

THE JOURNAL OF THE EMERYVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 2, SUMMER 2010

Special



Report



In 1948 the Oakland Oaks won the Pacific Coast League pennant. The veteran Oaks players, affectionately known as the "Nine Old Men" because of their advanced age, each received a championship ring. The above image is a photo of the ring awarded to Oaks catcher Ernie Lombardi. The center of the ring reads: "Oakland Oaks, 1948". The perimeter reads: "Pacific Coast League Champions." Photo, Tony Molatore. Ring, courtesy Ray Raineri.

Baseball in Emeryville: Part Two

**The 1948 Oakland Oaks and the "Nine Old Men"
and
Ernie Lombardi--The Archetypical Oakland Oaks Player
by Ray Raineri**

Oakland Oaks - 1948 - P.C.L. Champions

(Pictures Inside)

Casey Stengel
Manager, Casey Stengel

John Babich
Coach

Earl Jones
1. Earl Jones, p

Billy Martin
2. Billy Martin, 2b

Lou Tost
3. Lou Tost, p

Dario Lodigiani
4. Dario Lodigiani, 2b

Ralph Buxton
5. Ralph Buxton, p

Charlie Gassaway
6. Charlie Gassaway, p

Will Haley
7. Will Haley, p

Loyd Christopher
8. Loyd Christopher, cf

Ernie Lombardi
9. Ernie Lombardi, c

Merrill Combs
10. Merrill Combs, ss

Floyd Speer
11. Floyd Speer, p

Jack Salveson
12. Jack Salveson, p

Bill Raimondi
13. Bill Raimondi, c

Ray Hamrick
14. Ray Hamrick, ss

Eddie Fernandes
15. Eddie Fernandes, c

Brooks Holder
16. Brooks Holder, lf

Jim Tobin
17. Jim Tobin, p

Harry Lavagetta
18. Harry Lavagetta, 3b

Maurice Van Robays
19. Maurice Van Robays, rf

Nick Effen
20. Nick Effen, lb

Aldon Wilkie
21. Aldon Wilkie, p

Mel Duezabou
22. Mel Duezabou, rf

Red Adams
23. Red Adams, trainer

George Metkovich
24. George Metkovich, cf

Les Webber
25. Les Webber, p

Les Scarsella
26. Les Scarsella, rf

Roster of the 1948 Oakland Oaks Pacific Coast League Champions with signatures. Courtesy, EHS.



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The 1948 Oakland Oaks and the "Nine Old Men"

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Ernie Lombardi--The Archetypical Oakland Oaks Player

also

*The Ring: Ernie Lombardi's 1948 Pacific Coast
League Champions Oakland Oaks Ring*

by

Ray Raineri

Credits:

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Leaning on a rail with their bats, four players of the 1948 Oakland Oaks Championship Team focus on the action in the game. Left to right: Ernie Lombardi, Billy Raimondi, Cookie Lavagetto and Dario Lodigiani. Photo, 1948. Courtesy, A History of Baseball in the San Francisco Bay Area: San Francisco Giants Official 1985 Yearbook, p. 39.

The 1948 Oakland Oaks and the "Nine Old Men"
by Ray Raineri

Sixty two years ago, as the start of the 1948 Pacific Coast League season approached, many fans of the Oakland Oaks were notably enthusiastic and optimistic regarding the team's potential to field a contending team. Manager Charles "Casey" Stengel, with his keen sense of baseball and well-honed managerial skills, had directed the team to a second place finish in 1946, and then taken fourth place in 1947. Stengel would present a well-equipped starting line up and a talented crew of both starting and back up pitchers.

Adding to the overall upbeat fan sentiment were the major improvements completed in the magnificent old park,

originally constructed in 1913. Owners Clarence "Brick" Laws and Joe Blumenfeld, who purchased the team in 1943, had spent a huge amount for the times toward updating the facility. In the mid-forties, the park received a much improved set of lights, seating had been expanded and improved, and the main entryway on Park Avenue was substantially modified.

One other element also helped generate and sustain a strong and steady following of fans. The then new introduction of television had not yet captured the full attention of the public, and the sets were relatively expensive. The full impact and influence television would have in keeping people home and away from events elsewhere, baseball games included, wouldn't be experienced until several more years elapsed. Tickets to a ball game were



Charles ("Chuck") Dressen (left) and Charles ("Casey") Stengel (right) assume a playful boxing stance. Clarence ("Brick") Laws, co-owner of the Oaks, is in the center. The two managers produced the last two pennants. Stengel won the pennant for the Oaks in 1948 and Dressen led the team to a pennant in 1950. Photo. c1950. Courtesy, Ray Raineri.

well within the economic reach of most—adult general admission was \$1.25 with \$1.75 good for a reserved seat. (The club had attained a peak seasonal attendance in 1946 of just under 600,000 spectators).

The 1948 season was set—there would be one hundred and eighty-eight games with one hundred and fifty nine playing days/nights; (a double-header on Sundays was a standard part of the season back then). The Oaks opened play in Emeryville on March 30th against the Portland Beavers and would conclude the season on the road on September 26th up against the Sacramento Solons.

What follows will touch upon some of the memorable events of the season recalled by the writer, who then at age 10 seldom missed a home game, and even less seldom, paid for an admission ticket.

Team manager Stengel and coach Johnny Babich developed the starting season's line up which included a group of seasoned veterans, including a number who had experience at the major league level. As the season progressed, Stengel would call upon many of his strong back up players who also were into their 30s and brought to the game a mature, poised and confident presence. Among the heavy hitters were first baseman/outfielder Les Scarscella, who had led the league in batting in 1944, as an Oak, and outfielder Lloyd Christopher, whose two hundred ninety-six total bases had led all players in 1946 while playing with the Los Angeles Angels. Speed was also present with outfielders Mel Duezabou and Brooks Holder quite capable of beating out a steal. Providing the always needed stabilizing force was veteran



Oakland Oaks pitcher Ralph Buxton. "Pine Tar" Buxton stood 5' 11" and weighed 168 lbs. In a game against San Francisco on August 14, 1948 the umpire detected pine tar in Buxton's glove, hence the nickname. His favorite pitch was the screwball. Photo, 1948. Courtesy, Rodoni Collection

catcher Bill Raimondi, who was to ultimately log in nineteen years with the Pacific Coast League.

Finally, the pitching crew, ably led by opening day starter, Will Hafey, also included the strong arms of Charlie Gassaway, Ralph Buxton, Floyd Speer, Earl Jones, and Jack Salvesson. Overall, the team would add a number of acquisitions for the season. The three most significant were second baseman Billy Martin, catcher Eddie Fernandes, and seventeen year former Major League catcher, Ernie Lombardi. Now 40 years old and a member of the Oaks last pennant winning team of 1927, Ernie returned to the Oaks after having been cut by the New York Giants in '47.

The Oaks thus found themselves with

a twenty year old (Billy Martin), who was to develop into a brilliant player and manager, and Ernie Lombardi, at 40, following a long career in the majors, including 10 seasons at Cincinnati, and five with the Giants, ending with a respectable .306 lifetime batting average.

The '48 season was to begin and end with a sizzling battle between trans-bay rivals, Oakland and the San Francisco Seals, whose team featured a strong and proficient set of players. Off to a modest start, the Oaks were in 4th place seven weeks into the season. They were literally fighting their way along, as on May 31st, in the first game of a double header, Oaks outfielder George Metkovich was nearly struck by a couple of pitches, and ran to the mound to throw a whack at pitcher George "Pinky" Woods. In the second game, manager "Casey" Stengel was ejected from the game after a boisterous and animated argument with the umpire after "Casey" contended that Ernie Lombardi had been hit in the "stern" by a pitch—an occurrence evidently not witnessed by the umpire.

By mid-August, the Seals held a three percentage point lead over the Oaks with 79 wins and 58 losses against the Oaks record of 81 and 60.

In mid-September, things got real tense. With less than two weeks left in the season, the standings had the Oaks in first place at 104 and 71, with the Seals turning up the heat, posting a 103 and 71 record. The last two weeks pitted two of the all time masters of managing in baseball to draw upon all their resources to secure the Championship Pennant. Frank "Lefty" O'Doul of the Seals and "Casey" Stengel of the Oaks played it like a chess match—very carefully, and squeezing the best from their respective teams. The Oaks prevailed with a strong finish, with a final record of 114 wins against 74 losses. The Seals, in second place, two games out, had ended with 112 wins and 76 defeats.

Looking back, "Casey" had utilized a remarkably strong pitching staff with precision rarely seen. Eight pitchers won in double



A night game at the Oaks Ballpark. The Oaks batter appears to drop his bat after being hit by a pitched ball. Photo, c1948. Courtesy, Rodoni Collection.

figures, ranging between Charlie Gassaway with fifteen victories, and Aldon Wilkie with eleven. In between were six others recording between twelve and thirteen wins each. Aside from Les Webber, the relievers saw very little action.

On the batting side, seven starters averaged over .300 with George Metkovich's .336 tops for the team.

In his farewell to baseball, wearing the colors of the team he began with in 1926, forty year old Ernie Lombardi had played in 103 games and was the revered member of this championship team. A long look back at that '48 season has to be among the most sentimental and cherished of times shared not only by the "Nine Old Men", but also for all of us who are now "old baseball fans."

Sources Used:

Fred W. Lange, History of Baseball in California and Pacific Coast Leagues: 1847-1938. Oakland: n.p., 1938.

Gene Karst and Martin J. Jones, Jr., Who's Who In Professional Baseball. New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1973.

Various manuscripts from the writer's works, 1980-2008.

News clippings from the Oakland Tribune, various years.



After the Oakland Oaks won the pennant in 1948, there was a victory parade in downtown Oakland. In this photo Casey Stengel is riding in a convertible in the parade waving his hat in celebration. Courtesy, Ray Raineri.

**Ernie Lombardi—The Archetypical
Oakland Oaks Player
by Ray Raineri**

One of the earliest baseball parks in Oakland, known as the Oakland Grounds, was located at 13th and Center streets. In use through the 1880's, the park was within close proximity to the youth that lived with their families in small, extremely modest homes nearby—many of the families being recent arrivals from Europe—including a significant number from Italy. Although the Oakland Grounds closed in 1891, its memory inspired the neighborhood kids to pursue the sport and find another venue.

Shortly after 1900, one set of newly arrived individuals was Domenico Lombardi and his wife, who would reside at 1411-13th Street, and eventually establish a small, corner grocery store at 1200-Center Street. It was within this setting that a son, Ernesto, was born in 1908, and along with two sisters,

comprised the family.

Given the fact that Ernie's early years were spent within a block of the ball grounds, together with an account indicating that when Ernie was ten, his father purchased and gave him an accordion. Ernie quickly arranged with a kid nearby to trade the instrument for a baseball glove; it would seem almost preordained that he would become a baseball player.

Between helping as a clerk in the family grocery store and attending McClymonds High School, Ernie spent virtually all his free time on the field, usually at nearby Bayview Park—now known as Raimondi Park--located between 16th and 18th Streets, and Wood and Campbell Streets in West Oakland. He matured rapidly, and well before reaching 18 years of age, measured six feet three inches, and carrying two hundred and thirty pounds. By today's growth charts, these may not be noteworthy; however, in the early 1920's,

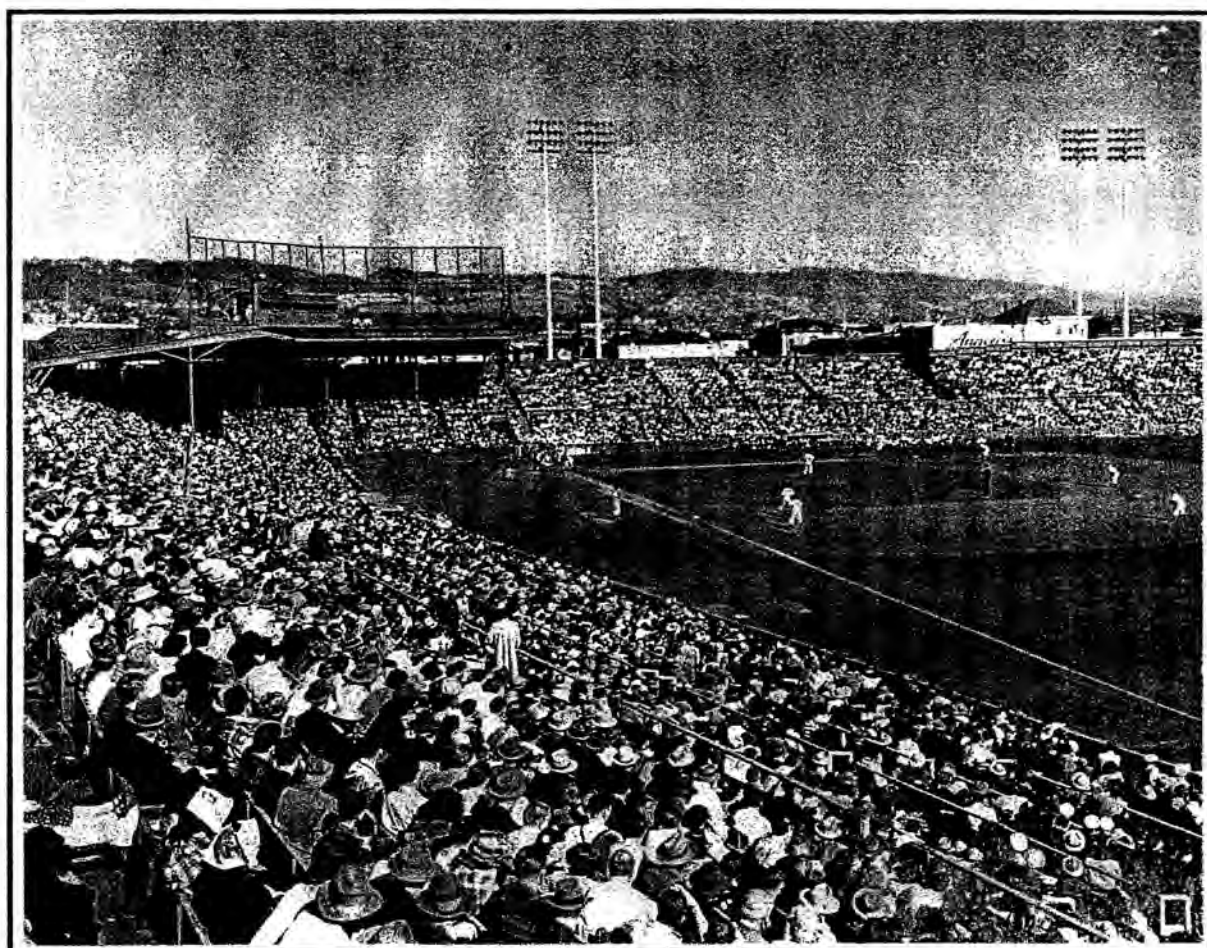
Ernie's size was viewed as immense. Offsetting his strength, however, was his inability to run; his pace rarely attained the speed of a fast walk. That limitation was to prove bothersome at best, and downright maddening to both Ernie and, later, his managers in professional baseball.

Shortly after his eighteenth birthday in 1926, Ernie received what must have been viewed by him as the ultimate belated gift—he was signed to a contract with the Triple "A" Oakland Oaks Baseball Club—then managed by Del Howard. Team officials had correctly assessed Ernie's tremendous power at bat, along with his able and competent skills as a catcher. His lack of speed was well known, but overall, he would more often than not, prove to be an asset on the Oaks team, and also for the teams he would play with in the

major leagues.

The 1926 Oaks had won only two pennants since the turn of the century; one in 1902, the last year the team was a member of the California League, and a second flag in 1912, as part of the Pacific Coast League.

In 1927, Ernie's role with the Oaks was secure, and he and a crew of extraordinary players, fielded a team that many observers of the day, proclaimed to be one of the best, if not the best ever. With strength and balance from pitching to defense, and hitting, the Oaks took first place in a blaze of glory. Ernie's contributions were a key, as he along with power hitter "Buzz" Arlett, led the team forward. (Ernie batted .398 for the season, after spending a very brief period farmed out to Utah).



This photograph is a memorable image of a 1948 game underway at the Oaks Ballpark in Emeryville. The shot was taken from the first base-side grandstand, looking southeast. Courtesy, EHS.

OAKS BOX OFFICE INFORMATION

Night Games.....8:15 P.M.	Doubleheaders 1:30 P.M.
Afternoon Single Games.....2:30 P.M.	Sunday Morning Games..10:15 A.M.

BOX SEATS	\$1.75
GENERAL ADMISSION	1.25
LADIES (Saturday Only)75
STUDENTS75
ADULT BLEACHERS75
STUDENT BLEACHERS50
CHILDREN BLEACHERS20

Phone reservations can be made any time before the day of the game — Call **OLympic 2-7700**. Reserved Box Seats must be picked up by 6:00 P. M. the day of the game. Sunday's must be picked up by 5:00 P. M. Saturday.

- Season reservations for any day of the week may be made by written request.

Oaks Box Office Information, including the price of admission. Oakland Oaks Official Score Book. 1950. Courtesy, EHS.

Ernie remained with the Oaks through the 1930 season, and in '31, at age 23, he was signed to a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers in the National League. The following year, he joined the Cincinnati Reds, where he was the starting catcher for ten seasons; during that span, his batting averaged over .300 for seven seasons, and he was in the forefront of the starting nine.

In 1942, Ernie joined the Boston Braves, another National League team, and ended that season with a hefty .330 batting average. The following year, he was signed by the New York Giants, where he remained until concluding seventeen seasons of major league baseball in 1947—posting a .306 lifetime average.

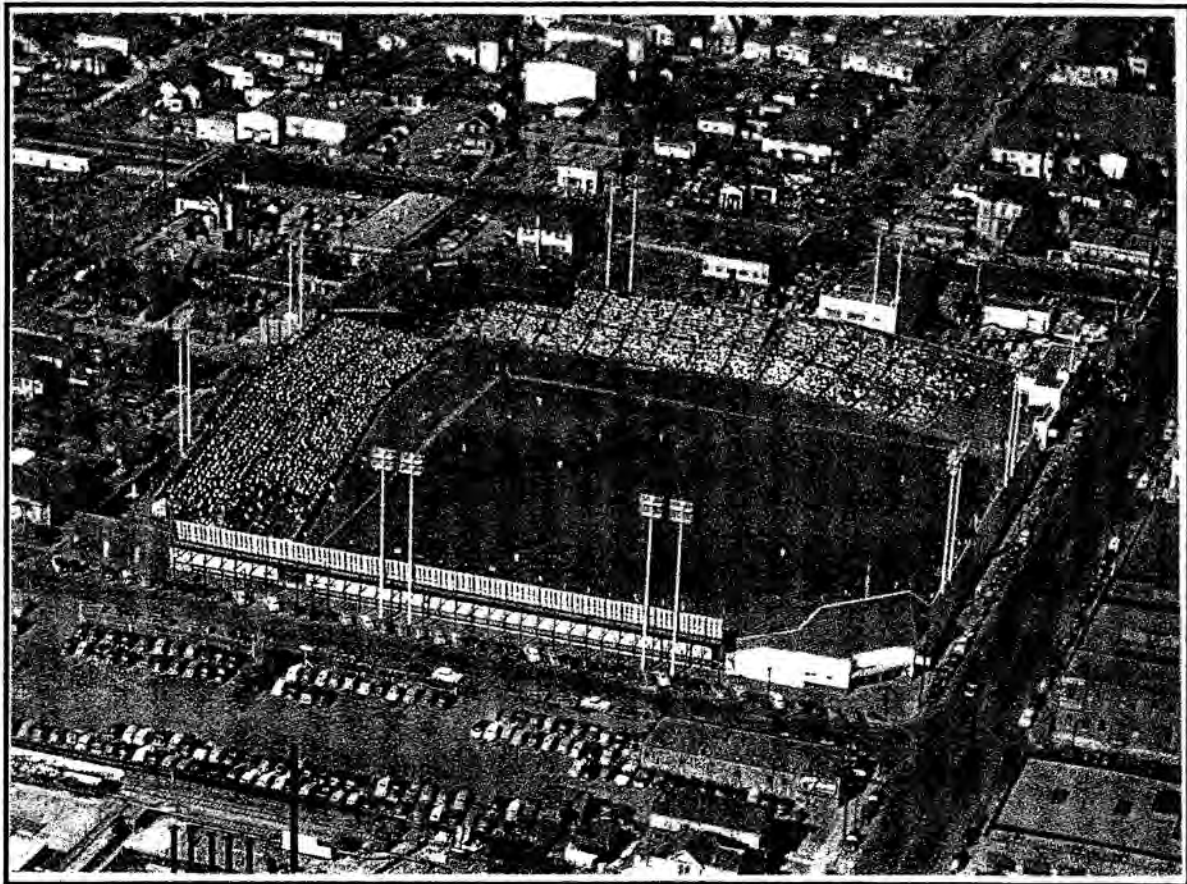
Returning to Oakland, he and his wife, Berice resided on 43rd Street in North Oakland. Ernie, at age 39 (considered almost ancient for a ballplayer at that time) still had some fuel in his tank, along with a strong love and attachment to the game. Thus, when Ernie signed on and joined his original team, the Oakland Oaks in 1948, he would prove to all that he was to end his career as it had began, by playing with the same drive,

determination and power that resulted in a pennant for the home team in 1927.

In the twenty-one year span of the '27 and '48 championship teams, Ernie did what no one else came close to. He played his best for both teams—first at 19 years of age—and once again at 40! finishing the season with a .264 average while producing eleven home runs. (And oh yes, he even had two stolen bases!)

The end of that incredible season had Ernie finally hanging up his spikes and other equipment. Accounts of his years during retirement portray a once happy and mild mannered athlete, feeling quite lost and lonely after having been virtually immersed in a sport that to him, was life itself. Adding to his despondency was his fear of apparently being overlooked for inclusion into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Ernie, as well as all those aware and knowledgeable about his accomplishments, would agree that he merited membership.

Following a bout with cancer, Ernie passed away on September 26th, 1977 in Santa Cruz. While he did not live to experience the fulfillment he truly deserved, he was voted



A classic aerial photo of a Saturday afternoon baseball game at the Oakland Ballpark in 1948. San Pablo Avenue runs horizontally at the top, and Park Avenue is shown on the far right side. Courtesy, Ray Raineri.

into the Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee in 1986, the proper and well-deserved recognition for a true Oakland home grown hero.

Sources Used:

Fred W. Lange, History of Baseball in California and Pacific Coast Leagues, 1847-1938. (Oakland: n.p., 1938).

Gene Karst and Martin J. Jones, Jr., Who's Who in Professional Baseball. Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1973).

Mark Emmons, "Lombardi Never Had a Chance to Enjoy Fame," San Jose Mercury News, appearing in the Montclairion newspaper Sports Section, October 8th, 2002.

Various manuscripts from the writer's works, 1980-2008.

News clippings from the Oakland Tribune for 1948.

**The Ring: Ernie Lombardi's
1948 Pacific Coast League
Champions Oakland Oaks Ring
by Ray Raineri**

During the past several decades, the collecting of sports memorabilia in all its many forms, has undergone an enormous participant expansion, especially at the adult level. When the writer was a pre-teen (late 1940's), younger individuals waited anxiously in front of the corner grocery store each week during baseball season, for the arrival of the driver of the bread van. He would not only unload Remar (and later Sunbeam) bread, but also the card featuring a player in the Oakland Oaks Baseball Team.

The above practice was repeated in most cities where a professional baseball



George Kelly coached the Oakland Oaks from 1948 to 1953. Photo. 1949. Courtesy, EHS.

team played, and whether it was a bakery, oil company, clothing store, or another business enterprise which had the cards produced as a means of advertisement of their product, the cards were scooped up rapidly—primarily by boys aged six or seven through the teen-age ranks.

Presently, of all the sports related material available, including clothing, photos, uniforms, bats, balls and yes, cards, few items are as highly coveted by collectors of Pacific Coast League memorabilia as a pennant winning team's ring. Adding to the special nature of this specific ring is the fact that the Oakland Oaks in their 53 seasons as member of the Pacific Coast League would manage to win only four League Championships—1912, 1927, 1948, and 1950. Noteworthy too, is that Ernie Lombardi (the ring's original owner) was the only player who was a part of both the

'27 and '48 teams!

Little is known of the awards bestowed upon the individual members of pennant winning teams in the early years, but it appears the ball players received rings following the Oaks last championship season in 1950.

Fast-forwarding to 2009, a set of fortuitous circumstances led to the writer obtaining the ring originally presented to Hall of Fame catcher, Ernie Lombardi, a member of that great 1948 Oaks team, often referred to as "The Nine Old Men."

Subsequent to Lombardi's passing in 1977, the ring was sold as part of his estate. According to the prior owner, the ring had been out of circulation for several years before he purchased the piece. It, therefore, appears that the writer is the fourth owner. Provenance was further established by noting that Lombardi's name is engraved inside the rim; and sealing the certainty, one only need examine the ring's size; it's huge!, so much so that the new owner had to make use of one and one half band aids wrapped around the bottom part to ensure it would remain on his largest finger—exclusive of the thumb! (Ernie stood 6' 3" and weighed in at 230 pounds). Reportedly, he could hold seven baseballs in his hand. It is to be noted that, appropriately so, the ring, like Ernie, is large. Weighing in just under a full ounce, it is made up of both yellow and white gold, with a striking accent in enamel, set off in a green tone. All lettering is well-designed and executed with all relevant wording clear and easily read.

Although the term "Acorns" is on the ring, that name never supplanted the name "Oaks". Famed illustrator, Lee Susman did utilize a drawing of an acorn for his many illustrations centered on the team, and for the yearly decals introduced in 1947, which featured the "Lil Acorn".

In closing, the writer could, perhaps, make a reasonably convincing case that the right person now provides TLC for this symbol once awarded to and worn by a very special person who well-represented the true spirit, demeanor, and skills of the great ball players of yesteryear. ❖❖❖❖

OAKLAND

Baseball Club



JOE BLUMENFELD
Vice President



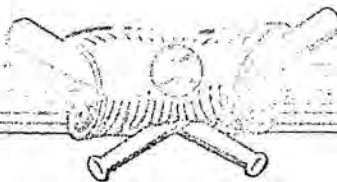
CASEY STENGEL
Manager



CLARENCE LAWS
President



HARRY DAVIS
Business Manager



Oakland Baseball Club. Oakland Oaks Score Book, 1948. Courtesy, EHS.

Mel Duezabou, RIP

**Former Oakland Oak
was known as slugger**

Oakland Tribune, April 19, 2010

Mel Duezabou, a hard-hitting Oakland Oaks outfielder during this city's minor league baseball era, died April 7 at his Oakland home from natural causes. He was 92.

Duezabou graduated from Fremont High in Oakland and UC Berkeley before joining the Oaks of the Triple-A classification Pacific Coast League during the 1940s. He played nine minor league seasons, eight in Oakland, and batted .302 during his career. He hit .308 in 1948 when the Oaks' "Nine Old Men" won the PCL championship.

Lil Arnerich, of Alameda, an Oaks teammate, said Duezabou had major league potential, but an arm injury early in his career weakened his defense.

"Mel was a good hitter," said Arnerich, now 81, "but he couldn't throw."

Billy Raimondi, 97, was an Oakland catcher during Duezabou's entire time with the Oaks, who moved to Vancouver after the 1955 season. "He was a nice guy, and he hit as good as anyone," said Raimondi, an Alameda resident. "But he wasn't a good fielder. You never felt good when he went after balls, although he never dropped a ball."

Duezabou also boxed at Cal. His ring skills were still evident in 1940 when 6-foot-4, 240-pound Sacramento pitcher Max Surkont challenged the 5-9, 140-pound Duezabou before a game at Oaks Park in Emeryville. Duezabou took out his false teeth and dropped the larger Surkont with a one-two punch. "Mel looked like a miniature Joe Louis," recalled Arnerich, who witnessed the fight.

Editor's Note:

The Emeryville Historical Society received this gracious note from Lee Susman, Oakland Tribune sports cartoonist. Susman created the Little Acorn mascot, an iconic cartoon character whose antics and expressions reflected the ups and downs of the Oakland Oaks baseball team.

4/15/10

EMERYVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
EMERYVILLE, CA 94609

DEAR SIRS & MA'AMS,

THANKYOU FOR SENDING ME
YOUR EDITION OF THE OAKLAND
OAKS-AKA-ACORN'S PIECE.

RAY RAINERI DID A
WONDERFUL JOB RESEARCHING
AND WRITING IT.

MANY PEOPLE CALLED TO
TELL ME THEY READ IT AND
HOW MUCH THEY ENJOYED IT.

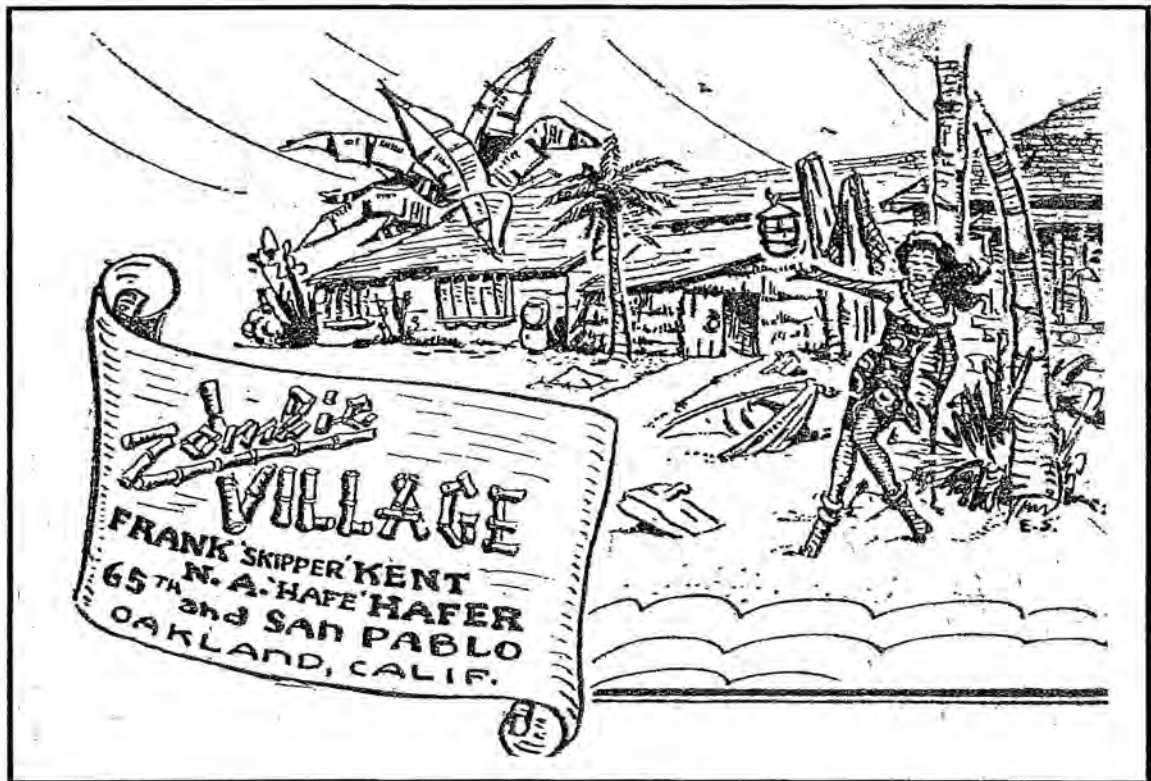
THANKS AGAIN FOR
REMEMBERING ME.

I TRULY APPRECIATE
YOUR THOUGHTFULNESS!

BEST REGARDS,

LEE SUSMAN





Zombie Village, located at 6485 San Pablo Avenue, was a restaurant operated by "Skipper" Kent. Patrons came to see the shrunken head on display and sip exotic drinks. The restaurant burned down on October 22, 1967 and never reopened. Postcard, c1950s. Courtesy, Oakland History Room.

Letter to the Editor from Dave Curtin

Dear Sirs:

A recent article mentioned the "Zombie Village" Restaurant (65th & San Pablo). There was mention of a "moat." The front of the structure was designed with a sand moat. There was a wooden ramp/gang plank that rose from the sidewalk, over the sand moat, to the entry. Within the moat were two canoes with outriggers. The structure itself was enclosed by bamboo. It was a great place to play as a child. I was there the night/early morning the Zombie Village caught fire and burnt. It never reopened.

Sincerely,

Dave Curtin

Zombie Village Burns

Oakland Tribune, October 23, 1967, p. 1.

Fire swept through the Zombie Village, one of Oakland's best known restaurants, just after

dawn yesterday, causing an estimated \$100,000 damages. The three-alarm fire completely destroyed the building at 6485 San Pablo Ave., according to Battalion Chief John Fahey.

A landmark since it was opened in 1942 by yachtsman Frank (Skipper) Kent, the South Sea Island-style restaurant had been operated recently by Zombie Village, Inc., headed by Jimmie Gee of 726 McKinley Ave., corporation president and restaurant manager.

James W. Dieterich Jr. of Alamo...said today that "many old-timers came by yesterday during the fire, and told us the old Village was a favorite place in their youth."

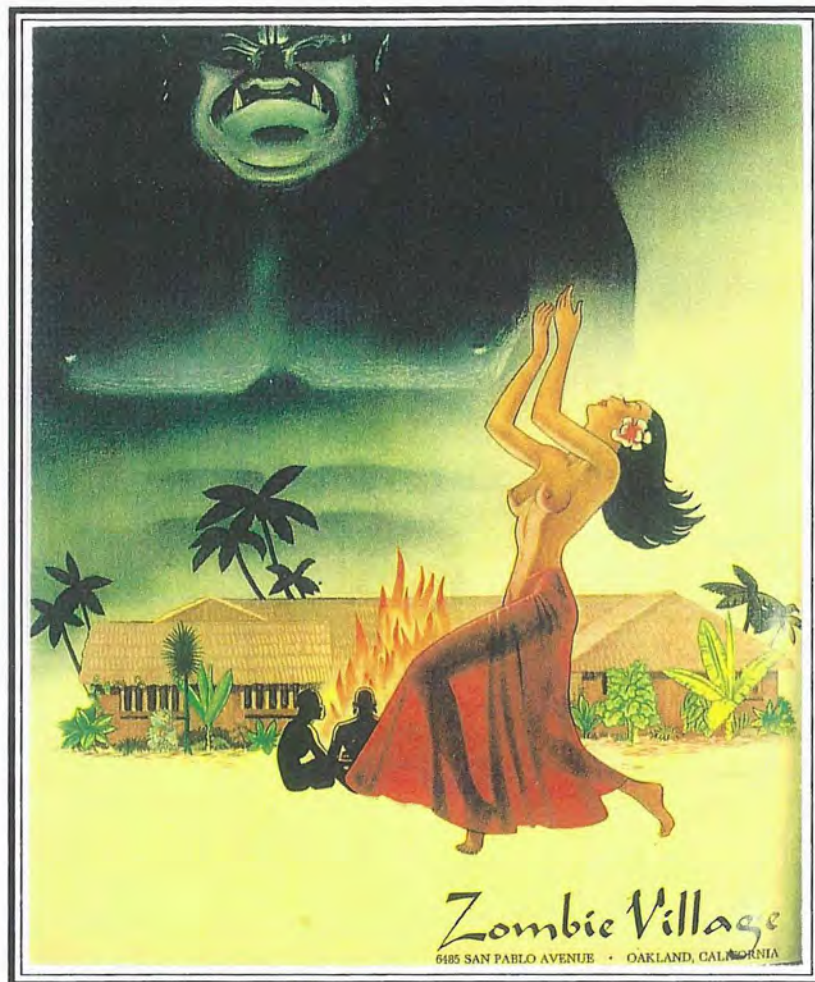
The first alarm was turned in at 6:34 a.m. When firemen arrived flames were soaring 50 feet through the roof and the restaurant was completely engulfed. Fifty-two men and 10 pieces of equipment responded to the blaze and prevented it from spreading to other buildings. ...Fahey said the restaurant was closed and it was not immediately determined how the fire started. It is being investigated.

The Emeryville Historical Society
6389 Racine Street
Oakland, CA 94609

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

TO:

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Zombie Village Restaurant was located at 6485 San Pablo Avenue in the Golden Gate District of North Oakland. It burned down on October 22, 1967. See inside, p. 14. Courtesy, EHS.