

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE BASEBALL LETTERS OF JOHN K. TENER

Edited by
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WITH more leisure time than ever before, Americans by the mid- and late 1880s found relaxation and enjoyment in professional sports, of which by far the most popular was baseball. In this brief series of letters written by John Kinley Tener while on tour with a minor league team from Haverhill, Massachusetts, and later with the National League Chicago White Sox (the present-day Cubs), we can see the youthful exuberance of a man with the skill and opportunity to make a contribution to a contending team in the big leagues. Tener's enthusiasm for the game, his humor, high spirits, and insight regarding notable baseball personalities exude from the pages of nearly every neatly inscribed letter.

Tener was born in County Tyrone, Ireland, on July 25, 1863, the son of George Evans and Susan Wallis Tener. He emigrated to Allegheny City with his parents in 1872 and together the family took up residence on Western Avenue. After graduating from Central High School in Pittsburgh, Tener worked at various jobs in the city before trying his luck with professional baseball. He played with the Haverhill team for a year, then joined the Chicago club in 1888. That year — his best in the majors — Tener had a seven-and-five won-lost record and appeared in fourteen games. In 1889, he pitched in more than twice as many games but posted a poor fourteen-and-fifteen won-lost mark. When the players revolted the next year against salary limitations, the onerous reserve clause, and other grievances, Tener jumped to the newly formed Players' League where he pitched for the Pittsburgh team. Finishing the confused 1890 season with a miserable three-and-thirteen record, he quit as a professional.

In 1901, Tener found employment as a cashier at the First National Bank in Charleroi, and within a remarkably short period of time clambered his way to the bank's presidency. His political career began with election to Congress in 1909 and culminated in a single

term as governor of the state from 1911 to 1915. Thereafter, Tener returned to baseball as president of the National League until 1918 and as one of the directors of the Philadelphia Phillies. He died in Pittsburgh on May 19, 1946.¹

The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania acquired the John Kinley Tener Papers as a gift of his niece, Miss Roberta Johns, in 1969. The papers include letters from high school, correspondence during Tener's baseball and political careers, and genealogical material on the Tener family. Personal letters after he left the governor's office, maps, pamphlets, and clippings are also found in the collection.

The following letters are printed as transcribed from the originals in series 2, folders 5 and 6, with only minor changes for clarity of meaning.

Haverhill July 7th 1885

Dear Will.

Enclosed please find Forty-Dollars (\$40⁰⁰/100). Please deposit same for me with the Twenty five I sent you by Frank.

Will send you just as much as I can spare in future which you can expect about the 5th and 20th of every month.

Come to think of it I guess I had better get a money order for this amount and be on the safe side.

Our manager Mr. Brackett has been released today for causes unknown. The stock holders are a very peculiar set of men who know absolutely nothing about ball & of course think they know it all. Mr. B.— has managed ball teams for the last twenty years with great success. it was he who got together and managed the famous Syracuse Stars of 76 or 7— and since then he has had charge of some of the finest clubs in the country. The men at the head of this club will never make any team a success. When we win the town is ours, but on the other hand when we lose — as all clubs must once in a while — they threaten to get a new nine that *can* win. & so it goes. It would not surprise me to find on wakening up some of these fine days that I had been fired or released for something or other. Only this afternoon I heard that I was out until 4-oclock on the morning

¹ *Directory of Pittsburgh & Allegheny Cities . . . for 1872-73* (Pittsburgh, 1872), 474; Carol Ann De Berti, "Biography of John Kinley Tener" (undated ms.), folder 1, series 1, Tener Papers, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania; Hy Turkin and S. C. Thompson, eds., *The Official Encyclopedia of Baseball*, 10th ed. rev. (South Brunswick and New York, 1979), 396; Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York, 1960), 233.

of the fourth & roving around town in a hack with a girl too. Of course you all know better, but it just goes to show how these rumors can be exaggerated.

The fact is that two of our players went out on the night of the third & staid out until the wee small hours, reports now have it that we were all out from the manager down. All I can do is to play good ball & act like a gentleman and then if they do let me go it will not be my fault.

Please remind Frank for me that the tobies he spoke of sending & which I would like very much to have are not yet arrived.

You folks may think that I will talk like a yankee when I get home — but I won't. The expression[s] seem so silly that I laugh at myself when I use them. They seem about twenty years behind the times. Tell the gang that letters from them would be very acceptable.

Love to Maud, Susie Bee and all the folks

Your affectionate bro.
Jno.

Chicago, Sept 7th 1888

Dear Maud and Will.

After writing to nearly all the ball cranks in and about Pittsburg including our brothers, I think it about time you should have my impression of this city and my experiences here as well as Ed's, for though he is doing nothing at present but talking baseball to me he asks me to write to you for him also.

So far I, or we rather, have seen but little of the city, as I spend nearly all the day at the grounds & of course Ed enjoys all privileges same as a player & is consequently happy. He also attended Keene's performance of Richard the Third "deadhead" with the Detroit and Chicago Clubs. We intend taking in the sights Sunday.

Since our arrival until today we have been stopping at the Fremont House, but are now pleasantly located in a much more convenient & less expensive hotel on the west side, it is also almost as good in every way as the Fremont less fuss and splendidly furnished room at one half the cost.

Am glad to say that my "debut"² here was a pleasant one to

² Tener pitched on September 5, and won ten-to-four over Detroit. A newspaper account said, "He showed great command of the ball and much speed at times, and he has a number of puzzling curves." *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1888.

me & must have been very satisfactory to the management & spectators judging from the congratulations I have received and the very complimentary press notices given me.

We sent you papers the other day, with alleged pictures of me. My name was spelled correctly anyhow.

It is now eleven oclock & Ed is ready for bed and as I am to pitch tomorrow against Boston think I had better get some sleep.

Have not forgotten Will's advice and shall always try to keep Maud's wishes in mind for my own good. So good-night to both of you.

Your affectionate bro
John.

Chicago, Sept. 16th 1888.

Dear Maud.

Was very glad to get such a prompt reply to my letter to Will and yourself & hope to hear from both of you before we leave for Boston (27th inst) where we play three or four games, then to New York, then Washington and finishing at Philadelphia the 13th ulto playing three or four games in each of the cities mentioned. Expect to be home the night of Oct'r 13th or morning of 14th to stay three or four days & get ready for the big trip which gives every promise of being a grand success. I can hardly tell you how well pleased I am here, with my associates and surroundings, everything being far above & beyond expectations, the people in general and Mrs Spalding³ and Anson⁴ in particular are delighted with my success. Mr Spalding who controls the Chicago Club, has made and is still making money, "hand over fist," out of base-ball is also very much respected business man & judging him by what dealing I have with him so far I consider him an honorable man, and while speaking of Mr Spalding I might

³ Albert G. Spalding is one of baseball's legends. Following the Civil War, he pitched for the Chicago Excelsiors, then joined the Boston Red Sox in 1871. He moved to the Chicago club in 1876. That year, he and his brother James organized A. G. Spalding and Brother, initially a sporting goods outlet but later one of the nation's major manufacturers of sports equipment. Spalding became president of the White Sox in 1882 and was instrumental in arranging the club's good will tour to Australia in 1888. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols. (New York, 1935), 17: 420-21.

⁴ One of the best-known personalities of the era, Adrian C. ("Cap") Anson took over as player-manager for Chicago in 1880 and stayed with the club until 1899. Anson led the league in batting four times and collected more than three thousand career hits. Seymour, *Baseball*, 173-74.

also add that he has asked me to act as his secretary, attending to correspondence &c &c on the trip as well as play. I don't know when or how he came to form such a high opinion of my business qualifications, unless it was from (and I believe it was) a letter I wrote him before joining the club, upon which I wasted almost as much energy in composing (hardly *wasted* either, I hope) as upon the famous "Dear-Uncle-John-I-appreciate" epistle. However I promised him my services & trust I shall not regret it.

As for Mr Anson, I can only speak in praise of him, who for some reason or other has taken a special liking to me, which I suppose is on account of the good work I have done for his team, but be that as it may, he is really a fine fellow & reminds me of George a great deal, except in one thing, viz his faculty of looking upon & finding the bright side. There is something about him that attracts & we both agree that there is a certain magnetism about George & when I say that he reminds one of George you can, perhaps, estimate my opinion of him. Expect to save about 500 out of my \$700 salary for the two months and if my success keeps up I will likely play here next season at not less than \$2500 — I think I should save say — Did you say chestnuts?

Ed leaves for home tonight, and I am just as sorry to have him go as he is himself to be compelled to leave Chicago. As usual he has "attended" me while here & I know I shall feel the loss of so good a "valet." But seriously, Maud, he is the boss boy and we should all be proud of him. I think he will tell you when he gets home that he enjoyed himself out here. I also think that he is looking better for his vacation, but I leave you to judge as to that. Have lost considerable in weight lately myself but feel in the very best of health and spirits & expect to pick up some flesh when the season closes, at least I hope to.

You will know Maud (now this is between me, you, Will & the lamp-post) that I am not much struck of Raphael Sargeant, and I know, he knows it, nevertheless, who should take the trouble to wire congratulations on my first victory over Detroit but Raph. "wishing me continued success and hoping I would always make it lively for the opposition." Rats!!! Now what do you think of that. I think I'll make it lively for him some day. Am very glad you don't think well of him and I don't see how Berta Annie and George, the latter especially, can bear him.

This letter is intended for you and Will & hope you will not hand it around promiscuously, for I don't want any part of it to be

talked about or get into the papers. Pauls quickness in getting on to the newspaper business is amusing and we both laughed a good deal when we read about it. Tell Paul that we drove a nice horse last Sunday all around "Ca'go." His name is "Daylight." Would like to get something for both of them & wish you would suggest something that would please. Will now send them my love.

Please remember me to Mrs Johns Sr. Mrs. Ben & all the boys
With love to Will and yourself I am

Your aff. bro
John

P.S. To Will—

I am taking care of my self and taking care of myself and — taking care of myself Cause I know — — — it is the best thing in the world for a young fellow to — a — a — a — take care of himself.

Yours at a safe distance — Jno.

Boston, Oct'r 1st 1888

Dear Steve—

It just now occurred to me that I have not answered your first and only letter to Ed and myself at Chicago and am sorry that I did not do so long ago, as I want to hear often directly from you, but of course can't expect to, unless I give as much as I get.

Have let down considerably in my letter writing, I am sorry to say, since Ed left me, but now, away from Chicago, with little or nothing to do two thirds of the day, I have taken another spurt and expect to keep it up the balance of trip hoping I shall be rewarded with answers before I see you all again, which will likely be on the *14th of next month*, or perhaps a day or so before if I pitch first game in Phila.

I think [it] was only a few days after my arrival in Chicago that a gentleman from Pittsburgh stopped me on the street and asked how I like the town &c &c, he also told me that, only the day before, he had bought a ticket for you to, I think he said Phila. now I don't know positively who he was but I think he is one of your salesmen, if so, tell him I told you I saw him in Chicago — See? When a person whose face is familiar greets me so friendly, I always hate to ask him his name or where we had met before.

Well, we have made a good start on this, our last trip, winning the first two games here and an exhibition game at Syracuse. I wish

Will, Johns, above all others, had seen our game Saturday.⁵ It was just the kind of a [game] that would please him, I mean as far as *our* play was concerned, of course if he or any one else had been "pulling" for Boston, it would be different. Our gang did not do any great slugging, not even enough to make the game one-sided, but the safe hits we did get were hard line drives, and a blind man could have told these by [the] ring as they went off the bat. Not an error was made on either side according to the official score, though the Boston scribes record passed ball, wild pitches and bases on balls as such in the error column instead of in summary and besides this I think, in fact I know, I pitched my best game and fielded my position to the delight of Anson and the gang, covering first on ground hits to the old man, and throwing Nash⁶ out at first on a short "bunt" hit in front of the plate, as well as getting a fly ball back of me that either Fred⁷ or Cap might have taken, and I can think of no one who would have enjoyed the pretty exhibition of teamwork that the Chicago's gave in this game, more than Will.

Now Steve-ey I put this on paper for you knowing in the first place that you will not charge me with the big-head and in the second place that you will not allow this letter to be read outside the family.

Rain prevents our playing this afternoon and more than likely we will double-up to-morrow, but hope not as I want to have all my speed and a good arm in New York as it was against that club I made my reputation in Chicago and I'd like to make them hustle on their own grounds even if I do lose, while in New York we stop at the Rossmore, where I shall expect a letter from you.

Tell Maud that I shall look to her to tell me what I shall most need on shipboard, so she might just as well put her thinking cap on in good time for I don't know anything about it. You might also tell her that I have not forgotten that both she and Will owe me a letter, and that I expect to hear from them at least once more before I get home.

⁵ Chicago won the first game in the Boston series, thirteen-to-seven, on September 28. Tener pitched on September 29 and won three-to-nothing. *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 30, 1888.

⁶ William M. Nash was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1865, joined the Boston club at the age of twenty, and played second and third base in 1888. He batted .283 that season. Turkin and Thompson, eds., *Official Encyclopedia*, 311.

⁷ Nathaniel Frederick Pfeffer was Chicago's second baseman in 1888. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1860, he joined the White Sox in 1883. *Ibid.*, 331.

Remember me to the Oliver boys Hooten, Fraser, and all the gang at office also to Jno. Edwards from whom I received congratulations at Chicago.

Love to Maud Will Berta and all.

Your aff bro
Jno.

New York, Oct 5th 1888

Dear Maud.

Your letter, which, with Annie's of course, was mailed to Chicago did not catch me, or rather I did not catch up to it, until we reached this city, when upon our arrival at Polo grounds first day we played it was delivered to me. But even then it was not before I expected you to write or Annie either who had owed me a letter, for some time it may have been George though to whom I addressed it. I forget now, still I hold both in my debt. Tell Will so too for I'd like to get another from him before I get home.

Had a great time in Boston Maud, a great time I tell you. Not altogether spent in Boston either but in Haverhill as well where tell Annie (and I'll tell you more when I see you) I imagined it was the middle of summer instead of the beginning of winter or Fall so warmly was I received by my — friend—s—, and now we are in New York and as we drive daily up Broadway and through Central Park to the grounds I feel like Pat Rooney when he sat on the north pole after building Niagra Falls, viz "Proud o' me jaub" (job) besides seeing the sights on the way to the grounds I usually take a walk down Broadway every morning and enjoy it hugely. It makes me think of Fifth Ave. Pittsburg its so different you know. Called at the Hoffman House only to learn that Berta had left about a week ago.

She wrote while here and I was greatly surprised when I opened the letter & found who had sent it. For I did not expect a letter from her, congratulating me on Base ball at any rate, have answered it and hope now to hear from her often.

Leave tomorrow for Washington and after playing there until Tuesday finish up in Phila the 13th inst & will be in Oakland likely on the evening of the 14th

Your aff bro
Jno.

Washington, D.C. Sept [Oct.] 7th 1888⁸

Dear Wallis and Ed.

I am not sure just how our correspondence stands at present, but I think I owe each of you a letter and as I expect to see you both within a week, I know you will be satisfied with a letter intended for both, as this is.

Have written to Maud, Steve and one of the rest of you, I forgot which, within the past few days and no[w] feel that I have kept up my end pretty well, which is nothing more than I should do, having so much spare time on hand.

Have had a grand time so far this trip (due principally to success). In Boston and New York we drew great crowds in New York especially there being almost 5000 people at each game & cold days too. The enthusiasts hardly knew what to do to us, they did not want to applaud and had no occasion to hiss us and after each game the spectators would crowd about Anson like a lot of flies on a lump of sugar and while they hooted him I'll bet they all admired him. Crane⁹ and myself had a great game the second day and only for an unfortunate passed ball of Farrell's¹⁰ neither side would have scored at all. Some papers called it a wild pitch but we all know better for the ball hit his protector and was between plate and batter. What a game Crane did pitch, he was fooling the batter, fooling the umpire and I think fooling himself sometimes, Farrell hit a ball at him you could hardly see, but it hit his hand and he then threw Charley out at first. It was a great treat for the crowd and just the kind of game that should be played between two clubs that had fought so hard for first place.

Have run across several Pittsburgers on the trip, saw Brown, Milligan, and Harry Cornish (Jim knows them) in Boston and Bob Schoyer (Weld's ? bro) in New York.

Intended sending you papers of the games I have pitched on this trip but could not find the papers when I wanted them. Though I was beaten in New York, they gave me a pretty good puff, and its

⁸ Tener mistakenly put down the month as September.

⁹ Twenty-six years old in 1888, Edward N. ("Cannon-Ball") Crane had moved from club to club before joining the New York Giants that year. Turkin and Thompson, eds., *Official Encyclopedia*, 142.

¹⁰ Charles A. ("Duke") Farrell was born in 1866 in Oakdale, Massachusetts. A rookie with Chicago in 1888, Farrell was listed as a catcher and outfielder. His long career ended with the Boston American League club in 1905. *Ibid.*, 172. Tener pitched on October 4 against the Giants, who beat him one-to-nothing and clinched the National League championship. Chicago finished second. *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1888.

worse than pulling teeth for those New York papers to be compelled to say anything favorable about Anson or his men, even the Sporting Times (Day's paper) speaks very well of me. Get todays & read the New York letter and show it to Maud will you? for I would like Maud to get the correct opinion of Baseball and players.

Both clubs attended a show in New York the other night, and as each group of players took their seats they were loudly cheered, (both NY and Chicago) but when Anson came in, he was compelled to get up and make some acknowledgment before they'd quit. He is known everyplace no matter where we go someone knows him, and the best people of New York (H Grant nominee for mayor for instance) ask to meet him and yet he would rather be about with the boys than anywhere else, save at home with his family. We found Borchers¹¹ who sometime ago was released in Chicago on our arrival in New York and it was hinted that he was looking for Anson and had blood in his eye. When Cap heard of this he hunted B' — up and found him in a saloon — and going over to where he stood offered George his hand and asked how he was getting along. Instead of carrying out his threats and showing fight, Borchers grasped Cap's hand and cried like a kid. Ed knows how tough B— wanted people to think he was.

Anson tells me he got Ed's very nice letter and asks me to assure him (Ed) that the same privileges will always be allowed him at any time he sees fit to visit Chicago. The old man thinks Ed would make quite a ball player. He considers him a sure catch now.

I can tell you all these things at home and will not write again until I am on my way to Australia.

Your aff bro
Jno.

Washington, D.C. Oct 8th 1888

Dear Will—

It seems hardly worth while writing home now as I am glad to say I shall be with you on the night of the 12th if all goes well, as it will be my turn to pitch the first Phila game on the 11th inst, and I have made arrangements to get away immediately after, that is, the

¹¹ For George B. ("Chief") Borchers, 1888 must have been an exceptionally frustrating year. His record as a pitcher with Chicago was a disappointing four-and-five, evidently being a principal factor in his release by Anson. Borchers returned to the majors for only one other season — 1895. Turkin and Thompson, *Official Encyclopedia*, 103.

same night, and will of course, get into Pittsburgh the following morning. The carrying out of this programme will depend upon the weather entirely and in case it rains on the eleventh so we cannot play I will necessarily be detained another day in Phila, however I shall wire you at noon on the 11th and if convenient for Maud and yourself would like to bring Ed. Wallis and Steve out with me to your house for supper on the 12th or 13th as the case may be.

We (the Club) called upon the President today and were each presented to "his nibs" by Congressman Lawlor of Chicago. Anson had quite a long talk with "Grover" during which he promised to give the club a letter endorsing us as the best representatives of the national game, to the Australian people, and altogether we had a pleasant time and we consider him good luck as we went out in the afternoon and beat Washington badly, though they jumped on us one inning for six runs, we also hit hard and won almost as we pleased.

I enclose herewith a letter from Mr Spalding in regard to what we should have with us on shipboard & wish you would give it to Maud for inspection.

Received a letter from Steve today full of news, of course, but this shall be my last letter to Pittsburg until I again leave for the west the 18th inst.

If you have room for me would like to make my headquarters with you for the few days I shall be in Pittsburgh. Suppose this is alright as Maud mentioned something to this effect in her letter.

Hoping to see you all on the night of the 12th. I am yours with love.

John.

P.S.

Can't find Spalding letter, will bring it home with me J.K.T.