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It would be irresponsible to discuss the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum without mentioning the town within which it resides. James Fenimore Cooper, The Farmers Museum and the Glimmerglass Opera Company aside, Cooperstown is like a natural baseball theme park. Warning: it is very difficult to get to. It's not near anything, Yogi. It is quite far from major highways, and the effect is pronounced. The roads get narrower and more bucolic as you approach the town, so that you are "In The Past" when you arrive. The sidewalks are all but wooden, most of the shops are "old fashioned" and/or run by old-timers, and there are lots of baseball souvenir shops, and other baseball-themed retail outlets, including the venerable Shortstop Restaurant, a few doors down from The Hall. The beauty is that none of it is staged or false; it's just the way the town is. In recent years, there's been a trend toward newness, as there has been in the Hall itself, but, again, it is not flashy or glitzy; in fact, it is as though an ambience consultant had been brought in. (While Cooperstown also houses Doubleday Field, where it all didn't really start, there is no minor-league baseball team in Cooperstown, even though there has been lots of lobbying over the years to enter one in the old New York-Penn League, a short-season rookie league. If you've schlepped all the way to Cooperstown, you might as well make the relatively short trip to Oneonta, New York, where the Oneonta Yankees play at Damaschke Field. Take in a night game, sit on the first-base side and you will forever swear that you have been in the best minor-league park in America.)

It's not clear from their literature whom The Hall brought in for their sprucing up, but the museum branch has been decidedly upscaled in the last couple of years. The basement, which used to house a "Stat Room," in addition to a display on baseball board games, current uniforms, and other assorted items, including a splendid old Iron Mike (now gone), has been closed to the public and is now used for storage. This necessitated my changing my thitherto standard plan of starting from the bottom of the building and working my way up the four (now three) floors. Thus, on my trip in late '89, I started at the top and worked my way down.

Upon entering the top floor, you hear strains of what is clearly a turn-of-the-century song coming out of an old Philco radio. Baseball music, heralding a baseball music exhibit: two dozen copies of sheet music, including "Tessie, You Are The Only, Only, Only," the Red Sox theme song, as sung by the Royal

Rooters fan club in 1903. “Take Your Girl to the Ballgame,” “Hooray for Our Baseball Team,” “Gee! It’s a Wonderful Game,” “The Feds Are Here to Stay” [*sic*]. Not exactly heavy metal. One of the museum’s weaknesses is evident right here. A piece of paper describing one of the pieces of sheet music is attached right onto the artifact, something most museums don’t do. This scrap of paper notes a donor—another fault—some donors are noted, others aren’t.

Just opposite the music display is one on baseball cards, including a seemingly accurate historical description of the development of cards, lettered onto the glass, making it somewhat difficult to read, given the harsh lighting in the room. Also included is a small display of baseball postage stamps, mostly from the U.S., but some from around the world. Nothing analytical in the way of explanation of how and why music, and baseball cards, and stamps are tied into American culture, but then again, most museums don’t hit you over the head with that sort of stuff either.

A corridor carries you past a very small minor-league display, including a North American map showing each city that has housed a minor-league team. I was not able to check its veracity, but it looked pretty accurate. Also included in this display are a showcase of trophies, and significant bats, balls, gloves, and the like. It is finished off with an outdated series of minor champions over the years, as well as youth league champions and corresponding pictures of recent champs. It stopped in ’88 and should have been updated by late December ’89. The Hall is slipping in this regard. They used to be right on top of every change. No more. Inexplicably buried on this the top floor is a quite large Babe Ruth exhibition. It has been in this position for quite a while. The Babe must have given just about everything to the Hall except for used hot-dog wrappers, and some of them may be at the bottom of the display as it needs cleaning. Today, with the burgeoning market in memorabilia, every cup-of-coffee call-up saves everything for himself, it seems. In Babe’s case, the Hall has everything. His locker. Silver cups, balls, bats, plaques, busts, uniforms, even his bowling ball. One wall has a Spalding-sponsored video of classic footage. Did the Babe ever have a normal voice, or was it just that raspy one toward the end? (Side note to our readers who know biomechanics: Did Babe and the others really run in that funny way or could we get someone to invent something that you can attach to old film footage and have them run and throw like normal people?)

The rest of the top floor is devoted to a here-it-is/no-explanation display of the evolution of the uniform, replete with the Chisox shorts of ’76. Perhaps the best room in the building is tucked away in the back corner of the floor, the Old Ballparks and World Series Room. Try to do this one at the very end of the day when there’s no one else around. Enter the room just as the music starts. Look quickly from freeze-frame-shot to freeze-frame-shot of old dead players and old razed parks, and if you’re in the right frame of mind, don’t be surprised to find a lump in your throat.

The room is very well done. It was done not long ago and represents a middle period in the Hall’s development. First there was a lot of just throwing stuff up on the walls. Today, there’s a shade too much glitz and modernity. This room

and a couple of other spots in the museum were done exquisitely well. Large cutouts of players and blow-ups of parks. Teams celebrating. Mays making "The Catch". Fisk. There's an overwhelming display of scorecards, press pins, tickets, team pictures, hats, bats, and trophies.

Down the back stairs to the second floor, where you are immediately hit with the All-Star Room. It is given a lot of play, much more than the league championship series on the upper floor, which you barely notice. This display has lots of blown-up newspaper headlines, lots of balls, and lots of All-Star game programs.

A large part of the second floor is a pretty good, though popularized, chronology of the game, starting in 2000 B.C. with the Egyptians, which is someone's way of saying that even Cartwright didn't "invent" the game, I guess, even though Cartwright gets an illustration in the appropriate spot in the chronology. There are also a lot of thematic exhibits, and a good number of oddly-placed non sequiturs, like a plastic undersized statue of Clemente. Would-be sculptors and artists! Create an image. Paint some ballplayer. Donate it to the Hall of Fame and there's a good chance they'll display it. Unfortunately, aside from the original Rockwells, most of the "art" in the Hall is just OK. Perhaps they do turn a lot of things down.

Other displays on the second floor include a Henry Aaron exhibit, though it is rather small compared to some others. It may be a function of how much stuff Hank gave to the Hall. For example, Ball #714 is here, but #715 and #755 are not. There's a nice display of items from the '57 Braves, though it's not clear why they get special mention. There's also a series of photos of various Presidents of the U.S. throwing out first balls. There's a Stengel exhibit twice the size of Aaron's, which may have more to do with the fact that Cooperstown is in New York than anything else. There's a section on World Tours, the Spalding Australia tour and various Japanese tours. Also on this floor are some very well done and chock-full paeans to Connie Mack, Cy Young, and the Giants and McGraw.

Tucked away in the back of the hall is a section on blacks in baseball with lots of pictures of teams sitting outside their busses, a couple of pennants and some newspaper clippings. Part of the main notation says ". . . with the Brooklyn Dodgers signing of Robinson, a barrier that had existed for half a century was broken and ever since, organized baseball has accepted blacks in a way that has been a model to end all segregation." There is no special section or any special mention made anywhere about Latin Americans.

There is only one spot in the entire museum where a pillar is really noticeable, and it is on this floor in front of one of the thematic exhibits. The pole is placed, or, I should say, the exhibit is placed, in such a way as to make people have to walk around it without stopping. I thought it was just me, but I actually stopped to watch and people tended to go around the pole without stopping at this one, the exhibit of the "So Called Black Sox Scandal."

This floor also includes a section on women in baseball, mostly photos of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League and Jean Yawkey, Joan

Payson, Joan Kroc, and Marge Schott. I didn't have a tape measure, but it seemed at least as large as the entire exhibit on all of the minor leagues. Umpires get what looks to be a six- by six-foot section which is actually a disgrace. They should probably have nothing, as opposed to such a small exhibit. Here the exclamation point is put on the notion that this is really a Hall of Fame for a) the major leagues; b) the major leagues since 1920; and c) players only.

Down to the first floor. Near the gift shop, which was being refurbished during my visit, is one of those borderline amateurish sculptures, this one of Ted Williams. It is right near the Great Moments Room. More freeze-frame cutouts. Hank watching 715 go out. Rose's 4192. Jackie's debut. Gehrig's 2130th. This room also contains just about all of the baseball portraits and other painted art. Unfortunately, there is little notation of authorship, size, media employed, or other footnotes normally attached to paintings. There's a new one of Yaz by James Apitz, but that's all we are told. The original Marichal by Neiman is here. There's also some sculpture of Thurman Munson in cast bronze, carved wood, and etched glass off in a corner. If the Hall were anywhere but New York, this would probably not be there. There are lots of Robert Thorn paintings, and most of the original Rockwells on baseball.

This floor also houses the Hall of Plaques, the plaques that look like the monuments in center field at Yankee Stadium that are capsules of each inductee's career. Unfortunately they are too small and they often don't do justice to a man's accomplishments. They used to be grouped randomly. Now they are grouped roughly by year of induction, which makes almost as little sense, as people like Al Barlick, Red Schoendienst, and Carl Yastrzemski are not from the same era. There is room for another 36, which gives them about nine more years until they have top break into the back yard with this room's expansion, which they are talking about doing.

Off to the side of this floor is what is called The Cooperstown Room, where you can follow how the Hall of Fame came to be in 1939. Of Doubleday, it is written that he used to play near what is now called Doubleday Field, that a homemade ball found in a trunk belonged to him, and that "[A]s a Civil War General, Doubleday performed deeds of valor that earned him a place in history; but in the hearts of those who loved baseball, he is remembered as the lad in the pasture where the game was invented. Only cynics would need to know more."

Here we find one of the newest additions to the Hall, the IBM Sports Gallery. At electronic kiosks, visitors can punch in the name of their favorite inductee, and within seconds they can view his complete statistical history, read his biography, or listen to an audio précis. For Yastrzemski, the soundtrack says, "He was considered the best left fielder the team ever had. . . . An outstanding player in the clutch."

The Stat Room, which used to be in the basement, has been moved up to this floor, and the numbers themselves are now in a difficult-to-read pin ball/dot matrix typeface. That's not the least of the problems, however. There used to be a 200 Homer Club downstairs. It's been changed to 300. Ditto for pitching

victories. The bigger problem, though, is that the stats aren't up to date. They had Jim Rice at .300 lifetime, which he was when 1989 started, but after the first couple of at bats ceased to be (perhaps forever). A display of current teams had John Hart managing the Indians, even though John McNamara was named manager a while ago.

Unconscionable for the Stat Room at the Hall to be Anything but up to the moment. They used to have a man go in and change every item EVERY DAY.

Penultimately, the library itself has not changed much over the years, even though there has been talk of updating it. I hope they don't. It has been quite functional over the years, as anyone who has used it knows. Needless to say, they have the largest collection of baseball books in the world, though they don't have a listing or card catalog. They have thousands of file folders of old clippings from *The Sporting News* and other newspapers. One for every player who has played major-league ball. Just about every box score of every game that has ever been played. Scores of old periodicals. Yearbooks. Press guides. Media guides. And LOTS of pictures, including, again, some priceless, irreplaceable ones. The public is not allowed into the library, which is housed in its own building and is somewhat off the beaten path. Those researching books or articles can, by appointment, spend as much time as they want at the library, however, and the staff is extraordinarily helpful and knowledgeable.

The last item is the one that you see when you leave the grounds (and when you enter), and that's the scoreboard showing yesterday's results. They still change that every morning during the season, just as the Hall opens. And while there are those who marvel at the growing body of knowledge becoming available for mankind in general, the scoreboard is a symbol of the growing body of baseball memorabilia that builds up each day, that will, it seems, eventually overrun the very town itself.

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