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The Survival of Professional Baseball in Lynchburg, Virginia, 1950s-1990s

By John Nagy

In the sixties, baseball sat on its ass and said, 'We're the national pastime; come see us.' So what happens? Attendance dwindles and the seventies become a hotbed for NFL football. No one bothered to call attention to baseball. We still had the older generation. They'd come forever. But we'd lost the younger generation, who didn't remember this was the national pastime. They had a lot of other ways to spend their time.

-- El Paso Diablos owner Jim Paul in 1990.[1]

The game of baseball was born in America in the 1840s as a new activity for sporting fraternities and a new way for communities to develop a more defined identity. The details of its birth belong to myth, but its development into the "national pastime" tells an elaborate story about American cultural history and values from the perspective of a sport that grew and developed in a parallel fashion to the rest of the nation. As the nation continued to expand, the game radiated south and west from its origins in New York and New England. Soon towns all over the young nation could watch and play baseball in many forms as the game became less the province of gentlemen's clubs and more a game for the people. Baseball's appeal to spectators and its introduction to small towns and rural areas particularly in the south during the Civil War engaged the game in what would become two of the important cultural themes of the American twentieth century: the commodification of leisure time and the formation of national identity. Lynchburg, Virginia, an important railroad interchange, river port, and affluent economic center, was one such small town that quickly fell in love with baseball, both as a spectator attraction and as a recreational activity.

As the nation moved in to the twentieth century, the game and its organizers found that baseball would have to keep changing with the times in order to survive. The game continued to grow: in its first one hundred years, cheap admission and omnipresence virtually guaranteed the professional game a prominent postition in American leisure. But the social changes and renewed economic prosperity of the 1950s created conditions unlike any that the sport had previously seen. While the effects of these changes were apparent on the sport as a whole, their impact on the minor leagues was devastating. Total annual minor league attendance fell from 41.8 million in 1949 to 9.8 million in 1961 while the number of organizations dropped from an estimated 400 teams in 59 leagues to 147 playing in 22 leagues. Unlike their predecessors, baseball owners, particularly those in smaller markets, were beginning to behave according to a new hypothesis: 'you can't just open up the gates and expect people to show up.'[2]

The story of professional baseball in Lynchburg illustrates ways in which baseball shaped community identity and how baseball managed to maintain its place in a society that threatened to find other amusements. A town that wanted a baseball team always needed two things: financial backing and

solid fan support. Until the consistent presence of professional minor league baseball began in the 1940s, Lynchburg's main obstacle appeared to be financing the team. The popularity of major league exhibition games and the town's competitive semi-professional industry teams in the early part of the century demonstrated Lynchburg's love for the game. Ironically, local ownership began to invest at the time when Americans as a whole, including Lynchburgers, started to turn their attention elsewhere. "The social climate changed," observed Lynchburg sports executive W. Calvin Falwell, who was born in Lynchburg and has been involved with baseball since serving as the president of the Lynchburg Cardinals in the 1940s. Falwell and his associates, like other minor league executives around the country, had to reevaluate their notions of what people looked for when they came to a baseball game, and how those notions had changed. Their answers differed from one minor league town to the next -- all as variations on the theme of constant promotion that would have to appeal to the new interests both of the nation and their respective communities.

Lynchburg sits in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge mountains on the site of John Lynch's eighteenth century James River ferry crossing. Incorporated in 1786, the town quickly became a prominent commercial center, thriving upon tobacco cultivation, production, and shipping. As New Yorkers crafted baseball at mid-century, Lynchburg ranked second only to New Bedford, Massachusetts in per capita wealth. Tobacco money brought the railroad to Lynchburg in the 1830s and by the start of the Civil War, the city was directly connected with the Nashville and Tennessee Railroad, the Norfolk and Petersburg line, and the Orange and Alexandria line to Washington, D.C. After the war, city sporting clubs assembled teams from the area's young men and organized individual baseball games, which included overnight travel and parties hosted by the home team at local hotels, with teams from other Virginia towns like Petersburg and Danville. The tobacco money that made such social outings possible also weathered Lynchburg through Reconstruction, but as the industry shifted south at the end of the century, new industries moved in to take its place. The George D. Witt Shoe Corporation ushered in a wave of shoe manufacturers after its founding in 1879, most notably Craddock-Terry, which bought out the former company in 1910. Ironworks also arrived. The Glamorgan Pipe and Foundry Co. and its younger competitor, the Lynchburg Plow Works, solidified the city as a new center for industrial and agricultural equipment manufacturing.3

Lynchburg is a traditional "good baseball town."4 Professional baseball first came to the stable industrial center in 1886 when *Lynchburg Virginian* sportswriter Harry Smith talked a group of local businessmen into supporting a team to represent the city. The gaps left by the absence of teams in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often filled by well-attended major league exhibition games played against the local team when one existed; as an important stop on the railroads, the city became a traditional game site for major league teams returning home after spring training. The intra-city semi-professional leagues sponsored by local businesses also introduced an entire generation of fans to the game in the 1920s and 30s. The Craddock-Terry Shoe Corporation fielded the powerful Cutters, and many local businesses hired young athletes strictly to secure their skills for the company team.5

Understanding the changing relationship between baseball and the towns that support it requires a closer look at baseball's celebrated model of life, the allegory that attracted Americans to ball parks in the first place. As the sport developed into its present form, spectators found at the ball park "the quintessence of urban leisure: watching others do things."6 Particularly for the fan of the later nineteenth century, the balance between intricate rules and the infinite number of possibilities generated by chance and physical exertion provided an allegory for the precariousness of modern life in a heavily structured urban society. Fans also saw a balance between leisure and pressure, the striking contrast between the grassy diamond in the middle of the city and the tremendous tensions demanded by the drive to win. The game emphasized both individual and team achievement.

Decisions were made by a manager, but success required the skilled performance of every player. Contributions could be minor or heroic, failures could be momentary or disastrous, but each was tangible to the spectators who could sense the game's congruities with their own professional and social lives. Every brilliant play and every blunder was public, and open to as many interpretations as there were witnesses.

Baseball's appeal extended beyond the urban life allegory. The ball park welcomed a level of rowdy behavior that was unacceptable in the workplace and most other arenas of social exchange. In a nation of immigrants, those excluded from attractions by language barriers found entertainment that they could enjoy regardless of ethnic background. Victorian ideals of nature often found their urban expression in the ball park. The game's natural setting drew comparisons to the sculpted woodland retreats created by Frederick Law Olmsted in New York City and Chicago, and the ball park was seen as an island of pastoral virtue in the harrowing modern city. Even the umpire reminded many of the authority of faceless corporate structures during the labor tensions of the 1880s and 90s, as vocal umpire abuse so frequently demonstrated.

The game also set new standards for leisure time and convenience. Games were not strictly weekend events; organized baseball even continued its official observation of Sunday blue laws until 1933. The steady flow of action and its relative brevity conformed to consumer needs, particularly in the midst of weekday urban commercial activity.[7] Sports enthusiasts who no longer had time for a day at the races turned to baseball, where they could witness a complete game and spend only a few hours. Teams began to play in stadiums that, from the street, were often nearly indistinguishable from the warehouses and department stores around them. Newspaper accounts of the games gave them legitimacy as topics of conversation and debate, and sportswriting quickly developed a more colorful style of its own.[8]

The baseball allegory still applies, and is easily understood by anyone who has ever watched and enjoyed a game, for it is this very element, its proponents contend, that made the sport "America's game." Yet declining attendance in the 1950s suggests that whatever appeal or convenience the game may have had, it was not invulnerable to the challenges of a new era marked more by suburban sprawl than urban migration, and by developments in communication and transportation technology. Where the fan of the 1880s could walk or take a streetcar to the stadium, by the 1950s the inner city stadiums were dying out, giving way to structures on the city fringes, which by the sixties were more often surfaced with astroturf than natural grass.[9] The old lures of baseball had faded and front offices would have to ask if allegories that likened baseball to modern urban life even applied to smaller towns like Lynchburg. After two world wars and increasing social violence, fans looking for an allegory of life in sport found stronger symbols in football. By the mid-1960s, public opinion polls showed that most Americans preferred football to any other sport.[10] The minors needed a new draw. Front offices recalled old promotions and pioneered new ones, turning to local businesses to encourage participation. If the allegory could not draw fans on its own, it could be a valuable promotional tool, used as an entertaining lens through which to view the game's past as well as the nation's. They turned to legends and dusted off old photos, kept their prices low, offered freebies and, often in the name of making new history, promised rising stars.

Even without competitive social developments, the different nature of the minor leagues altered important conditions of the allegory. The minors fulfill two purposes. The first is to provide professional baseball to areas "complementing those markets served by Major League Baseball." No club on either level may be located within fifteen miles of another.[11] The second, and arguably more vital purpose (from the perspective of the major league clubs who pay the player's contracts), is to provide a training ground for future major league talent. Thus, pressure to improve and advance eclipses pressure to play for the team. Baseball statistician Bill James found that player performance

peaks on average at age twenty seven. The Carolina League, one of the "low" minor leagues, rarely sees players over the age of 24.[12] The clock starts ticking on a player from the moment he signs his contract; he must treat any slump in performance as a threat to his career. If he does not prove himself at a remarkably early age, his life as a ballplayer will end quickly. Minor league baseball presents a different image of life to its fans, one particularly intensive on youth and potential.

The minor leagues have not always existed in subordination to the major leagues. One year after the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs formed in 1876, several dozen teams existed outside the league that competed both with National League teams and their independent counterparts. Lynchburg's 1886 entry into professional baseball, however, illustrated the comparative disadvantage faced by small towns hoping to support their own leagues and teams. Originally slated to play a 72 game schedule against teams from Richmond, Danville and other Virginia towns, the team disbanded after 25 games when the New State League folded that year. Although the league was a failure, baseball started well in Lynchburg; the team finished in first place, playing a home stand in June during the Lynchburg Centennial Fair. The game returned for three seasons (1894-6) and again disappeared for a full ten years, as the city established its record of patchy minor league participation that lasted until the city appeared to give up entirely after 1917. In the days prior to those when minor league teams developed closer associations with major league organizations, Lynchburg teams like those in most towns bore names that reflected the local landscape and economy: the 1894 "Hill Climbers"; the "Tobacconists" of 1895-6; and the "Shoemakers," who played on and off between 1906 and 1917.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the National League began losing its monopoly, creating an opportunity for the reorganization of minor league competition. By 1903, remnants of ownership and talent from older minor leagues collected in the American League, an entity powerful enough to challenge the National League's priveleged position. Concurrent with the establishment of a second viable major league was the organization of the minors into the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (NAPBL). Each minor league was assigned a class -- A, B, C, or D -- indicating the quality of competition and individual talent.[13] The National Association and the two major leagues met in 1903 and drafted the first Professional Baseball Agreement, the document governing the relationship between the major and minor league systems to the present. The PBA is amended regularly to accomodate new trends in the sport: in 1909, the PBA adopted a Double-A class and later created an additional Triple-A level.[14]

The disappearance of the last Shoemakers team in 1917 cast Lynchburg into its longest period without a minor league club. After only fourteen games, the class 'C' Virginia League disbanded due once again to financial difficulties that, in Lynchburg, discouraged local investment for over 20 years. Yet the face of the national minor league game remained relatively unchanged through the 1920s and 30s, as it survived the Great Depression on cheap ticket prices and the game's ever increasing popularity.[15] The source for discouragement in Lynchburg did not come from a lack of prosperity within the town. Lynchburg's economy remained stable even through the Great Depression, and in May 1930 the city could still report its "lowest outstanding debt in three years."[16] Rather, the difficulty of finding a viable league in which to participate and attract stable fan support fed upon itself. At the close of the 1930s, innovation came in the form of a rapidly expanding "farm system" pioneered by St. Louis Cardinals president Branch Rickey, an arrangement whereby major league clubs bought out local ownership and used their new minor league affiliates to develop young talent. Thus, the farm system preserved the original purposes of minor league competition. The difference was that they now owned player contracts and could buy and sell players to their advantage. Most clubs developed layered systems with teams in each classification. The new system enabled major league teams to shift their players vertically. Baseball's commissioner, Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, joined the system's

detractors who criticized it for depleting the minors of their better talent too quickly and depriving smaller towns of the identity afforded by a more consistent team roster.[17]

While some towns may have suffered a loss of team identity through the new system, Lynchburg simply gained a team. Attracted by the city's brand new stadium, the Washington Senators bought franchise rights in Lynchburg and fielded a team for three years in the class 'B' Piedmont League. The Senators then sold their rights to the McKenna family in 1943. The brief life of Rickey's farm system in Lynchburg and the McKenna's subsequent agreement with the St. Louis Cardinals proved beneficial to the city's future in professional baseball in two important respects. Major league ownership brought and kept a team in town consistently where local ownership had failed. More importantly, the Senators affiliation encouraged the McKennas to invest in a team, and these relationships trained Calvin Falwell and Wallace McKenna, who through the connections they had established with league and club executives on regional and national levels were to form the nucleus of future baseball ventures in the city.

The importance of the new stadium should not be overlooked, either in its role in attracting a farm team, or in its reflection of the city's social and economic conditions and ongoing interest in baseball. After rejecting several city offers to buy their land in the early 1930s, its struggling owners had finally consented to sell the fairgrounds to the city for $30,000 in 1936. The city finished work on the stadium in 1939, and was vital in bringing the Senators and Cardinals into town in the 1940s. The project was part of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration programs; the completion of the ball park and the adjacent football stadium cost the city $189,000 and the federal government $100,000 in WPA appropriations, an indication of Lynchburg's relative financial stability during the Depression. Once the chief location for fairs, and horse races, the fairgrounds had been a traditional community meeting place since the Lynchburg Fair Association opened them in 1894. This remained true after its conversion. Seven thousand fans crowded into the four thousand seat park for its first game in 1940: an exhibition contest between the four-time World Champion New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers.

In the wake of the Second World War, minor league baseball achieved numbers euphoria with leagues, clubs, and attendance peaking in 1949 at a level that will likely never be broken. Lynchburg, a late addition to the Cardinals' gargantuan affiliate system, plunged into the baseball craze with its yearly attendance figures tripling to nearly 130,000 between 1945 and 1948. Then the system collapsed. The premise upon which Rickey's system was based, the construction of a prospect pool that could be used for profit, diminished with the expansion of every major league organization. The trend reversed as quickly as it escalated, at the expense of minor league fans whose towns could not afford to support their own clubs alone. When the McKennas decided to sell the franchise in 1950, Wallace McKenna and W. Calvin Falwell, who had run the Lynchburg front office, determined that they would not allow Lynchburg to lose baseball again. They organized the sale of team stock and acquired a Player Development Contract (PDC) from St. Louis that kept the team in town.[18] As the two men worked to preserve local ownership in Lynchburg, the majors unloaded minor league burdens more rapidly, and a new relationship between the majors and the minors evolved.

The PDC, the key to post-1940s professional baseball relations, is an exclusive agreement between all major league teams and their minor league affiliates, standardized by the Professional Baseball Agreement. PDC updates are unilateral, and ratified by representatives from the NAPBL, the minors' governing body, and the Commissioner of Major League Baseball, who is appointed by major league owners. The PDC clearly defines the financial responsibilities of each party. For example, under the current PDC, approved in 1990, the majors pay player salaries, provide additional meal money, and send their own equipment, physical trainers and supplies, skills coaches, and field manager. In turn, local ownership is responsible for player transportation, promotions, a majority of accomodations

costs, and stadium rent -- the costliest expense of all.[19] Few major league organizations continued to own individual minor league teams, but the PDCs preserved the system's close-working relationships, and name identification between major and minor league affiliates remained standard for many years.

If the St. Louis Cardinals provided local management with its training, the social and economic climate of the 1950s was its proving ground. Within three years, minor league attendance nearly halved from its 1949 zenith. Season attendance at City Stadium dropped from 127,177 in 1949 to 50,958 in 1952, while the national average in the latter year stood at 74,149.[20] Regardless of their training, local executives nationwide contended with "limited markets, high travel costs, inadequate publicity, and rising maintenance costs for parks."[21] Saturated with baseball in the late 1940s, spectators were presented with radically increasing entertainment alternatives to the ball park. Baby boom families concerned with finances reduced recreational spending at the same time that cars and television sets were becoming increasingly available to the middle class. Low gasoline prices made travel a more attractive option. While only twelve percent of American homes had their own televisions in 1950, a study conducted on fans in minor league towns that same year said that 53% preferred to watch a major league night game on television than go to the ballpark. Yet even major league owners were hesitant to televise, fearing that living room attendance would drain profits at the gate, and more importantly, concessions revenues. During the 1960s, the advantages of television became clearer, and the PBA included compensations for minor league teams whose markets were invaded by broadcasts. Nor was television the only technological development to influence social patterns in the 1950s. Night baseball became even less attractive with the arrival of air-conditioning in theaters and other establishments.[22]

Crowds continued to thin at City Stadium as St. Louis failed to equip Lynchburg with a winning team after 1950. Attendance jumped 30,000 to 64,741 during the team's last year in 1955, but the apparent renewal of interest came too late. At that time, terms of the PDC required that the minors pay part of players' salaries. Larger Piedmont League cities like Richmond and Norfolk were promoted to triple-A ball, and in a weak effort to compensate, the league sold franchise rights to local ownership in Wilkes-Barre and Sunbury, Pennsylvania. The loss of the large markets compounded with increased travel costs to remote northern towns destroyed the league.[23] The league, in the fashion of the times, folded in 1955, leaving Lynchburg without a baseball team and dim prospects of picking one up in the future.

Although the 1950s closed another chapter on the city's professional baseball, Lynchburg, buoyed by the prosperity of shoe manufacturers and ironworks that had proved exceptionally fortuitous industries during wartime, continued to grow and remain prosperous through the decade and in to the next. Seven annexations between 1900 and 1964 extended city boundaries well beyond the original downtown area, swallowing up territory to the north and west, while the 1970 census revealed an according population swell of over 100%.[24] Expansion allowed for suburban sprawl, and prepared the town for an influx of young families from Philadelphia and New York on the heels of new business during the fifties. The city's first shopping center, Pittman Plaza, opened in 1959, confirming the arrival of suburbia in Lynchburg and the removal of commercial concentration from the downtown area. The foundries and shoe factories declined in importance in the 1960s, giving way to the arrival of larger national corporations such as nuclear developers Babcock and Wilcox, General Electric Communications Systems Division (later Ericsson/GE), a Coca-Cola bottling plant, and the Limitorque Corp. By 1969, the Chamber of Commerce could report that in the last decade, Greater Lynchburg (including the surrounding counties) had "drawn into its economic complex 30 companies employing over 6,000 people with an annual payroll in excess of $35 million."[25]

When the Lynchburg Cardinals played their last game in the summer of 1955, Calvin Falwell was already a businessman with strong civic, business, and baseball connections. Born in Lynchburg,

Falwell built upon family businesses and personal interests in aviation to create the Falwell Corporation, a collection of separate enterprises that included commercial aviation, well-digging, and freight transportation. His love for the game developed at a time when his hometown had no professional team:

> I never was a ballplayer ... My father was in the bus business. Back in those days, a lot of major league clubs came through here by train and he would move them from the train station to the ball park when they would play a lot of [exhibition] games before the season started. I got to meet a lot of the old timers and the old big-name ballplayers ... That got me interested in it. Then I took in the semi-pro teams in town, and being in the bus business you did a lot of charter work ... So I grew up liking baseball from the businesses [my father] was in.26

Falwell served terms for the Chamber of Commerce as the chairman of the aviation committee and for the city as the president of its volunteer fire department. The city had no Little League baseball; Falwell organized it and served as its first president. Falwell and a group of friends sponsored the creation of football programs at two area high schools.27 The boy who had grown up meeting ballplayers on his fathers bus became a community leader, and the only one with enough leverage at home and in the baseball community to secure Lynchburg a new PDC in 1959.

The problems Falwell faced were similar to those in minor league towns across the country, and he was aware of them. The post-war generation "had somewhere to go," he said. "Back when I was a kid they had nowhere to go but the ball park."28 However, convinced that the loss of the team did not spell the death of baseball in Lynchburg, Falwell immediately began working with major league teams and local minor leagues:

> From '55 up until I got that club here in '62, I attended every board meeting the Carolina League had and every board meeting [for] the Southern League ... I had the opportunity to get to those people. They were good friends of mine and they were looking out for me... I was the only individual [outside the league] allowed to sit in on the board meetings and executive sessions.29

In 1959, Falwell signed an agreement to bring another Washington Senators team to Lynchburg, this time in the class 'D' Appalachian League. It was a disaster from the beginning. The team played before average crowds of three hundred people and finished with the worst record the city had seen since 1912, when the Virginia League dropped the Shoemakers in mid-June. The Senators left at the end of the short season, but not before team morale had dropped so low that players began to fight among themselves. One afternoon after manager Robert Payne was ejected, a fight broke out among the coachless players over playing time. The game continued only when Falwell and a local policeman sat in the dugout to maintain order.30

A second chance for Falwell came in 1962 when racial problems between fans and players forced the Chicago White Sox' double-A affiliate in Savannah, Georgia to move virtually overnight. South Atlantic League officials, aware of Falwell's interest and efforts, sent the team directly to Lynchburg.31 With only six games left in the season, total attendance still doubled 1959 figures as the team took a first place season finish into the league playoffs against Macon (Georgia). The team's success seemed strong enough to have revived fan interest. Attendance climbed to 78,157 in 1964, but when the team's owners took the club to Evansville after a lackluster 1965 season, numbers were falling markedly once again. Still, three seasons of successful, reasonably well-attended baseball boosted everyone's confidence. The White Sox, impressed with the Lynchburg facilities, made it clear that they were interested in replacing the departing double-A club with a single-A team in the

Carolina League. Falwell, reluctant to work alone, knew that he would have to gain the support of the business community in order to support a team successfully. He had little problem.

> I had the feeling that it might be better off to get a broad base of twenty-five people and let them put some money in it, and I picked the leading citizens of the community, and they did it. My thinking back in those days, and I still think I'm right, if I'd have held the thing to myself and I wanted something done with the city council I'd be there before the council by myself. And when I had twenty-five of the leaders of the community there, they'd listen to me better ... I'm real pleased I did that."32

The result was the Lynchburg Baseball Corporation with Falwell as its president and Wallace McKenna as its general manager.33 Since 1966, LBC has worked in Lynchburg as the organizational force ensuring that Lynchburg would "continue to have competent professional baseball of a quality that knowledgeable fans would enjoy."34 Falwell's choices confirmed his wisdom through their dependability and endurance of hard times. Many members of the original Board of Directors -- lawyers, educators, clergymen, journalists, and businessmen known throughout the community -- would remain actively involved for over 25 years. The directors received no profits from the business. All profits instead went back in to operating costs and facility improvements, as in 1969, when LBC assisted the replacement of the old wooden seating with bleachers and new metal box seats.35 When the Corporation incurred losses after the 1974 season, investors increased their contribution, then raised ticket prices the follwing year.36 The community was not unaware of the directors' commitment. Vin Sawyer, Lynchburg's unofficial authority on the history of its professional baseball teams, observed the unusual attitude of the LBC in the context of the times:

> It is different from so many other minor league towns, where somebody owns it, and they're in it for a profit. And they'll run it for a few years, and build it up and sell it for a huge profit. Lynchburg's situation is very different. None of those directors get a dime out of that for themselves. If the club makes any money it puts in right into the grounds, the stadium, the clock, ... the lighting.37

Aside from Falwell's connections and personal resources and the support of local business leadership, the city's greatest asset was City Stadium. The stadium, a few miles from downtown, stands on the mainly industrial east side of Fort Street at Wythe Road, which divides that section from the more residential neighborhoods on the west. The old fairgrounds were the logical choice for the expanding city, whose 1926 annexation included the fairgrounds property.38 Population growth, real estate development and the new social habits created by the automobile confirmed the wisdom of the city's selection, as the space afforded by its removal from downtown congestion allowed sufficient parking in proportion with the stadium's size. The stadium's architect, New York stadium developer Gavin Hadden, had taken full advantage of the area's natural beauty, facing the stands toward the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains. Not built expressly for the purpose of drawing professional baseball, the stadium hosted home football games over the years for the city's high school and home sporting events for Lynchburg College and Liberty Baptist College (now Liberty University). Community events, shows, and fairs continued to take place at the stadium as well.39

The stadium complex houses the Corporation's front office. The team pays a regular rent and must renegotiate its contract on a regular basis. When the Corporation first rented the stadium in 1966, the city charged a straight fee and maintained stadium grounds itself. Gradually, however, the team began to incur more of the expense, choosing to keep its rent low in exchange for picking up security, arranging a trash service, and maintaining the playing field. Relations between the city and the Corporation always remained highly supportive, said the LBC's current general manager, Paul Sunwall, who attributes the friendliness in part to the understanding of a small community and the

city's willingness to make improvements of particular benefit to the team. In Lynchburg, part of the general manager's job is to arrange his team's schedule with local American Legion teams and both city high schools.[40] Such jobs demanded interaction between the LBC front office and the daily life of the city from the moment of the Corporation's arrival. It is the kind of system that ties the team to the community in ways not necessary at the major league level.

The use of the stadium by high schools, colleges, and local youth leagues in addition to the city's one professional sports team demonstrated the city's broad interest in sports. Ironically, this interest has both helped and hurt the LBC. Lynchburg sports enthusiasts, like those in most American communities, were not merely spectators but frequently participants. Outside the stadium, the town has twenty-six baseball diamonds for a school-age population that has hovered around 9,000 since the mid 1960s. Soccer and swimming became increasingly popular sports and families often found themselves too busy attending youth league events to go to the stadium with any regularity. Age was partly responsible for keeping away new families with small children, but where Calvin Falwell "had no where else to go," Lynchburg children had more activities than they could choose from.[41]

Liberty Baptist College and Lynchburg College attracted many area athletes to their programs. With large numbers of local athletes in several sports, spectators seemed just as ready to watch their sons, daughters, and friends perform than the relatively anonymous young men each summer at the ball park. Museum Curator Adam Sher, himself an out-of-towner and a baseball fan, noted that "you are more likely to get a consistent crowd at a high school football game."[42]

Local athletics was not the only option to professional baseball. The city's active interest in athletics, well known to Falwell and the Directors, brought their attention to other factors within the community which they considered when trying to revive interest in a fading city and national tradition.

Community growth and the flux of new residents accompanied a renewal of cultural interests already working within the community. Long the home of one of the nation's oldest continuous community theater groups, the city united its talents in drama, art, and music in the Lynchburg Fine Arts Center, Inc. The Center opened in 1962, the same year that Falwell received the White Sox from Savannah. "Equipped to meet the community's cultural needs" and dedicated "to offering quality programs and opportunities for community involvement," the Center was not a direct competitor for fan attention, but another factor in the community of which the LBC was going to have to prove itself a worthwhile part. The opening of the center marked only the beginning of significant community-based cultural expansion. The center itself grew during the 1960s and 70s and encouraged the foundation of related groups in the 1980s, including the Lynchburg Symphony, the Jefferson Choral Society and the Arts Council of Central Virginia.[43]

Cheap private transportation and the shopping mall also siphoned attention and leisure time in Lynchburg just as they were doing across the country. The automobile allowed the LBC greater mobility in attracting support from the surrounding counties, but it also freed those families to broaden their own horizons. Lynchburg area families with one or more cars in 1970 numbered nearly 30,000, and by 1980 that figure rose over 42,000. As of 1990, almost one in every three families owned three cars or more.[44] If one could see Virginia's scenic Blue Ridge from the bleachers in City Stadium, one could also get in the car for a country drive and a closer look.

While Calvin Falwell and Wallace McKenna labored to organize their Corporation in the winter of 1965-6, the Appalachian Power Company completed its Smith Mountain Hydroelectric Development, a dam project designed to generate much of the region's electrical power that created a recreational resort lake with over 500 miles of waterfront. Smith Mountain Lake quickly became "a focal point of

recreational interest" for fishermen, water skiiers, swimmers, and pleasure boaters," and another alternative to an afternoon at the ball park.45

After Pittman Plaza opened in 1959, shopping centers began appearing throughout the area. In 1994, the Chamber of Commerce listed twenty-two shopping centers inside city limits, with an additional nine in the neighboring counties of Amherst, Bedford, and Appomattox and the nearby towns of Altavista, Madison Heights, and Brookneal.46 Residents could also choose from a growing number of movie screens, and in 1968 the Chamber's annual report noted plans for a new rollerskating rink.47

Corporation management felt the results at the ballpark, and diverted community attention was not the only source of their problems. The entry of the Lynchburg White Sox into the Carolina League in 1966 saddled the league with an awkward eleven teams, creating scheduling problems and forcing mixed-doubleheaders where the home team would play against two visiting clubs on the same afternoon.48 The combination of increased leisure options and the strange league format characterized the Carolina League's version of the minors' universal attendance woes. League attendance dropped 15% to 480,000, while Lynchburg contributed only 34,000.

Then the league's slow downward spiral began. As attendance dwindled, teams began to fold. The major leagues, confronted with their own financial crises including threats of a players strike in the early 1970s, were more interested in cutting minor league fat than establishing new PDCs. By 1972, Carolina League fans not interested in seeing the same five visiting teams over a seventy game home schedule found even less to be excited about. At the close of the 1974 season, the Twins left town as the White Sox had in 1969, more with their eyes on other projects than with any particular disgust for Lynchburg: rare indeed was the town faring significantly better.

Falwell once again capitalized on his connections in the winter of 1974-5 and settled an agreement with the Texas Rangers. Hoping for the best, a local writer welcomed the new deal and reflected upon the nation's energy crisis:

> It is a cool breeze that blows across City Stadium in the summer and for the economy conscious baseball fan, an evening in the stands is one way to enjoy recreation and conserve energy by reducing the demands on the air conditioning.49

Few agreed with him. Falwell had remained true to his purpose; unfortunately, the marriage was a disaster of near-1959 proportions. Still playing the same 70 game home schedule, the league nearly suffered cardiac arrest with only four remaining teams and a combined schedule with the Western Carolina League. Supplementing the Rangers lineup were a few Atlanta Braves prospects. The team finished in fourth place before scant crowds averaging four hundred people per game.

Two short city histories of Lynchburg written in 1975-6 fail to mention professional baseball. The exclusion marked the relative periphery of professional baseball in the larger community consciousness, but it was not the last word.50 When the New York Mets offered to take the place of the departing Rangers, the fortunes of professional baseball in Lynchburg began to change, and the LBC established a firmer foothold in the community. The Corporation, under its various incarnations as the White Sox, the Twins, the Rangers, and, after 1976, the Mets, found that it would have to sell itself. Baseball in small town America had fallen out of the equation that added it to Mom and Apple Pie in the formulation of the American Dream. Falwell's connections, the investments of the board, the work of the Corporation would all come to nothing if Lynchburg residents had no interest in coming to the ball park. Aware that fans often preferred movies and other entertainments to baseball, LBC vice-president Rex Angel observed that

> People's habits change. Everything has a life. Baseball's still here, been here since 1886, people still come ... You won't see the New York Yankees draw capacity every night.51

Baseball's image as the national pastime would no longer sustain the game alone, although it would become an important part of the promotions and souvenir business that lifted the LBC, the Carolina League, and the minor leagues as a whole from the dark ages of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. "We want to be entertained and we want to feel like we're getting something extra," said Tom Webb, an elementary school principal and owner of a local baseball card shop. Baseball on its own does that only for the die-hards. This was the lesson that front offices learned in their quest to rebound during the seventies.

The promotion game was not new, however. In 1892, St. Louis Browns owner Chris Von der Ahe tried to preserve fan interest in his losing ball club by introducing water slides, night horse racing, and a Wild West Show to the Browns' ball park. Many called it "the Coney Island of the West."52 In 1951, Bill Veeck sent a 3 foot 7, 65 pound batter named Eddie Gaedel to the plate wearing a uniform numbered 1/8 in an attempt to promote breathing among his St. Louis Browns' fans. Even the Carolina League of the 1970s found nothing strange in the world of promotion. They simply needed to expand and develop it.

There are essentially three forms of promotions: the free ticket, the gimmick, and the souvenir. In the early seventies, the Carolina League, like most minor leagues, depended on the 'free' ticket or ticket discounts. A typical promotion was the "Guaranteed Victory Night" that rewarded fans with a free ticket to the next night's game in the event of a home team loss. The following description of the Third Annual Lynchburg Chamber of Commerce night on May 31, 1969 demonstrates how many free ticket promotions work:

> The chamber members are urged to purchase the tickets which have been mailed to all member business firms and distribute them to friends and customers so as to provide free admission to the game.53

The LBC had sent books of 100 tickets for $10 to each member. The promotion helped the team and the participating businesses as good public relations for each. The idea took on many forms, with particular business like Babcock and Wilcox and Central Fidelity Bank having nights of their own as exclusive distributors of free or discounted tickets to employees and customers. The Corporation began promoting county nights where businesses in Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell Counties cooperated with a similar arrangement.

Another promotional idea unique to Lynchburg is the All-Faith Night, a creation of the late 1980s intended to attract members of the town's strong faith communities. The nights, typically scheduled for every Monday night home game, gives a one dollar ticket discount to fans of all denominations who present bulletins from weekend services at the gate. "A lot of the people who go to take in ballgames are churchgoers, so we thought it would be a good way to get some new fans to the ballpark," said Calvin Falwell. Another community leader, Calvin's cousin Jerry Falwell, the chancellor of Liberty University famous for his television and radio gospel shows, supports the team and comes to some of the games. "He's got a good baseball program of his own," Calvin Falwell said. "Jerry's a baseball fan. Matter of fact, the Yankees tried to get him to sign up years ago when he was a kid. He's a good ballplayer."54

Gimmicks, like team mascots and souvenir giveaways were less frequent but became more so as the eighties wore on. In 1982, fans could see the San Diego Chicken and attend two separate $1000 "Dash for Cash" nights. When the Chicken had done his act a few times too many, fans shifted interest and attendance to the Phillie Phanatic. In the early eighties, the team also began to print its promtional

schedule in its souvenir programs more regularly, in addition to their regular newspaper ads and posters in the city.

Certain promotions were important enough to receive their own year-long program advertisements. "HELMET NIGHT IS COMING! HELMET NIGHT IS COMING!" screamed one frantic program ad. "Read the newspaper! Watch TV! Keep a sharp ear for public address announcements at the park!"55 In the mid-1980s, annual visits by the Hollywood Starlets, who put on a quick softball game and fashion show, and the infamous barnstorming softball team from the Steele's Sporting Goods Company with its line up of 250-plus lb. sluggers achieved great popularity. Occasionally the team had its own mascot, as in the case of Metslllfracus, the regular act of a Lynchburg College student that lost popularity after he left it in team hands. The Corporation advertised Metslllfracus's and its successors' availability to entertain at private functions, another promotional idea that proved beneficial for both parties.56 These promotions had nothing to do with the team itself or the action on the field. That fans could anticipate these promotions even months in advance indicated that they were designed to make a ball game exciting whether the home team won or not.

One promotion designed to increase contact between players and fans held its greatest reward for the players. Bowen's Jewelers offered a watch to Lynchburg's most popular player starting in 1970 with future major leaguer Steve Braun. Fans could cast ballots clipped from the Bowen's ad in the program throughout the season, with the player receiving the most votes claiming the watch at season's end. In 1994, another jewelry promotion, this time from Henebry's Jewelers, indicated that simpler ideas usually made better promotions. The first one thousand fans at the gate received a diamond in a paper envelope. Two of the diamonds were real; fans needed only to visit Henebry's for an appraisal to discover whether or not they had won. In spite of the incentive, attendance that night fell two hundred fans short of the promotion's 1500-fan goal.57

In 1975, the struggling Corporation received help from a new source when a small trading card company called TCMA began marketing cards for a "handful" of minor league clubs across the United States. The Lynchburg Rangers had a set made, received sets for their own promotional use and a rights fee for the players' pictures. The cards featured plain black-and-white photographs on stock cardboard with little more information than the players' height and weight on the back, where advertising for a local car wash or other business would be found. The idea fizzled the following year, but in 1977, the cards came back. When collecting became more popular in the 1980s, demand for minor league cards grew proportionally, and by 1987, major card companies like Upper Deck and Pro Cards began producing their own sets. Minor league teams have, on average, deals with two separate card companies. Though the minor league card business is not big in Lynchburg outside City Stadium, it is popular in triple-A Virginia cities and has a lucrative national following.58 The baseball card business, aside from its additions to stadium concessions stands, introduced minor league clubs to the new key to their future: the national souvenir market. If baseball fans could not be found in the team's hometown, they could be found across the country, following action in every league through publications like *Baseball America* and *Baseball Weekly*.

The game program itself exemplifies the Corporation's developing consciousness of the community and its own history. Early souvenir programs were little more than ad sheets. A crayon drawing of a #77 Mets Jersey decorated the cover of the 1977 Lynchburg Mets program, trimmed on the bottom by an advertisement for the Aberdeen Barn, a local steakhouse chain. As the programs grew more sophisticated, ads disappeared from the front cover and the drawings were replaced by photographs. A program cost 25 cents in 1977, before prices increased to 50 cents in 1979 and one dollar in 1984. The price reached a major league two dollars in 1994, but by that time comparisons could be made not only between prices but in style and content as well. Center layouts more frequently surrounded space

where fans could keep score, a device designed to promote the sale of multiple programs to the same fan in one season.

Program covers twice featured Mets players interacting with a crowd of children. Businesses hoping for front cover advertising found it incorporated as part of the photograph, appearing on the backs of children's Little League uniforms or painted on the outfield wall in the background. Slogans more elaborate than 1979's "Lynchburg Mets" emerged: the 1985 program invited fans to "Be a part of the Lynchburg Mets: America's Best!" after the Mets won two straight Carolina League championships and appeared to be headed to a third.

For once, an athletic team claiming to be America's best had a legitimate point. Between 1983 and 1986, the Lynchburg Mets compiled the best four season record of any professional baseball team (major and minor leagues) in the country.59 A letter from the mayor asking fans to meet him at the ballpark appeared in every program and the invitation was never idle. Front office staff profiles became increasingly personable and entertaining every year. A photograph of each staff member was consistently included by 1989 and shortly Lynchburg fans could learn about the best and worst parts of their jobs in baseball as well their hobbies and childhood heroes. The number of coaches' profiles, team histories, and articles increased, and one program even featured a short story by local radio broadcaster John Miller.

The LBC also devoted increasing attention to the history of baseball in Lynchburg in its search for ways to root itself in the community. Baseball had not wandered into town with Rickey's Cardinals in 1943 as program articles claimed even in to the early 1980s; it had a local tradition extending back to nineteenth-century teams that even fielded a few local boys on their way to careers in the major leagues. These teams were closely identifiable with the city in a way that the LBC could resurrect in spite of their dependence upon major league affiliates and Player Development Contracts. Team names were only one example. Demonstrating a long tradition of famous major leaguers who had built their careers in Lynchburg was another. Lists of Lynchburg old timers and active major leaguers appeared and were updated in every program. It mattered less that none of the boys on the Lynchburg team were born in the area. To be able to say that one had once seen a major leaguer on his way up was becoming reason enough.

The appeal of the team history to local fans was exemplified by one who made himself Lynchburg's unofficial baseball historian. Vin Sawyer's research was a welcome addition to a baseball business searching for community connections. Sawyer has contributed several articles to the programs, including a detailed statistical list of Lynchburg's professional teams extending back to 1886 that includes team names, league names, managers, attendance totals, final records, and places in the league for each year.

The concept of drawing attention to former major leaguers became gospel when stars from the 1983 and 1984 Carolina League Championship teams led the New York Mets to victory in the 1986 World Series against the Boston Red Sox. The significance of this Series to Lynchburg was unprecedented. Bowen's Jewelry's 1983 Most Popular Player Lenny Dykstra switched off in center field with the veteran Mookie Wilson. Darryl Strawberry, who struggled in Lynchburg in 1981 was among the majors league's leaders in several offensive categories. Dwight Gooden continued to strike out major league hitters at the same pace he had in Lynchburg, earning the nickname "Doctor K" and becoming the youngest person ever to play in an All-Star Game.60 Even Red Sox manager John McNamara had Lynchburg roots, as a Cardinal in 1952. The excitement of watching minor league baseball became refining one's eye for talent and speculation: which of these young athletes would be the next to go on to major-league stardom? Having hosted much of the talent that won the 1986 series, the LBC

provided Lynchburg sports fans a way to feel connected to the rest of the country and a sense of pride that sweetened the Carolina League Championships and elevated them to the national level.

"You are part of a proud tradition," declared the Mets' Official 1986 program. "100 Years of Professional Baseball in Lynchburg, 1886-1986." Thanks to historical research and the program's cover photo of the 1895 Tobacconists, received from the son of former Lynchburg Tobacconist and major league pitcher Al Orth, Lynchburg fans became aware of the tradition in town. In August that year, as the New York Mets swept towards the World Series and the Lynchburg Mets promised another solid finish, the Lynchburg Museum presented an exhibit on baseball in Lynchburg. The August exhibit was part of a larger city bicentennial celebration series on "Sports in Lynchburg," which had featured tennis and baseball along with football, boxing, and golf. Museum administrator Tom Ledford said that the idea was to alert the community that there was some connection to the major leagues. He began making phone calls to look for help in assembling a presentation and found a wealth of material. Vin Sawyer gave Ledford his research, a print of the Tobacconists photo and names of other helpful collectors. Tom Webb and business partner Jim Wright contributed old gloves, bats, cards, and other memorabilia. Paul Sunwall, then assistant general manager for the Lynchburg Mets, sent a Carolina League pennant won a few years earlier. Calvin Falwell gave stories and photographs. Ledford even had to turn down a bat signed by Babe Ruth because it didn't fit the theme of the exhibit.61 Ruth had no past in Lynchburg. He didn't belong.

The exhibit highlighted former native Lynchburgers who had made it to the majors, many of whom had never played professionally in town. The city presented a plaque for Orth to be mounted by the gates at City Stadium, but the plaque went into storage when it was decided that the memorials to the city's baseball fathers were beginning to look too much like Spring Hill Cemetery across Wythe Road. The Craddock-Terry semi-pro teams received attention, as did the more modern incarnations of Lynchburg's professional baseball. The popularity of the baseball exhibit, exceeded perhaps only by the exhibit on tennis (which benefited from visits by Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe), confirmed the position of professional baseball within the community. The Lynchburg Baseball Corporation had passed the test of the 1970s. The chief reasons behind its survival and its new revival within the community reflected a fascination with and appreciation for the past. That appreciation for the past may have been limited to particular sections of the community, but it was strong enough to preserve a tradition.62

The achievements of the Mets' system in 1986 and the community's renewed appreciation for the team as quietly reflected by the museum exhibit, set Lynchburg baseball on an attendance plateau that has stabilized it through the present. Attendance never dropped below 74,000 in spite of two important changes: the Mets' departure after 1987 and the inability of the new Red Sox to finish above fifth place in the eight team league until 1992. Though some felt attendance could rise even higher, the consistency of fan attendance demonstrated that it was not simply winning teams that kept the stands occupied from year to year. Success was part of Lynchburg's past, and publicizing that fact suggested every reason to believe that the new faces could make it part of the future. In 1993 Lynchburg fans broke the 100,000 attendance mark for the first time since the pre-bust years of 1947-9. Attendance was up, and observers in the Corporation and in the stands noticed the formation of a community in miniature. Most of the fans attending games were regulars, people who came to City Stadium twenty or more times per year. The revival of old baseball love affairs was not peculiar to Lynchburg. National minor league attendance also climbed, from 15.2 million in 1979 to 23.1 million ten years later. Lynchburg's totals trailed behind the national averages, but Sunwall and Falwell saw that as no reason to panic. The town's isolation made it an unusually small market, even by class-A standards.63 The Mets' 1987 move to Florida was friendly and in fact had little to do with Lynchburg. The team's new home, Port St. Lucie, had built a new facility and offered the New York club exclusive spring

training rights as long as they provided the city a team for the class- A Florida State League. The Lynchburg club was New York's only option. Calvin Falwell wasted little time in settling with the Boston Red Sox. Hill City fans knew the Red Sox were coming by November of that year.

There seemed to be many factors responsible for the national rebound. The most basic seemed to be market forces. As baseball's apparent obsolescence kept large numbers away from minor league ballparks, owners unable to make a go of it were forced out of the market. Those who could stay in risked the scarcity of PDCs: when one major league team pulled out, there was no guarantee that another could take its place. Only in rare cases would minor league franchises ask their major league affiliates to leave; this became more common as the PDC market loosened in the 1980s.64 In the late 1970s however, minor-league ownership had become so devalued that risktakers like Durham's Miles Wolff could pick up franchise rights cheaply, though it was still considered a bad investment. The result was a contribution to minor-league revival from owners and investors who combined their capital and community presence with a love for the game.

Then there was the Hollywood factor. When baseball's longtime unofficial rival began making baseball films, seats began to fill more rapidly at the ball park. Hollywood produced a flood of successful baseball movies that caught itself up in the game's rising popularity. The most direct hit from the minor league perspective was *Bull Durham* (1988), written and directed by former minor leaguer Ron Shelton. Instantly, the demand for Durham Bulls souvenirs shot upward on a national scale, and other minor league front offices noticed a significant coattail effect for their merchandise. *Bull Durham,* however, was not a root cause. The movie capitalized upon unspoken undercurrents of rising baseball affections and publicized them; the minors in turn capitalized on the free publicity. Other major films followed -- *Eight Men Out* (1988); *Major League* (1989); and *Field of Dreams*(1989) -- and another important lesson was learned. "Who has the PDC with the Durham Bulls?" asked Rex Angel.65 Whether or not one knows the answer, the point was that Durham had developed its own identity. The same national collecting market that sustained minor-league trading cards was waiting for new clubs and new logos to collect. The Rickey system tradition of taking the name of one's major league affiliate was becoming more a part of baseball lore than its reality. General managers were reporting souvenir revenue increases of up to 500% when they chose their own name.66 When the Red Sox left Lynchburg at the end of the 1994 season, the Board of Directors decided that it was time for a name change. In late September they placed ads in the *Lynchburg News and Daily Advance* and the national *Baseball Weekly* asking for suggestions by mail or fax before October 5. A list was compiled and the Board of Directors considered each one, with a prize offered to the fan who suggested the winning name. The process involved a legal investigation of names to safeguard against copyright infringements upon other teams or sporting goods. One name was even rejected because it too closely resembled the name of an old-model bicycle.67 The new name needed not only be representative of the Hill City, but also be distinctly unique.

Meanwhile, in spite of the Corporation's painless acquisition of a PDC with the Pittsburgh Pirates, they remained simply the Lynchburg Baseball Corporation. The affiliation switch had some in town concerned. Major league baseball was in the middle of the longest players' strike in professional sports history, and the Pittsburgh Pirates, playing in a small major league market, faced greater troubles than most. "There's no question this is going to be a great challenge," said acting baseball commissioner Bud Selig. "There's been a great deal of financial damage, and there will continue to be a great deal of financial damage -- to both sides. There are no winners in all of this."68 The strike's effect upon the minors was uncertain. The players' union includes only major league players, so there was no fear of a minor league strike. But a long strike would hurt the ability of weaker teams like Pittsburgh to keep their minor league payrolls. With the 1995 season already contracted, the "low" minors (Rookie and single-A leagues) had at least a full year before cuts could take place. The

Carolina League was not far down the list. On the other hand, the 1981 strike proved quite profitable to many minor league clubs, and even boosted their attendance with disgusted fans who had already grown tired of baseball's greed game.[69] Lynchburg's isolated market, however, deprived it of the success enjoyed by other teams. Attendance at City Stadium actually dropped 14,000 while teams closer to major markets experienced tremendous gains.[70]

Another source of concern was Pittsburgh's eviction from Salem, Virginia, Lynchburg's closest neighbor in the Carolina League. After thirteen straight half-seasons with losing ballclubs, Salem built a new stadium and informed Pittsburgh that they would not renew their PDC, hoping to find a partner who would invest greater resources in the Salem franchise. The Corporation remained unconcerned. "We were just happy to have a relationship with a major league club," remarked Paul Sunwall.[71] But fans were not so sure. Their fear was that if Lynchburg lost its baseball team, it might never get another if markets larger than Lynchburg's swept away major-league teams reworking their systems. Falwell admitted that PDCs were again becoming harder to come by; however, he had built a stable representative of the community to ensure that it will keep its connections with professional baseball. "The first one to call, I'm going to nail to the cross," he had said after the Mets left. "There will be baseball in Lynchburg."[72] The Corporation had seen its share of scrapes before and it has survived.

Groups in the city independent of the Corporation have formed with similar purposes, namely to keep sports active and establish Lynchburg as a regional sports leader. On the back page of the 1990 program, the Corporation saluted the return of the Virginia High School Coaches Association Clinic and All-Star Games for its fifth consecutive season in Lynchburg. The feature recognized the work of Jimmie Bryan who originally brought the event to the city as mayor in 1985. Organizers anticipated 11,000 spectators for the July games, with baseball and football taking place in City Stadium.[73]

Another group, formed entirely on the initiative of avid city baseball fans, focused its energies on the team. In the early 1990s, Tom Webb helped organize a Booster Club for the team that had attracted 75 members by 1994. The Booster Club sponsored several gatherings for the team and introduced players and community on a level that had not previously existed. Club members donated furniture and kitchen utensils to many players, some of whom were young enough to still be in high school. The club helped players find apartments, and individuals often took turns offering to put players up in their homes.[74] While the team supported changed from year to year, the Boosters gave them a place to establish Lynchburg roots, and relationships often formed between players and active fans that lasted long after the players moved on.

Area athletic initiatives extended past the walls of City Stadium to incorporate other sports and related interests across town. When the Chamber of Commerce announced in 1991 its goal that "by the year 2001, our community will be nationally recognized as having the best quality of life for all its citizens," they helped create the Greater Lynchburg Sports Capital of Virginia, Inc., to advocate the community's interests in sports and recreation.[75] The organization today works to bring sports figures in to speak and attract sporting events like the Team One National Showcase, a gathering of the best high school ball players on the east coast. Team One chose Lynchburg as one of three national sites for its 1995 Showcase. "The biggest reason we came here is for the hospitality that we will get," said Team One president Jeff Spelman. "The Sports Capital of Virginia Committee has been instrumental and I really like the central location."[76] Weekly bulletins in the *Lynchburg News and Daily Advance* throughout the fall of 1994 announced the organization of another Sports Capital of Virginia event: a roast of Lynchburg Baseball Corporation president Calvin Falwell.[77]

The city has also hinted about the construction of a massive youth sports complex that would incorporate facilities for every sport actively played in city youth leagues in one central location. The

idea reflects the importance of sports in the city, both as a participatory activity and as a significant element in the city's larger cultural framework.

The placement of professional baseball within that cultural framework was largely motivated by one man. Yet Calvin Falwell had invited others who shared his interests to work with him to preserve what he correctly saw as Lynchburg's customized contribution to a national tradition. On June 28, 1992 city officials, businesses, front office staff, Carolina League executives, and Lynchburg baseball fans gathered to celebrate W. Calvin Falwell Day. The Board of Directors unveiled a plaque to be mounted at the Stadium gates in spite of the reasoning that had kept Al Orth's plaque in storage. Falwell threw out the game's first pitch and took his seat in the stands as he had for most of the home games ever played in City Stadium. "Baseball's local leader" was, after all, just a big baseball fan, perhaps the biggest his hometown had ever seen.78

Lynchburg life, like American life, has always preserved an important place for athletics. Once baseball executives realized that they couldn't coast upon the fumes of "national pastime" folklore, they realized and demonstrated to the country tangible ways that could reinvent the game as part of the larger cultural life of individual communities. Curiously, where drawing a crowd of 1500 was an achievement for an ordinary night, the Corporation could count on standing room only for the Fourth of July game and Westover Dairy's annual fireworks display. Baseball occupied some intangible, connection to American consciousness rooted in nostalgia and history, but the professional game could not survive on one strong turnout per year. No longer seeing baseball as "the only game in town," successful franchise directors increased their interaction with community life and community traditions, and their ties to local identity.79 Baseball would always occupy an important role in the shaping of certain aspects of American life, but unless it could update its reasons for existence, it would live in the museums and die in the ballparks. The survival of professional baseball in Lynchburg is not the story of a radical reawakening or baseball euphoria, but a redefinition of its place in contemporary American society.

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Essays in History

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Notes for "The Survival of Professional Baseball in Lynchburg, Virginia, 1950s-1990s"

1. David Lamb, *Stolen Season*, (New York: Warner Books Inc., 1991) 80.

2. W. Calvin Falwell and C. Rex Angel, president and vice-president of the Lynchburg Baseball Corporation, taped interview, November 2, 1994.

3. Richard B. Loyd and Bernard K. Mundy, *Lynchburg: A Pictorial History*, (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company / Publishers, Inc. 1975) 11-13, 18.

4. Lynchburg Baseball Corporation, *Lynchburg Mets 1979 Souvenir Program*, 13; Vin Sawyer, Lynchburg baseball historian officially registered with the Society of American Baseball Researchers (SABR), taped interview, October 26, 1994; Tom Webb, elementary school principal and co-owner of "The Wright Stuff" baseball card shop, taped interview, October 26, 1994.

5. Tom Ledford, administrator, Lynchburg Museum, phone interview, November 7, 1994.

6. Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth- Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 148.

7. Horse racing was America's most popular sport until it was passed by baseball later in the century.

8. Barth, 150.

9. Neil J. Sullivan, *The Minors: The Struggles and the Triumph of Baseball's Poor Relation from 1876 to the Present*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). Sullivan presents his purist criticisms of astroturf and other 'artificial' developments including the designated hitter, adopted by the minor leagues in the early 1970s, and their effects on minor league baseball on pp. 274-282.

10. Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 213.

11. National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, *Professional Baseball Agreement and National Association Agreement,* Statement of Purpose, (St. Petersburg: National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, 1990) 1, 112; Sullivan, vii.

12. Rader 205; Lamb's account of the Stockton (CA) Ports gives a clear picture of players' anxieties and minor league life, 25-37.

13. Ibid., 42.

14. Ibid., p. 58

15. Ibid., p. 68.

16. Loyd and Mundy, 21.

17. Sullivan, p. 109.

18. C. Falwell, interview. The McKenna family bought the team in 1943.

19. Paul Sunwall, general manager of the Lynchburg Baseball Corporation, interview, October 17, 1994.

20. Rader, 214; Vin Sawyer, "Lynchburg's Professional Baseball Teams," 1994 Lynchburg Red Sox Limited Edition Official Souvenir Program, 62.

21. James Edward Miller, *The Baseball Business: Pursuing Pennants and Profits in Baltimore*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 11.

22. Ibid., 6-11; Sullivan, 235.

23. C. Falwell, interview

24. Loyd and Mundy, 24; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1970*, CENSUS TRACTS, Final Report PHC (1)-121 Lynchburg, Va. SMSA.

25. Loyd and Mundy, 25; Lynchburg Chamber of Commerce, *Lynchburg*, vol. 1, no. 12, Sept. 1969, 3.

26. C. Falwell, interview.

27. Terry Falwell, Board of directors, Lynchburg Baseball Corporation, taped interview, November 2, 1994.

28. C. Falwell, interview.

29. Ibid. The Southern League was still called the South Atlantic League until it changed names in 1964.

30. T. Falwell, interview.

31. C. Falwell, interview; T. Falwell, interview. Terry Falwell recalled the story that when some of the Savannah players heard that they were moving to Lynchburg, they replied that they weren't going anywhere until they learned more about how the town had gotten its name.

32. C. Falwell, interview.

33. After a few years as Lynchburg GM, McKenna accepted the job of Carolina League president and worked to guide the league through the troubled 1970s.

34. *1979 Program*, 13.

35. Lynchburg Baseball Corporation, *1990 Official Souvenir Program*, 50.

36. Ibid.

37. Vin Sawyer interview.

38. *1990 Program*, 25, 31, 58.

39. Paul Sunwall, interview.

40. Ibid.; Lynchburg opened its second high school in 1953.

41. Sawyer, interview.

42. Adam Sher, curator, Lynchburg Museum, interview, October 12, 1994.

43. *Lynchburg Life*, 1994, 17-20.

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60. 'K' is the scorekeeper's symbol for strikeout.

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62. Ibid.

63. Vin Sawyer, "Lynchburg's Professional Baseball Teams"; Rader, 214; Paul Sunwall, interview.

64. Paul Sunwall, interview.

65. Rex Angel, interview. The answer to the question is the Atlanta Braves.

66. Paul Sunwall, interview; Calvin Falwell, interview; Rex Angel, interview; Terry Falwell, interview.

67. Tom Webb, interview.

68. Mark Maske, "Baseball Checks Its Pockets," *Washington Post*, 29 October 1994, natl. ed., sec. A: 1.

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73. *1990 Official Souvenir Program*.

74. Tom Webb, inteview.

75. *Lynchburg Life*, 1994, 63.

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77. *Lynchburg Daily News and Advance*, 18 October 1994, sec. D: 2.

79. Rader, xvi.