

The Right of Ascendancy

or

*How I Came to Possess a Photo of the Babe
with My Great-Grandfather*

by

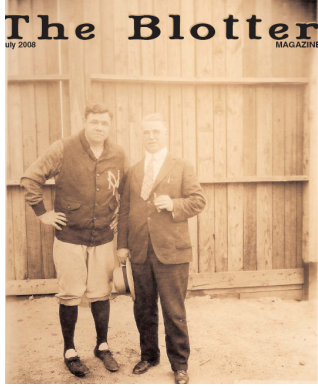
Richard Lewis

Babe Ruth was the epitome of baseball to those of his era. No doubt talented, bon vivant baseball star out late at night drinking, eating, smoking, having a grand time. A hero figure to all would-be professional baseball players if they weren't so old, young, poor of vision, sore of knee or back or arm, married with children, poor, rich, obligated to the military, responsible to their business. Pick one, everybody back then did and still does. He was real. He could do it all and that meant they could, too if it weren't for....

I'm sure that's the way my Great grandfather Dick felt when this picture was taken. Dick had his moments as well as a minor league semi-pro baseball player around the turn of the century (18s-19s, not the last one). He was said to have been a pretty good first baseman and not a bad hitter but took over the family plumbing supply business in deference to reality. Married with children and not a star baseball player. A bit of a responsible citizen. He became a local politician of some import, being elected to the office of city alderman and eventually local party boss. I've been told he was a generous man to a fault, willing to help his pals out no matter what, even to mortgaging the family house to provide loans to those down on their luck. He looks it, doesn't he?

I've known about this photo for some time. My grandmother, Dick's eldest daughter, was a bit of a chip off the old block when it came to bon vivantness. A teacher/community curmudgeon, you know, the one at the town council meetings every week keeping the council on their toes from the audience. She started her career in politics after her husband passed away so that her ambitions would not interfere with caring for him. I always will love Nan for that. She was elected to city council in the early 1970s in her early 70s, unheard of for a woman at that time, and even gave the mayoral race a few years later a run for its money.

Nan was the oldest and therefore had possession of the photo along with other memorabilia of the age as the eldest of three daughters. My father, Nan's son was her only child. Let's just say she felt he shouldn't be the one to have possession of family memories and so granted me the responsibility of keeping a bit of the family history going. Before Nan died, with no small amount of gravitas, she gave me several piles of papers and photos regarding family legacy in public and private. There were several scrap books with articles about this, that or the other. There was also a cardboard folder, just a piece of old style brownish cardboard in which were unceremoniously placed newspaper clippings from the late 1800s and early 1900s, a few tin type photos of unnamed family members, a title to a defunct sailing vessel and several large black and white photos, some loose and some on mat. Several photos depicted minstrel shows being performed in a school auditorium from around the early 50s. I still don't know what to think about those but I'll share if you want. There was a matted 8x10 posed photo of a clam bake from around the 1920s and there, hidden in all the junk was the Babe Ruth photo with Dick standing next to him that you see here.



I stumbled across it while unpacking my personal belongs in my new home, a rented house on the big island of Hawaii. I had recently moved there to take a job in order to save myself from financial ruin and to put 6000 mile of which 3000+ in any direction is a deepwater moat between myself and the final stages of a very nasty divorce. Thank god for high speed internet access. Plodding through all the stuff of my life I stumbled on this somewhat startling photo and was reminded of a line of my family heritage that had been pushed to the back of my consciousness due to life's painful twists and turns over the last few years. I have spent many hours since meditating on the implications of these resurrected memories and the morphic resonance of the lives of these two characters as it continues to vibrate into the future nearly 100 years later.

I can just imagine the conversations this photo stimulated for Dick and his pals and his family. I can only imagine that the Babe probably thought nothing of it, just another photo with some local politician while on an off season publicity tour.

Now I have it. It's fading but it's still clear and sharp. It's still instigating all kinds of thought lines and conversations. Were they pals? Did they smoke a cigar together or go have a beer? Was the Babe awed by this somewhat pompous politico? Was Dick awed to speechlessness by being in proximity to the Sultan of Swat? Or did he nervously chat the Babe up and regale him with tales of first basemanship as a fellow ballplayer? Did the Babe listen and engage or did he blow Dick off as just another yokel in a long yokel parade of his life as a touring phenom? I can only imagine. But that's the beauty of it, if you ask me. Some people say I should sell the photo now and maximize it's cash value as it is after all fading and who knows what the market will be in the future. Any ideas? I don't know, though. I feel like I have a legacy to protect by keeping it and passing it on to my kids. Besides, when you hold it and look at it and look into their eyes you feel a kind of electricity, an energy of some sort that I'm thinking is really just priceless.

Dr. Richard Lewis
Hawaii