

THE SACRAMENTO SOLONS: A STUDY OF POPULAR  
REPRESENTATION WITHIN THE PACIFIC COAST LEAGUE  
(PCL) 1930-1960

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

June 2024

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Gene Garcia for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of History to be taken June 2024

Title: The Sacramento Solons: A Study of Popular Representation within the Pacific Coast League (PCL) (1930-1950)

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Dr. John Thorn, the official historian for Major League Baseball (MLB), places the origin of the sport in west-central Massachusetts, with mentions of the sport in newspapers dating back to as early as 1735, then more frequently in the 1750s. One factor in the longevity of baseball is the communal ties of baseball teams to their cities. Although, this comes along with different governmental struggles around land usage by the team. Take for example, the “Friendly Confines” of Wrigley Field and the various community jewel box stadiums each built into and for the community they reside in. The provision of land for stadiums is one area where it is clear that complex negotiations are necessary between a team and a city, but this is only the most visible aspect of the relationship. Existing scholarship on the history of baseball focuses overwhelmingly on sporting history. These communal, governmental, and social relationships between baseball teams and cities have received some attention with major league teams but have been almost completely ignored in the minor leagues. Throughout the history of the Sacramento Solons, the involvement of the community of Sacramento provides a case-study of communal financial, physical, and governmental relation with the capital city baseball team of California. Using news articles, popular media, state and city legislation, and interviews with ownership, this study explores city and communal involvement between 1930-1950.

This study demonstrates that the city's continued support of the Solons was tied to its desire to be perceived as a notable Californian city.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the Robert D. Clark Honors College, the University of Oregon, and the Department of History for giving me the opportunity to pursue original historical research. A special thank you to Dr. Ocean Howell for your continued guidance, mentorship, and collaboration. Thank you to Dr. Casey Shoop, Dr. Steven Beda, and Dr. Katie Macica for serving on my thesis committee. And a special thank you to Alan O'Connor and Graham Womack for your collaboration and support of my research. And finally, I owe this opportunity to my parents and my family for supporting and educating me.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis explores Sacramento baseball through the history of the Sacramento Solons. Current academic research leans heavily toward a focus on Major League Baseball and premier minor leagues such as the Negro Leagues and Pacific Coast League. While scholars have discussed the history of the Solons, the niche category and dearth of academic attention has limited the exploration of the Solons to team history, player narratives, and team achievements. This thesis, submitted to the Robert D. Clark Honors College in May 2024, reanalyzes newspaper stories, interviews, and municipal documents alongside site visits to understand the role of Sacramento in its relationship to the Solons. Thus, in effect, this thesis argues that city residents and governmental agencies supported Sacramento baseball to bolster Sacramento's status among California cities.

## Review of Sacramento Baseball History

Baseball has been an American pastime since the 1750s.<sup>1</sup> The sport was played during the American Colonial Period, through the American Revolution, during the Civil War and both World Wars, and continues to be played today, as MLB celebrates its 121<sup>st</sup> season since the merger of the National League (NL) and the American League (AL). Thus, baseball first began to be played by Americans throughout the North American continent, then in Europe, Asia, and Central and South America before garnering local communal support and being played within these societies. In the case of California, West Coast baseball first began to be played during the days of the Gold Rush as young, hopeful miners from the East Coast participated in various recreational and semi-professional leagues.<sup>2</sup> Baseball was first mentioned in the Sacramento region in the November 1859 edition of the *Daily Union* newspaper. The mention of the sport indicated that the players were using “New York rules.”<sup>3</sup> The next year, in 1860, the first completed game in California was played in Sacramento at the California State Fair Base Ball Tournament.<sup>4</sup> The game matched up a San Francisco team versus the Sacramento club and awarded the “Silver Ball” trophy to the victorious team from San Francisco.

The growing popularity of the sport in California, in time, brought professional baseball to the state. In September 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings played a local Sacramento team and beat them 50-6.<sup>5</sup> In 1883, the California League, the first professional league in the state,

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<sup>1</sup> John Thorn. *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Snelling. *The Greatest Minor League: A History of the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1957*. McFarland & Company Incorporated, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Alan O'Connor. *Gold on the Diamond: Sacramento's Great Baseball Players, 1886 to 1976*. Sacramento, CA: Big Tomato Press, 2008 AND “New York” rules refer to an adherence to the way baseball was played on the East Coast, which was viewed as standard play.

<sup>4</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond* AND The Cincinnati Red Stockings (now the Cincinnati Reds) are generally recognized as the first professional team in America.



was established with five teams from San Francisco and Oakland.<sup>6</sup> Three years later, in 1886, the California League expanded to include the Sacramento Altas. Thus, there exists a deep history of baseball within Sacramento. Sacramento is a baseball town.

The Sacramento Altas, a reference to Alta California, as California was known before 1900, played their first season at Agriculture Park between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> streets and E and H street, before moving the Snowflake Park between 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> streets and R and S streets, in 1889.<sup>7</sup> In this time, the ability to field a team was sporadic with it being common for the Altas to put together a team for one or two seasons before taking a year off. The largest break was between 1894-1897.<sup>8</sup> As the team came and went, they underwent a couple name changes from the Altas, to the Senators, the Gilt Edge also known as the Brewers, and back to the Senators, but they remained in the California League in spite of their inconsistent names.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this time, the Sacramento Baseball Club developed a tradition of play within the Sacramento downtown metropolitan area.

In 1903, the Pacific Coast League (PCL) added teams in Portland and Seattle violating Organized Baseball by expanding at the expense of the Pacific Northwest League.<sup>10</sup> The PCL would go to on to continue to add teams that bordered the West Coast, including a team from Sacramento, and would dominate the region for the next fifty years. At the turn of the nineteenth century, professional baseball had begun to recognize their newfound market in the West Coast, but the PCL consolidated this market to create a league with an ability to sign its own players

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<sup>6</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>7</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>8</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>9</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond* AND The Gilt Edge were named after Ruhstaller's top-seeling beer, founded locally in 1881 AND The name changes were as follows Altas (1886-1889), Senators (1890-1893), Gilt Edge (1898-1900), Senators (1901-1935) (Senators joined the PCL in 1903), and the Solons (1936-1960).

<sup>10</sup> Organized Baseball is an archaic term that refers to MLB and its affiliated minor leagues. This term does not include international leagues, amateur leagues, and independent leagues. It began in 1845 and is responsible for assigning minor league team classes and organizing regional leagues.

and compete with the major leagues. Furthermore, in some cases, the PCL offered better services than the MLB. So, while East Coast teams like the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers commuted on trains, the PCL provided planes.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the warmer weather allowed the PCL to regularly operate for 170 to 200 games per season, allowing for more revenue for both teams and players. As Dennis Snelling writes, “Indeed, prior to 1958, baseball fans living on the West Coast considered the Pacific Coast League to be *their* major league.”<sup>12</sup> The Sacramento Senators joined PCL from the onset, and the very first Pacific Coast League game was played in Sacramento between the Senators and the Oakland Oaks on March 26, 1903.<sup>13</sup>

The Pacific Coast League was born out of the expansion of the California League. First with the addition of the Los Angeles Angels, the California League extended throughout the state. Next in 1903, the teams in Portland and Seattle were annexed from the Pacific Northwest League by the California League and thus the Pacific Coast League was born.<sup>14</sup> The California League that had given way to the PCL violated organized baseball with its interference with another league, the PCL was designed as an independent league to rival the American and National Leagues and become a “winter headquarters for eastern players.”<sup>15</sup> The PCL would remain in this stature to rival MLB until the purchase of the Solons by the St. Louis Cardinals in 1936 which relegated the Solons and the PCL as below MLB.<sup>16</sup> Still, the PCL remained a premier independent league, even earning “Open Classification” in 1952 which allowed the league to have priority access to star players. However, with the introduction of West Coast

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<sup>11</sup>Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>12</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>13</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>14</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>15</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>16</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

Baseball in 1958, the PCL was relegated to AAA status and was deemed and continues to be inferior to the major leagues as one of its various minor leagues.<sup>17</sup>

The Pacific Coast League, as an independent league, lasted from 1903-1957 consisting of eight teams: San Diego Padres, Los Angeles Angels, Oakland Oaks, Portland Beavers, Seattle Rainiers, San Francisco Seals, Hollywood Stars, and Sacramento Solons.<sup>18</sup> While seven teams had a typical owner, ownership family, or ownership partners, the Sacramento Solons were unique in having co-owners sharing 2,500 shares of stock.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, this more egalitarian ownership base allowed for the team to be a reflection of community and city support, as it was the community that they would come to rely on throughout the team's history.

In 1910 the Senators began playing in Buffalo Park at the corner of Broadway (Y street, at the time) and Riverside Boulevard.

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<sup>17</sup> AAA is the highest level of the farm systems in Minor League Baseball. The Minor Leagues are broken down to the levels of Low-A, High-A, AA, and AAA, before a player may be called up to the majors or finish their rehab.

<sup>18</sup>Amy Essington. *The Integration of the Pacific Coast League: Race and Baseball on the West Coast*. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. AND *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>19</sup>Essington, *The Integration of the Pacific Coast League*



Figure 1: 1913 city map of the intersection of Broadway and Riverside Blvd. Courtesy of the Sacramento Room of the Sacramento Public Library.<sup>20</sup>

Buffalo Park is outside contemporary city limits and surrounded by farmland.

The field was built and owned by then- majority stakeholder and West Sacramento native, Edward Kripp, and sponsored by the Buffalo Brewing Company.<sup>21</sup> During this time, the levee sat on Y street which meant that on the other side – the side of Buffalo Park—Kripp could sell alcohol and provide gambling services.<sup>22</sup> Although the park would undergo naming changes, from Moreing Field, Sacramento Baseball Park, Cardinal Field, Doubleday Field, and finally to Edmonds Field, that park and that location would remain the home of the Sacramento Solons until they left Sacramento in 1960.<sup>23</sup> Typically, each name change came from either a change in majority ownership or as a result of community contests. After the Moreing brothers, Lew and Charlie, bought the team in 1920, they tore down the stadium at the end of the 1921 season and by the start of the 1922 season, they had commissioned a brand new (state of the art) baseball stadium.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Map of Sacramento City 1913*, 1 in:1,000ft, copyrighted 1913 Phinney, Cate, & Marshall. Sacramento Room

<sup>21</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>22</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>23</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>24</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond* AND Lew and Charlie Moreing were natives of Stockton, California. Forty-five minutes south of Sacramento.



Figure 2: Moreing Field in 1930. Alan O'Connor's Collection<sup>25</sup>

Pictured is Ruby Ryan, the wife of then-manager Buddy Ryan.

By the 1934-35 season, local banks had taken over the Senators and thus the stadium was renamed to the Sacramento Ball Park.<sup>26</sup> 1936 marked a momentous year for Sacramento baseball, it was in 1936 that the Senators officially became the Solons, a nickname for the legislature and a reference to the state capital. The team had previously been referred to as the "Solons" in newspapers since before World War I, and thus this name change is emblematic of the aligning the Sacramento baseball club to the community's perception of their team.

Furthermore, recognizing the skill and market of the Solons, Branch Rickey, General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, purchased the team and treated them as the top team within their newfound farm system.<sup>27</sup> Branch Rickey, being the innovator that he is, created the first ever farm system within the MLB with the purchase of majority stock of the Solons. The field was renamed to Cardinal Field.

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<sup>25</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>26</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond* AND Branch Rickey also was the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers who was instrumental in bringing in Jackie Robinson and breaking the color barrier in 1947.

Under the ownership of Rickey, the Solons became immensely successful in the 1940s and saw their one and only championship in 1942 following a 105-73 season. However, World War II was the great equalizer, and following The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, baseball teams from around the nation, including the Solons, began to lose talent to the military draft and on-field performance decreased. By 1944, Branch Rickey and the St. Louis Cardinals were setting up to sell the team to Tacoma, Washington.<sup>28</sup> This would have happened, if it was not for the efforts of *Sacramento Union* editor, Dick Edmonds, for going door-to-door and collecting over \$4,000 to keep the team in Sacramento.<sup>29</sup> During this opportunity, Fred David became majority owner until the team left in 1960.<sup>30</sup> In 1944, a community naming contested renamed the stadium Doubleday Field in reference to mythologized founder of baseball, Civil War veteran Abner Doubleday. But the following year, after the death of Dick Edmonds, the field was renamed Edmonds Field in honor of him for keeping the team in Sacramento. This field was burned down during the night on July 11, 1948, and caused the Solons to play the rest of the season on the road. By the 1949 season Edmonds Field was rebuilt as a concrete stadium that remained the home of the Solons until they left in 1960.

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<sup>28</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>29</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>30</sup> Graham Womack "Written interview with Fred David." March 3, 2001, shared with author



Figure 3: Rebuilt Edmonds Field after 1949, original date unknown, Alan O'Connor's Collection<sup>31</sup>

John Spalding refers to the 1950s Solons as “bottom feeders.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, during this decade, the team never went above fourth place in the PCL and finished last in four separate seasons.<sup>33</sup> However, 1950 marked the year that the Solons broke the color barrier with second baseman Marvin Williams and pitcher Walter McCoy, both of whom previously played in the Negro Leagues. Additionally, in 1952, the Pacific Coast League upgraded to the status of “Open Classification” within organized baseball, which granted the Solons and the rest of the league better position when signing players.<sup>34</sup> Yet, with the arrival of the Giants and Dodgers in 1958, the Sacramento Solons and PCL were systematically choked out by the MLB. Suddenly, the Solons were part of a smaller market league and competed with the San Francisco Giants for attendance and profits. Additionally, with the arrival of West Coast Baseball, the PCL lost its “Open Classification” status to be eliminated as competition for the MLB.<sup>35</sup>

The 1960s saw no change, as attendance plummeted, and after a sixth-place finish in the 1960 season, the Solons were sold and relocated to become the Hawaiian Islanders. Fred David

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<sup>31</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>32</sup> John Spalding. *Sacramento Senators and Solons: Baseball in California's Capital, 1886 to 1976*. Ag Press, 1995

<sup>33</sup> Spalding, *Sacramento Senators and Solons*

<sup>34</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>35</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

remained hopeful of Sacramento baseball but after a land offer in 1964, David sold the land on the corner of Broadway and Riverside, which would become a GemCo Department Store before becoming the Target that it is today.<sup>36</sup> All that remains are two plaques: one inside the Target marking the stadium that had once been on the land and one outside in the parking lot denoting where home plate once was. In 1974, the PCL's Eugene Emeralds (at the time the PCL was fully a minor league division of the MLB) relocated to Sacramento to become the Solons. Due to the lack of baseball fields, the Solons played at Hughes Stadium, a football and track complex on the Sacramento City College campus. After two seasons, and complaints over the abysmal dimensions, particularly the 232 ft distance to the left field fence, the Solons were bought by the Texas Rangers and forced to relocate to San Jose in 1976.<sup>37</sup> Sacramento went without a baseball team for 24 years until the arrival of the Sacramento River Cats in 2000.

Indeed, Sacramento is a baseball town and has a long history of hosting and supporting a team. However, as Amy Essington points out, "The Minor Leagues are an important aspect of baseball history in general and integration history specifically that baseball historians have ignored in favor the Major Leagues."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this lack of attention to Minor League Baseball history is why the Solons have generally been forgotten among the Sacramentans who once loved them so dearly. By exploring the Minor Leagues and their relationships with their host cities, one can begin to understand both the history of the city itself in its relationship to the team, as well as understanding the role of baseball clubs throughout American history. Such stories already exist for major league teams such as the Chicago Cubs' Wrigley Field and the Boston Red Socks' Fenway Park. The Minor Leagues offer a wider study of community teams

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<sup>36</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>37</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond* AND Rule 1.04, enacted on June 1, 1958, set a minimum distance to the right and left field fences of 325 ft.

<sup>38</sup> Essington, *The Integration of the Pacific Coast League*



where trends within city support can be noticed to contextualize urban histories and urban perceptions. Indeed, the support that Sacramento gave to the Solons can now be seen in their support of the Sacramento Kings, the Sacramento Republic FC, the Sacramento River Cats, and soon the Athletics from 2025-2028.<sup>39</sup> Sacramento's lineage of support for its sports teams continues to this today. This demonstrates a recognition of the city status by Sacramento leaders and residents as well as the city's ability to support a professional sports club.

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<sup>39</sup> The Oakland Athletics plan to play at Sutter Health Park in West Sacramento as the "Athletics" from 2025-2028 before their relocation to Las Vegas, Nevada.

## Literature Review

The previous section represents the overwhelming focus of the scholarly discussion about the Sacramento Solons. As Amy Essington reminds us of the disregard of the Minor Leagues in academic circles, the PCL, due to its ability to rival Major League Baseball, stands as one of the more documented leagues. Authors such as Dennis Snelling and Amy Essington have done extensive research on the formation and management of the PCL alongside social and player analyses. Dennis Snelling's *The Greatest Minor League* (2012) stands as the most comprehensive study of year-to-year performance and league management. Other studies have since referred to Snelling's work as they have explored other topics within baseball history, such as integration and player stories/achievements, and of specific teams. In all, much of the current scholarly work has yet to explore the situation of the Sacramento Solons. It focuses on studies of the league as a whole or the bureaucratic interaction of league owners and commissioners.

Moreover, research about the Solons have followed the trends of baseball historical research. John Spalding's work, *Sacramento Senators and Solons: Baseball in California's Capital, 1886 to 1976*, chooses to focus mostly on team history and playoff standings rather than on the year-to-year relationships with the city of Sacramento. Similarly, Alan O'Connor's comprehensive study of the Solons, *Gold on the Diamond*, recounts changes in the public image of the team including team name changes, stadium location, player achievement, and ownership alongside historical narratives of key players and people within Sacramento baseball history. Still, throughout the current conversation of the Sacramento Solons and the PCL, there remains a lack of attention of the teams social, economic, and personal connection to the city and community of Sacramento.

Concurrent research of academic peer-reviewed journals including *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, *Journal of Sports History*, *Journal of Negro History*, *The Baseball Research Journal*, and the *Southern California Quarterly* are remiss to mention critically the Solons in any capacity, including a lack of focus on the shareholding ownership anomaly and how it may exemplify a sports team's relationship with their host city. If any, there appears to be a great discussion on certain achievements among sports historians like the discussion on the Solons' Neil Sheridan's home run allegedly longer than the Babe's 587-foot blast by sports historians such as Rick Cabral.<sup>40</sup> An urban historian has yet to study this unique dynamic between city and team. Other publications deal more broadly with the Pacific Coast League by doing other case studies of the experiences of Japanese and Chinese Americans and immigrant populations.<sup>41</sup> Yet, these studies concern themselves with the Pacific Northwest, many of them directly with the Seattle Rainiers and San Francisco Seals. Yet overall, there generally is a lack of focus on the PCL and even less in respect to the Sacramento Solons. In effect, the literature is focused on the league in of itself and what it may comment on the national history of baseball; there exists in the literature a strong Major League Baseball bias. A void in the literature exists in respect to how a team interacts with its host city.

In specific regard to the community of Sacramento, the Sacramento River Cats occasionally wear replica Solons jerseys to remind Sacramento of its long and proud baseball past.

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<sup>40</sup> Rick Cabral. "Neill 'Wild Horse' Sheridan and the Longest Home Run Ever Measured." *The Baseball Research Journal* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 94+.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Regalado. "'Play Ball!': Baseball and Seattle's Japanese-American Courier League, 1928-1941." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (1995): 29-37. AND Roberta J. Park. "Sport and Recreation Among Chinese American Communities of the Pacific Coast From Time of Arrival to the 'Quiet Decade' of the 1950s." *Journal of Sport History* 27, no. 3 (2000): 445-80.



Figure 4: Sacramento River Cats Throwback Solons jersey alternative. Courtesy of Sacramento River Cats' Instagram.

The Sacramento River Cats donned these jerseys for the first time on April 20, 2023, in celebration of the Sacramento Solons and Sacramento's baseball past. The jerseys were worn twice that season but not since. Pictured is Dinger, the Sacramento River Cats mascot.

Additionally, organizations such as the River Cats and the California Museum have created exhibits dedicated to California baseball with displays of team and player memorabilia.

Additionally, buildings throughout Sacramento specific to Solons' history such as Sampino's Kitchen at Joe Marty's, on Broadway, and the Limelight Bar, both of which were originally built and founded by Solons players feature game memorabilia and photographs. Still, the general perception of the Solons, albeit small perception, is focused on team events and players. Yet, one cannot deny the impact the city of Sacramento in supporting the Solons and keeping them in Sacramento. In response to this oversight, this thesis reanalyzes Solons' history with specific

focus on the community's financial, physical, social, and governmental support. In short, this thesis studies the relationship of Sacramento to professional baseball. In the case of the Sacramento Solons, where the city is physically and financially involved, this social debate is elevated to a higher economic and political stage. Thus, the study of the team may comment on how the city may be understood.

While baseball has been played in Sacramento as early as 1859, this study will focus on the Sacramento Solons in the Pacific Coast League between 1930-1960. This period encompasses the greatest disparity of on-field performance from the championship of 1942 to the lackluster 1950s alongside the greatest shows of community support in terms of attendance and other charitable actions to keep their team. Thus, in this 30-year period, the essence of the support for Sacramento baseball becomes malleable.

## Methods

The methods employed in this thesis are consistent with existing scholars in the field. Historians such as Alan O'Connor have employed the usage of newspaper records, personal interviews, books, as well as collections of team and player memorabilia to reconstruct the history of the Sacramento Solons, which has been, in large parts, forgotten in the popular memory of Sacramento residents. These sources, especially the sports columns of the newspapers, have been valuable in piecing together year-to-year standings, players statistics, and notable games and player performances. Other scholars, those with a focus on the PCL as an independent entity, such as Amy Essington and Dennis Snelling, have utilized these same sources across the different West Coast cities of the league in collaboration with personal narratives. While these general histories are useful in determining systemic changes within the bureaucratic elite of the PCL, the case study of the Sacramento Solons' shareholding model of ownership within the state's capital may yield insights on the popular, economic, and governmental atmospheres surrounding the team. Therefore, in large parts, these are the same sources that have also been employed in this thesis, yet with a greater and specific focus on the city of Sacramento itself, neighboring residents, and governmental representatives. For it was in these same general sources with a different focus that the involvement of the city and community is depicted and represented.

### Newspapers

The incorporation of newspaper sources has been made possible through the utilization of digital and physical newspaper archives. Through University of California, Riverside's California Digital Newspaper Collection, this thesis has been able to benefit from archived editions of the *Sacramento Bee* (1935-1995). The *Sacramento Bee* has been consistently issued

in Sacramento since the very first issue on February 3, 1857. Since that time, it has become the flagship newspaper in the Sacramento region and thus has had the opportunity to report on various notable Solon events, including the fire at Edmonds Field, the purchase of the team by Branch Rickey, details on the team's relocation, and, of course, daily statistical updates throughout the season.

Additionally, reports from the *Sacramento Union* (1935-1994) provide parallel, alternative reporting of the team and team events, namely in who or who not is being interviewed when compared to the *Bee*, in the *Union's* reporting of the same events. The *Sacramento Union* was the first newspaper in Sacramento, with its first issue being released on March 19, 1851, until the newspaper unfortunately went out of print in 1994- ending the oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi. Access to the newspaper was made possible by the Center for Sacramento History Archives which holds this collection for viewing by appointment.

### **Site Visits**

In tandem with newspaper and scholarly sources, I visited two sites. The first visit occurred in December of 2023 over the course of three weeks, wherein I was able to visit the corner of Broadway (formerly Y Street) and Riverside Boulevard where Edmonds Field once stood but now is occupied by a Target. This opportunity to survey the land worked in concert with a study of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps to track the historical development of the parts of the city affected by the team as well as to understand the community in which the Solons' played. This December trip also allowed me the opportunity to consult Alan O'Connor and freelance journalist, with work published by the *Sacramento Bee*, Graham Womack on my research. They both provided valuable insight into the current study of the Sacramento Solons and available resources. Additionally, Graham Womack shared with me some materials,

including his written interview conducted in 2001 with Fred David, majority shareholder and owner of the Solons since 1944, who unfortunately passed away in 2009. This December trip also included a visit to the Sacramento Room at the downtown Sacramento Public Library, which will be discussed further in the following section devoted to archives.

During the last week of March, I made my second site visit. During this second visit, I visited the Center for Sacramento History to view archived editions of the *Sacramento Union*, city council meeting minutes, and Sacramento Planning Department records. The second visit was done for the purposes of archival research and to view sources/documents that are not accessible in Oregon.

### **Archives**

Finally, archives were another pertinent source for my research methods. The utilization of online archival databases such as Archive.org along with the physical archives at the Center for Sacramento History and within the Sacramento Room of the Sacramento Public Library. The Sacramento Room was pivotal in providing various maps of the city and team memorabilia including souvenir programs and booster brochures. As such, these sources aided in tracking the development of Sacramento around the Solons team and Edmonds Field. As previously discussed, the Center for Sacramento History allowed access to *Sacramento Union* newspapers, city council meeting minutes, and planning department records that served to supplement the materials observed on online databases. Additionally, the City Clerk's Records Library of Sacramento is an online database that was employed to study Sacramento city council minutes. Finally, the collection of Archive.org included player interviews and game broadcasts, but most importantly, the database had a few copies of game programs and scorecards- analysis of the various sponsors, messages, and activities in the booklets hinted toward the well-off



demographics of the fans as well as the role of an economic base that the Solons served for neighboring businesses.

All in all, my methods follow the contemporaries in the history field with the usage of scholarly works and various of types of first-hand accounts. The key difference is my employment of these evidence not toward the recollection of the history of the Sacramento Solons team, but rather as a recollection of the Sacramentans who supported the team. This distinction in some cases had overlap with players who were born and raised around the Solons and would later join the team, or players who joined the team and would later become Sacramentans after retirement. Therefore, by nature, a study of the Sacramento Solons is a study of Sacramento. Thus, my methods attempt to uncover the physical, governmental, economic, and social landscape of Sacramento.

## **The Sacramento Solons (1930-1960): The Pacific Coast League and Sacramento Baseball**

Coming off the heels of the 1920s, the natives of Sacramento had been treated to a competitive team who had won a banner in 1928 after winning the second-half championship.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, this previous decade had brought the purchase of majority ownership by Lew Moreing and the construction of Moreing Field, a state-of-the-art sporting complex in Sacramento's burgeoning Broadway. Therefore, by the beginning of 1930 and throughout the decade, the Land Park neighborhood of southern Sacramento saw growing urbanization as predominately white people moved out of downtown and into the area south of the city center that had once been occupied by farmland. The improvements to the Broadway and Riverside baseball field thus serve as a reflection of the growing urbanization and as a symbol for Sacramento modernity. Such a symbol a symbol of modernity permeated from every aspect of the neighborhood, from the very expansion of the neighborhood to the types of buildings that lined the streets, to the success of the Solons as a premier PCL team, to the very perception of the neighborhood by its inhabitants.

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<sup>42</sup> The league championship was a matchup between the first and second half champions.



Figure 5: 1939 aerial view of Broadway. Courtesy of Sacramento Archives Museum Collection Center.

At the bottom is the newly built Tower Theatre and at the top is a wooden Edmonds Field and the City Cemetery squarely rooted on the edge of downtown next to residential sectors.<sup>43</sup>

Across the field on Riverside Boulevard, which at the time turned into a one-way once it came over the levee to the side of Moreing Field, stands Sacramento City Cemetery (Figure 1). The cemetery has been a staple of Sacramento since it was built in 1850, after John Sutter had donated the land to the city.<sup>44</sup> On game days children would often hang out in the cemetery hoping to catch a foul ball then run across the street and redeem the ball for admission. As such, once Riverside came over the levee, the speed limit was reduced to 5 mph. This practice continued throughout the Solons' tenure in Sacramento and reflects the community that the Solons fostered, and the city marketed. In a Sunday September 1937 edition of *The Sacramento Union*, the paper advertises Sacramento as "a city of fine homes" and proceeds to highlight different newly built properties in the city. These properties are advertised in such architectural styles as Spanish mansion, English cottage, American colonial, and Elizabethan styles, each

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<sup>43</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>44</sup> Sacramento Planning Department. Subseries 1.16. 900 Broadway. Center for Sacramento History

reminiscent of fine upper-class styles of large market American cities.<sup>45</sup> Four of the seven properties advertised are in the Land Park neighborhood which demonstrates a vested interest in the development of Southern Sacramento into a higher class residential suburban community akin other residential communities that surround American baseball parks. Today, Land Park homes continually rank among Sacramento's nicest and most expensive. Thus, the development of the neighborhood around Moreing Field into an upper-class community reflects both a desire to match the success of the Solons and the state-of-the-art field, as well as the desire of the perception of the team and surrounding community as one of prominence, status, wealth, and participants of a larger city market. In short, in a mutually beneficial relationship, the success of the Solons elevated the prominence of Land Park and Sacramento which in turn elevated the image of the Solons in the community in which they played.

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<sup>45</sup> "Sacramento— A City of Fine Homes." *Sacramento Union*. 26 Sep. 1937.



Figure 6: Sunday, September 26, 1937, edition of *The Sacramento Union* advertising “Sacramento—A City of Fine Homes.” Courtesy of the Center for Sacramento History.

However, not many predicted the stock market crash in 1929, this includes the Solons who, over the first half of the decade, suffered declining revenue and a declining ability to sign premier players. During this time, the team finished no higher than third place. As a result of on field performance along with the mass unemployment that characterized the decade, attendance also declined in this era creating a vicious cycle that kept hindering the team’s performance.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the declining attendance and performance, once again fostered doubt over the prominence of the Solons and Sacramento’s ability to host a professional team. However, this was not the way the decade began for the Solons. Notedly, two important milestones occurred in the early years of the 1930s.

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<sup>46</sup> O’Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

Realizing that night baseball could be the savior of minor league baseball during these trying times, Lew Moreing ordered lights to be installed on his field for the cost of \$10,000. As Spalding reports, Moreing believed, "Sacramento would be an ideal city for night baseball as the climate is just right during the summer evenings."<sup>47</sup> On June 4, 1930, at 8:31 P.M., he flipped the switch and for the first time, Moreing Field was illuminated.<sup>48</sup> The first PCL night game was played on June 10, 1930, in Sacramento against the Oakland Oaks. Even for the most skeptical, the lights were a hit and in no way hindered on field performance. In fact, Sacramento drew more fans in the first quarter of the 1930 season than in all of the 1929 season due to the ability to play night games which made the Solons a destination for working class Sacramentans and demonstrated the unrivaled support of Sacramentans.<sup>49</sup> This support of the team by Sacramento put to rest Moreing's plans to relocate the team to San Diego or Stockton. Sacramento would soon climb to the top of league attendance with 219,300 fans and even surpassed the attendance of the 1930 American League's attendance leading St. Louis Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles).<sup>50</sup>

However, the Depression eventually affected all in the nation. In 1932, the Solons signed Kenso Nushida, who became the first Asian American player to put on a Solons uniform.<sup>51</sup> The signing of this player is possibly evident of the more limited resources of Moreing to sign premier white players. Additionally, recognizing the financial state of the team, a year later, in 1933, local banks took over the ownership of the Solons.<sup>52</sup> This foreclosure came as a direct

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<sup>47</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>48</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>49</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>50</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League AND The St. Louis Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles) had an American League attendance record of about 152,000.*

<sup>51</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>52</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

result of the Depression. By 1933, Lew Moreing owed \$160,000 to three different lending institutions and after a brief unsuccessful fundraising effort, Moreing was forced to relinquish the franchise.<sup>53</sup> In the years prior, Moreing had used the Sacramento Solons as collateral for less-profitable ventures including towards the benefit of the team and in relation to his late brother's funeral services.<sup>54</sup> The banks owned the team for three years in which team performance continued to suffer and increasing doubt was cast on the ability of Sacramento's market to support a team. An agreement was made between the banks and the Solons' manager Earl McNeely for him to take control of the team.<sup>55</sup> Thus while the Solons were able to stay afloat, financial difficulties still remained for Sacramento baseball.

Under the ownership of McNeely, the Solons had been forced to sell players whose contracts has been used as collateral to keep the franchise afloat.<sup>56</sup> But on December 12, 1936, Branch Rickey and the St. Louis Cardinals purchased the team to become one of the Cardinals top farm teams. Bill Killefer, of the Cardinals, contacted McNeely with the offer, "If you can get us the franchise, the St. Louis Cardinals will take over the Sacramento team," and thus the Cardinals rescued the Solons from financial peril.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the support of the Cardinals rejuvenated Sacramento's support and recognition of their team. However, this move came to the disdain of other owners within the league. The President of the PCL, W. C. Tuttle charged that the St. Louis Cardinals with Vice President Branch Rickey pulling the strings, acquired the Senators [Solons] with no idea of stocking it with first class players.<sup>58</sup> Concerns arose of the ability of Sacramento to field a team, but under the ownership of the Cardinals, Sacramento was

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<sup>53</sup>Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>54</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>55</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>56</sup>Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>57</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>58</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

not only able to field a team but one of premier class AA players. During the last three years of the 1930s the Solons excelled in the PCL. In 1937 the Solons placed first in the regular season standings (something that had not been done since 1900) but lost in the first round of the playoffs.<sup>59</sup> The following 1938 and 1939 seasons ended with consecutive Governor's Cup championships, which in turn resulted in mass celebration for fans and players alike and proved as an opportunity for a show of support for their team.<sup>60</sup> However, still in those two years, the league championship was awarded to the PCL first-place finishers: Los Angeles Angels and Seattle Rainiers. Sacramento's winning ways followed them into the 1940s.

After brief slip in the 1940 season, by 1941 the Solons were competitive again and in 1942 the Solons won the league championship against the Los Angeles Angels. The city of Sacramento rejoiced as their team won the last five games to overcome a one game deficit. That edition of the *Sacramento Bee* reported 11,663 "patrons" who "went wild" after they had waited all their lives and watched their team be the runner up six times to finally see their Solons win. As the *Bee* reports, "An overflow crowd of 11,663 took advantage of the situation. They were repaid by a contest which could not have been filmed any more excitingly by the most brilliant Hollywood mind."<sup>61</sup> In effect, the 1942 championship and the success in the years leading up to 1942, demonstrate concretely the ability of Sacramento to field and support professionally competitive teams. Such a feat is indicative of a substantial city market with available funds and time to invest into a franchise and the show of support by Sacramentans indicates the strong desire to do so for their team.

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<sup>59</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>60</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>61</sup> Wilbur Adams. "11,663 fans go wild over fiction finish." *Sacramento Bee*. 21 Sep. 1942. Metro Final. p. 10



Who is to say how long championship baseball could have lasted in Sacramento. Perhaps the lineage of success would have elevated the status of the Solons enough to keep them in Sacramento. However, a year after their 1942 pennant, the Solons were dismantled as the Cardinals downsized their farm system. Furthermore, World War II and the draft took all eligible men and every star player. Professional sports suffered across the nation in this time as each team either folded or contended for a way to continue. In the case of the Solons, the Cardinals ownership group was finalizing a contract to sell the team to Tacoma, Washington in response to Branch Rickey leaving the Cardinals for the Brooklyn Dodgers. That would have happened if not for the efforts of *Sacramento Union* editor Dick Edmonds. In February 1944, Edmonds and Yubi Separovich spearheaded a group to raise the \$90,000 in funds to keep the team in Sacramento.<sup>62</sup> They went door-to-door fundraising and with other businessmen, they sold the team to the Sacramento Baseball Association.<sup>63</sup> As Fred David reflects, this sale, “kept baseball in Sacramento.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, again in a time of doubt over Sacramento’s market and ability to host a team, the residents of Sacramento proved their support physically and financially to keep their team and demonstrate their ability as a prominent California city able to host professional West Coast baseball. The raising of these funds and transition to a shareholding ownership model demonstrates the direct involvement of Sacramentans for their team and represents a shift to the continuation of Sacramento baseball as contingent to the support of Sacramentans.

Fred David purchased one of these original stocks in 1944 for \$1,000.<sup>65</sup> Beginning as a stockholder, David would continue to buy stock until he became the president of the Sacramento

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<sup>62</sup> O’Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>63</sup> O’Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>64</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>65</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

Baseball Association in 1954.<sup>66</sup> In total, David was involved with the team from 1944 until he sold the stadium's land in 1964. According to Jack Spalding, Fred David vowed to keep baseball in Sacramento "until hell freezes over."<sup>67</sup> Some might say David's discussion of fire and brimstone was tempting fate.

On July 12, 1948, Edmonds Field, a wooden structure, went ablaze. The *Sacramento Union* reported the next morning, "Many had been among the estimated 50,000 who tuned out at midnight Sunday to see the city's most spectacular blaze level the ball park in less than an hour."<sup>68</sup> Local authorities determined the cause of the fire to be the butt a cigarette that had not fully been put out. The *Union* continued, crowds flocked "around the gaping wound in the heart of the city's sports world, seemingly unable to believe their eyes at the twisted wreckage and waste of the grounds."<sup>69</sup> But these were not the fires of hell that took the Solons out of Sacramento. The fire did considerable damage, eating up the grandstands and taking down power lines. In fact, the gas station across the street was drenched in water so as to prevent further damage. Sacramento was heartbroken but as the city had done four years prior, they came together to save their team and their stadium. The *Union* reported, "one Sacramento contractor offered to erect a wooden grandstand within 20 days," but was turned down because Yubi Separovich, general manager of the Solons, wanted something permanent.<sup>70</sup> The Solons would go on to play the rest of the 1948 season on the road. But by 1949, thanks to support of the PCL and the charitable actions of Sacramento, a new concrete Edmonds Field had been built and the team finished third—their best season since their 1942 championship (Figure 3).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>67</sup> Spalding, *Sacramento Senators and Solons*

<sup>68</sup> Bill Conlin. "Solons to spend season on road." *Sacramento Union*, 13 July 1948, Metro Final, p. A1.

<sup>69</sup> Conlin, "Solons to spend season on road."

<sup>70</sup> Conlin, "Solons to spend season on road."

<sup>71</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

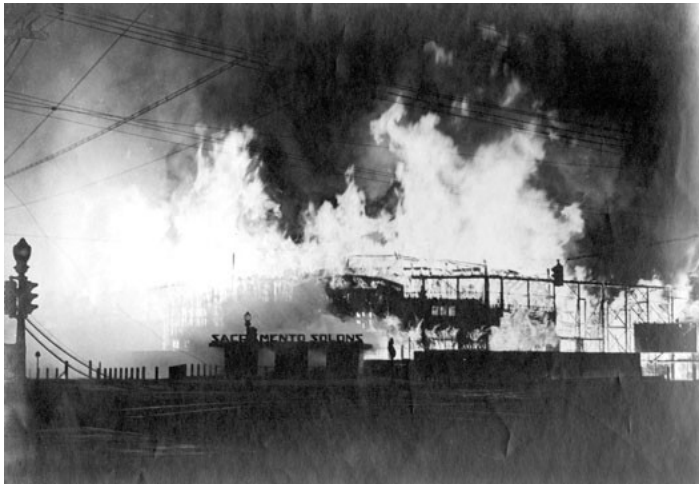


Figure 7&8: Edmonds Field ablaze, July 12, 1948. And Sacramento Ball Park circa 1934-1935 before becoming Edmonds Field. Alan O'Connor's Collection.<sup>72</sup>

While the 1950s brought abysmal on field performance by the team, community and governmental support did not waiver. Attendance continued to remain steady throughout the 1950s in spite of lack of competition on the field simply because the city loved their team. On four separate occasions, the Solons were mentioned in the Sacramento City Council meeting minutes after the conclusion of a season. After the 1951 season, Resolution 414 stated, “Be it resolved by the City Council of Sacramento, that Manager Joe Gordon be extended the congratulations and commendation of the members of the Council of the City of Sacramento and this community.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed a similar congratulation was extended by the City Council of Sacramento to an official scout of the Sacramento Solons Bill Avila for his work in preserving and supporting Sacramento baseball and the city council were regularly invited to Opening Day ceremonies.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, 1953 Senate Concurrent Resolution No.7 stated, "Resolved. The

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<sup>72</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

<sup>73</sup> Resolution 414. Regular Sacramento City Council. 23 April 1951. Center for Sacramento History

<sup>74</sup> Resolution 701. Regular Sacramento City Council. 17 Oct. 1957. Center for Sacramento History

Senator John F. McCarthy and Assemblyman Robert I. McCarthy be appointed to act as the aforementioned committee and report back to the Legislature in 1953 with all the facts and figures pertaining to a successful 1952 season for the Sacramento Solons."<sup>75</sup> This support amounted to more money given to the Solons to recruit and sign players. Although it did not amount much to actual on field performance, these examples show a vested interest by the municipal government of Sacramento to the success and play of Solons baseball. This relationship was indeed reciprocal as the manager of different Solons teams would often visit the City Council to invite them to significant games, such as Opening Day of 1953.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, Figure 9 depicts Edmonds Field in 1952 and shows continued urbanization around the stadium since 1913 (Figure 1), revealing coordination on part of municipal planning departments with the team to create a bustling Broadway and communal residential sectors around Sacramento's Edmonds Field and emblematic of Solons baseball.

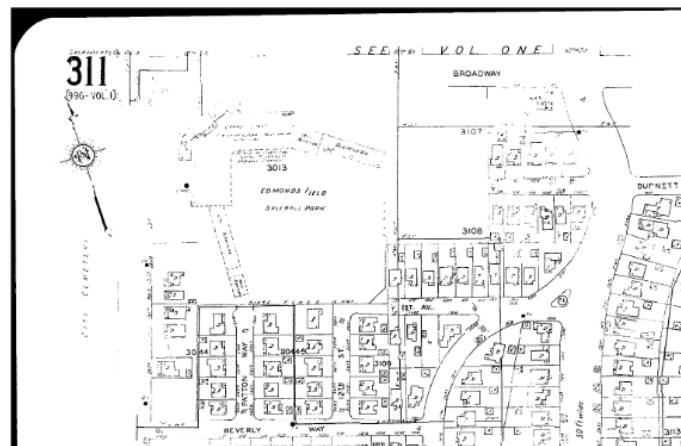


Figure 9: 1952 Sanborn fire insurance maps of the intersection of Broadway and Riverside Blvd.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> State Concurrent Resolution 7. Statutes of California. 1953. Center for Sacramento History

<sup>76</sup> Resolution 2957. Regular Sacramento City Council. 12 March 1953. Center for Sacramento History

<sup>77</sup> *Insurance Maps Sacramento California Volume Three Sanborn Company Maps*. Sheet 311, 1952. 1in:100ft in Sanborn Mapping Co

Indeed, the construction of Edmonds Field at the corner of Riverside Blvd. and Broadway had immense impacts on the surrounding neighborhood of William Land Park in South Sacramento. Prior to the construction of Edmonds Field, Broadway (known as Y Street) was on top of a levee and marked the end of the downtown city limits. This area first began to be developed in 1849, after John Sutter donated land to be used for the City Cemetery (which was built the following year), and as is shown in the plan of 1849, the construction of the City Cemetery was originally built as an extension of the downtown grid street structure.<sup>78</sup>

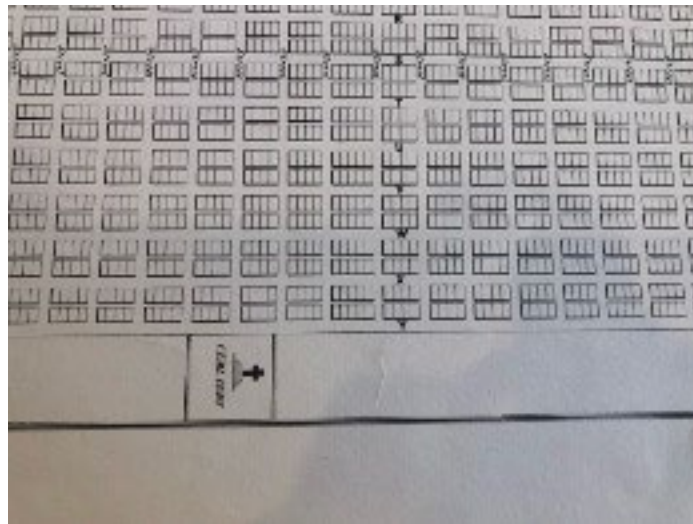


Figure 10: Sacramento City Plan of 1849 (reproduction 1969) W. H. Warner and Clement W. Coote. Courtesy of the Sacramento Room of the Sacramento Public Library

Buffalo Park was constructed across from the cemetery in 1910. By 1913 and again in 1916, Sacramento City maps depict Buffalo Park surrounded by farmland and interspersed by a couple access roads and isolated communities, who have since abandoned the grid structure (Figure 1).<sup>79</sup> In 1939, Tower Theatre was constructed down the street from Edmonds Field on Broadway

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<sup>78</sup> *Sacramento City, Plan of 1849*. Reproduction 1969. Vault Maps Drawer 2. W. H. Warner and Clement W. Coote. Sacramento Room

<sup>79</sup> *Map of Sacramento City 1913*, 1 in:1,000ft, copyrighted 1913 Phinney, Cate, & Marshall. Sacramento Room AND *Map of the City of Sacramento: Showing New and Old Streets*, copyrighted 1916. Sacramento Room

in an Art Deco/ Moderne style (Figure 5).<sup>80</sup> It was built outside the old city center that had developed in the 1920s and 1930s and thus is designed to represent that progress. Thus, Tower Theatre memorializes the urbanization that Sacramento had undergone, made in large part by the added tourism that Edmonds Field brought to Land Park. By 1952 (Figure 9) the area around Edmonds Field had become completely urbanized as suburbs surrounded the field to the south and downtown and the business districts bordered the field to the north.

During 1951 Joe Marty (Solons' star player who retired in 1951) moved Joe Marty's bar on Broadway and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, in the same building as Tower Theatre.<sup>81</sup> The bar had previously been on J St. after opening in 1938. Joe Marty was born in Sacramento and would go on to become a Solons star before playing for the Chicago Cubs and with other teams in MLB before returning to the Sacramento Solons.<sup>82</sup> Joe Marty' bar is a staple of Sacramento that still exists today (although under different ownership). During the time of the Solons, fans and players alike could be found enjoying a drink and meal before and after games. Furthermore, on Alhambra Boulevard in Central Sacramento stands The Limelight Bar & Café. The Limelight Bar was bought by Pete Mikacich (Class B Solons player) in the 1970s and stood as place where patrons could come together for a drink and a meal.<sup>83</sup> Today, The Limelight is owned by Pete's son, John Mikacich, and has since become a "tour of Sacramento baseball history" with the help of Alan O'Connor's collection.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the popularity of the team helped in the creation of communities south of downtown. Edmonds Field (in its various names) represented the modernity of the neighborhood (which would come to be represented in later buildings as well)

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<sup>80</sup> Sacramento Planning Department. Subseries 1.16. 1518 Broadway. Center for Sacramento History

<sup>81</sup> This information is inscribed on a sign in the window of Sampino's Kitchen at Joe Marty's.

<sup>82</sup> Josh Jackson "Rich PCL History Lives on in Sacramento." MiLB.com, June 18, 2018

<sup>83</sup> Jackson, "Rich PCL History Lives on in Sacramento."

<sup>84</sup> O'Connor, *Gold on the Diamond*

and fostered economic ties in and around the field itself. In short, Edmonds Field aided in creating an economy and population south of the downtown city center through development and economic ties.

Yet, more so than simply Solons fans, Sacramento is a baseball town and on May 28, 1957—if David is to be believed—hell froze over. Faced with declining on field performance and attendance as well as the 1950 draft for the Korean War which took whatever talent was left, by 1957 Sacramento had become a small market baseball town.<sup>85</sup> So, in spite of communal and governmental support, when the Giants moved to San Francisco the following year, they encroached on the Solons' market. From there it was only a matter of time before the residents of Sacramento realized the better product in the Bay, as Fred David reflects, “Sacramento was too small. They [Sacramento residents] wanted Major League Baseball.”<sup>86</sup> This disparity in talent was only widened when the PCL and Solons lost their Open Classification status after 1957 and were relegated back to AAA, so as to not compete with the Giants and Dodgers in California.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the city that had once loved the Solons so dearly and fought to keep them in Sacramento, finally let go when they were offered a better product by MLB. In 1960, the team finished sixth, the franchise lost \$100,000, and its assets were virtually nothing.<sup>88</sup> After a failed fund-raising drive, on November 14, 1960, shareholders voted to sell the franchise. The sale was completed on December 15, and the Sacramento Solons moved to Hawaii.

Fred David sold the team in 1960 but still owned Edmonds Field for another four years. As he reflects, “before we knew it all was left was an empty stadium.”<sup>89</sup> He had hopes of

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<sup>85</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>86</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>87</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>88</sup> Snelling, *The Greatest Minor League*

<sup>89</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

bringing the Solons and Sacramento baseball back, but after mounting losses and a land offer in 1964, he sold the land and Edmonds Field was demolished and replaced with a department GemCo grocery store. Thus, it is only fitting that the last game played at Edmonds Field was an exhibition game on April 11, 1964, between the San Francisco Giants and Cleveland Indians, while bulldozers waited in the parking lot.<sup>90</sup> Giants' icons and Hall of Fame players, Willie Mays and Willie McCovey played at that game. As a Sacramento native, myself, to expand on David's remarks, with the demolition of Edmonds Field, before we knew it, all that is left are fleeting memories of a bygone era of a team that Sacramento fought so dearly to keep until they wanted it no more.

The legacy of the Sacramento Solons persists in the memory, development, and pride of Sacramento today. After a brief emergence of a team representing the Solons only in namesake in the 1970s, the legacy of Sacramento's baseball team is remembered and marked throughout the city. Firstly, with the dedication of Edmonds Field at the Target lot in 1998 by Play Ball! Sacramento (Figure 11).<sup>91</sup> Along with more public facing representations such as the River Cats jerseys, the Sacramento Baseball mural at Sutter Health Park, and the California Museum exhibits, the Solons teams have also been the rich subject of sports historical scholarship.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> "Edmonds Field fans will have only cherished memories of bygone eras" *Sacramento Bee*, 13 April 1964, p. 19

<sup>91</sup> Play Ball! Weekend is an MLB and MiLB league-wide celebration to celebrate and inspire the next generation of baseball and softball players.

<sup>92</sup> Sutter Health Park in the baseball field for the Sacramento River Cats.





Figure 11&12: Edmonds Field Memorial plaque, author’s photograph, and Sutter Health Park Sacramento Baseball mural.<sup>93</sup>

The mural depicts prominent Solons players and coaches, as well as historian Alan O’Connor.

Still, the impact and prominence of the Solons have been imprinted in the history of Sacramento in other more subtle ways. Figure 13 shows the 1991 Sacramento City Council District Map,

<sup>93</sup> “Visit Sutter Health Park Home of the Sacramento River Cats.” MLB.com, February 3, 2022.



## Conclusion

After a brief stint of Solons baseball between 1974-1976, baseball would not return fully to Sacramento until 2000 with the San Francisco Giants' AAA affiliate Sacramento River Cats. When the River Cats came to Sacramento, they were welcomed to a newly built Raley Field (now Sutter Health Park) in West Sacramento and thus were continuing the long history of baseball in the California capital city dating back to 1859. This history of Sacramento baseball fundamentally represents Sacramento natives and the city itself as a symbol of Sacramentan support and of the growing city status. In spite of varying on-field performances between 1930-1960, in the most turbulent of times, it was the city of Sacramento that supported the Solons and kept their team in Sacramento.

Repeatedly throughout Solons' history, from the sale of the team to the Cardinals in 1944, to the fire of Edmonds Field in 1949, to continued community support through attendance and municipal support and recognition, Sacramentans remained steadfast in keeping the Solons in Sacramento. Truly, the Solons were a community cornerstone. Fred David, majority owner of the Solons from 1944-1964, began his team involvement at the age of fifteen working in concession stands at Edmonds Field.<sup>94</sup> When asked about his favorite memory with the team he responded, "we kept baseball [in Sacramento] going for 20 years, good times and bad."<sup>95</sup> Therein, lies the central theme, the Sacramento Solons were Sacramento's team, that stood on the corner of Broadway and Riverside and was the place of countless memories for fans growing up. This care is evident throughout the periods of community and governmental support in times

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<sup>94</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

<sup>95</sup> Womack, Written interview with Fred David

of need for the team. Of course, as the team no longer exists, the support finally waivered out amidst a more compelling product in Major League West Coast Baseball beginning in 1958.

Although Sacramento lost its Solons, this passionate support for its sports teams through attendance, financial, and governmental support can still be seen amongst Sacramento sports teams. Today, Sacramento is home to three professional sports teams: the Sacramento Kings of the National Basketball Association (NBA), the Sacramento Republic FC of the United Soccer League (USL), and the Sacramento River Cats of Minor League Baseball (MiLB). Threats of relocation are not new to Sacramento. They were reoccurring threats during the time of the Solons, they resurfaced amidst rumors of the Kings relocating to Seattle from 2006-2013, and the current fight for the Sac Republic to join the Major League Soccer (MLS) are born out of the same doubts over Sacramento—that Sacramento is a small market city, unable to host a professional sports team. Yet, time and time again, the people and government of Sacramento have banded together to prove their love and support of their teams. They have proved this in their support of Dick Edmonds and the sale of the team to the Sacramento Baseball Association. They doubled down in their support amidst the Edmonds Field fire. Again, their love was shown when the Kings were sold to majority chairperson Vivek Ranadive in 2013 who was determined to keep the team in Sacramento. The government and city agencies have shown their support in the building of the Golden 1 Center in downtown and their current plans of city development in the Railyards of North Sacramento to build a state-of-the-art stadium for the Sac Republic. Thus, this unwavering support of Sacramento for its sports teams shows a desire by the city and government to shed the “small market city” label and prove its support for a Sacramento sports franchise. These aspirations are representative of an overall desire for Sacramento to be a major California city and market.

Through this study of popular representation within the Sacramento Solons franchise, comes a story of city and communal pride, recognition, and support. This study serves as only one example of what a greater academic focus on minor league baseball may reveal—in short, it reveals the relationship of the city with its sports team which in turn is a reflection of the city’s aspirations and self-image. These individual relationships then make up and reflect the impact of baseball on American cities and their residents. Thus, greater attention to the minor leagues and individual teams is needed among academia to reveal the development and image of American cities. In the case of this study of the Sacramento Solons, this team reveals a persistent image for the status of Sacramento among major Californian cities through its ability to host and support professional sports franchises.

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