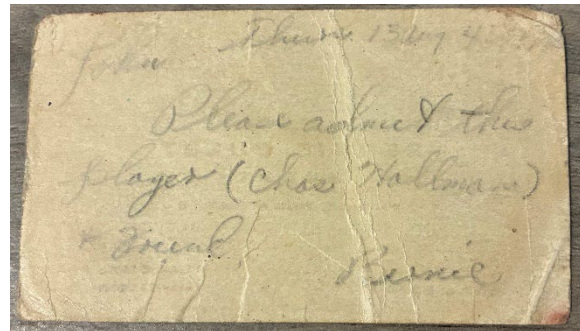




Haverford Township Historical Society



Hidden in Haverford: Connie Mack's "Guest"



On its face, the simple business card tells us very little. Bernie Guest was a scout for the Philadelphia Athletics. He lived at 1224 Steel Road in our town.

It is a tiny snapshot of a life, captured on a small piece of cardboard. It does not reveal how Bernie Guest spent all but the first few years of his existence with Philadelphia's American League ballclub, beginning as a sweeper and errand boy, and working his way all to minor league overseer for one of the most accomplished franchises in baseball history. Nor does it detail how Guest became right-hand man to legendary manager Connie Mack, and his son Roy. Or how he brought minor league ball back to Lancaster, led a traveling baseball school and was set to move with the A's to Kansas City, before falling ill and tragically passing at a young age.

The card tells none of those things by itself, but its discovery unlocked the story.

Bernard John Guest was born on November 23, 1915, to Bernard Aloysus and Anna Guest. He had a sister named Mary, who was three years younger.

Bernard Sr., born in Staffordshire, England in 1895, was involved in America's pastime himself. Nicknamed "Soapy," the right-handed hitting catcher played as high as Class-B, appearing in 22 games for the 1922 Bay City Wolves in the Michigan-Ontario League. It was the same team that sent future Hall of Famer Kiki Cuyler to the Pittsburgh Pirates one year prior. The older Guest—a bricklayer at the shipyard by trade—played in local leagues until at least 1930. He later served as night watchman at Shibe Park, until his own sudden death in 1948.

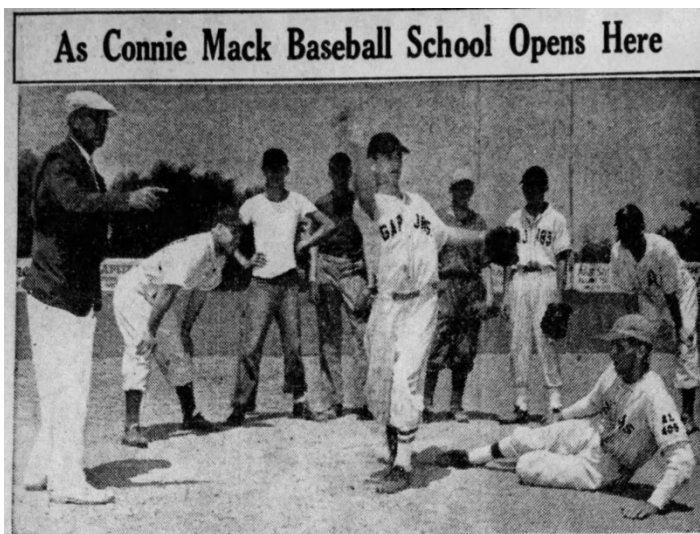
Bernard Jr., or “Bernie” as he would be called, followed his father in the game and was a left-handed pitcher as a youngster, reaching the semi-pro level with Federalsburg and Milford in the Eastern Shore League. He later played in the Tri-State League and was briefly in affiliated ball with the Washington Senators’ affiliate in North Carolina.

“He pictured himself then as another Lefty Grove, only with a more dazzling curve, and he might have achieved something in that line, too, had his arm not gone dead,” according to a profile on Guest in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

After his arm injury, Guest worked at Gimbel Brothers department store and coached basketball—two of the only jobs he ever held outside of the confines of Shibe Park.

It is not known exactly how Guest became acquainted with the Athletics as a young boy, but acquainted he certainly was. One newspaper story in 1953 stated he had been working with the team for “at least 34 of his 37 years.” Another mentioned his employment at age six.

Beginning first by sweeping the grandstands, running errands for the players and doing odd jobs around the park, he grew into shagging fly balls and throwing batting practice. He was bat boy for the World Series champion 1929 team—a club that featured Jimmie Foxx, Mickey Cochrane, Al Simmons, Lefty Grove and future fellow Havertownian Jimmy Dykes.



At the Connie Mack Baseball School at Stumpf Field Thursday morning, Jack Coombs (far left), Duke University coach with an outstanding major league career behind him, comes from atop the dug-out to give expert advice to James Foulk of Gap, who is making the double play pivot at second base. John Eby, also of Gap, is executing the slide. This is one of the many fine points of the game which Coombs explained. Also at the bag—left to right—are:—Horace Hendrickson, University of Pennsylvania baseball coach and backfield grid mentor; Albert Shand, Henry Rutherford, Marietta; David Hackett, West Lampeter; Donald Ginder, Landisville; and Bernard Guest, former minor league hurler, who, with Hendrickson, assisted Thomas and Coombs.

Bernie Guest (back, far right) helped run the Athletics' traveling baseball school for several years. Photo courtesy of Daily Intelligencer Journal

“Comparatively little known beyond his personal purlieus, Bernie Guest nevertheless stands out as one of the most familiar figures at Connie Mack Stadium,” one *Inquirer* reporter stated later in Guest’s career. “Everyone there knows him; the older hands saw him grow up.”

“I can’t remember a time when I didn’t know my way around the ballpark,” Guest admitted.

He hawked peanuts, then managed all concessions. He served as clubhouse custodian, then presided over the clubhouse used for tryouts.

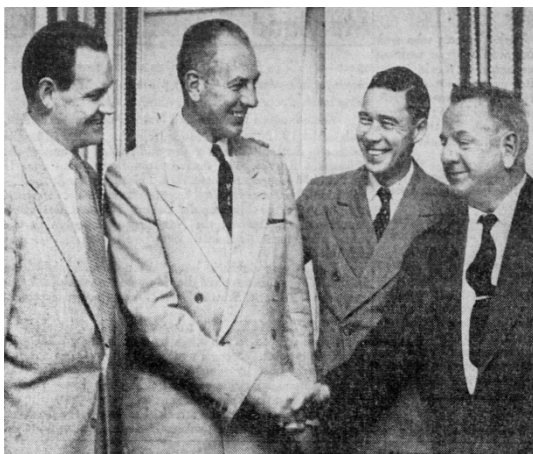
In 1941, he took a break serving the Mackmen to serve his country, mustering in at Philadelphia as a private, and out in 1946 at

Indiantown Gap, Pa., as a major. He had spent his time there with the 12th Infantry Regiment helping to operate the massive training center that housed upward of 150,000 troops.

When he returned from service, the A's scooped him back up as an assistant to former players Ira Thomas and Jack Coombs, with whom he helped start a traveling baseball school during the season, sponsored by the club and Atlantic Refining Co.

“In this capacity, Guest has started many a youngster on the road to a career in professional baseball,” according to a report in the *Delaware County Times*. “A real student of the game, he has absorbed all of the finer points of baseball from men like Ira Thomas, Jack Coombs, Lena Blackburne, Chief Bender, and of course, Connie Mack.”

It was in this role Guest met former University of Pennsylvania coach Horace “Horse” Hendrickson, who helped him land a freshman coaching role at the school. He did that for two years, before taking a year-round job—his first—with the Athletics. He initially worked in ticketing under Roy Mack and later moved to the baseball side under Arthur Ehlers.



At a press luncheon announcing Lancaster's Piedmont League team, new Lancaster manager Kemp Wicker shakes hands with general manager Frank Spair (right). Bernie Guest (left) and Earle Mack Jr. look on. Photo courtesy of The Lancaster New Era



Bernie Guest, right, in uniform giving pointers to hopeful youth at an A's baseball school in 1951. Photo courtesy of The Windsor Star

Ehlers was farm director from 1947 to 1950. When he took over for Cochrane as general manager of the team in Fall 1950, much of the supervision of the minor leagues fell to Guest. A few years later, Ehlers left to lead baseball operations in Baltimore.

At that point, Guest was officially listed as a scout, but “the Macks learned upon the departure of Ehlers for Baltimore, he has been much more than that. Guest stood out as the only remaining member of the organization thoroughly acquainted with the player personnel and book-work connected therewith from top to bottom. Bernie, in short, had become a key man, a link in the chain, and the Macks needed him.”

That revelation was detailed in the 1953 *Inquirer* report detailing Guest's promotion to farm director of the Athletics, in charge of all minor league operations. That year, among his first moves was to bring minor league baseball back to Lancaster, negotiating to have the A's sponsor a team in the Piedmont League. It was a wildly popular move among the locals.

"I don't know how many people know it, but Roy Mack, who was then my boss, has always had a warm spot for Lancaster," said Guest in a later interview with the *Kansas City Star*. "He felt then...and still feels now...that this is a good baseball town."

But the Athletics were struggling mightily financially, and those struggles permeated down. Guest himself admitted to the same publication, "we didn't have enough money to go out and compete with other clubs. And the result was that in most cases we just had to take what the other teams didn't want."

The once-dynastic Athletics lasted just one more season, 1954, before being sold and relocated to Kansas City. The new ownership was keen on retaining Guest, who was their leading candidate to assume control of the minor league system, which then had six teams. He was officially appointed to the position on Nov. 30, 1954, but was, according to reports, "reluctant to leave Philadelphia, where he was born and raised."

He would spend only a few months in Missouri before he returned home in February, battling ulcers, high blood pressure and chest pains, which he claimed had started around the time he traveled to Houston in December to officially sign his contract. Doctors told Guest—who never drank or smoked and remained active—that he needed "to rest for a year, and do nothing, not even shovel snow or sprinkle the lawn" at his Steel Road home.

The A's were quite supportive in his recovery.

"They (the KC officials) were wonderful to me," Guest told reporters. "In effect, they said to me: 'Look, go home. Take a long rest. Your office won't be touched. We'll put men on the



Legendary A's Manager Connie Mack rides with farm director Bernie Guest in a parade celebrating the club's Lancaster affiliate. Photo courtesy of The Lancaster New Era



Pictured here in mid-1954 at age 39, Bernie Guest developed health problems the following winter and passed away two years later. Photo courtesy of The Salisbury Times.

road to check player development. They'll keep you informed so there will be no pressure on you.”

Eventually, though, it became apparent he would be unable to retain his job, or health. His Athletics career over, and with a wife, Evelyn and two young daughters, Patricia and Eileen, to support, Guest worked for a short time as a sporting goods salesman at A.G. Spalding Company. He also suffered his first heart attack.

A year later, in December 1956, he suffered a second, fatal one at his Havertown home. He was 41 years old, more than a decade younger than his father when he died suddenly at 53.

Bernie Guest's name is smattered only inconspicuously in accounts of Philadelphia A's baseball, largely crowded out by the many more prominent figures with and for whom he worked. His home on Steel Road—not far from where the local youth play ball to this day— was torn down and rebuilt a decade ago. Attempts to find his next of kin have been unsuccessful.

But we still have his card, and more importantly, his story.

Hidden in Haverford tells local history stories through the lens of artifacts either found in or associated with Haverford Township. If you have such an artifact that you would like to be considered for this series, please contact HTHS volunteer Kenny Ayres at kayres8@gmail.com.