



# Hockessin Holler

*A Publication of the Hockessin Historical Society*

Volume 12, Issue 2 - June 2015

Co-Editors Joseph R. Lake & Sandra Pugh

## On The Edge Of Greatness



*Nip Winters, 1924 Colored World Series*

*Article by Joe Lake*

Wouldn't it be great to visit the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York and find information, photography and artifacts from a Hockessin baseball player? It could have happened, and, some day, it just might still happen. The local baseball player with these extraordinary credentials is James Henry "Jesse" Winters – locally known as "Nip" Winters. There is a Delawarian in the Baseball Hall of Fame today. He is William Julius "Judy" Johnson of Marshallton, Delaware. A historical marker can now be found near his home on Kiamensi Road. Johnson played for the Negro Baseball League (1921-1936), the same league and about the same time that Winters played for them. "Judy" Johnson entered the Hall of Fame in 1975.

"Nip" Winters was born in Washington, DC in 1899 to James and Martha Winters. He had 2 sisters and 1 brother (Sarah, Mabel and Elmer). He took an early liking to the game of baseball and played the sport throughout his high school years. He starred as a left-handed pitcher. His talent ambition was soon recognized by the Negro Baseball League about 1919.

Looking at his professional career, he is credited with playing for the following teams:

Atlantic City Bacharach Giants (1921, 1931, 1932),  
New York Bacharach Giants (1922),  
Darby Hilldale Giants (1923-27, 1931),  
New York Lincoln Giants (1928),  
Colored All-Stars (1928),  
Homestead Grays (1928),  
Baltimore Black Sox (1929),  
New York Lincoln Giants (1929),  
Washington Pilots (1932).

In 1924 he played for the Darby Hilldale Giants in the Colored World Series. Nip also appeared occasionally in the lineup of several other Negro ball teams, in addition to those listed above. Furthermore, while playing for one of the New York teams in the 1920s it is reported that during an exhibition game, "Nip" struck out the infamous Babe Ruth. That was one of the highlights of his career.

About this time "Nip" met Connie Mack, Manager of the famous Philadelphia Athletics. He supposedly told Winters, "if you were a white man, I'd sign you to a contract right this second."

About 1935 "Nip" met and married Sarah Smith, daughter of Hockessin farmer, Jake Smith. The Smith home was at the corner of Evanson and Valley Roads. Following the wedding, Winters moved into the Smith home. He got a job as a laborer with Hockessin Supply Company. In those

days. Hockessin Supply Company was a combined Lowes, Tractor Supply, & feed mill. "Nip" was employed in the feed mill. Grains were custom ground and sweetened and as the final product reached the 50 or 100 pound bags, "Nip" would tie or stitch the top of the bags and load them onto an awaiting customer's vehicle.

Joe Lake remembers "Nip" Winters as a quiet individual, who worked with Roy Salyard in the mill. I never once heard him discussing his baseball career with anyone. However, the noise level in the mill caused by the machinery made it nearly impossible to carry on a conversation. Edward "Monk" Gormley, former Hockessin postmaster, remembers "Nip" as anything but quiet. Visiting Gormley's store/postoffice daily "Nip" is remembered as providing story after story about his baseball career.

"Nip" Winters died in Hockessin in 1971, about the same year that Hockessin Supply Co. became a part of American Home & Hardware Co. Roy Salyard, his coworker, died in 1965.

To make Hockessin residents aware of their once famous baseball player, Darlene Amobi is spearheading an HHS effort to have a Delaware State Historic Marker dedicated to Winters career placed in Roser Park near the site of the Smith family home.

### Mark Your Calendar

HHS Meeting & Election of Officers

Tuesday, June 23, 2015 - 6:30 p.m.

Back Burner Restaurant

Light Refreshments and Open Bar

Guest Speaker

### Does Hockessin's History Matter?

On Friday, May 15, Joe Lake received an e-mail message from Kim Burdick concerning an adhoc committee meeting of a group calling themselves Delaware 2016 Preservation Celebration. The meeting would be held on May 18 at the John Dickinson Plantation near Dover. Kim was hoping that someone from HHS could attend. The purpose of the meeting is to plan the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of historic preservation laws in Delaware. The e-mail sparked Joe's memory of several recent newspaper articles on this very subject. If he was the editor of a regional newspaper, he would call issue an editorial called, "Does Hockessin's History

Matter?" Joe believes, and hopefully is correct, that the people of Hockessin care deeply about its history. Many grieve when artifacts of that history are lost forever – whether they are documents, photographs, paintings, or other irreplaceable symbols of our past. Our local government has an obligation to support efforts to preserve history. Our political leaders must feel this caring. That is why so many governments allocate tax dollars for the preservation of history. These dollars are used to fund cultural programs, archives, preservation projects, school programs, oral history projects, traveling exhibits, publications, and more. About half of the 50 States have active history preservation budgets – Delaware included. As an unincorporated town, Hockessin has more relevant history than most chartered cities in the United States. It depends on the County and State Governments to assist in our preservation efforts. Who else is there? Some politicians respond to this question by saying, "Go to the private foundations for funding." On the other hand, these politicians know full well that our nation is struggling to overcome a rash of economic downturns. Foundations are overwhelmed by requests, not only for historic preservation funding, but more money just to survive – regardless of their mission. So what does the Hockessin Historical Society do that warrants taxpayer support?

- It educates schoolchildren and local residents about the history of our town. The recent series of talks at the public library and elsewhere on slavery and the abolitionist movement in Hockessin before the Civil War is a prime example;
- If its Exhibit Building is soon built, it will house and display hundreds of artifacts from the town's past;
- The same building will serve as a repository for hundreds of historic documents, books, images, and maps that tell the town's story. It will serve a resource to journalists, historians, tourists and others interested in exploring the area's past; and,
- It provides a forum for discussion and debate about what is beautiful in our community and what is not.

Since 1999, the HHS has published its newsletter – The Hockessin Holler. This quarterly publication is dedicated exclusively to the history of Hockessin and the surrounding areas. With a historic repository and working space, the organization hopes to encourage the printing of monographs and books on local history.