



## Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

---

---

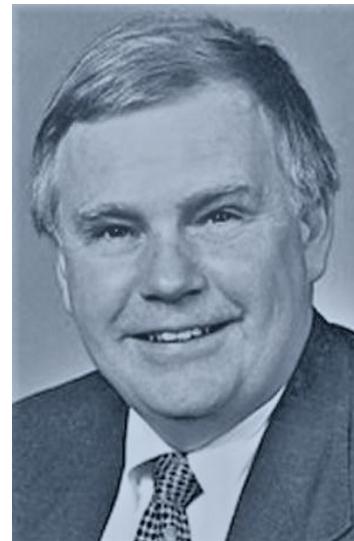
15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

April 2023

---

---

Many people like baseball. CSHOF inductee Greg Peterson (right) LOVES baseball. Many people know some baseball history. Greg Peterson KNOWS local baseball history because of arduous research he has engaged in over the years. Peterson's combination of love and work resulted in the 1996 publication of "The Celoron Acme Colored Giants" in *The National Pastime: A Review of Baseball History*, a Society for American Baseball Research journal.



Peterson's article chronicles the brief history of the Celoron Acme Colored Giants, an African-American baseball team that played in Celoron, a nearby "village on Chautauqua Lake". They played only one season, 1898, and Peterson believes it was the last professional minor league team in existence before the color line descended completely and relegated blacks to their own separate but unequal leagues.

### **The Celoron Acme Colored Giants**

More than 60 black players were in the recognized minor leagues before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1900. Two of them – Moses Fleetwood Walker and his brother Weldy – also appeared in 1884 with Toledo of the American Association, which was a major circuit then.

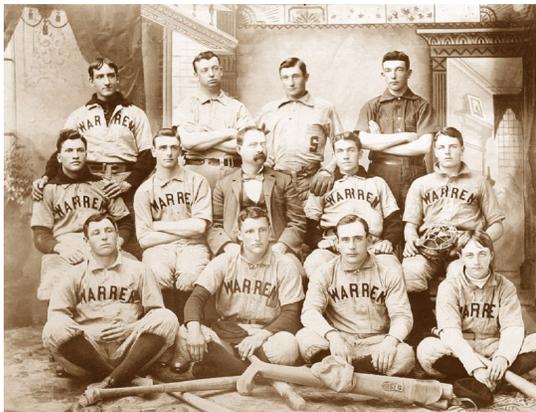
The color line against blacks began lowering in the late 1880s and was complete after the 1898 season, with rare, and usually brief exceptions. It would not be lifted until the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson in October, 1945, to play the '46 season with their Montreal Royals farm club in the International League.

This is the story of the Celoron Acme Colored Giants in the Iron and Oil League of 1898. The Iron and Oil had teams in six small towns in southwestern New York and northwestern Pennsylvania (Bradford, Olean, Warren, Oil City, Meadville and Celoron).

The all-black team represented Celoron, a village on Chautauqua Lake, adjacent to Jamestown, the biggest city in southwestern New York. Celoron's chief attraction was a large amusement park which billed itself as "The World's Greatest Pleasure Resort." Among its pleasures were thrilling rides, fireworks, balloon ascensions, a zoo, swimming matches pitting a horse against a man, and the Celoron Acme Colored Giants.

The Colored Giants were organized by a white man named Harry Curtis. Curtis promised to have the strongest colored club in America..." His 16-man roster was as follows:

Al Baxter	LF	Boston, MA
Billy Booker	2B	Paterson, NJ
Eddie Day	SS	Reading, PA
George Edsall	RF	Norristown, PA
William Kelly	3B	Chambersburg, PA
John Mickey	P	Lexington, VA
William Payne	CF	Allegheny, PA
Random Pringle	P	Savannah, GA
John Southall	C	McKeesport, PA
Walter Williams	P	Portsmouthg, VA
Edward Wilson	P	Bellevue, PA
Clarence Wright	1B	Olean, NY
Fred Collins	P	Bradford, PA
Carter		Middletown, CT
Jupiter	P	Boston, MA
Maybie	OF	



The Giants opened the season in Warren, Pennsylvania (left), on May 12, 1898 and promptly lost three straight games. Warren won the first 12-8, in a game that was described as first-class except for one inning. In that inning the Celoron pitcher, John Mickey, became wild, which, together with a costly error or two, netted the Warren players eight runs. There were about 500 people in attendance. The team was described by the Warren correspondent of *Sporting Life* as having been well-received.

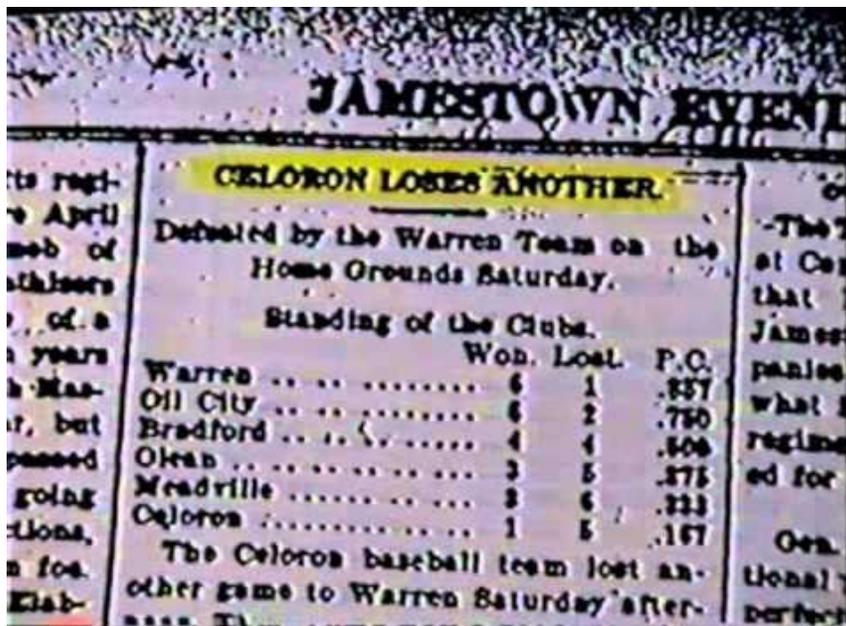
*The Celorons drove home from here Saturday night, and leaving town they enlivened the air with singing, and they can sing as well as they can play. The Negroes are a jolly, gentlemanly crowd and an honor to the league.*

After their first road trip, the Colored Giants were scheduled to host Bradford. The team stayed at a boarding house in Celoron. Prior to the game, the manger, Harry Curtis, suggested that the two clubs be driven about the City of Jamestown on a streetcar as advertisement for the opener. George Maltby, president of both the Street Railroad Company and the Celoron Amusement Company, agreed, and the two teams toured the city promoting the game.

Unfortunately, management forgot to provide return tickets to Celoron for the Bradford players. So while the Acme Giants were driven home, the Bradford players had to hike the four miles from the streetcar barns in Jamestown to Celoron. According to the *Jamestown Journal*, the Bradford club thought itself “badly used.” Miffed but apparently not exhausted, Bradford spoiled Celoron’s home opener by winning, 15-4.

The Spanish-American War was at its height, and the headline writer for the *Journal*, overcome by the war fever, headed the story of the game:

*CELORON BOMBARDED, THEIR FLEET SUNK, AND THEIR FORTS DEMOLISHED*



*A discouraging beginning of the season. It was not an enthusiastic opening of the baseball season; in fact, it rather fell flat. The crowd was a fairly good one... they were prepared to shout, but it was impossible to get up any enthusiasm for the team that represents Celoron... It did*

*not seem like a home team because all members are strangers. It cannot be said that they put up a strong or fast game, however, in any respect, and they failed entirely to meet the expectations of Jamestowners.*

The Celoron nine wore yellow uniforms. The final headline stated: *YELLOW SUITS, YELLOW GAME.*

The Acme Colored Giants were finally successful on their fifth try. They beat Bradford, 7-6, and according to the *Journal*:

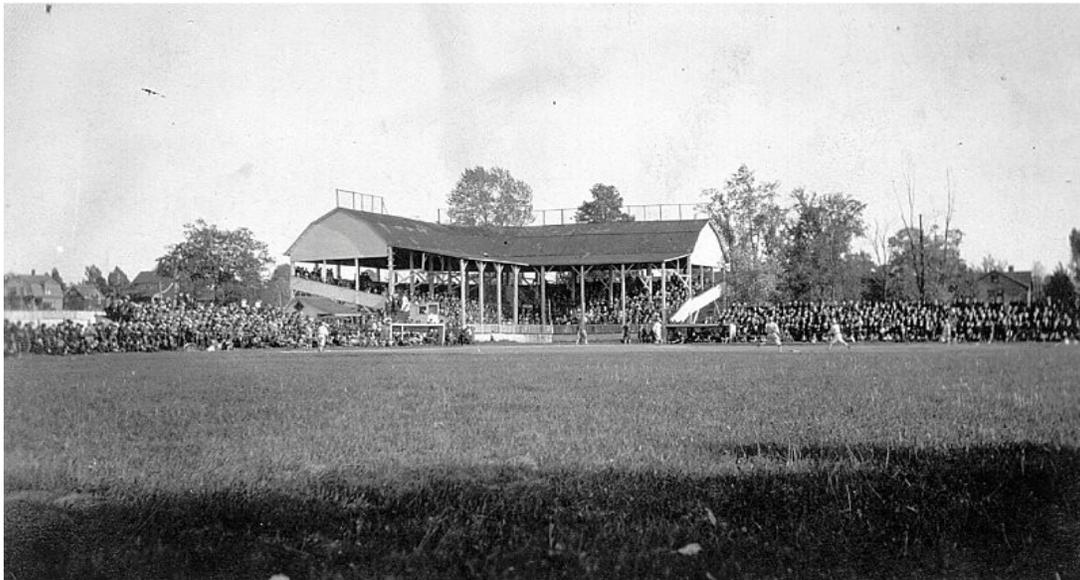
*...won praise and admiration from the attendants at the ball game... The strength of the Celoron players lies largely in their batting and while this does not appeal strongly to many baseball enthusiasts, it certainly is an attractive feature to the average attendant at ball games.*

As the fortunes of the baseball team floundered, so did the degree of coverage by the *Journal*. The season commenced with excitement and detailed coverage including complete box scores. With mounting losses, the coverage was reduced to line scores and then mere notes in the paper, if anything. The *Journal* often complained about the lack of consistency in timing and scheduling:

*The manager makes no effort, apparently, to let people know when a ball game is to be expected. Many people in the city would be present had they known that a game was scheduled.*

The team, in the early going, seemed to play good ball with the exception of an inning or two each game. The *Journal* reported:

*The game was a satisfactory one with the exception of one inning when the colored Giants lost their head and permitted the visitors to score seven runs. In fact, the Giants always put up a strong game with the exception of the unfortunate habit of going to pieces at critical times.*



One of the best games of the season for Celoron occurred on Memorial Day when the Celoron Park was formally opened for the year. The *Journal* stated:

*The Acme Colored Giants and the Warren team played a game of baseball... It was an old-time enthusiastic baseball crowd and the enthusiasm of the crowd must have been communicated to the Celoron team, for they wrested victory from the Warren team after playing the best game of baseball that has been seen here this season.*

The Acme Giants won only five of their first sixteen games. The losses continued to mount and manager Harry Curtis told the *Journal* that he had “secured at heavy expense, Ransom Pringle, of Savannah, who, he claims, is the best colored ball player in the United States.”



At the time, Celoron was 6-17. Pringle turned out to be no savior. Neither did an outfielder and left-handed hitter named Maybie, who was added later.

By early July, the Giants were planted solidly in the league’s cellar and were losing money; the prospects were dim for improvement on the field or in the box office. Only July 5, the Giants lost to Warren, 12-4. The next day, they defeated a team of Jamestown amateurs, 7-5. On the Sixth, an article appeared in the *Jamestown Journal* as follows

***New Baseball Club  
Celoron Giants Disband – A Strong Club Secured To Take Their Place***

*The Celoron Cored Giants, connected with the Oil and Iron baseball league, disbanded Thursday. Bad playing and consequent poor patronage was the cause. George E. Maltby of the Celoron Amusement Company informs the Journal that he has engaged a team selected by C. W. Toboldt, who is to be the manager, to take the colored team’s place for the balance of the season.*

*The new club is selected from among the best players in the Southern League, which recently disbanded. It is comprised white men and was recruited at Louisville. It will be here to play its initial games in this league next week.*

*In order to fill the club dates, Mr. Maltby organized a local club to go to Olean today to play the club of that city the balance of this week.*

*With a strong club here, as promised, Celoron will soon recover its lost ground and the patronage of the games will increase at once.*

The Acme Giants final record in the Iron and Oil League was 10-37 for a .213 percentage. None of the ballplayers on the Celoron Acme Colored Giants ever appeared later with a major black team.

As for Harry Curtis, he was only temporarily discouraged. He wrote to *Sporting Life*: “I have just returned from Jamestown, New York where I was located with my Acme Colored Giants in the Iron and Oil League wherein (despite all reports to the contrary) we were third at the time we quit.”

Evidently responding to complaints from a couple of players that they had not been paid, Curtis lamented, “I, myself, am out of pocket over \$600.00” But he bounced back like the born promoter he was: “I have a complete outfit and I am prepared to furnish a first-class team, either colored or white, to play in dependent ball, or we will go in any league.” History indicates there were no takers.

The white team that replaced the Colored Giants, lasted not much more than a week before disbanding because of dismal gate receipts. It was a dreary postscript to the last season in which blacks played in the minor leagues. For forty-eight years, segregation on the professional baseball scene would be the norm.

