment for several of baseball's finest players, who had been banned from playing in any officially-sanctioned league after being implicated in fixing games.

"Prince Hal" Chase, formerly a first baseman for the New York Giants and Yankees, had been accused of throwing games by Christy Mathewson, Chase's manager when he played for the Cincinnati Reds in 1916. The odor of corruption followed Chase through the remainder of his big league career, which ended in 1920 when baseball commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis added him to the list of players banished from organized baseball. One of the game's finest first basemen, Chase served as a player-manager for the Douglas Blues and was often seen on the diamond at Warren Ballpark.

Several other star players banned from organized baseball for similar reasons also found their way to Warren Ballpark on visiting teams: ex-White Sox Chick Gandil, "Happy" Felsch, Swede Risberg, Lefty Williams and Buck Weaver. All five had been members of the infamous 1919 “Black Sox” and had been accused of accepting bribes from gamblers to throw the World Series played against the Cincinnati Reds that year. Joining Gandil, Weaver, Felsch, Risberg and Williams on the field at Warren Ball Park as a visiting player in the outlaw leagues was ex-New York Giant Jimmie O'Connell, also banned for "throwing" ball games.

Bisbee's team, known as the Miners, joined the six-team (El Paso, TX; Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico; Fort Bayard, NM; Chino, NM; Bisbee and Douglas) Copper League in 1926.

Throughout its two years playing in the Copper League, Bisbee signed only one outlaw player: its player-manager Tom Seaton, a former big-league pitcher and 27-game winner for the 1913 Philadelphia Phillies. Seaton jumped to the Brooklyn Tip-Tops of the Federal League the following year, finishing the 1914 season with a 25-14 record.

After returning to the National League when the Federal League collapsed in 1915, Seaton pitched for the Cubs. With his arm worn out and his best days over, he was sent to the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League in 1917.

Released from the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League in 1920 when rumors "regarding the practice of players and their associates" began to circulate, Seaton steadfastly denied allegations of his conspiring with Bay Area gamblers to "fix" games. He tried to find a spot on other minor league teams but had already been branded as a pariah. Although no formal charges were ever made against him, the aging pitcher had been effectively blackballed from organized baseball. By the mid-20s, Seaton had found his way to Warren Ballpark in Bisbee.

The Bisbee Miners compiled a dismal record in 1926 – going 12-24 in the first half of the season and 11-19 in the second. In 1927, with Seaton still at the helm, Bisbee finished the first half of the season in second place in the four-team (Fort Bayard, Chino, El Paso and Bisbee) league, with a 15-12 record. The Miners ended the second half of the season in third place, with a 17-14 record.

Bisbee had operated under a severe handicap by keeping outlaws (other than its manager) from the team roster throughout its participation in the Copper League, but the club's refusal to use banned major league players may have been a point in its favor when organized baseball selected sites for Arizona's first minor league teams in 1928.

Other major leaguers made their way to Warren Ball Park under more honorable circumstances. Big-league teams regularly toured the country by railroad before or after the baseball season, picking up additional revenue playing exhibition games in front of crowds that would otherwise never have had the opportunity see a major league game. Bisbee was a frequent stop for barnstorming teams touring the west.

The stars come to Warren Ballpark

A post-season game played Nov. 7, 1913 between John "Mugsy" McGraw's New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox, managed by James "Nixey" Callahan featured future Hall of Famers Tris Speaker, Sam "Wahoo" Crawford, pitcher Urban "Red" Faber and catcher Ray Schalk. Behind the plate calling balls and strikes was umpire Bill Klem, also destined for induction into the Hall of Fame. Accompanying the White Sox on the tour,

but not until the teams arrived on the west coast after stopping at Bisbee, was team owner Charlie Comiskey. (Both Comiskey and McGraw were also inducted into the Hall of Fame.)

The game was part of the 13-nation World Tour intended to introduce baseball across the globe. Before heading across the Pacific Ocean, the two teams barnstormed their way by train across the U.S., playing 32 games in 33 days as they traveled from Cincinnati, Ohio to Portland, Oregon. From there, the "tourists" would travel by ship to Japan, China, Australia, Ceylon, Egypt, Italy, France, England and finally, back to the U.S. to complete their global circuit.

The two teams arrived from Douglas the afternoon of Nov. 6 after playing a game that earlier day in the border town. The players, managers, owners and other men in the touring entourage were wined, dined and entertained at the country club, then located a short distance south of Warren, while the ladies received similar treatment at the Copper Queen Hotel.

On the field the following sunny November day in Bisbee were future "Black Sox" players Buck Weaver and Hal Chase, destined to be banished from baseball a few years later. Unbeknownst to them they would wind down their careers playing games on the same field where they'd played under more honorable conditions in 1913.

Also playing for the Giants was the legendary Jim Thorpe, a Native American recognized as one of the nation's greatest natural all-time, all-around athletes. Thorpe, whose strength, speed, endurance and agility are still legendary, blasted a home run over the outfield fence during the exhibition game.

The Giants won the game, beating the White Sox 9-1. Pitcher Art Fromme earned the win for the Giants. Rookie "Red" Faber, destined to be the last legal spitball pitcher to play in the major leagues, was the losing pitcher that day for the White Sox.

Other major league teams that are known to have stopped to play exhibition games at Warren Ballpark while on barnstorming trips during the 1910s, 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s are the Chicago Cubs, Philadelphia Athletics, Pittsburgh Pirates and Cleveland Indians. After the Chicago White Sox-New York Giants World Tourists of 1913, the Cubs were the earliest big league team known to have stopped to play an exhibition game in Bisbee, doing so April 5, 1919. The barnstorming Cubs took on a local team known as the Bisbee Miners, beating them by a score of 9-8.

As was the case with the Cubs in 1919, visiting big leaguers often played a team of locals. At other times two traveling major league teams would play each other as part of a final series of spring-training games. Games between the Chicago White Sox and Chicago Cubs were a regular springtime event in Bisbee during the late 1930s as the big league teams made their way east after spring training on the Pacific Coast.

Baseball in a minor key

Organized baseball – the teams that make up the great network of professional major and minor leagues – came to play full-time in Arizona (and in Bisbee) in 1928, with the creation of the major league-sanctioned Class D Arizona State League. One of the league's charter teams was the Bisbee Miners, which played its first season against the Phoenix Senators, Tucson Cowboys and Miami Miners.

Perhaps the most unusual game ever played by a Bisbee minor league team took place at Warren Ballpark before opening day of the 1928 season, when the 17-man House of David traveling team stopped to take on the Miners for their first-ever game on their home field.

The House of David players belonged to a religious commune that forbade its members to engage in sexual relations, drink alcohol or smoke tobacco. Male members of the Benton harbor Michigan-based sect were also forbidden to cut their hair or shave their beards. Those who were athletically inclined were encouraged to play baseball though, and did it with a flourish. The commune members were augmented by "ringers," non-believers but good ball players, who were willing to grow beards and long hair to play for the House of David.

Much like the Harlem Globetrotters of later years, the House of David ballplayers were ready and willing to amuse and amaze fans as they put on an entertaining pre-game "pepper show" exhibition of their ball-handling skills. But the Israelites of the House of David turned serious when the game started.

As was usually the case when they played minor league or semipro teams, the House of David "Whiskerinos" (as they were dubbed by the press) defeated the hometown boys, ending the game on top by a score of 11-9.

After bidding the House of David squad farewell and taking on the soldiers of the all-Black 25th Infantry Regiment team from Camp Harry J. Jones in Douglas in a pair of exhibition games, Bisbee's first minor league team was ready to begin their first regular season.

The Bisbee Miners (renamed the Bees shortly after the season began when it was learned that the Miami team also used Miners as its name) were managed by Roy J. "Hardrock" Johnson, a tough character with a brief, forgettable major league record who'd played for Fort Bayard in the outlaw Copper League and who would play outfield and pitch as needed. Also pitching for Bisbee during their first minor league season were Tom (nicknamed "Long Tom or "Iron Man") Vaughn, Syd Cohen, Al Bauer, Harvey "Preacher" Muns, Jess Sargent, Tate, Harry Althaus and Harry Harding.

Catcher and Bisbee native Buck Multinovich worked almost the entire season behind the plate for the Bees, replacing Johnny Smirch after he suffered a broken leg early on. M.D.

“Kit” Kitterman, another hometown boy, started the season playing first base, but was replaced mid-season by “Tex Covington, who was later replaced by Jay Hughes.

Eddie Miller handled duties at second for almost the entire season. Filling the shortstop position was a bigger challenge for Roy Johnson – the Bees went through a succession of players at short who were replaced because of inadequate fielding, poor hitting or injuries. Those who spent time playing shortstop for Bisbee during the '28 season included Bobby Clary, Billy Hamilton, Henry Doll, Johnny LaBate and George Steward.

Harry "Pops" Stower held down third base until a fractured foot sidelined him in late August. Outfielders included M.D. “Kit” Kitterman, "Chink" Tucker, Syd Cohen (who doubled as a pitcher) Tony Antista, Art Heatwole, Mont, Fant, C. Roberts, Tate and Benny Tolson. (Kitterman's son Sam would also play baseball, first as a member of Bisbee High School's 1947 state championship team and later that year, as a member of the Bisbee Yanks class C team. Sam Kitterman would go on to play for two seasons for Olean KS in the Kansas-Oklahoma Missouri League.)

The Miners started the season with a disastrous drubbing on the road, losing to the Phoenix Senators April 20 by a score of 9-0. After being shut out by Phoenix 11-0 the following day, Johnson put out an urgent call for players with better hitting skills.

The Miners were more successful in their first home stand, playing their first official game at Warren Ballpark April 27, when they turned the tables on the visiting Senators in a 5-1 win. M. D. “Kit” Kitterman’s twin home runs paced the home team to their first win at home.

While all of the parks used by teams in the early days of the Arizona State League were a fielder’s nightmare, sporting uneven playing surfaces covered with a mix of dirt and rocks that served as a poor substitute for grass, the field at Warren Ballpark possessed an additional quality that must have had players and managers swearing a blue streak: a line of automobiles parked next to the playing field.

Mining company officials and other Bisbee worthies not wanting to rub elbows with the riffraff in the grandstands watched the game in style and comfort, sitting on the upholstered seats of their shiny touring cars. Boys were paid to perch on car hoods, hoping to catch fly balls and line drives before they shattered windshields or dented hoods or doors.

The Bisbee Evening Ore finally called for a halt to the practice on May 18, informing its readers that “In the five State League games played at Warren Park a number of men have reached base because it was physically impossible for outfielders to field fly balls which dropped among automobiles parked near the west fence. An equal number of players been forced to be content with a two-base hit because their long drives reposed under somebody’s car.”

During the next few weeks Bisbee - playing as the Bees for the first time on May 18 when they took on Miami at Warren Ballpark - floundered, despite Johnson's efforts to shore up his team's hitting, fielding and base running.

Finally, in mid-June, the cellar-dwelling Bees began to come to life. Bolstered by the addition of the hard-hitting Tony Antista and Syd Cohen to their roster, Bisbee climbed into third place, and then into second place, bypassing Tucson and the fading Miami Miners. By early June the Bees had come within ½ of a game of the league-leading Senators, but faded back into second place.

Bisbee ended the 1928 season in with a 37-31 record, two games behind Phoenix. The Bees had remained one or two games behind the red-hot Senators for much of the latter part of the season, but were never able to close the gap.

The 1928 season was marked by the debut of Syd Cohen, the younger brother of New York Giants star Andy Cohen, and Tony Antista, a short (5' 6) but hard-hitting outfielder who had played in the outlaw Copper League in 1927. Both joined the Bees at the end of June and both were called up to play for Beaumont in the Texas League at the end of July. The two were sent back down to Bisbee in mid-August despite putting in fine performances for Beaumont at the plate and on the field. Antista, who hit .350 during his short stay in the Texas league, went on to hit .311 for the Bees during the 1928 season. Cohen, a left-handed pitcher who could play outfield and first base as the situation demanded, was also a good hitter.

Under Roy Johnson, Bisbee never failed to field a competitive team. Affiliated with the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League in 1929, the Bees finished the season with 60 wins and 30 losses, the best overall record in the six-team league (expanded from four teams with the inclusion of the Globe Bears and the Mesa Orphans) that year.

As the top team for the first half of the season, Miami would meet Bisbee (winners of the second half) to determine who could claim bragging rights as the overall champions of the Arizona State League.

By September, the Bees were red-hot. Paced by the pitching of Glen Gabler and the superb hitting of Tony Antista (as well as by the timely hitting of Syd Cohen) Bisbee caught up with and left Globe in the dust, sweeping the Bears during a mid-August home stand.

But a subsequent road trip to Phoenix was as disastrous for the Bees as their series at Globe had been successful. Ace pitcher Glen Gabler, who led the league with a 20-2 record, lost his composure and his temper after being sent to the showers in the sixth inning of the series opener. The heckling Phoenix fans, the summer heat and the frustration he felt over his sub-par performance on the mound led Gabler to vent his rage on league president Fred Joyce, who was sitting in the stands as a spectator. Joyce fined Gabler on the spot for his behavior and then upped the ante to a season suspension when the pitcher refused to shut up.

Although Bisbee was already guaranteed a spot in the championship series with Miami, their chances of winning the best-of-seven series had plummeted with the loss of Gabler.

A last minute reprieve by league president Joyce allowed Gabler to return to the team by paying a \$50 fine.

Bisbee and Miami battled intensely during the playoffs, with the Bees losing the first two games to the Miners at Association Park. When the series moved to Bisbee's Warren Ballpark, the Bees bounced back to take three of the next four games, setting the stage for a seventh and decisive game back in Miami.

A most unusual finish

Gloomy skies and intermittent rain couldn't keep the two teams off the field – nor could the threat of bad weather discourage a capacity crowd of Miami fans from filling the stands for the big game.

If the crowd was hoping for an unforgettable experience, it certainly got what it wanted, for the game was to be one of the most unusual and controversial played in the history of Arizona minor league baseball.

By the end of the 6th inning, Bees pitchers Syd Cohen, Bart Greene and Glen Gabler had been hammered from the mound by the hard-hitting Miners, giving Miami a hefty 13-6 lead. Bisbee manager Roy Johnson took over pitching duties in the seventh and kept Miami scoreless. Then, as the evening skies darkened over Miami in the top of the eighth, the Bees unloaded on Miners pitcher "Babe" Mitchell to narrow the gap to 13-12.

Johnson held Miami scoreless in the bottom of the eighth as dusk settled onto Association Park. In the top of the ninth the Bees struck again, stinging the Miners for two runs and taking a 14-13 lead with no outs.

It was at that moment that the Miami fans put on a demonstration of Arizona mining town civic spirit that had been, in times past, channeled into such activities as lynch mobs and vigilante committees. Outrage turned to rage as the crowd left their seats by the scores - and then by the hundreds - to pour onto the field.

The Bees remained on the field or in the dugout, waiting for the crowd to disperse and for play to resume while the Miami players left the field.

The Miners wanted the game to be called in their favor. Since the field had become too dark to continue play, they believed the score should revert to the previous inning's 13-12 Miami lead, thereby counting as a win for the home team.

The Bees insisted Miami had forfeited the game by not keeping the game-stopping crowd off the field. Therefore, the seventh game and the league title rightly belonged to Bisbee.

Faced with a large and unruly mob, Arizona State League president Fred Joyce took the safest course – he declared the game a "no contest," requiring the two teams to play it over. Both refused to do so, with each insisting that they were the legitimate league champs.

Game seven of the Arizona State League championship remained in limbo while the stock market plummeted and the world's economy began to unravel. Finally, on October 28, the 1929 Arizona State League baseball season came to an anticlimactic end. A league meeting convened in Phoenix by the five remaining teams ended with a 2-1 vote declaring Miami the winners of game seven and holders of the league title. Representatives of the Globe and Phoenix team had sided with the Miners, while the Tucson club supported Bisbee. Bisbee and Miami accepted the decision and life went on.

Players on the '29 Bees included pitchers George "Lefty" Neilson, Marvin Ater, "General" Urquijo, Bart Greene, Charlie Moncrief and Barton Smith; first baseman Don Flickinger; second baseman Arthur Parker; shortstop George Steward; third basemen Dutch Sousa and Ed Olle; utility infielder Ed Lyons; catchers O.K. Norton and Ernie McCabe; left fielder Jay Hughes; center fielder Chuck Burns and right fielders Leo Burns and Syd Cohen.

A number of Bees who played for Bisbee during the team's two years in the Arizona State League made their way into the record books. Among them were pitcher Tom Vaughn, who led the league in wins in 1928 with 14 and Eddie Miller, who ended the '28 season with a league-leading 104 hits.

In 1929 Arthur Parker led the league in runs scored (99) and batting, with a .390 average. Pitcher Glen Gabler recorded the most wins in the league with 20 and Leo Burns hit the most home runs, with 23.

When El Paso was added to the league in 1930 to replace Mesa, the Arizona State League was re-named the Arizona-Texas League.

Hardrock, Syd, Spud and Tuck

The 1930 Bees, affiliated with the Chicago Cubs and the Los Angeles Angels of the PCL, shook off a disastrous cellar-dwelling early season performance to finish the first half of the split season in fourth place. Bisbee finished the season by clinching the second half championship, ending the full season with a 60-45 record. Reinforced mid-season by first baseman Syd Cohen and catcher Gene McIsaacs, the Bees were transformed into killer Bees, finishing one game ahead of El Paso.

The season ended on a note almost as strange as the 1929 season had: Bisbee, the second-half league champions, were designated league champs when Globe, winners of the first

half of the split season, refused to play a seventh tie-breaking playoff game at Warren Ballpark.

To make things even stranger, Globe, which had ended the first half of the season tied with Phoenix, earned the right to play Bisbee for the season pennant by defeating the Senators in a tie-breaking best of five series, to determine the first half winners after the entire regular season had ended.

Playing for Bisbee during the 1930 season were pitchers Roy Johnson (player-manager), Al McNeely, "Lefty" Greer, Charlie Moncrief, Bob "Cecil" Green, Bob "Lefty" Shanklin, Allen Barringer, Clarence "Spud" Murphy, Hal Stitzel, Frank Sabilla, Chuck Hatfield, Home Hurst and Frank Gabler (kid brother of Glen Gabler, star pitcher of the '29 Bees.)

The younger Gabler's skills on the mound were such that by 1935 he was pitching at the Polo Grounds for the New York Giants. Frank Gabler, AKA "The Great Gabbo," spent a total of four years in the big leagues, including more than two years with the Giants. In 1937, he was traded to the Boston Braves and in 1938 Boston sold him to the Chicago White Sox of the American League.

Infielders for the 1930 Bees included first basemen Syd Cohen, Norman Burbank, William Brandt and Eddie Church; second basemen Elmer O'Shaughnessey, "Red" Smith, Tony Bernardo and Chuck Montague; shortstop George Steward; third basemen Ralph Layne and Bobby "Bud" Byrne; and catchers Ernie McCabe, Marty Hauser and Gerald "Gene" McIsaacs.

Outfielders for the Bees included Tony Antista, Buck Milutinovich, Asher Joerndt and Duke Marlow; center fielders Ernie Haas, Stanley Coombs and Leo Burns; and right fielders Clyde Prather and Francis Kelly.

Tony Antista, whose diminutive size (5'6" and 145 lbs.) belied his power at the plate, earned the league's "Triple Crown" in 1930, leading all other hitters with a blistering .430 batting average, 127 runs scored and 191 hits. Antista also set a league record by hitting safely in 45 consecutive games.

Pitcher Al McNeely led the league in 1930 with a 14-2 record and George Steward led the league in home runs with 22.

Bisbee continued to play in the Arizona-Texas League at Warren Ballpark through the 1941 season, with a gap from mid-1932 through 1936 while the league was disbanded due to economic hard times during the Great Depression.

The Bees, still under the direction of "Hardrock" Johnson, finished fourth out of six teams in 1931.

Playing for the Bees in 1931 was outfielder George "Tuck" Stainback, a teammate of Johnson's at Bisbee who did make it to the major leagues as a player. From Bisbee Stainback moved steadily up the baseball ladder, reporting to the Chicago Cubs from the AAA Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League in 1934.

In 1935, Stainback precipitated the ejection of the Cubs' entire dugout during a World Series game against the Detroit Tigers through his vigorous heckling of umpire George Moriarty from the Chicago bench.

After playing for the Cubs for four seasons, Stainback (along with Curt Davis, Clyde Shoun and \$185,000 thrown in to sweeten the deal) was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals for the starring member of the 1934 "Gashouse Gang" and future Hall of Famer Dizzy Dean.

Although he wasn't always a regular in the lineup, Stainback played for a total of 13 years in the big leagues, with the Cubs (1934-1937), the Cardinals (1938), the Philadelphia Phillies (1938), the Brooklyn Dodgers (1938-39), the Detroit Tigers (1940-41), the New York Yankees (1942-45) and finally, with Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics in 1946.

Stainback had his best year big league year during his rookie season when he batted .306 for the Cubs. His lifetime batting average was .259.

Also playing for the Bees in the 1931 season were pitchers Roy Johnson, Glen Gabler, Bob "Cecil" Green, Hal Stitzel, Allen Barringer, Jess Short, Joe "Lefty" Sullivan, Chico Sabilla, "Lefty" Woods, Phil Gugich, and "Chief" McMurtry.

Playing first base for the 1931 Bees were Jack Keane, Don Crowley and Cook. Second basemen were Art Parker, Larry Dimter, Eddie Leishman, Charles Ross, and Lahman. Hank Picancio played shortstop. Holding down third base were Eddie de Cuir, George Van Curren, Jack Keane and Lahman.

Working behind the plate for the '31 Bees were Gene McIsaacs and Harry Wilson.

In left field for Bisbee were William Burgett, Flach, Stanley Coombs, Johnny Vusich and Bill Etheridge. "Tuck" Stainback played in center field. Playing right field for the Bees was Eddie Miller, L. Owens, Joe Meyers and Sam Sudano.

Hard times

Although the Bees continued to turn a profit during the depression, the other teams in the league weren't as successful. The 1932 season ended prematurely after the playing of 99 games.

A Bees player who made it to the majors after paying his dues in Bisbee during the truncated 1932 season was the right-handed Jim Tobin. Signed by the Oakland Oaks of

the Pacific Coast League, Tobin was sent to the Bees where he compiled a 9-2 record and 6.13 ERA.

In 1933 Tobin was signed by the New York Yankees and sent to Wheeling, West Virginia, where he played for the Stogies. While there Tobin won 13 games and lost 7 with an ERA of 3.86. From Wheeling Tobin was sent to the Binghamton, New York Triplets, where he finished the 1933 season with a 3-3 record. He remained in Binghamton for the 1934 season, finishing with a 15-10 record and an ERA of 3.98.

Tobin's next minor league stop was his home town of Oakland, where, pitching for the Oaks, he compiled an 11-8 record with a 4.14 earned run average. He also showed himself to be a good-hitting pitcher, ending the 1935 season with a .294 average. Torn cartilage in his knee cut Tobin's season short and an attack of appendicitis the following year kept him with the Oaks, where he won 16 games and lost eight during the 1936 season.

His major league career began on April 30, 1937 with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Tobin went 6-3 that year and hit .441. The following year he went 14-12 for the Pirates.

In 1939 Tobin compiled a 9-9 record for Pittsburgh. In 1940 he was traded to the hapless Boston Bees, where he finished the season 7-3 with a 3.83 ERA. In 1941 Tobin went 12-12 with a 3.10 ERA.

On May 13, 1942, Tobin, still playing for Boston (now renamed the Braves) became the first (and last) major league pitcher in the "modern" era to hit three home runs in a single game. But his pitching record in 1942 wasn't up to par with his record-setting hitting. Tobin won 12 games while losing 22.

Tobin's record for the 1943 Braves was 14-14, with a 2.66 ERA.

In 1944, Tobin switched to throwing knuckleballs and pitched a pair of no-hit games, one against the Brooklyn Dodgers and the other against the Philadelphia Phillies.

Tobin fell under .500 in 1944, with an 18-19 record. In 1945 Tobin continued to decline as a pitcher, going 9-14 for the Braves before being placed on waivers and traded to the Detroit Tigers.

Although fading as a pitcher, Tobin made his only World Series appearance that year, giving up two runs in three innings during the Opening Day game.

He finished his baseball career as many fading big-leaguers did, in the minor leagues, first in the Pacific Coast League, playing for the Seattle Rainiers and the San Francisco Seals in 1946. He was released in 1947, but was picked up by his hometown Oakland Oaks in 1948.

Tobin played for the Oaks again in 1949, and ended his days on the mound with the Memphis Chicks in 1950.

Roy "Hardrock" Johnson's baseball career rebounded quickly after the collapse of the 1932 Arizona-Texas League season. In 1934 he was selected to manage the Ponca City Angels of the Western Association, leading them to a second place finish. In 1935 Johnson was offered a coaching job with the Chicago Cubs and stayed on them through the 1939 season.

He remained with the Cubs organization for the rest of his baseball career, as a manager for the Tulsa (OK) Oilers in the Texas League from 1940 through the 1942 season, as manager for the Lockport Cubs of the PONY League in 1943 and again as a coach for the Cubs from 1944-1953. In May 1944 Johnson served briefly as interim manager for the Cubs. He also worked as a scout for the Cubs after leaving his coaching job in 1953.

Others who played for the short-lived '32 Bees were pitchers Carl Kimball, Emil Hemingway, Bill Phoebus, Butch Simas, Short, Anderson and "Lefty" Woods. Jack Keane and Swanson held down first base, Hank Picancio and Leo Kintana played at shortstop. On third base was Labetich.

Outfielders for Bisbee in 1932 included George Ackerman, William Burgett and Toomb.

Working behind the plate was Billy Raimondi.

Had a minor league team continued to play at Warren Ballpark at the height of the depression, local fans would probably have witnessed the start of the professional baseball career of the first Bisbee boy to make it to the big leagues.

Buster breaks new ground

Elvin "Buster" Adams, a 1934 Bisbee High School graduate, hadn't played varsity ball in school, but was good enough to make the Class C Springfield, IL Cardinals team in the Western Association the following year. In 1935 Adams moved up to AA ball with the Pacific Coast League's Sacramento Solons, remaining with that team through the 1938 season.

Buster broke into the big leagues at the end of the 1939 season when he joined the St. Louis Cardinals from Sacramento. His first trip to the majors was a brief one (he stayed up with the Redbirds for only two games) and Adams spent the next three seasons in AA ball with Sacramento and Rochester.

The drain of talent into the armed services from major league baseball turned out to be the lucky break that Buster Adams needed. A brief stay with the Cardinals in 1943 ended when he was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies. Adams remained with the Phillies through the 1943 and 1944 seasons and started 1945 with that team before being traded

back to the Cardinals. In 1945 Adams hit .287 for St. Louis, which was to be his best year in the big leagues.

Happy days are here again

Several attempts were made to revive the Arizona-Texas League and bring minor league baseball back to the southwest in the mid-1930s, but none bore fruit until the 1937 season. With even high school athletics being put on hold during much of the depression, only semipro baseball teams and a mining company-sponsored softball league continued to use the aging Warren Ballpark for most of the mid-1930s.

But signs of a better time for baseball in Bisbee were on the horizon. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" had promised jobs to the millions of unemployed American workers snared in the nightmare of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Work Progress Administration (W.P.A.), created in 1935, was the principal vehicle for putting jobless Americans back on the payroll working on public construction jobs. Warren Ball Park, a dilapidated wooden structure by the mid-1930s and largely unused at the height of the Depression, was a prime target for such a project. Targeted for demolition and replacement, Warren Ball Park was destined to rise Phoenix-like from the scrap pile just in time for the 1937 season.

There was a hitch, however. In order for the publicly-funded construction of a new grandstand on the site of the old structure to be authorized, the property had to pass from private to public ownership.

With that goal in mind, ownership was transferred from the Warren Company (a subsidiary of the Phelps Dodge mining corporation) to the Bisbee School District.

In August, 1936, the Bisbee Daily Review reported that:

"Prospects of starting work on the rubble stone and concrete stadium and bleachers at the Warren ball park some time next month are good..."

"The structure, in the lower part of which will be shower and dressing rooms, will seat 2,000 persons. Additional seating accommodations will be provided with stone and concrete bleachers on either side of the stadium, according to plans. The stadium will be roofed with corrugated iron and steel girders.

"The new accommodations will replace an old wooden structure no longer useable."

With new or renovated ball parks springing up throughout the Southwest as the result of New Deal pump-priming, an improved economy and a more optimistic national outlook, the time was finally ripe for the return of minor league baseball. Happy days seemed to be returning for players and fans alike.

By September 1936 major league baseball was looking at the Southwest as fertile ground for a re-constituted Arizona-Texas League.

The Bisbee Daily Review reported in September 1936 that “Branch Rickey, general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, announced that his club is definitely interested in placing a team in the proposed circuit.”

So was America’s oldest professional ball club, noted the Review in mid-September, 1936.

“The Cincinnati Reds disclosed recently they were anxious to back an Arizona-Texas entry and will probably get behind a club in Bisbee.”

By October interested parties were meeting in Bisbee to draw up plans for a new league and for the 1937 season. By March 1937 a league had been organized, officials designated, a schedule worked out and teams selected. Under the leadership of Bisbee school superintendent-rancher-sportsman R.E. Souers, the newly-revived Arizona Texas League was ready to play ball.

The first game between professional baseball teams at the rebuilt Warren Ballpark was played on April 6, between the barnstorming Chicago Cubs and their cross-town rivals, the White Sox. The Cubs won 9-2. Baseball fans back in the Windy City were able to tune into the game on Chicago station WJJD through a live remote feed made possible with the help of Bisbee radio station KSUN.

On the field for the Cubs that day were former Bee "Tuck" Stainback in left field, and Roy Johnson, the Bees' first manager, now coaching first base for the Cubs.

The Bees return to their hive

A few days later, the Bees played their first game at the refurbished ballpark against the crack 25th Infantry Regiment team of African-American soldiers from Fort Huachuca.

Although the Arizona-Texas League season opened with great expectations and hoopla on April 15, the Bisbee Bees, managed by George “Mickey” Shrader, stumbled to a last-place finish with a 51-71 record in a four-team league.

The blame couldn’t be fixed solely on Shrader, who was an experienced minor league manager. Cincinnati had decided to stock the Bees with the rawest of rookies drawn from the Pacific Coast. As a result, the Bees never had an opportunity to climb out of the cellar during the season.

The 1937 Bees included pitchers Augie Acuna, Ray Alviso, John Landucci, Joe Orrell, Eddie Burns, John Lund, Lawrence Sussee, Ed Brady, Bruce Waugh, Lyle Turpin and Jesus Valenzuela On first base were Marion Coltrin, George Benson and George Dean.

Duties at second base were handled by Bernard Mayers, Otero Giusti and Manuel Ray. Shortstops for the '37 Bees were Dale Laybourne and Salvador Madrid.

On third base were Edwin Laurel, Robert Miller and Louis Spannraft. Behind the plate was catcher Frank League. In the outfield were George Antone, Bill Bendetti, Andrew Durmanich, Garrett McBride, Sheldon McConnell, Gene Robertson and Mike Simon.

A flood of replacements joined the Bees as Shader cut poorly performing players, but nothing seemed to work for Bisbee during the 1937 season.

From last to first

The following year the Bees became an affiliate of the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League and were managed by Charlie Moglia. The change in team affiliation brought a supply of more talented players to Bisbee, and with them Moglia led Bisbee to a regular season first-place finish with a 72-58 record. El Paso beat the Bees four games to three during the 1938 playoffs to win the league pennant.

Bisbee's first place finish at the end of the regular season was largely due to the strong right arm of Jesse Flores, the team's ace pitcher. Born in 1914 in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, Flores posted the Arizona-Texas League's best pitching record in 1938 with 24 wins and six losses. He also recorded the lowest ERA (2.37) that season.

Flores's sterling performance with the 1938 Bees earned him a quick promotion to a berth with the 1939 AAA Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League. Three years work with the Angels earned him a brief time in the major leagues with the 1942 Chicago Cubs, but Flores was sent back down to the Angels after pitching in only four games.

In 1943 Flores's contract was purchased by the Philadelphia Athletics. He remained as a starter with Connie Mack's A's until the end of the 1947 season. Although he pitched as well as or better than any of the other pitchers on the Athletics staff, Flores never had a winning season with the cellar-dwelling Philadelphia team. His 4-13 performance in 1947 earned him a ticket back to L.A., where he pitched for the Angels for the 1948 and 1949 seasons.

Flores's 21-10 record with Los Angeles in 1949 earned him another shot at the majors in 1950, this time with the Cleveland Indians. His 3-3 record that year wasn't good enough to keep him on the Cleveland pitching staff, and in 1951 Flores was back in the PCL, pitching for the Sacramento Solons.

During the next three years Flores played for Sacramento and Oakland in the PCL. He ended his playing career with the Class C Modesto team in 1955.

From 1955 until his death in 1991, Flores worked as a scout for major league teams, spending most of that time with the Minnesota Twins organization.

Jesse Flores was inducted into the Mexican Baseball Hall of Fame (“Salon de Fama”) in 1991.

Two other members of the 1938 Bees also turned in outstanding performances. Center fielder Dick Warfield scored the most runs in the Arizona-Texas League with 120 and second baseman Bill Creager was the League home run champion, with 20.

Other pitchers on the 1938 Bisbee roster included John Carpenter, Joe Kralovich, Hal Stitzel, Earl Jones, Jack Hickson, Eddie King, Harry Nace, Jr., Eddie Van Pelt, Mike Morales, Hector Miranda and John Carpenter. Joining Dick Warfield in the outfield were Fred Bradley, Paul Schiffner, Alex Herman and McGrath.

Roy Myers worked the entire season at first base for the Bees, as did Guy Beringheli at shortstop. Duties at third base were shared by Al Plummer, Carl Barbettini and Frank Maygren.

Catcher Roy Partee handled most of the games behind the plate for Bisbee with Angel Salas filling in as his rarely-needed backup.

Salas, a Bisbee native, played several games when Partee suffered a hand injury.

Like Flores, Partee spent a single season with the Bees before moving on and upward through the minor league ranks, going to the Salt Lake Bees of the Pioneer League in 1940, the AAA San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League in 1941, and then to the Portsmouth Cubs of the Class B Piedmont League in 1942. He broke into the major leagues in 1943 when he was signed by the Boston Red Sox.

Service in the Army from October 1944 through April 1946 interrupted Partee’s major league baseball career, but he returned to Boston as a reserve catcher in 1946, playing with the Red Sox in the 1946 World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals and remaining with the team through the 1947 season.

He was traded to the St. Louis Browns after the 1947 season ended. 1948 would be Partee's last season in major league baseball.

The Bees joined the Cubs organization in 1939 and remained affiliated with Chicago through the 1941 season. Four players on the 1939 roster would make it to the major leagues.

Managed by Carl Dittmar, the Bees repeated their first place finish in 1939, winning 72 games and losing 57. Shortstop Dale Gill led the league with 182 hits that year, and pitcher Eddie King won the most games with 25.

A farm team’s abundant harvest

A player who began – and ended – his entire professional playing career while with the Bees in 1939 was pitcher Harold “Lefty” Phillips. His pitching days ended after only five games when he developed a sore arm, but Lefty remained in professional baseball, working his way up the ladder as a scout and coach.

In 1965 he was selected as pitching coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers, working with a stellar mound staff that included Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale and Don Sutton. Lefty moved on to the Los Angeles Angels organization in 1969 where he became director of player personnel and in May of that year, team manager.

A member of the 1939 Bisbee Bees who rose rapidly through the farm system to the big leagues was Alvin “Al” Montgomery, who broke into the majors in 1941 at the age of 20. Born in Loving, NM in 1920 as Alvin Atlas, Montgomery played catcher and right field for Bisbee and led the Arizona-Texas League in home runs in 1939 with 17.

Sold by the Cubs to the Boston Braves in 1941, Montgomery batted .192 for Boston manager Casey Stengel in 42 games and worked 30 games behind the plate.

Al Montgomery’s major league career was destined to last only one season. On April 26, 1942, he was killed in a traffic accident in Virginia, while heading north from spring training with the Braves in Florida. Montgomery was only 21 years old.

Another member of the 1939 Bees also made his mark in the big leagues, but primarily as a pitching coach rather than as a player. Charles Dwight "Red" Adams pitched for Bisbee during the 1939 season, when he was 16-8, and again in 1940. He moved up to the Class AAA Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League in 1942. In 1946, Adams was called up by the Chicago Cubs, where he pitched in 8 games and compiled a no wins, one loss record. Adams returned to the PCL during the 1947 season and remained there until retiring from a playing career at the end of the 1957 season.

In 1959 Red Adams became a scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers organization, remaining in that role until 1968. The following year he became the pitching coach for the Dodgers, where he worked with some of the best pitchers in the major leagues. Hall of Fame inductee Don Sutton described Adams as "...a standard by which every pitching coach should be measured. No person ever meant more to me in my career than Red Adams, and without him I wouldn't be standing in Cooperstown today."

Adams retired from coaching in 1980.

Yet another member of the 1939 Bees team would climb the minor league ladder to the big leagues. Joseph Edward "Eddie" Bockman, born in California in 1920, moved from the 1939 Bisbee club, where he hit .285, to the Class D Joplin Miners of the Western Association in 1940. In 1941 he hit .290 and drove in 72 runs, earning him a promotion to the Norfolk Tars of the Class B Piedmont League. Bockman also played for the Class AA Binghamton Triplets of the Eastern League prior to joining the U.S. Navy in 1943.

Stationed in San Diego, Bockman played baseball for the naval base team. He returned to professional baseball in 1946, joining the New York Yankees for spring training. Bockman played the 1946 season for the AAA Kansas City Blues of the American Association, hitting .303. He finished the season with the Yankees for their final four games.

Traded to Cleveland after the 1946 season ended, Bockman played 46 games for the Indians in 1947 and batted .258. In January 1948 he was purchased by the Pittsburgh Pirates, where he played as a reserve third baseman during the 1948 and 1949 seasons. His lifetime major league batting average was .230.

In 1950 Bockman was sent by the Pirates back to the minors, playing with the AAA Indianapolis Indians of the American Association. In 1952 he played with the Portland Beavers of the AAA Pacific Coast League.

Bockman remained in minor league ball as a player-manager until 1958. In later years he worked as a major league scout, signing Larry Bowa, Mark Davis and Joe Charboneau.

Also playing for the Bees in 1939 were pitchers John Carpenter (12-10), Frank Totaro (8-4), Larry Baldwin, John Colmer, Fay Starr, Ernie Mitchell and Eddie King (25-6.)

Holding down first base for Bisbee was Roy Myers, who batted .324. Sam Arico, who batted .337 for the season, Guy Beringheli and James Donovan shared duties at second base. Shortstop for the '39 Bees was Dale Gill, who hit .332. At third were Eddie Bockman, player-manager Carl Dittmar and Hank Slagle.

In left field for the Bees was Earl Moore, batting .302. Center field was handled by Gordon Cockcroft. In right field for Bisbee was Joe Lapiana, who led the team in batting with a .348 average. Working behind the plate were Jerry Varrelman and Al Montgomery, batting .320.

Bright lights and baseball nights

One of the more memorable moments of Bisbee's 1939 season came on August 12, when the Bees played their first night game under the lights at Warren Ballpark. Sparked by Red Adam's six-hit performance on the mound, Bisbee edged out the Tucson Cowboys 6-5 in 10 innings. The game was seen by a crowd of fans estimated at close to 3,000.

Unfortunately, the ability to play night games didn't translate into a winning season. The 1940 Bees, again managed by Dittmar, finished last out of four teams, with a 58-63 record. Pitcher Frank Tataro was the only Bisbee player who led the league in any category that year, compiling 251 strikeouts.

Perhaps the most notable event in 1940 as far as Bisbee and baseball were concerned took place before the start of the regular season. Barnstorming major league teams passing through town often stopped to play an exhibition game on their way home from

spring training. What made 1940 so special was that Bisbee fans were treated to back-to-back big league exhibition games and the presence of two of the baseball's greatest figures.

On April 1, the Cubs and the White Sox stepped off the train to play a game in the blustery wind of an early spring.

The next day, the barnstorming Pittsburgh Pirates and Philadelphia Athletics rolled into town. With them came Pirates coach Honus Wagner, considered to be one of the finest baseball players of all time and the A's legendary manager Cornelius McGillicuddy, better known as Connie Mack.

The two, now enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame, were honored guests at the Bisbee Rotary Club luncheon held before the game at the Copper Queen Hotel.

Although he didn't set any league records in 1940, Clarence James Maddern gave Bisbee baseball fans another reason to be excited – and proud.

A native-born big leaguer

The only Bisbee native (born in 1921 in the long-vanished residential part of Lowell) to make it to the major leagues, Maddern played in just one baseball game for Bisbee High School during his four years there. (There was no high school baseball team in Bisbee during Maddern's first three years at BHS and he suffered a season-ending foot injury during his senior year after playing in the opening game of the 1938 prep season.)

A star softball player, Maddern managed to attract the attention of legendary University of Arizona baseball coach "Pop" McKale. He attended the University of Arizona in 1939, playing on the freshman baseball team before he signed with the Bees.

"I wasn't doing that well academically and some people in Bisbee were trying to get me back down here to play ball," Maddern recalled in a 1983 newspaper interview.

As a second baseman and shortstop, the 6'1 185 lb. right-hander hit .331 for the Bees in 1940 and .356 in 1941. Maddern also led the Arizona-Texas League in RBIs in 1941.

Obtained by the Cubs organization from Bisbee late in the 1941 season Maddern finished the year playing five games for the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League. In 1942 he played most of the season for the Vancouver Capilanos in the Western International League, where he hit .351, but was edged out for the batting title by Jack Richards of Salem, who finished the season with a .3512 average.

Maddern's baseball career was interrupted when he enlisted in the U.S. Army in October 1942. His military career took him to Europe and included combat duty in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944-January 1945. It was during that period when he suffered frostbite in his feet from the record cold temperatures.

After hostilities ended in 1945, Maddern played baseball for the 76th Infantry Division Onaways team in Europe. Following his discharge, he returned to professional baseball and quickly worked his way through the farm system, playing for Tulsa in the AA Texas League for most of the 1946 season before earning a spot on the Chicago Cubs' roster for their final three games of the year.

In 1947 Maddern was sent back down to the AAA Los Angeles Angels, where he hit .322 and helped the Angels win the PCL championship by hitting the game-winning grand slam home run in the eighth inning of a scoreless sudden death playoff game played against the San Francisco Seals.

He played his only full season in the major leagues in 1948, breaking into the lineup in 80 games as an outfielder for the Cubs and hitting .252. His biggest moment in a Cubs uniform came that year when he hit three home runs in two games while playing against the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds.

Maddern started the 1949 season playing first base for the Cubs but was sent back to the Angels in L.A. despite hitting .333 for the 10 games in which he appeared. He hit .307 for Los Angeles in 1949 and .283 in 1950.

In 1951 Maddern was traded to the San Diego Padres, where he hit .311 in 99 games. He spent the last part of the 1951 season playing for the Cleveland Indians, where he hit an anemic .167 in 11 games. It was to be Maddern's final appearance with a major league team.

He continued playing minor league ball in the Pacific Coast League into the 1950s, first with the Seattle Rainiers, where he hit .294 during the 1952 and 1953 seasons. In 1954, Maddern's average slipped to .270. He spent the 1955 season playing for San Francisco, Portland and San Diego, hitting .269 for the year.

Maddern sat out the 1956 season, but returned to play in 1957 with the AAA Miami, FL and Rochester, NY teams. He returned to Bisbee where he worked as an insurance agent after retiring from professional baseball. Maddern died August 9, 1986, in Tucson.

Other members of the 1940 Bisbee Bees included catchers Jerry Varrelman and Jim Devlin, Warren Williams at first base, Rod Campbell and Farris Hardin at second, Fritz Nandoski and Ray Brunzell at shortstop, Richard Jerome and Dale Case at third base, Augie Acuna at third base and shortstop, Gordon Cockcroft in left field, Fay Starr in center field and Joe LaPiana in right field. The pitching staff included Ed Cook, Frank Tataro, Leonard Gilmore, Al Faccio, Orlando Rodriguez, Ernest Mitchell, Stan Wagner, Floyd Harris and Harold Rasey.

The threat of war loomed over America in 1941, but the Bees continued to play at Warren Ballpark. On the field for the '41 Bees during what would be the team's final

season was a teammate of Clarence Maddern and Red Adams whose experiences would result in one of the most inspirational stories to come out of baseball.

One leg and plenty of guts

Robert Earl “Bert” Shepard was a left-handed pitcher who also played first base and outfield. He recalled his experiences playing for the Bisbee Bees during an interview with author Todd W. Anton for “No Greater Love: Life Stories from the Men who Saved Baseball.”

“Without much else to do I moved to Bisbee, Arizona where I drove a truck during the day and played a season of unpaid minor league ball during the evenings. Maybe some scout would see me and sign me up to play ball for money. I used Bob Feller as a reference point, but so did a lot of us kids.”

Shepard was released by Bisbee after compiling a 3-5 record and a dismal 8.25 ERA for the season, playing in 30 games and pitching 73 innings. As he acknowledged later, control problems on the mound led to walks and walks resulted in runs.

When he wasn't walking batters, Shepard was hitting them and giving up way too many hits. During a losing effort against the Albuquerque Cardinals on Aug. 29, Shepard was tagged for 14 hits and also "beaned" a batter, rendering him unconscious for several agonizing minutes in the bottom of the sixth inning.

With many minor leagues folding due to the travel restrictions imposed on them by the wartime rationing of gasoline and tires (not to mention the shrinking pool of talent that resulted from the disappearance of so many players into military service) Shepard's opportunity for playing professional baseball faded. And in May 1942 he received his draft notice.

Shepard volunteered for pilot training and despite his complete lack of familiarity with airplanes - he acknowledged to his flight instructors that he'd never even been near one prior to his entry into military service – he earned his pilot's wings and a commission as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Forces.

While undergoing advanced flight training at Williams Field near Phoenix, 2nd Lt. Shepard made a cross-country flight to visit the town where he'd spent the 1941 season playing baseball.

He described his “homecoming” flight in his P-38 twin-engine fighter plane to middle school history teacher and baseball writer Todd Anton decades later.

“See, I was at Williams, Field, Arizona, which is just south of Phoenix, and I head for Bisbee, where I played ball. The first time I soloed in a P-38, the town was down near a little gully. I buzzed the town, did a loop and came out of the loop down between the buildings right in front of the baseball office at the Copper Queen Hotel.”

By 1944 Lt. Shepard was flying combat missions in Europe as a P-38 fighter pilot with the 55th Fighter group based in England.

On May 21, 1944, during his 34th mission, he was severely wounded by anti-aircraft fire and shot down while strafing an enemy airfield in Germany. A German doctor rescued Shepard from a lynch mob of angry civilians gathered at the crash site, but surgeons at a nearby hospital had to amputate his right leg below the knee.

A fellow POW in Stalag IX-C (the prisoner of war camp where he was held) fashioned Shepard a makeshift artificial leg out of scrap metal and leather. He began his own rehab program behind barbed wire, using a borrowed cricket ball to play catch with other prisoners.

During his months of captivity, Shepard continued to practice his pitching. His efforts to recover his strength, mobility and agility impressed his German captors and fellow POWs alike.

Repatriated in a swap of severely injured POWs in February 1945, Shepard met with Assistant Secretary of War Frank Patterson immediately after his return to the U.S. When Patterson asked him what he wanted to do after being fitted for a new artificial leg, Shepard didn't hesitate: he told him that if he couldn't fly combat missions in the Pacific theater he wanted to play professional baseball again.

Impressed with Shepard's determination and self-confidence, Patterson contacted Clark Griffith, a personal friend who was also the owner of the American League's Washington Nationals. After hearing Shepard's story and learning of his desire to return to baseball, Griffith agreed to give the lefthander his chance.

One month later Shepard, fitted with a new leg, reported to the Nationals (AKA Senators) for spring training. His strong desire to play, coupled with his improved ability to pitch, field bunts, cover first base, run and hit earned him a place on the team as a player-coach. As hoped, his inspiring story generated considerable national attention and favorable publicity for the Nationals and the War Department.

Shepard pitched well in several exhibition games against quality military teams. His constant workouts in the POW camp and after his return to the U.S. had finally solved his chronic control problems. Still, Shepard was relegated to pitching batting practice.

Then, on July 10, his opportunity finally came, when he was selected to pitch in an exhibition game between the Nationals and the Brooklyn Dodgers at Griffith Stadium.

Although he walked the first two Dodgers batters he faced, Shepard kept his composure and pitched his way out of the inning by retiring the next three batters. He remained on the mound for four innings, giving up a pair of runs. The Nationals won 3-2 and Shepard was credited with the win.

More importantly, Shepard's performance in the exhibition game against Brooklyn earned him a spot on the active roster.

On August 4, 1945, Bert Shepard made his way into a major league regular-season game and into baseball record books, as the only player to pitch on an artificial leg in the big leagues

He entered the game in the top of the fourth inning during the second game of a double header against the Boston Red Sox. The score was 12-2 in favor of Boston, the Nationals were in a close pennant race, and manager Ossie Bluege didn't want to use up any more of his regular pitchers in a lost cause.

The fans, who'd given up on the Nationals that day after Boston's 7-run shellacking of relief pitcher George Cleary, sat up and cheered loudly as Shepard trotted to the mound.

The bases were loaded with two outs and George "Catfish" Metkovich stood at the plate.

Shepard worked Metkovich up to a full count before striking him out. Then he walked back to the dugout to a standing ovation.

He remained in the game through the final out, pitching five and 1/3 innings, striking out two Boston batters while giving up a single run on three hits and a walk.

Despite his fine performance in the game against the Red Sox, Bert Shepard would never again take the field in a major league game.

Shepard was recognized for his military service on August 31, 1945 when he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by Undersecretary of War Patterson in a ceremony held at home plate during a doubleheader with the Yankees played at Griffith Field in Washington, D.C.

In 1946 he played for the Chattanooga Lookouts as a pitcher and first baseman. His ability to pitch, field, hit and run impressed teammates and fans alike.

Problems with what remained of his right leg stump kept Shepard off the ball field again until 1949, when he returned to baseball as a player-manager for the Class B Waterbury Connecticut team. He retired from baseball after the 1949 season.

Shepard made a comeback in 1952, playing for four different minor league teams. He ended his career in 1955 playing for the Modesto Reds of the California League.

Others who played for the 1941 Bisbee Bees included pitchers Paul Wright (2-4), Al Faccio (12-19), Hugh Salisbury, (12-12), Ysmael Morales(1-2), Jack Noriega (3-6) and Orlando Rodriguez, Kenneth Clow (8-12) and Dixie Medlock (2-2). Working behind the plate were Jerry Varrelman and Alfred Witicke. Holding down first base was Warren

Williams. Stan Gray handled duties at second base; Joe Esqueda played shortstop while Dale Case and Larry Chapman shared duties at third base. Joining Clarence Maddern in the outfield were Tom Downs and Arthur Leininger.

Gasoline rationing, a shortage of rubber for automobile tires and the diversion of most able bodied men into the military services or war work caused many minor leagues to suspend operations after the U.S. entered the Second World War. Among those who canceled play for the duration was the Arizona-Texas League.

Adult baseball didn't completely come to a halt in Bisbee during the war years, however. The semipro Bisbee Miners played a variety of military teams from Fort Huachuca, Douglas Army Airfield and Davis-Monthan Army Airfield at Warren Ballpark from starting in 1942 and continuing on through the 1945 season.

A team of fighting ballplayers

Professional baseball didn't return to Bisbee until 1947, when the Class C Bisbee Yanks took the field at Warren Ballpark. As a farm team for the New York Yankees, the Yanks were managed by 28-year-old Charlie Metro. Before coming to Bisbee, Metro had played on two major league teams – the Detroit Tigers and Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics - in the early 1940s. Released by the Athletics, he played for the Oakland Oaks under Casey Stengel and for the Seattle Rainiers of the Pacific Coast League before taking on the job as skipper of the Bisbee team.

In an interview conducted in 2008, Metro recalled how he was selected to be a manager.

“When I was playing out in Oakland, I taught the younger guys how to play the outfield. Joe Devine, the great Yankee scout, saw me and asked me what I was telling them. He must have remembered it when Earl Sheeley, who'd released me from Seattle, recommended me for a manager's job. Joe offered me the job as player-manager for the new team in Bisbee.”

Metro's passion for teaching the fundamentals of baseball can also be seen on his 1945 Oakland Oaks baseball card, which features a photo of him showing a young boy how to hold a baseball bat.

Born in Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania in coal mining country in 1918, Metro felt right at home in Bisbee.

“I liked it out there. I'd worked underground so I knew about miners and mining,” Metro remembered. “The Bisbee fans were great fans, and of all the places where I managed, Bisbee was my favorite, because it was the first.”

As a manager of a class C team, Metro was tasked with identifying promising players and polishing their skills.

“I had a bunch of kids who had never played professionally. They (the Yankees organization) didn’t give me very many prospects. Most of my players weren’t considered to be very good. Only one of them (Clint Courtney) made it to the majors.”

Under Metro (who also played third base or any other position as was needed) the Yanks compiled a 74-59 record, finishing in third place in the Arizona-Texas League. It was to be the only winning season posted by any Bisbee-based minor league team in the postwar years.

Among the players Metro managed at Bisbee were catchers Clint Courtney and Hillman Lyons, shortstop Frank Lucchesi who joined the team in mid-season, first basemen Jim Wert and Richard Dawson, third baseman Lynne Stone, right fielder Jim Bynon, center fielder Frank Finnegan, left fielder Bud "Whitey" Howe, shortstop Wayne Peterson and second basemen Charlie Kelly and Bobby Keller.

On the mound Metro had "Bullet" Joe Valenzuela, Jim Propst, Gene Smith, Jim Rude Max Hittle, Bill Collins, Charles Pickett and Douglas Oliver.

The Yanks also drew on local talent to fill out their roster. Jim Bynon, a World War II Navy veteran who’d come back to Bisbee after his discharge from military service to take a job with the Miners and Merchants Bank, tried out for the team and earned a spot on the roster. Given the nickname “Boom-Boom” by his teammates for his power and skill with a bat, Bynon hit .325 for the Yanks in 1947 and set an Arizona-Texas League record by hitting safely in 34 consecutive games. He repeated his 34-game hitting streak in 1948 while playing for the Bisbee-Douglas team. Bynon would continue to play minor league ball through 1955, ending his playing career that year with the Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings.

Both Charlie Metro and catcher Cliff Courtney were fined during the tumultuous 1947 season. Altercations on the diamond between opposing teams were not infrequent during those rough and tumble days of the low minor leagues, but the worst brawls seemed to take place when the Yanks and the Phoenix Senators met to play. In August the Tucson Citizen characterized the rivalry between the two teams as "the most bitter in the Arizona-Texas League."

A three-day series between the Yanks and Phoenix at Warren Ball Park in early August led to a fight between Cliff Courtney and Senator outfielder Billy Taylor, who had leaped onto Courtney's back as he faced off against another Phoenix player. The result was fines for Metro, Courtney, Taylor and a 10-day suspension for Senators manager Arky Vaughn.

“That was a team of fighting ballplayers,” Metro said. “I don’t remember ever paying that fine.”

From red and grey to pinstripes and beyond

In August Bisbee High School graduates Pete Vucurevich, Sam Kitterman and Bob Holland joined the Yanks for the final month of the season, after winning the 1st state championship title for the Pumas.

Vucurevich, a right handed pitcher, remembered how he was recruited during a recent interview.

“Yankees scout Bill Essick came down – he must have taken in some of our high school games. I got a call from him, and he asked me if I was interested in playing for the Yankees in the minor leagues. He asked me to meet him at the Copper Queen Hotel. At that time I was working in the ice plant, delivering ice. He offered me a contract – I jumped right on it.”

Vucurevich ended his brief stay with the Bisbee Yanks with a 1-1 record.

He went on to play minor league ball for several years, starting with the Class C Ventura Yankees of the California League in 1948. From there, he moved to Victoria, British Columbia, where he pitched for the Class B Athletics of the Western International League.

“I didn’t do too well, and ended up 5-10,” Vucurevich recalled. “I learned a little bit, but lost my control. There was a pitching coach who had me go down to the bull pen. He said I wasn’t throwing the way I used to. That straightened me out, and I won a couple of games.”

Sent to Twin Falls, Idaho, home of the Class C Cowboys of the Pioneer League, Vucurevich found himself playing once again for Charlie Metro during the final month of the ’49 season.

“They brought me in with two other guys. We (Twin Falls) ended up winning the league championship. I pitched the last game of the season and we ended up beating Billings 6-1 to win the championship. I ended up 8-11 for the season, 3-1 at Twin Falls.”

Metro recommended Vucurevich for a shot at Class A ball at Binghamton, New York. While there he was used mainly as a reliever.

“I felt I got the short end of the stick there.”

Vucurevich spent much of the 1950 season being moved from team to team – from Binghamton to Wilkes-Barre, PA and then on to Norfolk, VA, where he played for the Tars in the Class B Piedmont League, compiling an 8-7 record.

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 caused Vucurevich to consider joining the navy in December.

“The recruiter told me they had a helluva baseball program at the San Diego Naval Training Center. That convinced me.”

“A chief petty officer at boot camp asked us if there was anyone who wanted to play on a base team. Well, I jumped on that. The CPO, who was the team manager, looked at us, and said you’re not what I was looking for.”

“I told him he was looking at a professional baseball player.”

Vucurevich pitched for top-ranked teams while serving in the Navy during the early ‘50s. Among his teammates were several future major leaguers.

“I played with (future Hall of Famer) Eddie Mathews for 2-3 months. What a dandy! I also played with Foster Castleman (Castleman played for the New York Giants in 1954-57 and the Baltimore Orioles in 1958) and Pete Whisenant.” (Whisenant played for the Boston Braves in 1952, the St. Louis Cardinals in 1955, the Chicago Cubs in 1956, the Cincinnati Reds, the Cleveland Indians and the Washington Senators in 1960, the Minnesota Twins and Cincinnati Reds in 1961.)

“I think I found myself (in the navy.) Those service teams were loaded with talent. I went 20-5 in 1952, had a good fast ball and my curveball was O.K.”

Vucurevich was invited to pitch in a pair of exhibition games that pitted his skills against minor leaguers and major leaguers.

“We (San Diego Naval Training Station) played a game against the San Diego Padres, who at that time were in the Pacific Coast League. We beat them 2-1.”

In that game, playing for the Padres, were Clarence Maddern and Buster Adams, the two Bisbee boys who’d made it to the major leagues. Both were finishing out their pro careers in the PCL.

“Then I was invited to pitch for the minor leaguers in a game played against major leaguers. We beat the major leaguers, 5-3. I went the distance.”

Pitching for the major leaguers in that game was former Bisbee Bee Jesse Flores.

During his third year in the navy Vucurevich pitched his Los Alamitos Naval Air Station team to the All-Services championship, defeating a number of topnotch military teams along the way. During the championship game, he went the distance, limiting Barksdale Air Force Base to two hits in a 7-0 shutout.

Vucurevich also defeated the University of Arizona varsity baseball team twice during his navy career.

After his discharge in October 1954, Vucurevich remained in California for a while, working at a movie studio and playing AAA semipro ball on the weekends.

“I screwed up when I got out of the navy. I wasn’t working out, but was pitching four or five innings every Sundays. I started feeling pain in my right shoulder and I thought I’d better lay off baseball.”

Vucurevich returned to Bisbee and took a job with Phelps Dodge.

“I laid off baseball altogether for a time and got myself in shape. Then, the first ball I threw, it hurt me.”

Vucurevich was still under contract to Binghamton, in New York. He told them his arm was injured, and worked out a deal where he was optioned to the 1955 Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings.

It was an agonizing season for Vucurevich.

“After I pitched I couldn’t raise my arm up for days.”

Vucurevich ended his playing career in 1955, after pitching two games for Bisbee-Douglas championship title for the Pumas.

Charlie Metro left Bisbee after the 1947 season to take over the Class C Twin Falls, Idaho Cowboys in 1948 and 1949. From there he went on to a long and distinguished career managing teams including the Class B Montgomery, AL Rebels (1950 & 1951) the Montgomery, AL Grays (1952 and 1953), the 1954 Class A Durham Bulls and the Augusta Tigers in 1955.

In 1956 Metro was designated manager of the AAA Charleston WV Senators, but was replaced after compiling a 5-17 record.

He spent the rest of the 1956 season managing the Terra Haute, IN Huts until that team folded, and then finished the year as skipper of the Idaho Falls Russetts.

Metro's fortunes improved in 1956 when he was put at the helm of AAA Vancouver Mounties of the Pacific Coast League. While there he managed future Baltimore Orioles third baseman and Hall of Fame inductee Brooks Robinson.

In 1960 Metro was assigned to manage the AAA American Association Denver Bears.

He returned to the major leagues in 1962, as a member of the Chicago Cubs coaching staff nicknamed the "College of Coaches," an experiment in managing a major league ball club through the use of four coaches, each of whom would spend part of the season leading the Cubs before being rotated to similar duties with a minor league team. When it

came time for Metro to manage the Cubs, he convinced the Chicago front office to leave him at the helm until the season ended. He finished the year with a 43-69 record.

After the '62 season, Metro was hired as a coach and advance scout for the Chicago White Sox, remaining in that job until the 1966 season, when he took over the AAA Tulsa Oilers of the Pacific Coast League. The following year Metro became a scout for the Cincinnati Reds.

In 1968 Metro joined the Kansas City Royals, an American League expansion team, as director of player procurement. In that role he was instrumental in building the team's organization from the minor leagues on up, and was credited for much of the team's success during its early years.

Metro managed the Royals for part of the 1970 season but was replaced after compiling a 19-35 record. He remained in the team organization as a scout through the 1972 season.

Metro also served as a scout for the Detroit Tigers in 1972 and 1973. He was hired by the Major League Scouting Bureau in 1974, and became a scout and talent evaluator coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers from 1976 to 1981.

In 1982 Metro returned to coaching as a member of the Oakland Athletics staff, under his old friend Billy Martin. He retired from baseball in 1984, after spending a year with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Described as “one of the best baseball minds that I’ve ever known” by Buck O’Neil, Negro League star player/manager and the first African-American coach in Major league Baseball, Charlie Metro was a hard-driving manager with a strong competitive spirit who was always keenly interested in developing the skills of his young players.

Metro is also known in the baseball world for having invented the batting tee.

Scrap Iron and Billy

One of Metro's young players on the '47 Yanks team was catcher Cliff Courtney. Known as “Scrap Iron” for his willingness to battle opposing players, he hit .318 for Bisbee while playing for the Yanks.

Born in 1927 in Hall Summit, Louisiana, Courtney picked cotton as a boy. He started his baseball career at age 17, playing for a shipyard team in Orange, Texas. Courtney was playing as an outfielder for an Army team at the National Baseball Congress semipro World Series in Wichita, Kansas when he first caught the attention of Yankee scouts. While stationed in Japan, Courtney continued to play ball but moved behind the plate. He would remain a catcher for the rest of his baseball career.

After he left the Army Courtney signed with the Yankees and was assigned to their new Class C team in Bisbee.

Charlie Metro, Courtney's manager on the '47 Bisbee Yanks team, remembers his catcher as "very feisty...a hardhead...aggressive."

"He'd keep the ball club on its toes," Metro said of Courtney in his autobiography "Safe by a Mile."

Metro recalled the unique – and odiferous – method Courtney used to pad his catcher's mitt.

"Rather than buy a sponge, he would use a couple pieces of cheese to soften the blow there. I don't know what kind of cheese it was, but there were two slabs of it. Boy, when that was over, you could smell it for weeks. The umpire would say, "What the heck do I smell here? What the heck's that?" Of course, I'd say that Courtney messed his pants."

It was during the '47 season that Courtney and the equally scrappy Billy Martin of the Phoenix Senators began their on-field feud that would carry on for years whenever their teams met. It all started when Courtney spiked Martin's manager as he slid into second base, recalled Charlie Metro.

"Billy Martin and Clint Courtney started their feud when Billy played for Phoenix and Clint was my catcher ... One game Clint barreled into the Phoenix second baseman and manager Arky Biggs...he slid into second base and knocked the ball out of the second baseman's hands. While Courtney was lying there, Biggs hauled off and hit him alongside the head and broke his own hand. Courtney jumped up. Next thing, everybody came out. Billy squared off with Courtney. Billy would fight anybody anytime ... Billy would fight at the drop of a hat. Courtney was not quite as aggressive. If he had the advantage, he would. He wasn't a match for Martin. Billy got the best of him all the time. But Billy would take on anybody."

Clarence Dupnik, a Bisbee boy who would later serve more than three decades as sheriff of Pima County, AZ, remembers seeing one of the Courtney-Martin battles and its aftermath:

“Clint Courtney liked to slide on his ass into second base with his feet up in the air, spikes high. I was there at one game when he slid into Billy Martin and spiked him. That started the fight. That was on a Saturday night. I was an altar boy (at St. Patrick’s Church in Bisbee) at the time. On Sunday morning, Billy Martin came to St. Pat’s wearing a big shiner on his eye.”

In 1948 Courtney moved up to the Augusta Class A team in the Sally League. Vision problems affected his hitting, leading to his demotion to the Class B Norfolk Piedmont League that same year. Diagnosed with astigmatism in his right eye, Courtney had to choose between quitting baseball and learning to catch while wearing glasses. He decided to try wearing glasses, taping them to his head so they'd stay on when he ripped off his catcher's mask.

Continued problems with poor eyesight still affected his hitting and Courtney remained with class B teams in 1949. After he became accustomed to wearing eyeglasses, Courtney worked his way up to the AA Beaumont Texas League team in 1950 where he played under Hall of Famer Rogers Hornsby. In 1951 he was sent up to the AAA Kansas City Blues of the American Association. At the very end of the 1951 season, Courtney was called up to the New York Yankees.

As a new member of the Yankees, Courtney found himself as teammate to his archenemy Billy Martin. The bad blood between the two could only lead to one outcome: after playing a single game for the Yankees Courtney was traded to the St. Louis Browns.

"The strange thing is the Yankees owned both ballplayers," Metro said. "Here were two guys in the same organization fighting. Later the Yankees traded Courtney away to the St. Louis Browns, because, as I understand, they had quite a few scraps."

Legendary Negro League pitcher and Browns teammate Leroy "Satchel Paige" described Courtney as "the meanest man I ever met, but I'm glad he's on my side. He's a great catcher, a kid I like to see hitting for me with the winning run on third base and one out."

Courtney's war with Billy Martin continued on in the major leagues when the Browns and Yankees met on the field. In 1952 Courtney spiked Martin, prompting the Yankee infielder to punch the Browns catcher between the eyes. The altercation cost Courtney a \$100 fine and a three-day suspension

The Courtney-Martin feud reached its high point on April 28, 1953, when Courtney spiked Yankee shortstop Phil Rizzuto at second base while trying to stretch out a single. Martin, playing second base, jumped on top of Courtney, starting a general bench-clearing brouhaha. When the dust cleared Courtney and five other players were assessed an American League record (at the time) total \$850 in fines.

When not sparring with Martin, Courtney was piling up an impressive record behind the plate and in the batters box. He was the Sporting News Rookie of the Year in 1951 and also the runner up American League Rookie of the Year.

The first Major League catcher to wear glasses behind the plate, Courtney was a good hitter and solid as a defensive player. During his 11-year major league career he also played for the Baltimore Orioles, the Washington Senators, the Chicago White Sox and the Kansas City Athletics.

The youngest manager

Another member of the '47 Bisbee Yanks who made it to the big leagues – as a manager rather than as a player – was utility outfielder Frank Lucchesi. A native of San Francisco, Lucchesi had broken into pro ball in 1945 at age 18 playing for the AAA Portland Beavers Pacific Coast League team.

"Joe Devine, the Yankee Scout, was responsible for me getting into professional baseball," Lucchesi recalled. "He lived about six blocks from me in San Francisco, and saw me play in high school and at the park on Sunday."

From Portland Lucchesi was sent to the Salem Senators in Oregon where he played the 1946 season.

He started the 1947 season in Victoria, British Columbia, but was sent to Bisbee in mid-year.

"Charlie (Metro) was very good to play for," Lucchesi recalled. "He was always trying to teach the ball players how to improve their skills. A minor league manager, unlike a major league manager, has two jobs – he's trying to win ball games and also develop his players."

Lucchesi was remembered years after by his manager Charlie Metro for helping to keep things light and loose for the ball club.

"Frank drove the team bus," Metro said. "I remember him driving us to El Paso for a series there. It rains a lot in that part of the country in the summer, and the low spots in the road can fill up with water before you know it. So Frank was driving along, singing "Racing with the Moon" like Vaughn Monroe did, with his right leg propped up and somebody says "Hey, Luke - there's water up ahead."

Frank says, "No, that's not water, that's a mirage." Then he drove into the low spot, and it was full of water. The bus stalled and filled up with the water. When we finally made it to El Paso our uniforms and equipment were soaked with muddy water."

Lucchesi also remembered the interrupted bus ride to El Paso.

"Traveling by bus was kind of hard in those days. You'd go one, two, three hundred miles between towns for games. The regular bus driver didn't make it that day. Charlie asked if anybody knew how to drive a bus. I told him I'd never driven one before, but I'd drive it. We were driving along the road to El Paso when we hit the water. We went right through it and the bus stopped. I really pulled a dandy that day!"

On another occasion, recalled Metro, Lucchesi and his teammates arranged for him to do an Al Jolson impersonation on the pitcher's mound during a game delay. Lucchesi, wearing blackface and white gloves, pantomimed to a recording of Jolson singing "Swanee," to the delight of the crowd.

Although he hit .347 in 1947, Lucchesi wasn't able to move up to the highest rungs of the minor league playing ladder, let alone make the jump to the big leagues.

He remembered years later how Yankee scout Joe Devine once told him the closest he'd ever get to center field in Yankee Stadium was to buy a postcard of the ballpark.

"But then he told me he thought some day I'd be a good manager."

Four years later, Devine's prediction came true. After playing on minor league teams in Ventura, CA and Pocatello, ID, Lucchesi was offered a job at age 23 as manager of the Yankees' Medford, Oregon Rogues in the Class C Far West League.

"I was the youngest manager in professional baseball," Lucchesi said.

He spent the next 19 years working his way up the minor league management ladder, running teams in Thomasville, GA, Pine Bluff, Pocatello, ID, Salt Lake City, UT, High Point-Thomasville, Williamsport, PA, Chattanooga, TN, Little Rock, AR, San Diego, CA, Reading, PA, and Eugene, OR. Most of that time was spent in the Phillies organization, before he was selected to manage the Philadelphia parent club in 1972.

Lucchesi would lead three major league teams during his professional career: the Philadelphia Phillies from 1970-72, the Texas Rangers from 1975-77 and the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago Cubs in 1987.

During his 22 years as a minor league manager, Lucchesi won seven pennants and was named Manager of the Year five times. But his greatest honor, he said during an interview in 2008, was being designated manager of the Williamsport, PA Crosscutters All-Century team.

The Yanks lasted only a year in Bisbee and were replaced in 1948 by the Bisbee-Douglas Javelinas, affiliated with the San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League. The Javelinas (a type of peccary or wild pig-like animal found in the Southwestern U.S.) played their home games in both cities that year.

A team with three names

Purchased by A.J. Agajanian, a wealthy California businessman, the team was originally stocked with players from California. One of them was Russ Kusmertz, a young Navy veteran who'd played minor league ball in Aberdeen, South Dakota during the 1946 season and for Globe-Miami in the Arizona-Texas League for part of the 1947 season before moving on to the west coast. In California Kusmertz was recruited to play for Bisbee-Douglas.

"We played for the love of the game and \$200 a month. For a single guy that was good money. Of course, we all wanted to go to the majors, but that wasn't why we played. We loved it."

Conditions were tough for playing ball on some of the fields in the Arizona-Texas League, Kusmertz recalled.

“The ball park in Claypool (used for the Globe team) was the damndest thing you ever saw. You go to take a shower and the plumbing wasn’t working. Someone would flush a toilet and the water would stop.”

Some of the playing fields were just as primitive, said Kusmertz.

“You’d sink into soft dust on the field. Then there’d be nothing but bedrock. A ball would land in front of you, hit a hard spot and go over your head. The next time, the ball would hit a soft spot and just stay there.”

Hot flannel uniforms made playing games in the summer even more unpleasant, said Kusmertz.

“Summer games were really hot. Even at night. We played a game at night in Phoenix, when it was 112 degrees. The sweat would just pour off.”

Not everything about playing in the Arizona-Texas League was tough, according to Kusmertz.

“We stayed in some nice hotels when we were on the road – the Adams Hotel in Phoenix, the Santa Rita in Tucson and the Dominion in Globe.”

“I wouldn’t take a million dollars for the experience, but you couldn’t give me a million to do it again. Your life wasn’t your own. You belonged to the ball club, lock, stock and barrel.”

Nothing seemed to work for the Javelinas. By mid-June Bisbee-Douglas was in the Arizona-Texas cellar with a 16-39 record. A mid-season name change from Javelinas - area newspapers had started referring to the Bisbee team on their sports pages as “the Porkers” - to the Miners - did nothing to revive the fortunes of the floundering ball club. Nor did a change in names from Miners to Copper Kings in mid-June do anything to boost the Bisbee-Douglas club's ability to win games.

There were occasional winning streaks, examples of solid play and even flashes of brilliance from time to time. Outfielder Jim “Boom-Boom” Bynon repeated his 34-game consecutive hitting streak of the previous year. Pitcher Russ Kusmertz, shortstop Al Gonzales and second baseman Tony Villa pulled off a triple play against Tucson – while Bisbee-Douglas lost the game 17-3 to the Cowboys. Big Bob Henry outlasted a quartet of Phoenix pitchers during a hot Phoenix night in early September to pull off an 11-10 win. Still, the successes were too few and the failures too many.

Managed by Mel Steiner and later in the season, Mitch Chetkovich, the Javelinas/Miners finished the season in 6th place with a dismal 47-93 record.

Playing for the 1948 Bisbee-Douglas Javelinas/Miners were pitchers Earl Chapple, Mitch Chetkovich, Gene Clough, Willis Dudley, Bob Henry, James Hughes, Russ Kusmertz, Socorro Mejia, Fred Parker and Carl Shulte.

Only Willis Dudley, who finished the year 11-7, posted a winning record.

At first base for the Javelinas/Miners/Copper Kings was Robert Goldstein. Antonio "Tony" Villa was the regular second baseman, Al Gonzales played most of the season at shortstop and third base duties were handled by Maximino Mora, Joe Catlin and Leonard Kelly.

In left field for Bisbee-Douglas were player-manager Mel Steiner, Frank Marinkovich and Jim Hughes, center field was covered by Gene Clough and Leonard Pill, while right field was the almost-exclusive domain of Jim "Boom-Boom" Bynon (William Pinder stood in for Bynon on rare occasions.)

Behind the plate for Bisbee-Douglas were the veteran Jerry Varrelman, Charlie Luis and Trini Cordova.

In 1949, the Copper Kings continued to play at both Warren Ball Park and Copper King Stadium in Douglas.

It was to be the first year since minor league baseball resumed after the war that the team would be locally-owned. In 1947 the team was owned by the New York Yankees organization and in 1948 it was under the ownership of A.J. Agajanian.

Operating during the 1949 season under the direction of two managers (Elmer "Speck" Williamson and Buck Elliott), the Copper Kings finished in fifth place with a 66-83 record.

Bisbee-Douglas staggered out of the starting gate to a 7-34 record by the time Williamson was replaced by Elliott in late May. An infusion of new players from the Brooklyn Dodgers minor league system accompanying the change in managers sparked the Copper Kings to a strong mid-season rally that raised hopes but ultimately proved to be too little and too late to propel them into the four-team post-season Governor's Cup playoffs.

Players for the 1949 Copper Kings included pitchers Bob Henry, Octavio "Chato" Bello, Trinidad Cordova, Dick Spadey, Manny "Blackie" Morales, Willis "Bill" Dudley, Russ Kusmertz and Jack Dunn.

In the outfield were Gene Clough, Vic Trusky, Billy McDaniel, Irvin Whitt, Hillard Beeson and Ed Rutherford. Working behind the plate were Dick Samek and Cecil Hamilton. Playing on the infield were first basemen Paul Jones and Buck Elliott, second basemen Dominic "Nick" Cannuli and Jacincto Palacios, third baseman "Shanty" Hogan, Donald Johnson and Leonard Kelly and shortstop Fern Paredes.

From 1949 through the 1950 season the Copper Kings played in the Arizona-Texas League. Their 1950 record under Buck Elliott was 69-79. The Bisbee-Douglas team improved their standing from the previous year, moving up a notch to finish fourth in the six-team (Phoenix Senators, Tucson Cowboys, El Paso Texans, Juarez Indios, Globe-Miami Apaches and Bisbee-Douglas) league.

The roster for the 1950 Copper Kings included player-manager Buck Elliott at first base, second baseman Ted Dean, shortstop Fern Peredes, Glenn Garbous at third base, catcher Joe Potts, Richard A. Smith in left field, Jack Dunn in center field, Don Johnson in right field and pitchers Blackie Morales, Bob Henry, Richard Smith, Rogers and Chato Bello.

Gorbous, who hit .315 for Bisbee-Douglas in 1950, advanced through the minor league system to earn a spot in 1955 playing outfield for the Cincinnati Reds. Gorbous was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies early in the season and remained with that Phillies through the 1956 season.

Reputed to have given Copper Kings manager Buck Elliott a sore glove hand with his hard throws, Gorbous holds the world's record for the longest throw of a baseball – 445 feet, ten inches.

From 1949 through 1951 the Copper Kings were connected with the Brooklyn Dodgers organization.

Syd returns to Bisbee

For three years (1951 through 1953) the Copper Kings were managed by Syd Cohen, a former pitcher for the Washington Senators. Cohen had played for the Bisbee Bees in 1928, 1929 and 1930, hitting an impressive .356 in 1930. In the majors Cohen earned the distinction of being the last man to strike out Babe Ruth while the Bambino played for the Yankees – and was also the pitcher who Ruth hit his final home run off as a Yankee in 1934.

A fluent Spanish speaker, Cohen was also known for adopting the persona of “Pablo Garcia” while playing for the Nogales, Sonora Internationals of the Arizona-Texas League in 1931. He became “Pablo” to placate hometown fans who were upset at the predominance of gringos on a supposedly Mexican team. Cohen was the brother of big-leaguer Andy Cohen, who played for the New York Giants.

The merger of the Arizona-Texas League with the Sunset League in 1951 resulted in the creation of the 10-team (El Paso Texans, Juarez Indios, Las Vegas Wranglers, Yuma Panthers, Phoenix Senators, Tucson Cowboys, Mexicali, Tijuana, El Centro and Bisbee-Douglas) Southwest International League. Managed by Cohen, the Copper Kings played in the new league for a single season, fading to an eighth place finish and a 64-80 record.

Pitchers for the 1951 edition of the Copper Kings included manager Syd Cohen, Thomas Cannon, Wilbert “Red” Pender, Manuel “Blackie” Morales, John Dotson, Glenn

McMinn, John Kemp and Charlie Lamberti. Once again Morales was the mainstay for the Copper Kings on the mound, compiling a 24-12 record for the season.

On first base were Carlton Bloom, Van Huppert and Robert "Bosco" Verbica. Cliff Prelow held down second base for the bulk of the season, Fernando Paredes and Lacey Curry shared the job at shortstop, and Ed Serrano handled duties at third.

Behind the plate for the '51 Copper Kings were Cecil Dotson and Vernon Highfield.

Outfielders included Jimmy Cantu in left field; Jack Austin, Edward Rutherford and Don Paulsen in center field and Vernon Highfield, Richard Palmidessi, Van Huppert and Herman Humble in right field.

Bisbee-Douglas returned to the Arizona-Texas League in 1952. Once again under the direction of Syd Cohen, the Copper Kings finished the season with a 60-80 record in fifth place.

Baseball with a Spanish accent

In 1952 the Copper Kings became a wholly locally-owned and independent team for the first time since minor league ball returned to Bisbee in 1947. Lacking a major league affiliate to draw young players from or a higher-level minor league to serve as a source of talent, Cohen, who spoke Spanish like a native-born Mexican, looked south of the border for help. He recruited heavily in Sonora and picked up additional Mexican players who had been cut from other teams in the league.

With more than half of the 1952 team coming from Mexico, communications between the English and Spanish-speaking players was more difficult than usual.

"All of these guys who came from south of the border couldn't speak English," remembers Danny Vucurevich, a 1946 Bisbee High School graduate who played for part of the 1952 season on Cohen's team. "But when it came to playing baseball, they understood the game as well as anybody."

Conditions were primitive for the Copper Kings as they traveled long distances in a touring bus on two-lane highways to away games.

"Syd Cohen didn't travel with the team," Vucurevich recalled. "He had an older Cadillac that he rode in. It was pretty nasty in that bus. We had a five-gallon bucket in the back of the bus to use as a urinal because we didn't stop very often. When it filled up, we'd stop somewhere and empty it out. It was a lousy ride, with exhaust fumes and the bucket in the back. We'd get where we were going, start playing around twilight and finish a night game around 11 p.m. A lot of the time we slept on the bus. The guys from Mexico were used to real rough conditions, so it didn't seem to bother them much, but it didn't go over very well with Ronnie Smith, Jimmy Cantu and me."

Once a game was over players would look for a restaurant for a quick meal, Vucurevich said.

"One the road you were subsidized, not a lot of money, but enough to get something decent, not fancy, but good enough to eat. If you were playing at home, you weren't subsidized at all."

After a quick post-game meal, ballplayers had the choice of sampling the local nightlife or hitting the sack.

"One of the good things about minor league baseball is that you were single and never had trouble finding girls," Vucurevich said. "There wasn't much time after games, usually between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m., but there were always pretty young girls around the ball parks."

The local crowds on road trips were less pleasant to deal with, Vucurevich remembers.

"The fans would get boozed up before the game. They'd always sit on the first base side and get on the ball players."

Players would train themselves to sleep until about 10 a.m., said Vucurevich.

"You had to be back at the ballpark at 2 p.m. Then you started the game around twilight. That was the life of a ball player. Sleep late, work late, go to bed late. All of those towns with minor league teams had movie theaters. It was important for minor league players to have a movie theater to go to."

Playing for the 1952 Copper Kings in left field was Jimmy Cantu. The regular center fielder was Pedro Osorio and right fielders were Elias Osorio, Roy Castillo, Benjamin "Papalero" Valenzuela and Willie Siverand.

Sharing duties at first base for Bisbee-Douglas were Manuel Magallon, Charlie Neal and Nicholas Sunseri. At second were Ed Serrano, John Sanderson, Gutierrez and Danny Vucurevich (Serrano also played at shortstop). Nicholas Cappelli played most of the season as shortstop; Robert "Bosco" Verbica, Benjamin Valenzuela and Houston Chaison shared third base duties.

Working behind the plate were catchers Francisco Bustamonte, Jephtha Holmes, Jim Leavitt and Bachichi Fraide. On the mound for the Copper Kings were Syd Cohen (player-manager), Manuel "Blackie" Morales, Ron Smith, Eduardo Jacobo, Oliverio "Baby" Ortiz, Jesus Santos, George Moeller, Francisco Sosa, Jesus Santos and Arnulfo Manzo.

Smith was one of only two Bisbee-Douglas pitchers to post a winning record in 1952, with 12 victories and nine losses. Jesus Santos notched up four wins and two losses.

Things didn't get any better for the Copper Kings during the 1953 season, which was to be Cohen's last at the helm of the Bisbee-Douglas team. Once again, they finished the year in fifth place, with a 59-80 record.

The 1953 team included pitchers Syd Cohen, Earl Wilson, Donald Terry, Guillermo Galindo, James Hubbard, Ronnie Smith, Arnulfo Manzo, Don Seamans, Lloyd Jones, Arthur Muche and Manuel "Blackie" Morales.

In the outfield were Jimmy Cantu, Dick Steinhauer, Joe Castillo, R. King, Lou Bagdonovich and Bill Eastburn.

Playing first base for the Copper Kings were Manuel Magallon and Chadwick Bradbury. Holding down second base were James Dean and Domingo Sepulveda, Melvin Gemberling worked at shortstop and third base was covered by Benjamin "Papalero" Valenzuela, Joe Castillo, Stephen Hill and Joe Domingez.

Vern Highfield, Guillermo Fraide, German Bay and Earl Wilson worked behind the plate as catchers for Bisbee-Douglas.

During their seven years playing at Warren Ballpark and Copper King Stadium in Douglas, the Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings never enjoyed a winning season.

Catcher turned pitcher

A Copper Kings player who did have winning seasons in the major leagues was Earl Wilson. A 22-game winner for the 1967 Detroit Tigers and starting pitcher in game three for the Tigers against the St. Louis Cardinals during the World Series the following year, Wilson began his professional baseball career as a catcher with the 1953 Copper Kings, but was encouraged to change to pitcher by Bisbee-Douglas player-manager Syd Cohen.

"The only reason they did that was because they didn't have any pitching," Wilson told Steve Buckley years later for "Where Have You Gone? - Catching Up with Bill Rohr, Earl Wilson and Oil Can Boyd."

"Cohen said to me, "Can you pitch?" So I went out and pitched. And I was a pitcher from that point on."

In 1962, while with the Boston Red Sox, Wilson pitched a no-hit, no-run game against the Los Angeles Angels during which he also hit the game-winning home run.

Traded by Boston to Detroit in 1966 shortly after he complained about a racially-charged incident that occurred off the field during spring training in Florida, Wilson would have his best years with the Tigers.

The replacement of Cohen by Edwin Roberts (who was himself replaced later in the season by Ron Smith) did nothing to improve the Copper Kings' fortunes. They finished the 1954 season with a 57-83 record, in 7th place.

On the mound for the 1954 Copper Kings were Trinidad Cordova, Guillermo Fraide, Guillermo Galindo, Ron Hagler, Dee Hatton, Lawrence Karr, Jim Loepp, James Malloch, Charles Matzen, Orville Mohler, Manuel "Blackie" Morales, Earl Mortenson, Charles Nelson, Duane Peters, Catarino Ponce, Terry Porter, Roberto Rodriguez, John Smith, Richard Smith, Ray Steele, Adolfo Villancana and Frank Wilburn.

Arnulfo Manzo led the 1954 Bisbee-Douglas pitching staff with a 17-8 record. Ron Hagler, at 11-9, was the only other pitcher to post a winning record.

Robert Evert and Vernon Highfield caught most of the games for the Copper Kings in '54.

Infielders for Bisbee-Douglas included Manuel Magallon, Stephen Hill, Richard Kraft, Heron McDaniel, Peter McKenzie, Richard Connor and Benjamin "Papalero" Valenzuela.

Outfielders for the Copper Kings in 1954 were Chester Ashman, Robert Butcher, Jim Bynon, Lucio Hague, Delbert Kast and Ed Roberts.

Valenzuela and Kast led the team in hitting, with .388 averages. Close behind was first baseman Magallon, hitting .383.

The Copper Kings pull up stakes

Bisbee-Douglas continued to lurk in or near the cellar in 1955. Managed by Everett Robinson, the Copper Kings finished the year in 6th place with a 63-77 record.

Pitchers for the '55 Bisbee-Douglas team included Ollie Brantley, Antonio Dicochea, Donald Green, Charles Adams, Vernon Adams, Arnulfo Manzo, John Midwood, Gustavo Muniz, Ray Preston, Pete Vucurevich, Robert Willis, Richard DeLozier, Richard Montoya, Raymond Neal, and August Kurtz. Only three Copper Kings pitchers – Dicochea (13-6), Manzo (12-11) and Willis (8-4) had winning records.

For pitcher Pete Vucurevich, who had started his professional career at Warren Ballpark with the Bisbee Yanks back in 1947, the 1955 season would be his last. A painful pitching arm led the navy veteran to hang up his cleats and take up a career with the Phelps Dodge mining corporation.

Declining attendance and gate receipts prompted the Copper Kings front office management to make hard choices. The team played their final games in Bisbee in 1955, becoming the Douglas Copper Kings for the final three years of the team's existence. At

the end of the 1958 season the team folded, marking the end of an era of minor league baseball in Cochise County, Arizona.

The Pumas take the field

For almost half a century Warren Ballpark was primarily used for Bisbee High School baseball and football games.

Although Bisbee's high school team didn't play at Warren Ballpark until the 1950s, the Pumas, coached by Waldo Dicus, had already earned a state title in 1947 by defeating Tempe High School 2-1. Bisbee's varsity baseball team captured its second state championship in 1966, under the direction of Coach Dick Atkinson, by defeating Agua Fria, 2-0.

Declining enrollment following the suspension of active copper mining in the mid-70s led to a decline in fortunes for the Bisbee High School baseball team. In 1992, after years of frustration, the Pumas were re-energized when BHS varsity baseball coach Mike Frosco and assistant coach Butch Hammett led the team to the state playoffs. In 1993 Frosco and Hammett coached Bisbee to a 20-6 record and the 2A high school state championship, beating Florence 8-5.

Frosco retired from his coaching position in 1995 and Hammett, volunteer assistant coach, also left the team. Both returned in 1999 to rebuild a program that had stagnated after their departure. In 2002, Bisbee, 27-6, captured its fourth state championship, beating Thatcher by a score of 13-3. Head coach Frosco was joined by assistant coaches Butch Hammett, Todd Hammett, Pablo Aguirre and Beto Bernal.

The Pumas, still under the direction of Mike Frosco but now with assistant coaches Todd Hammett, Felix Dagnino, Scott Spoonamore and Beto Bernal, took Bisbee to its fifth state championship title in 2008, defeating Bourgade Catholic 9-8.

At the same time that the high school baseball program was coming back to life on the 1990s, the Pumas home field was beginning to show signs of age. Light poles that had been erected decades before were declared unsafe and torn down in 1995. For the next two years, athletic events were limited to daytime play while local citizens, the Kiwanis Club, the Bisbee High School Alumni Association and the school district worked to raise money for a new lighting system. Two years later, new concrete poles with new, bright lights were up and operating. The community had rallied around one of its most beloved landmarks and demonstrated a willingness to invest the money and effort to keep it functioning.

Hope and disappointment

In 2003 Bob Lipp brought professional baseball back to town when he resurrected the long-departed Arizona-Mexico League as an independent minor league. One of the teams would be the Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings. Also in the league were the Charros from

Nogales, AZ, the Mineros of Cananea, Sonora and the Cevceceros of Tecate, Baja California Norte.

The league would play an ambitious schedule of 72 regular season games. The Copper Kings' home games would be split equally between Bisbee's Warren Ballpark and Copper Kings stadium in Douglas.

The team was owned by Mark Hebard, Rick Johnston, John Guy and David Skinner.

A series of imaginative promotions were planned, with one – Ted Williams Popsicle Night – generating enough controversy to be the subject of a story on ESPN.

Under the direction of field manager Butch Hammett, who was assisted by pitching Coach Fred Trujillo, bullpen coach Todd Hammett and special assignment scout Bo Hall, Bisbee-Douglas ended the season with a 9-7 record, tied for first place with Cananea and Tecate.

Playing for the minor league 2003 Copper Kings were pitchers Ron Arostegui, Efren Canchola, D.J. Eberlin, Jason Glosser, Rick Gonzales, Brad Hall, P.J. Lewis, Adam Montarbo, Ray Nagrete, Chris Trevino and Nick Williams.

Behind the plate for Bisbee-Douglas was Matt Johnson. Phil Archer and Paul Rottman shared duties at first base, Peter Meza and Ruben Redondo held down second base, Eric Archer and Lenin Solorzano played third base and Jose Mateo was shortstop.

Outfielders for the 2003 Copper Kings Included Albert Ambriz, Erickson Andrus, Chuck Carr, John Kanche, Adam Spiker and Jason Tibesar.

Carr, who had played several years in the major leagues with the Mets, Cardinals, Marlins, Brewers and Astros, also served as a player-coach for the Copper Kings.

Although the Copper Kings ended the truncated season with a winning record and drew large enthusiastic crowds at games played in Bisbee (but not in Douglas where they played to much smaller crowds at Copper Kings Stadium), the league folded mid-season due to financial difficulties.

The sudden collapse of the league left season ticket holders and others who had enthusiastically supported the return of baseball to Bisbee with a sour taste and strong feelings of mistrust towards team owners and league officials. Once again, Warren Ballpark and Bisbee were without adult baseball.

A new start and new ownership

Three years later Bob Lipp returned to Bisbee to enlist support for a new league and team. Warren Ballpark became the home of the Bisbee Kings, one of seven teams organized for play in the semi-pro Border Baseball Series. Once again under the direction

of field manager Butch Hammett, with the assistance of coaches Todd Hammett and Sergio Davila, Sr., the Kings posted a 15-4 season record in 2006.

Players for the 2006 Kings included pitchers Michael Chavez, Ron Arostegui, Jason Kimzey, Angel Encinas, Ray Novoa, Sergio Moreno, Carl Schaefer and Andy Deford.

Catching for the Kings were Jose Higuera and Robert Leigh.

Infielders for the Kings were Tad Hammett, Louis Bernal (both Bernal and Hammett were members of the 2002 Bisbee High School state championship team,) Rocky Wright, Manny Davila, Mario Barredo, Nick Greer and Diego Ochoa.

Outfielders for Bisbee were Richard Hummel, Bryce Shuller, Sergio Davila, Anthony Morales, Tyler Hardt, Brandon Arreola, Edward Valenzuela and Zach Baldenegro.

2007 saw the Copper Kings reborn as a semi-pro team, under the ownership of Bisbee businessmen Frank Barco and Tom Mosier. Out of the picture was Bob Lipp, who remains a controversial figure in Bisbee baseball circles today.

Playing in the four-team Centennial League, the Copper Kings, managed by Butch Hammett, faced the San Luis Athletics, the Tucson Stars and the Phoenix Diamonjdaxx, compiling an 18-12 season record.

Coaches for the 2007 Copper Kings were Todd Hammett, Sergio Davila, Sr. and Andy Deford.

Pitching for Bisbee were Jesus Hernandez, Sergio Moreno, Jason Kimzey, Michael Chavez, Shane Foreman, Ricky Valdez, Anthony Morales, Jacob Thomas, Carlos Lopez, Tyler Johnston and Diego Ochoa.

Working behind the plate for Bisbee were Thomas Chadwick, Carlos Martinez and Robert Leigh.

Infielders for the Copper Kings were Tad Hammett, Manny Davila, Mario Barredo, Sterling Shuller, Justin Wright, Sergio Davila, Jr. and Nick Greer.

Playing outfield were Tyler Hardt, Zach Baldenegro, Robert Rodriguez, Chance Ruggeroli and Bret Shepard.

The 2008 Copper Kings faced tougher competition when they were invited to join the 5-team Southwest Pacific Baseball League. Bisbee finished the season with a 19-13 record, playing against the Havasu Heat, the Casa Grande Cotton Kings, the Phoenix Garden of Gears and the Tucson Nationals and two non-league teams. The Heat won the National Baseball Congress 2007 World Series Championship in Wichita Kansas, rising to the top of a 42 team field representing the best teams from semi-pro leagues all over the nation.

2008 was a milestone for the Copper Kings when they hosted the First Annual Fourth of July Baseball Tournament at Warren Ballpark and the Cochise College Douglas campus field. The tournament was the first of its type to be held in Bisbee for half a century.

Pitching for the Copper Kings during the 2008 season were Jason Kimzey, Calen Pennington, Tyler Johnston, Jason Gustavson, Jared George, Jacob Thomas and Shane Foreman.

Sergio Davila, Jr. was the designated hitter for Bisbee during most of the season.

Catchers for the Copper Kings were Carlos Martinez, Bret Shepard, Eric Tapia and Robert Leigh.

Infielders included Mario Barredo, Gary McMurtrie, Justin Wright, Cody Bair, Destry Wright, Eric Valenzuela and Luis Pimentel.

Playing in the outfield were Sterling Shuller, Chance Ruggeroli, Ben Seymore and Richard Hummel.

As a team playing in the Pacific Southwest League, the 2009 Copper Kings will have an opportunity to qualify for a berth at the NBC World Series in Wichita.

Among the players who appeared in past National Baseball Congress World Series are Leroy "Satchel" Paige, Ralph Houk, Whitey Herzog, Don Sutton, Billy Martin, Ozzie Smith, Joe Carter, Mark McGwire, Dave Winfield, Tom Seaver, Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens.

By 2008 the old ballpark showed signs of deterioration and neglect. Although the lighting system was state of the art, the wooden fence surrounding the field was rotting, the restrooms were in poor condition and the facility fell far short of meeting the needs of fans with disabilities. That year baseball fans and other county residents interested in preserving one of baseball's least-known historic treasures joined together to form "The Friends of Warren Ballpark." A non-profit organization, The Friends worked to help plan the 2009 centennial celebration and to lay the groundwork for renovating and maintaining the park for future use.

The 2009 season began with an exhibition game between two vintage baseball teams from Phoenix. Named after minor teams from bygone days, the Bisbee Bees and the Phoenix Senators delighted the crowd with their 19th-century uniforms, equipment and style of play.

Still playing in the Pacific Southwest Baseball league, the Copper Kings opened their season in late May, playing the most home games at Warren Ballpark scheduled for a single season since the Bisbee Yankees in 1947.

Once again, the Copper Kings' league rivals included the Tucson Nationals, Casa Grande Cotton Kings and the Mesa Garden of Gears. Out of the league and out of Arizona was the Havasu Heat, who moved to Kansas.

A century has passed since "play ball" was shouted for the first time at Warren Ball Park. Since then, thousands of players, men and boys, have taken the field and a multitude of fans have cheered on the hometown team, win or lose. The players no longer wear baggy flannel uniforms and tiny "pancake" fielding gloves, the fans no longer sport derby hats, straw boaters or fedoras, but the thrill of watching a well-turned double play or a close play at the plate remains just as it was when street cars brought the crowds out to Warren to watch the Old Ball Game.