

AUTHOR BRINGS TO LIFE FAULKNER COUNTY LEAGUE

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By Susan Peterson

Regional author and retired educator Jim Yeager from Russellville is keeping Arkansas' baseball history alive with the publication of his book "Backroads and Ballplayers: A Collection of Stories about Famous (and Not So Famous) Professional Baseball Players from Rural Arkansas."

Even when he was a child, it was the stories of the players that interested him much more than collecting autographs or other memorabilia. Over the years, he conducted interviews, did research in small-town libraries, and even visited cemeteries to chronicle the tales of players with Arkansas roots. He published some of these stories locally, and when he showed them to a cousin who was in the publishing business, she told him, "This is a book – just write 40 more stories." And so he did.



Jim made the decision to self-publish his work but was advised to hire someone to assist him since the process is not as easy as it may seem. He was glad he did and is proud of the professional quality of the 300+ pages in the end product.

Jim notes that baseball in its early days (the first half of the 20th century) was a great equalizer. Education and money were not important. A ball, a bat, an open field, and players were all that were needed. Because other forms of entertainment were not readily available, players were abundant. Today, vestiges of ball fields, with crumbling back stops and dugouts, can still be seen in many small towns around the state. It was a different way of life.

Few people know that Arkansas has such a fascinating baseball history. Of interest to many in the area would be the chapter on Dr. Earl T. Williams, otherwise known as “Dr. Baseball,” who coached a team in Greenbrier and helped establish a semi-pro team called the Faulkner County League. In 1938, he started a baseball summer school in Greenbrier, offering many young men an immersive baseball experience in a rural setting. The school was a success and ran until 1952.

Arkansas-born brothers Dizzy Dean and the lesser known Paul “Daffy” Dean are also featured. In 1934, Daffy impetuously got married in Russellville to Dorothy Sandusky, a Miss Russellville, and the news made national headlines.

The story of Glenna Sue Kidd of Choctaw, who played in the All American Girls Baseball League, is one of the many other players in the book.

“Backroads and Ballplayers” received high praise from an online reviewer for its ability to interest even non-sports fans. “The personal stories share the limelight with the stats and provide amazing insights into the lives of players of the past. Even though the focus of this book is on Arkansans who made the Majors, I believe anyone would enjoy this book, and Arkansas fans will especially love it.”

Jim is more than a bit surprised by the book’s success, the sales of which he estimates to be in the thousands since its publication in 2018. He enjoys the opportunity to share information about baseball and often speaks to groups of historians and sports enthusiasts alike. He has appeared on local radio and TV shows.

After graduating from the University of Central Arkansas, Jim began his career in education as a teacher and coach. Later in his career, he was a counselor and an instructional technology specialist for various school districts and the Arkansas Department of Education.

Today, Jim refers to himself as a baseball historian. He is a member of the Society for American Baseball Research and the Robinson-Kell Arkansas Chapter of SABR. He relishes the friendships he has made there and enjoys the company of other like-minded enthusiasts, many of whom are serious researchers and statisticians. Several

of these friends contributed chapters in his book. He believes their work has made an impact on the game.

Jim continues to write about baseball and works from his home in a room that “is a combination of an old man’s office and a little boy’s room.” He credits his wife, Susan, for assisting in editing and says she is his biggest critic and most valuable supporter.

His next book will be an extension of a column that he writes for Only In Arkansas, an online magazine sponsored by First Security Bank. He hopes to publish the book by late 2022. It will also tell unique and heartbreaking stories of Arkansas baseball players. “I want to humanize the players, both on and off the field,” he said.

“Backroads and Ballplayers” and autographed copies are available at backroadsballplayers.com.

Susan Peterson

Susan Peterson holds a PhD in education and taught at the University of Central Arkansas and Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. She retired in 2004 and now spends her time doing artwork (painting and pottery).