

Porter was forefather of Chippewa Falls amateur baseball

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Since its inception in 1867, there have been numerous people who have contributed to the continuation and success of organized baseball in Chippewa Falls.

In the late 1890s and the first few decades of the 1900s there was no one more important than Andy Porter.

Born Israel Larrivee on December 30, 1867, Porter first emerged on the busy Chippewa Falls adult baseball scene in 1887 when he played second base for the Chippewa Falls Browns, a semi-pro team.

There were numerous city teams taking to the diamond at the time including: the South Side, Taylor block nine, the Dudes, the Red Caps, and the Browns. The Browns were the cream of the crop and were the most followed team of the lot.

Following a two-year stint with the Browns, Porter's baseball skills took him on a decade and a half long journey to leagues around the country, including Texas in the Southern League, Joliet of the Illinois-Iowa League, Fond du Lac in the Wisconsin State League, and Kansas City in the Western League.

Although baseball took him all over the country, he always returned to his house on West Grand Street which he called home his entire life.

It was during his stint with Fond du Lac that he achieved a feat that would one day earn him a place in "Ripley's Believe It or Not!"

During a double-header Porter made 29 putouts without an error (19 in the first game, 10 in the second).

Now referred to as "Captain," Porter returned to Chippewa Falls as a player-manager in 1902, and within a few years was fielding one of the top independent teams in the Midwest.

Led by African-American pitcher George Wilson, regarded to be one of the best pitchers in the country, the Chippewa Gotzians were crowned the 1904 Northwestern Champions. The deciding game was a 10-2 defeat of Renville, Minn. at Lexington Park in St. Paul that saw Wilson strikeout 17 batters.

At the same time as putting an elite team on the ballfield, Porter was bringing other recreational activities to the city. He set up a roller rink at the opera house and then Weyenberg's Shoe Factory.

In addition he also brought wrestling and boxing matches (which he would referee) to the Victor Theater.

He also enthusiastically entered floats in the July 4th parade, as well as ran the dance pavilion at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair.

In 1906, Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire shared a Wisconsin State League franchise — the Orphans. Porter, who was instrumental in bringing the team to the Chippewa Valley, was named the manager.

It was a disaster and he was relieved of his duties by the end of April. It was no reflection on Porter's abilities, as the team went through three more managers on their way to a 44-71 record and a last place finish.

Porter didn't let his failure in the Wisconsin State League deter him as he quickly brought a city team back to Chippewa Falls, assembling teams for the Western Wisconsin League and then the Chippewa Valley League, a precursor to the modern day Chippewa River Baseball League.

Over a decade later, Porter was still on the bench for Chippewa Falls, and at age 53 was even occasionally being called into play. The Eau Claire Leader reported, "Andy is bench manager but was forced to go to the outfield and complete the lineup when one of his men failed to report. Andy got a brace of singles and otherwise distinguished himself."

Porter remained involved in local recreational activities until his death on Oct. 21, 1944. Recollections of Porter are many, but one stands out as his contributions to local baseball: "Andy was the spark that helped ignite an interest in baseball in our area, which has no equals."