



Take me out to the ball game

By Maurice Smith

Many an early memory was made with father and son sitting side by side at a ballpark nicknamed The Fleet Street Flats.

Located on Lakeshore Road at the foot of Bathurst Street, Toronto it was the home of the Triple A minor league baseball team Toronto Maple Leafs. Ticket prices started at 15 cents. Ball games from that location were not televised, but if you could not make it to the park you could hear it broadcast on CKEY Radio with Joe Chrysdale and Hal Kelly doing the play-by-play. Games were a far cry from the slick promotional World Series contests we watch now.

A gentleman farmer from Whitchurch Township had a great connection to that Toronto team, that league, that stadium and to baseball in general.

In 1830, Thomas and William Cook left their family farm in Ireland to seek their fortune in Canada. They settled homesteads on the 7th Concession (now McCowan Road) in Whitchurch Township; William on the west side near Bloomington Road and Thomas a little further north.

When William's first son, William Andrew, married a local lady named Hannah, they purchased property on the east side of this same roadway. One of their four sons, George, married Aurilla and they purchased a farm in the area. Over the years, fathers and sons expanded their land holdings and by 1900, different branches of the Cook family controlled more than a dozen farms in the area.

No doubt George and Aurilla wanted all their sons to assume responsibility for the farm but one, Earl, opted to follow his real

passion, baseball. Earl played for a number of amateur teams in the Toronto area before being signed by the International League Toronto Maple Leafs in 1931. He was a major force with the team for a number of years, such that they held an "Earl Cook night" in his honour in 1936.

Eventually he was traded to Syracuse and then to Buffalo of the same league, where he had his moment of fame in 1939, when his team played a double header against Jersey City. Earl pitched the first seven inning game, winning 2-0. During the break between games he told the coach he thought he could pitch a few innings to start the second game. The coach, being short of pitchers, agreed. Earl's throwing became stronger and he pitched all nine innings, winning by the identical 2-0 score.

With this feat he became only the fourth

...he became only the fourth professional baseball player to throw, and win, both ends of a double header.

professional baseball player to throw, and win, both ends of a double header. He was the first on record to hurl a shutout for those two wins. Three days later he was on the mound and on his way to pitching what would be 26 consecutive shutout innings, a record at the time.

At the end of the 1940 season his contract

was purchased by the Detroit Tigers, who used him as a relief pitcher. Although he had difficulty adjusting to this role, he had the thrill of pitching in a game at Yankee Stadium. The first batter he faced was the five-time all-star Tommy Henrich and he

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struck him out. Two batters later it was Joe DiMaggio and he fled out to left field.

The following comment was attributed to Earl in the next day's Detroit Free Press. "When you are young, and get a call to come into a game in Yankee Stadium - with the bullpen way back there in centre field - it makes for a long walk."



In 1943 Earl retired from baseball and returned with his wife Blanche to the family farm in Stouffville, where he acted as a player coach in the town's amateur baseball program. Earl died in 1996 and his wife passed away about two years ago at the age of 102.

There are now two streets which run across the farm fields once ploughed by Earl, his father and grandfather. One is Earl Cook Drive and the other William Andrew Avenue. They run from McCowan and align with the back section of Maples of Ballantrae golf course.

It is now a different era in baseball but the ticket prices for Toronto Blue Jay games, which some will argue are not as entertaining as Toronto Maple Leaf baseball, range from approximately \$25 to \$150.

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