

Strike Out: A Pirates Pitcher at the Battle of Homestead

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Extensive study has been done on the circumstances and events surrounding the 1892 Homestead Steel Strike. Ten men were killed and dozens wounded when agents of the Pinkerton Detective Agency hired by Henry Clay Frick attempted to land two barges on the grounds of the Homestead Steel Works to protect it from striking workers that were locked out of the mill. In the aftermath over 160 people were charged with crimes and Frick was the target of an assassination attempt by Alexander Berkman, an anarchist unaffiliated with the initial struggle.

Amid the chaos on the banks of the Monongahela River and one of the many arrested in the wake of the labor dispute was an unlikely man: Pittsburgh Baseball Club pitcher Mark Baldwin.¹ A Homestead native, Baldwin was notorious for his fastball, wild pitches, and a penchant for getting into trouble, but his presence in the steel mill during one of the bloodiest conflicts of the American Labor Movement was a far cry from his usual alcohol-fueled antics. Something stronger than drink, namely a sense of community and solidarity, likely motivated Baldwin to trespass onto the grounds of Andrew Carnegie's property, thus providing one of the more bizarre storylines affiliated with the newly monikered "Pirates" franchise.

Conflict in the Mill

The Homestead Steel Works was two years old when Carnegie and his associates purchased the plant in 1883 with the intention of increasing their company's production. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had organized the mill prior to its acquisition by Carnegie, Phipps and Co. and, thanks to an aggressive strike in 1889, managed to maintain its presence in the labor force with a new contract that was set to expire on July 1, 1892.

Carnegie had previously hired Frick, owner of Frick Coke Company, to run his steel operations. Frick was notoriously anti-union and his sights were focused on breaking the Amalgamated Association at Homestead because they were perceived as interfering with production and profits. Advances in technology meant that less skilled men were required to produce steel, and so without the constraints of a union contract the company would be free to eliminate unnecessary skilled positions and decrease the remaining workers' wages based on a new production based rate system.

It was determined that Frick would use the charade of contract negotiations with the Amalgamated Association to break the union. After listening to their demands for a wage increase, justified by a booming steel market, Frick countered with a significant wage decrease and an ultimatum that he would only negotiate for one month before the company ceased recognizing the organization. The company proclaimed the craft union, which represented about 800 of the plant's 3,800 workers, elitist and explained that the workforce as a whole would benefit from their proposal as they did at their mills in Braddock and Duquesne.

As negotiations wore on, the company increased the mill's production in anticipation of a strike. When no agreement was reached by the last week of June, Frick began to systematically lock out his employees so that by June 29 the entire mill was shut down. A tall picket fence topped with barbed wire ensured that no disgruntled workers would enter the grounds. For their part, the local Amalgamated Association men were set to keep the mill closed and set up picket lines and vigilant units to keep watch for any potential attempt to reopen the mill with scab labor.

With the steelworks surrounded by the company's fence and strikers, Frick devised a plan to introduce new workers onto the grounds via the Monongahela River. He had reached out to the Pinkerton Detective Agency of Chicago and made arrangements for 300 of their men to arrive by rail at the property of Captain William Rodgers in Bellevue. From there they would board specially modified barges that would deliver them to the dormant mill in Homestead so that they could secure the factory for production.

The Pinkertons arrived on the evening of July 5 and slowly made their way toward the Homestead Works. While on the barges the agents were deputized by a representative of the Allegheny County Sheriff and issued a uniform and Winchester rifle. Under the cover of darkness the barges floated down the Monongahela, but unbeknownst to them a watchman on the Smithfield Street Bridge in Pittsburgh was aware of their presence and he sent a telegram ahead warning the strikers. When Captain Rodger's tug *Little Bill* pushed the barges aground within the enclosed mill at about 4am the Pinkertons were surprised to see an angry mob approaching the river bank.

As agents attempted to disembark the barges a shot was fired, from which side has never been

definitively determined, and chaos erupted. In the ensuing battle three Pinkerton agents and seven workers were killed. Captain Rodgers ferried wounded men to a train station on the other side of the river and, upon his return to retrieve the barges, another firefight began. After outbursts throughout much of the hot July day, the Pinkertons were able to negotiate surrender around 5pm and they were escorted through a gauntlet of angry townspeople to a makeshift jail in the Homestead Opera House. Their evacuation from Homestead was negotiated around midnight and the agents were permitted to leave for Pittsburg by train.²

“Baldwin Bagged”

As expected, such a display of violence resulted in a series of investigations and criminal charges. Pennsylvania Governor Robert E. Pattison relented to the numerous pleas from the County Sheriff and sent the state militia to restore order in Homestead. The state assembly conducted an investigation as to why an outside force, the Pinkertons, was hired to do the work of local law enforcement.³ Meanwhile, the county coroner began the arduous task of identifying and determining the cause of death of the ten men fatally wounded in the conflict, taking witness testimony and organizing a jury to issue a verdict that could lead to murder charges.

It is in the coroner’s records that the name “M.E. Baldwin” first appears in conjunction with the Homestead Steel Strike. During the coroner’s inquest into the deaths associated with the clash Baldwin’s name appeared on two undated witness lists with his occupation listed as “Base Ball Pitcher.”⁴ A *Pittsburg Press* article of August 2, 1892, stated that Baldwin was to testify for an inquest that day, but he was unable to appear as the team was playing in Chicago at the time.⁵ When the Pittsburg club arrived home on August 5 the coroner’s jury had already delivered their verdict, and so Baldwin was probably never made to testify.

During the next few weeks, though, it is likely that rumors came to light implicating Baldwin in the events at Homestead. Although he started more games than any Pittsburg pitcher during the 1892 season, he did not throw between August 25 and September 7. A note in the August 25 *Pittsburg Press* proclaimed that Baldwin was released unconditionally by the club, attributing it to his instability during games and quick temper; however, it is perhaps not coincidental that his name made headlines soon after his dismissal from the Pirates, exposing another potential reason for his suspension.⁶

On September 1 Baldwin appeared at the office of Alderman McMasters in Homestead in response to a warrant out for his arrest. The *Pittsburg Dispatch* explained that “he is charged with having incited and participated in the riot at Homestead,” the official charge being aggravated riot as handed down by Carnegie Steel Secretary F.T.F. Lovejoy. The company’s lawyers claimed to have witnesses that saw Baldwin in the mill yard participating in the conflict.⁷ It would have been hard for him to hide because, as a native of Homestead and former Chicago White Stockings player, he was perhaps the only person present that day who would have been known by most of the participants.

The paper also mentioned that there were rumors he “furnished his fellow citizens with two Winchester rifles on the memorable morning of the battle” which then led to his arrest.⁸ This rumor likely originated from the fact that Baldwin’s home was searched a day or two beforehand during an investigation for missing Pinkerton guns. During the search, agents found two Winchester rifles which he explained were his personal property that he used for hunting during excursions with his brother and team trips out west.⁹ Rumor or not, the *Pittsburg Post* noted that the arrest of the controversial pitcher “created a great deal of commotion, and it was discussed on almost every street corner.”¹⁰

Baldwin’s father, Frank, of the Homestead real estate firm Baldwin & Wilson and a director of the Pittsburg Baseball Club arrived shortly after his arrest and posted the \$2,000 for Mark’s release.¹¹ The pitcher never denied being on mill property during the riot, saying “he was there merely as a spectator, and when the surrender [of the Pinkertons] occurred went to his home in Homestead and in no way aided or abetted the attack on the defenseless prisoners.”¹² When approached by a *Pittsburg Press* reporter, Frank said that “Mark did not go to the mill until about noon and I am sure that he had nothing to do with the rioting.”¹³

With the majority of the firefight occurring before noon, it would seem that Baldwin was not present during the deadliest portion of the struggle; however, his presence on the scene that day is still startling considering that he was to pitch in a game that very afternoon. The sports page of the July 7 editions of several local newspapers document his spectacular first six innings, allowing only one run, followed by an eight-run seventh inning that handed the game to the Washington Senators.¹⁴ Knowing his whereabouts before the game, one could guess that fatigue had set in after a busy day of rioting, but the *Dispatch* noted that “every now and again just when victory seems certain for Mark’s side when he is in the box he takes a prominent part in a chapter of blunders and shortcomings.”¹⁵ It would seem that

Baldwin was not so much tired as he was distracted by the events unfolding blocks away from his home.

With his arrest and subsequent release behind him, Baldwin was able to rejoin the Pittsburg club. When he returned to the box on September 7, the *Press* noted that “Baldy” would not remove his cap to acknowledge the fans cheering his return.¹⁶ He was clearly embittered over the ordeal he had just endured, but his association with the strike had not yet come to an end. After defeating the National League leading Spiders in Cleveland, the *Press* quipped that “Baldwin may now come home and receive the congratulations of his friends.”¹⁷ Instead, he was greeted with headlines listing him as a defendant along with 166 other men after a grand jury issued a true bill for aggravated riot. He was arrested once again after pitching on September 23, but was never brought to trial.¹⁸

Despite all the distractions Baldwin finished the 1892 season with a record of 26 wins and 27 losses, posting an earned run average of 3.47 in just over 440 innings pitched. He was the workhorse for the Pirates for two years, but his off-field troubles likely led to his release after just one game to start the 1893 season. He was picked up by the New York Giants where he would finish his last season in the major leagues.¹⁹

A Union Man with a Wild Side

The events surrounding the Homestead Strike were not Baldwin’s first brushes with the law or labor activism, nor would they be his last. His career in baseball led him into the perils of excess that still haunt professional athletes today, but it also led to his involvement in outlandish situations that could only occur during the formative years of professional baseball in Victorian America. As an employee during a period of heightened labor sensitivities, he was also aware of the rising importance of trade unions in protecting the interests of workers who were being exploited by those profiting from their efforts.

Baldwin officially broke into the National League with the White Stockings in 1887 after a failed attempt to add him to their roster for game five of the 1886 championship series against Chris von der Ahe’s St. Louis nine of the American Association.²⁰ As a new player in the National League, it is likely that he was encouraged by his teammates to join the Brotherhood of Professional Baseball Players. Founded by John Montgomery Ward in 1885, the Brotherhood was the first sports labor union and represented virtually all of the National League’s star players.²¹

At the conclusion of the 1888 season White Stockings owner Albert Spalding organized a world tour to promote the game of baseball and his line of equipment. The team, including Baldwin as its primary pitcher, played exhibition matches on five continents against a team of National League all-stars. One of his opponents was Brotherhood president Ward who, like Baldwin, was a native Pennsylvanian and former student at Pennsylvania State University. During their trip around the globe they would have had plenty of time to discuss labor issues facing ball players.²²

With Baldwin's reputation as a wild pitcher already established, Spalding's tour provided the first glimpse at what he could do off the diamond. Once the tour left the country Baldwin was quickly caught up in the shenanigans of his fellow players and he "partook in much of the trip's alcohol-fed hijinks. At one point he was attacked by a monkey and bitten in the leg after parading it around the ship and feeding it pretzels and beer." He expended all of his money before the end of the journey and borrowed extensively from Spalding, causing the owner to sue Baldwin in 1897 to recover the money. As a result of his behavior on the trip Baldwin was released by the White Stockings upon their return to Chicago in 1889.²³

The American Association team in Columbus picked up Baldwin for the 1889 season. While there, he still managed to tip his cap to the struggle between the National League owners and their players by stating that he preferred the American Association because "the salaries and treatment given the players are greater and better."²⁴ On November 4, 1889, the Brotherhood issued a manifesto that announced their desire to play for new ownership the following season and Baldwin and many other Brotherhood members jumped their teams to form their own Players League. The new league was to be run as a co-operative where players and backers both governed the league and shared equally in its profits.²⁵ On November 21, Baldwin signed with Charles Addison's Chicago Pirates, but he also played a significant role in developing the young league off the field.²⁶

Once signed by the Chicago Pirates, Baldwin set out as a recruiter to gather more men for the Players League. On November 25 he traveled to St. Louis and successfully swayed the Browns' Yank Robinson and Joe Quinn of the Boston Beaneaters to leave their teams. During a December barnstorming tour Baldwin also persuaded Tip O'Neill and Charles Comiskey to leave the Browns and play with him in Chicago.²⁷ It is clear that Baldwin was a persuasive member of the Brotherhood who had his finger on

the pulse of the labor issues of the day, much to the ire of National League owners, and particularly von der Ahe of the St. Louis American Association club which was depleted singlehandedly by his efforts.

Baldwin thrived in the Players League, posting a career season and leading the league in games played, complete games, innings pitched and strikeouts.²⁸ The league fielded superior talent, but the costs of supporting eight brand new teams and competing for attendance took its toll. The Players League was no match for the wealth backing the established National League and it officially folded by January 1891. Players' contracts reverted back to their 1889 teams based on baseball's reserve clause and so Baldwin was once again with the American Association's Columbus nine.²⁹

Columbus initially told Baldwin that they no longer required his services, but amid rumors that his rights were traded to Boston they quickly resigned him to their club.³⁰ During this same period the American Association withdrew from the National Agreement preventing teams from stealing players in other leagues, thus leading to Baldwin's availability to sign with a National League team for the right price.³¹ That offer came from his hometown team and he signed with the Pittsburg Baseball Club on March 1, 1891.

By March 3 Baldwin was en route to St. Louis on another recruiting trip, this time to secure the services of his Players League teammate Silver King and Jack Connor. After losing three players to his recruitment efforts in 1889, von der Ahe was ready for Baldwin's visit. Claiming that King was under contract with his Browns, von der Ahe had Baldwin arrested for conspiracy on March 5. Upon his release Baldwin sued von der Ahe for false imprisonment which led to a seven year court battle, von der Ahe's alleged kidnapping and his arrest at Exposition Park. By the start of the 1891 season King had signed with Pittsburg and the club came to be known as the Pirates after acquiring players from several other teams under dubious circumstances. In 1898, after a series of court battles, Baldwin was eventually awarded \$3,000 from the von der Ahe suit.³²

The entire Pittsburg club was under scrutiny during the 1891 season for raiding American Association teams and benefitting from the fall of the Players League, but Baldwin remained in the spotlight during the 1892 season for his participation in the Homestead Strike. He was dealt to the New York Giants in 1893 for his last season in the major leagues, but Baldwin's reputation always managed to catch up with him. While playing in the minors in 1895, the *Milwaukee Journal* noted that he was "unable to curb his

appetite" for whiskey.³³

Baldwin also never strayed too far from baseball's labor issues. In 1896 his father purchased a semi-professional team in Auburn that Mark managed and ran with a few local players. The team was designed to be a co-operative much like the Players League, but as money tightened he was forced to revert to the typical salary system and the team went bankrupt by the end of the season. He was also arrested after his team played a game on a Sunday, violating Auburn's Blue Laws.³⁴ With his playing career at an end, Baldwin could confidently say that he did his part in advocating for players' rights during the profession's foundational period - and he had fun doing it.

An Upstanding Member of the Community

There was more to Baldwin's life than baseball, though. He was born in 1863 on Pittsburgh's South Side and moved with his parents to Homestead in 1872.³⁵ Both areas were highly industrialized, exposing Baldwin to the plight of workers all of his life. This includes the experiences of his father, who was a nailer before entering the world of real estate and insurance sales.³⁶ These conditions also led to a tight knit community of workers' families within the small town. After leaving western Pennsylvania to pursue a career in baseball, Baldwin's sense of community pride and labor solidarity which developed in Homestead still served as a lifelong influence, most notably surfacing during the July 1892 steel strike.

Although he played ball in Chicago and Columbus at the start of his career, Baldwin continued to return to Homestead during the offseason and maintained ties within the community. He trained at local gymnasiums and after the 1891 season he played on the town's football team.³⁷ Baldwin also stayed apprised of local talent, directing White Stockings manager Cap Anson to sign John K. Tener in 1888. In addition to being an asset to the ball club, Tener went on to serve as the Brotherhood's Secretary and in 1913, while serving as governor of Pennsylvania, he became the president of the National League.³⁸

While the Amalgamated Association was establishing itself in Carnegie's Homestead Steel Works, Baldwin was busy organizing professional baseball players for the Brotherhood and the Players League. Even after the league folded and he joined the Pittsburg Baseball Club, his involvement in the Brotherhood and the relationships he developed within the union remained. With the uncertainties of the Battle of Homestead still fresh in everyone's mind, Brotherhood President Ward and his Brooklyn team came to town for a short series against the Pirates. After arriving from Cleveland on July 9, Ward

and his Brotherhood teammates visited Homestead in an act of solidarity with the strikers.³⁹ Because the citizens were suspicious of any new arrivals to Homestead after the incident with the Pinkertons, they would have required an escort or someone to vouch for their intentions.

Baldwin, who played with Ward on Spalding's 1888 World Tour and served as a Brotherhood recruiter for his Players League, is a likely candidate. As the *Pittsburg Dispatch* noted after he was charged with aggravated riot, Baldwin "knows almost every man, woman and child in the borough," and so an endorsement from him would carry weight within the skittish community.⁴⁰ Also, despite his wild reputation in baseball, the *Commercial Gazette* pointed out that "he has resided at Homestead since childhood and always bore a reputation for being peaceful and law-abiding."⁴¹ It seems that his famous temper was held in check until provoked on the field or elsewhere, such as the Pinkerton threat to Homestead.

At the conclusion of his baseball career Baldwin chose to spend the rest of his life serving the local community. He became a general physician and surgeon in April 1899 and opened a practice in Homestead.⁴² By 1907 he also maintained an office in downtown Pittsburg's Keenan Building.⁴³ He practiced medicine in the area until his death on November 10, 1929; the culmination of a life dedicated to baseball, labor and community service.

Baldwin's presence at the Homestead Steel Works was likely more active than that of the spectator he claimed to be. Given his reputation for being ill-tempered and his close ties to the community, it is easy to imagine him participating in the riot in some way as the Pinkertons threatened his friends and family. His role in bringing players into baseball's first trade union also indicates that Baldwin was sensitive to labor issues and an affront to striking workers in his hometown was sure to ignite his short fuse. Despite his status as a famous baseball player, Baldwin succumbed to the same mob mentality that ensnared many of the townspeople during the conflict, but his lack of anonymity forced him to endure ramifications in the headlines and on the diamond.

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¹ Pittsburgh's "-h" was dropped by the United States Board on Geographic Names in 1891 and was reinstated in 1911 due to the city's resistance to the spelling change. The author has attempted to use the spelling contemporary to the events described throughout the article.

² There are many books available concerning the Homestead Steel Strike. The author relied on Arthur Burgoyne's *The Homestead Steel Strike of 1892* and the summary found on the University of Pittsburgh's Archives Service Center's *Resources on the 1892 Homestead Steel Strike @ Pitt Archives: Strike Information*, <http://pitt.libguides.com/homestead>

³ *ibid*

⁴ Witness Lists, Box 16A, Allegheny County, Pa. Coroner's Office Records, 1884-1976, AIS.1982.07, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh

⁵ *Pittsburg Press*, August 2, 1892, Google News Archive

⁶ *Ibid.*, August 25, 1892, Google News Archive

⁷ *Pittsburg Dispatch*, "Caught a Pitcher," September 2, 1892, Library of Congress Chronicling America newspaper database.

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Commercial Gazette*, "Baldwin Bagged," September 2, 1892, Carnegie Steel Scrapbook, Box 20, Helen Clay Frick Foundation Archives, 1892-1987, AIS.2002.06, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh

¹⁰ *Pittsburg Post*, "Baldwin To Be Arrested," September 2, 1892, Carnegie Steel Scrapbook, Box 20, Helen Clay Frick Foundation Archives, 1892-1987, AIS.2002.06, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh

¹¹ *Pittsburg Dispatch*, "Caught a Pitcher," September 2, 1892

¹² *Commercial Gazette*, "Baldwin Bagged," September 2, 1892

¹³ *Pittsburg Press*, September 2, 1892, Google News Archive

¹⁴ The most detailed account of the game comes from the *Pittsburg Dispatch*, July 7, 1892, Library of Congress Chronicling America newspaper database.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Pittsburg Press*, September 7, 1892, Google News Archive

¹⁷ *Ibid*, September 21, 1892, Google News Archive

¹⁸ *Pittsburg Dispatch*, September 22 and 24, 1892, Library of Congress Chronicling America newspaper database.

¹⁹ Baseball-Reference.com, Mark Baldwin Player Page, <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/baldwma01.shtml>

²⁰ Brian McKenna, "Mark Baldwin," in the Society for American Baseball Research Biography Project, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/41f65388>

²¹ Craig Britcher, "We Are Now Pirates: The 1890 Burghers and Alleghenys," *Western Pennsylvania History*, vol. 97 no. 1 (Spring 2014): 44-53.

²² McKenna.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ethan Lewis, "A Structure to Last Forever: The Players' League and the Brotherhood War of 1890," <http://www.ethanlewis.org/pl/ch2.html>

²⁶ McKenna.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Baseball-Reference.com

²⁹ Lewis. Chapter 2 contains an in depth discussion of the Reserve Rule.

³⁰ McKenna.

³¹ Britcher, 50.

³² McKenna.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Pittsburg Press*, September 23, 1908, Google News Archive

³⁶ Directory of Homestead, Munhall, Six Mile Ferry, and adjacent parts of Mifflin Township, Allegheny County, Pa., [Homestead, Pa.]: M.P. & J.R. Schooley at the Local News Office, 1891 & 1894: 33.

³⁷ McKenna.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Pittsburg Press*, July 9, 1892, Google News Archive

⁴⁰ *Pittsburg Dispatch*, "Caught a Pitcher," September 2, 1892

⁴¹ *Commercial Gazette*, "Baldwin Bagged," September 2, 1892

⁴² McKenna.

⁴³ Pittsburgh and Allegheny directory, R.L. Polk & Co. [Pittsburgh, Pa: R.L. Polk & Co. and R.L. Dudley] 1908: 159.