

Charles William Boyer

League President , 1915-1916

Class D, Blue Ridge League

By Mark C. Zeigler

When the Class D, Blue Ridge League was originally organized in late 1914, the man most responsible for its association with professional baseball was Charles W. Boyer, a respected baseball man, who helped organize the original South Atlantic League, and whose love for the game of baseball was notwithstanding.

Boyer was born on February 29, 1864 in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and was the son of William Henry Boyer, a soldier in the Confederate Army, and Sara Anne “Nannie” Gore of Fredericksburg, VA. The Boyers had two children, Charles and Nellie Lee, born in 1862. Charles never knew his father, as William Boyer died near the end of the Civil War, of wounds at Washington Street Hospital, Petersburg, VA, on April 11, 1865.

Charles grew up with his maternal grandparents, until his mother remarried in October of 1876 to Samuel Jefferson. As a teenager, he took his first job as a newsboy, advancing to newsboy on trains. In 1891, he moved to Hagerstown, Maryland, to work at the Cumberland Valley and Western Maryland News Agency. On March 8, 1893, Charles married the former Nettie P. Harbaugh, a native of Sabillasville, MD, whose family had later moved to the Hagerstown area.

By 1895, newspaper sales on trains had been abandoned, and Boyer found himself looking for other suitable employment. In 1896, Boyer moved to Roanoke, VA, where he undertook the management of the Roanoke Baseball Club in the Virginia League. Under Boyer’s management, he helped develop Jack Chesbro, the first professional spitball thrower, whose contract was eventually sold to the New York Highlanders. During the next three years, Boyer managed baseball teams in Charleston, SC, Savannah, GA, and Richmond, VA.

Out of baseball for the next three years, Boyer became Business Manager of the Atlanta (GA) Crackers Baseball Club of the Southern Association during the 1903 season. In November of 1903, Boyer, representing the Charleston, SC club and five other representatives from Savannah, GA, Macon, GA, Jacksonville, FL, Augusta, GA, and Columbus, GA, organized the original South Atlantic League. Because of his experience in “Southern baseball circles,” Boyer was unanimously named the league’s first president, and was responsible for establishing the league’s constitution, schedules, and bridging a relationship with the new National (Baseball) Commission, known today as Minor League Baseball.

Based in Savannah, GA, Boyer led the South Atlantic League as League President for the next five years through the 1908 season. Prior to the 1909 season, Boyer resigned as League President, and decided to move back to Hagerstown, Maryland, to be closer to his wife’s family, and pursue his other interest in theatre.

In the spring of 1909, Charles leased the Academy of Music, one of Hagerstown’s foremost theatres, which featured vaudeville acts, plays, and later, moving pictures. Boyer ran the Academy of Music the next six years, until catastrophe struck, and the theatre, and the Baldwin House Hotel, that he had leased in 1912, was destroyed in a major fire.



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(photo Maryland Cracker Barrell, April 1999 and Nancy Porter McNulty)

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During 1914, Boyer became involved as a supporter of the semi-pro Tri-City League, that featured a baseball team in Hagerstown. While he tried in vain to rebuild his theatre, Boyer also became more active in the baseball circles around Hagerstown. Through his experience, connections, and efforts, Boyer helped establish the new Blue Ridge League, gaining it acceptance with the National (Baseball) Commission as a Class D League in 1915.

Boyer purchased the fledgling Hagerstown franchise during the winter of 1914, and was elected the first-ever President of the Class D, Blue Ridge League in early 1915. Boyer's experience in the league was bittersweet, as the fledgling independent league sparked some controversy with player eligibility, and the club's taking advantage of loopholes in league rules, but thrived on the field in its first season. Boyer's connection with the Hagerstown club, while overseeing the league, proved to be too much of a conflict of interest in the early days of the 1916 season, and he stepped down as league president in favor of another Hagerstown businessman, James Vincent Jamison, Jr. At the end of the 1916 season, Boyer sold his interest in the Hagerstown club to a group of businessmen, headed by J. C. Roulette, and returned his focus on his theatre interests around the Tri-State region.

In 1920, Boyer took over the Palace Theatre, which later became known as Henry's Theatre, a well known landmark in downtown Hagerstown. Due to health reasons, he gave up the theatre business for good in 1930.

The Boyer's had five children, Nellie Innes (b. 6/17/1896-d. 8/10/1972), twins Mary Virginia (b. 8/19/1898-d. 12/17/1982) and Nancy Beatrice (b. 8/19/1898-d. 8/17/1988), Charles W., Jr.. aka "Bill", (b. 3/7/1911-d. 6/25/1987), and James Alexius (b. 6/11/1915-d. 5/11/1990). In his later years, Boyer worked at the Alexander Hotel, and at the Fountainhead Country Club. Charles Boyer died at his home on Saturday, October 7, 1950, at the age of 86 years. His wife, Nettie, passed away 14 years later, on March 17, 1965, in Hagerstown, at the age of 91.

Story written by Mark C. Zeigler. Sources – Charles W. Boyer's granddaughter, Nancy Porter McNulty of Leeds, MA; Cracker Barrel Magazine, Hagerstown, MD, April 1999 issue; Hagerstown Herald Mail, Life Lines by Newman, 1943; "Retired 84-Year Old Organizer of Sally League Still Interested," by Barclay Hand, 1948; The Colley See-Ums of Sports, by Frank Colley, Hagerstown Mail, October 9, 1950; Hagerstown Herald-Mail articles, 1915, 1916; 1920 and 1930; 1930 United States census, Hagerstown, MD, researched by Ann Lindley Gill.