

ST. PATRICK'S DAY 2011

The West Side Irish-American Club

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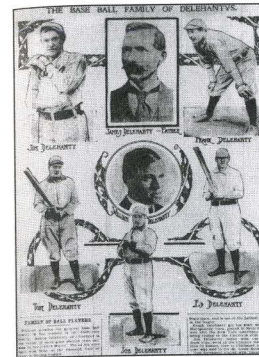


Cleveland's Delahanty Brothers



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The Irish Diaspora Shapes the National Pastime



In the summer of 1903, Edward Delahanty was an awful lot like other men whose parents had emigrated from Ireland to Cleveland and other industrial cities. He had spent more than a decade at the same job, most of his adult life, working to support a young family and struggling with the consuming evils of alcohol and self-doubt.

“Big Ed,” as his baseball peers would eventually call him, had won their respect as one of the best in his profession and he was taking home a bigger paycheck than most of them.

But in other ways Ed was far from the ordinary Irish laborer eking out a living in late 19th century America. You see, since the late 1880s, the tall, burly athlete had been a major league slugger, spending most of his career playing left field for the

Philadelphia Phillies.

But Delahanty's career is but one piece of a larger story of even greater awe – Ed was one of five brothers who were all talented enough to play major league baseball. They remain the only set of five brothers in the game's history. A sixth brother, the youngest, William, also played ball, with a very brief stint in the minor leagues.

The Delahanty boys' success parallels the success of so many Irish, immigrants and the children alike, who found the path to economic security and assimilation into American life had bases at the other end; and that despite playing before crowds in the tens of thousands and earning substantially more than their factory-working and ditch-digging contemporaries, they still faced the same ethnic prejudices as those unskilled laborers toiling away for some 70 hours every week digging canals, building roads or enforcing the law.

At the dawn of the 1890s, an era that some baseball scholars have dubbed the “Emerald Age” of baseball, half of all unskilled laborers in the United States were Irish. For the previous three to four decades, the opportunity for work was what drew so many Irish out of rural Ireland and into America's urban melting pot. One of those was James Delahanty, or O'Dulchainte, as the name had been in County Kilkenny, within view of Carlow's Blackstair Mountains in the Irish midlands.

Lovely as it was, Kilkenny in the 1850s led the island nation in emigration. James and his brother Martin left their parents, two brothers and three sisters, and headed to the promised land in “Amerikay” – Ontario, Canada, where they had family waiting for them.

After following prospects of better work to Buffalo, James met Bridget Croke, who had emigrated from Waterford with her parents and three siblings. It didn't take long for Bridget to steal James' affections. Marriage soon followed. And it was Bridget who suggested the couple make their own way – there were steady jobs in the emerging port city of Cleveland, further west on the shores of Lake Erie. There, James and his fellow Irish made up 15% of the laboring workforce.

It was here that James and Bridget set about raising what would become their family of six boys and three girls in Cleveland's near East Side, at 42 Phelps St. (later 1431 E. 34th St.), between Superior and St. Clair, where James worked as an independent contractor and teamster.

The second of 10 children, he had grown up the leader in a boisterous family, learning the ways of boyhood and holding his own among his five brothers and three sisters (the eldest, a baby daughter, died of scarlet fever in infancy).



Ed Delahanty

Ed started playing ball with other kids in a field near Engine House No. 5. The fireman there would invite local boys to play ball, hold tournaments and teach kids the game. During these games, they saw in this young Irish boy a talent for hitting a baseball. It wasn't long before the teenage Ed Delahanty was playing ball with the Shamrocks, a local semi-pro team that played its games on the riverbed grounds west of the Cuyahoga River.

In 1887, when he was 19, Ed's hitting prowess caught the eye of Sandy McDermott, the manager of the Mansfield team in the Ohio State league, who signed him to play for \$50 month.

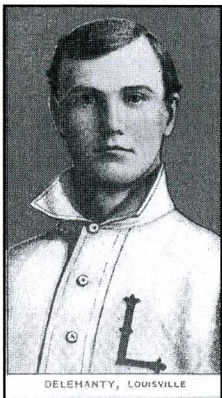
The following year, Ed doubled his salary, signing with Wheeling of the newly named Tri-State League. It was at Island Park ball field in Wheeling – known then as “Nails” and “Stogie City” for its major industries – that the Philadelphia Phillies (also known as the Quakers) paid \$2,000 for the rights to Delahanty.

It took two fledgling seasons before Ed began to shine and in his third, 1890, after jumping to the Cleveland Infants of the upstart Players League, his hitting improved to just under .300, playing more games and, though hitting only 3 home runs, ripping plenty of extra base hits.

The labor-allied league lasted but one season and Ed returned to the Phillies in 1891 for a less than stellar season, hitting just .243. But starting in 1892, when Ed hit .306, he put together a string of 12 seasons batting over .300. During that stretch, Ed Delahanty hit better than .400 three times, winning one batting title, hitting .410 in 1899.

At his career's end, Ed had compiled a lifetime .346 batting average – that's fourth all-time – winning five titles for doubles, one for triples, two for home runs, three RBI titles. He even won a stolen bases title, with 58 in 1898.

None of the other Delahanty boys neared the success eldest brother Ed had in major league ball, but they were good enough to play during the 1890s, when there were only 12 National League teams, the lone major league.



Frank Delahanty Card American Tobacco Co.

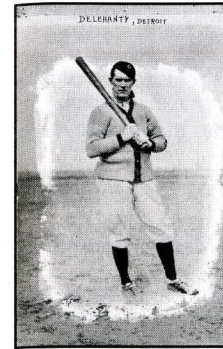
Tom Delahanty, five years Ed's junior, played just 19 games over the course of three seasons. He played just one game in 1894 and the rest in '96-'97 in short stints with the Philadelphia Phillies, Cleveland Spiders, Pittsburgh Pirates and the Louisville Colonels. His best days were spent in the high minor leagues where he hit .295.

Joe Delahanty didn't play on a major league diamond until he was 32, and played most of his 270 games in left field in three seasons with the St. Louis Cardinals from 1907 to 1909. But his success came in the minors as well, hitting .303 over 14 seasons.

The brother most like Ed was Jim Delahanty, playing 12 years in the National and American leagues, four of those finishing off his major league career in Detroit hitting a lifetime .286. He retired in 1915 after two years with the Brooklyn Tip-Tops of the Federal League.

Known for his versatility in being able to play every position, Jimmie's favored spot was a second base. When he joined the

Tigers in 1909 under fellow Irish American and manager Hughie Jennings, Jim earned the respect of teammates, who referred to him as a tobacco-chewing tough guy. Jim gave them a big lift, helping the Tigers win the American League pennant. While Honus Wagner's Pirates beat them in the World Series, Jim's nine hits and .346 series average bested teammate Ty Cobb and the famed Pirate leader Wagner.



**Jim Delahanty
Detroit Tigers**

Frank was the last Delahanty brother to play in the majors, from 1905-'08, three of those with the New York Highlanders, later to become the Yankees. 1907 was spent in Cleveland with the Naps, but Frank disliked playing in his hometown, lamenting the ease of “too many friends” and “too much stepping around,” which evidently explained his .173 average over just 15 games in left field.

He returned to New York in 1908 and was released after just 37 games. Frank was unimpressive over the next several years with a variety of minor league teams and a short stop in the Federal League.

But the story of the Delahanty brothers' baseball careers also involved labor strife and discrimination. Many American ballplayers had little regard or respect for immigrants or their children, especially the Catholic Irish. An environment much the

same as that endured by fellow immigrants and their children – whatever their ethnicity – throughout turn of the century American society.

And still, like a great many of those seeking a better life in a place that could be often hostile and unforgiving, Ed Delahanty flourished. In an era when doubles and triples, not home runs, drew crowd admiration, Ed Delahanty hit 101 home runs and stole 481 bases.

On July 13, 1896, he hit four home runs in one game. He also went 6-6 twice in his career and once over the course of a doubleheader went 9-9.

In 1902, at the age of 34, Ed Delahanty had jumped to the Washington Nationals team in the new American League. He didn't skip a beat, hitting .376 with 43 doubles, 10 home runs and 93 runs batted in.

But Ed's career and life faded quickly. Throughout his career, he vacillated over taking a stand on player rights. In his less-than-firm move to the Players League in 1890, he regretted jumping, meekly returning to Philadelphia the following year and never firmly taking a side on the players' grievances, publicly favoring the status quo and then favoring rebelling players.

Midway through the 1903 season, Ed was again toying with the idea of chasing a better contract, this time with John McGraw's New York Giants.

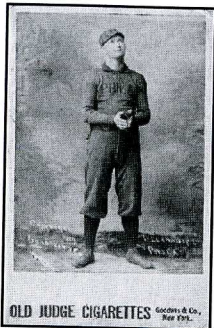
In his mid-30s, with a wife and child to support, worry began to weigh heavily on Ed. Suicide threats. Drinking binges. Behavior so erratic, according to writer David Zingler in a 2003 article for Simply Baseball Notebook, that his mother would sometimes follow him on road trips to prevent him from harming himself.

So it was that on July 2, 1903, “Big Ed” was put off a train on his way from Detroit to New York City, supposedly drunk and brandishing a razor, threatening passengers.

In the dark night, upriver from Niagara Falls, Delahanty fell from a railroad bridge near Buffalo and drown in the Niagara River. His body was found several days later, downriver, bloated and bruised after having gone over the falls.

It was a tragic and premature end to a hall-of-fame baseball career and a story that could just as easily be that of a ditch digger or fireman or butcher.

More telling, though, is how the Delahanty brothers represent the generation of Irish ballplayers who were part of the game's transition from a rule-skirting, often violent entertainment spectacle into the staid game we know today. Out of the chaos of the 1890s came the American League as the National's partner, more stable franchises with higher gate receipts and more money for player salaries.



Ed Delahanty
Phillies Rookie
Old Judge Tobacco

Out of the 1890s came the national pastime, pure Americana. Like apple pie, the automobile, hot dogs.

But so, too, as purely Americana as coming to the Land of the Free, working hard, raising your family and bravely creating for yourself and your children opportunities that didn't exist back home.

Let's do our best to never forget that.

~ Thomas Mulloy, March 2011