

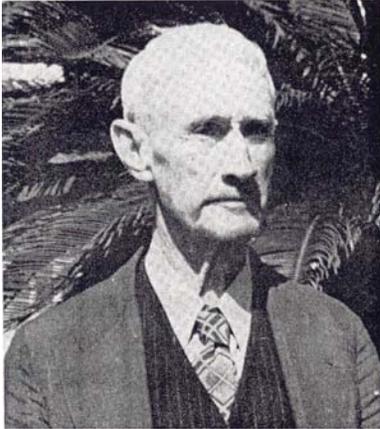
Abner Powell

The Father of New Orleans Baseball

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He was the Bill Veeck of 19th century baseball. Many of his innovations, including the Knothole Gang and Ladies' Day, survived well into the next century. Others, like the "rain check" and the tarp that covers the field in bad weather, are so much a part of the game today that they are often taken for granted.

Charles Abner Powell was born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, in December of 1860. His major league career consisted of two years – one with Washington of the Union Association (a short-lived major league which operated only in 1880) and one with Baltimore and Cincinnati of the old American Association in 1886. Powell played a variety of positions.

While playing for Cincinnati in a game against Louisville at Eclipse Park in Louisville in 1886, Powell was involved in an unusual occurrence. With the score tied 3 – 3 going into the bottom of the 11th inning, Powell was stationed in center field. A Louisville hitter named William "Chicken" Wolf hit a line drive in Abner's direction. As Abner started toward the ball, a dog that had been napping nearby awoke to the sound of the cheering crowd and chased Powell, grabbing hold of his leg. It must have been a sight to see Powell dragging the dog, still fastened to his pants leg, across the outfield in pursuit of the ball. With the fans howling with delight at Powell's predicament, Wolf circled the bases for a game-ending, inside-the-park home run.

Abner Powell arrived in New Orleans in 1887. For the next fifteen years he put the Crescent City on the baseball map with innovations and competitive ballclubs that kept the fans coming back to the ballpark.

Two of Powell's innovations were matters of necessity: the "rain check" and the tarpaulin. With profits being drained by rainouts, Powell pioneered the use of a detachable ticket stub that was reusable in case the game would have to be postponed by the weather. Powell reportedly came up with the idea of using a tarpaulin on the field after watching stevedores cover bales of cotton with tarps on the riverfront.

In 1888 Powell took over as manager of the New Orleans Pelicans. Twice his teams won the Southern League pennant – in 1889 and 1896. In 1901 the defunct Southern League reorganized with a new name, the Southern

Association. Powell became the first manager of the Pelicans in the new league. Not happy with the performance of his club, Powell traveled to North Carolina on a business trip on which he replaced his entire team. The new team was a winner. The following year they made a strong showing, finishing second in the Southern Association.

The 1903 season found Powell in Atlanta, where he would manage for two years with good results. After the 1904 campaign, Powell returned to New Orleans, retired from the game and went into private business.

In August of 1953 Abner Powell died at the age of 92. He was interred at Hope Mausoleum in New Orleans. He was inducted into the Diamond Club of Greater New Orleans Hall of Fame for meritorious service to the game he helped popularize and nurture.

Facts on Abner Powell

- *Powell is credited with having held baseball's first Ladies' Day on April 29, 1887.*
- *At one point in the 1890s, to help keep the league in business, Powell owned four Southern League clubs: Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans, and Selma.*
- *Powell is credited with being the first man to steal home on the pitcher's windup.*
- *It is widely believed that the first field covering tarp was used by Powell in New Orleans in the 1880s. The Cincinnati team borrowed the idea and brought it north with them, where several other ball clubs followed suit.*
- *Powell is generally credited with the invention of the "rain check" as a ticket stub redeemable for admission at a future game if the game for which the ticket was purchased was postponed.*