

retained until 1931. One of the most remarkable aspects of Sam Rice's baseball career is that he did not play his first full season in the majors until 1917, when he was 27 years old, which is unusually old for a rookie. Age was not the only thing that made him an unusual rookie, he also hit .302, and showed the speed for which he would become a legend by stealing 35 bases.

Rice spent part of 1917 and most of 1918 in the U.S. Army during the Great War. But with his return in 1919 until his career began to falter in 1931, Sam Rice was the Senator's starting right fielder. During that 13-season period, he fell below .300 in batting average only twice, when he could manage a meager .295 in 1922, and .297 in 1927.

Sam Rice played major league baseball at a time of giants. The Senators had such stars as Walter "Big Train" Johnson and "Goose" Goslin. Other American League stars against whom Sam Rice played included Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb, and George Sisler. In an era of giants, Sam Rice held his own. Rice led the American League in hits in 1924 and 1926 with 216 in both seasons.



He was perennially in the top five in stolen bases, copping a career high of 63 in 1920 to lead the league. He was also an extraordinary fielder leading the league twice in put outs.

His biggest season was that of 1925. He led the Senators to their second straight AL pennant with a .350 batting average, while collecting a career high 227 hits. But it was in the World Series of that year that led Sam Rice into the realm of baseball legends.

The 1925 World Series pitted Washington (which had not yet earned its reputation as "First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League") against the Pittsburgh Pirates. In the previous year's series Rice hit a slump, batting only .207, but in 1925 he continued his torrid pace of the regular season, hitting .367 in the series. But it was not at the

plate that Sam Rice became the stuff of World Series lore.

In the third game of the series, temporary bleachers had been installed in the outfield to accommodate the crowds. A short wall separated these bleachers from the outfield. Late in the game, relief pitcher Fred Marberry was brought in for Alec Ferguson to face the Pirates' catcher Earl Smith with two out. Smith lined a Marberry pitch to right field. Rice gave chase, but he ran out of room. Rice tumbled over the barrier in front of the right field temporary bleachers, and he disappeared from sight. Press accounts indicate that Rice was out of view of the playing field for some time. Finally, National League umpire Cy Rigler ran out into outfield to see what had happened. As the umpire approached the bleachers, Rice emerged with the ball firmly in his glove. Seeing this Ridler called Smith out. This touched off a controversy that some say lingers to this day. The Pirate bench, led by owner Barney Dreyfuss, charged the field to take issue with the ump. "I know that I never heard such uproar," said Rice in 1964. The Senators won the game over the protest, but many Pirates maintain that while Rice may have had the ball as he fell, he dropped it and a fan handed it to him before he re-emerged on the field. Rice remained mum. A short time later Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the Baseball Commissioner, called Rice in to question him on the play. When asked directly by the Judge if he had caught the ball, Rice responded simply, "Judge, the umpire said I did." The Judge pondered the situation and said, "Sam let's leave it that way."

Some 1600 fans provided affidavits regarding the controversial catch, but Rice said in a later interview that these came down about 50-50 on whether or not he

had made the catch. Sam Rice did not make a comment on the incident until 1965 when he presented the Baseball Hall of Fame with a sealed letter to be opened after his death. He did not even tell his second wife, Mary whom he married in 1929. The letter opened by the President of the Baseball Hall of Fame after Rice's death stated:

"Monday, July 26, 1965. It was a cold and windy day the right field bleachers were crowded with people in overcoats and wrapped in blankets, the ball was a line drive headed for the bleachers towards right center. I turned slightly to my right and had the ball in view all the way, going at top speed and about 15 feet from bleachers jumped, as high as I could and back handed and the ball hit the center of pocket in glove (I had a death grip on it).

I hit the ground about 5 feet from a barrier about 4 feet high in front of bleachers wall all the brakes on but couldn't stop so I tried to jump it to land in the crowd but my feet hit the barrier about a foot from top and I toppled over my stomach into first row of bleachers. I hit my Adams apple on something which sort of knocked me out for a few seconds, but McNeely arrived about that time and grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me out. I remember trotting back towards the infield still carrying the ball for about half way and then tossing it toward the pitcher's mound. (How I have wished many times I had kept it.) At no time did I lose possession of the ball. Sam Rice"

The Baseball career of the man who couldn't make the Watseka team lasted until 1933 with the Senators, and for one more year with the Cleveland Indians. Though age began to catch up with Sam Rice, it never really dimmed his batting eye. In his last season in the majors, he hit a respectable .293

Sam Rice closed his career with a lifelong batting average of .322. He fell just 13 hits short of the magic 3,000, with 2,987. He said later that Senators' owner Griffith offered him the chance to come back and collect those last 13 hits, but as Rice put it, "By that time I was too old, and my career was behind me." Rice said that he wasn't aware of his closeness to the 3,000-hit mark until after he retired.

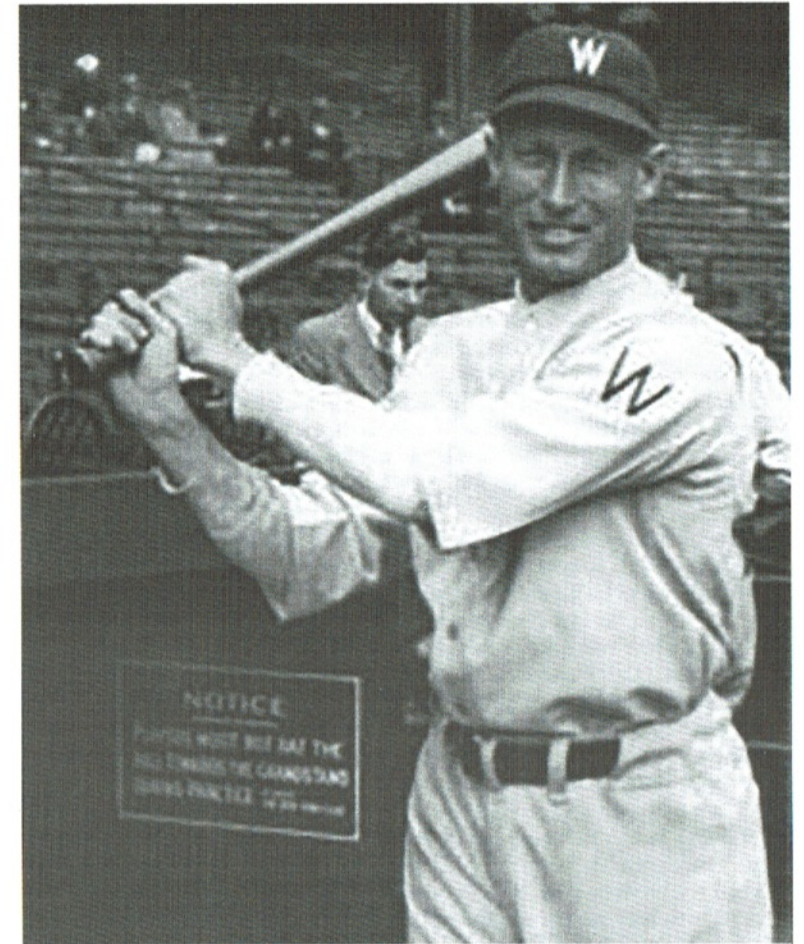
Sam Rice played baseball in the days of the big money. He made \$18,000 per year playing for the Senators, but he saved his money and invested in, among other things a chicken farm. Following his retirement from baseball, he looked over his investments, and put off the regular questions from reporters about the World Series catch. In 1963, nearly 30 years after his retirement, the baseball Old Timers elected him to the Hall of Fame. *The Sporting News* reported later that Rice became somewhat bitter over the delay in his selection, while other of lesser talent gained admission to the Hall, quoting his reaction as, "Oh, its fine, but I can't say I'm too thrilled." However, by the time his induction arrived, he seemed to have mellowed, stating then, "I don't think there are words to use on a day like this. It's the biggest thing any of us can have."

Rice continued an active interest in baseball, always turning out for Hall of Fame functions, and indeed, his last public appearance was in August 1974 for the induction of Mickey Mantle and others.

Sam Rice died of cancer October 13, 1974, at Rossmoor, Maryland, near where he had lived throughout his retirement. Sam Rice's baseball exploits may rank him as this area's greatest natural athlete, but the events of April 21, 1912 served to make him a figure of sympathy as well as admiration. *Written by John J. Yost, June 7, 1984.*

Indiana State Historical Marker
Located at the Scott-Lucas House, Morocco, Indiana
 Placed in 2019 by Town of Morocco
 Newton County Economic Development
 and the Newton County Historical Society

Compiled and published by the Newton County Historical Society, 2019 utilizing archive files and material
 © Duplication or reproduction prohibited in any form without written permission.



Edgar Charles "Sam" Rice

Sam Rice

Baseball's Man-O-War

They called him Baseball's "Man O' War" because of his military service and because of his fleet-footed fielding and base running. He is arguably the greatest athlete to be born and reared in the Newton County area.

The Beaver Township baseball field is named in his honor. His name is Sam Rice, and his story is one of glory on the playing field which earned him enshrinement in baseball's Hall of Fame. His is a story also colored by sadness, as he is linked to what is considered to be the greatest natural tragedy to ever occur in Newton County.

Edgar Charles "Sam" Rice was born on February 20, 1890 on a farm near Morocco, Indiana. He was one of five children born to Charles and Louise Christine Newmyre Rice. The Rice family lived for a while in the Kentland area, settling finally on the Gard Farm which was located between Morocco and Donovan, Ill., about five miles northeast of Donovan. Rice grew up in that area where he went to school for several years with Ray Webster of Kentland. Webster, who is one of the few area residents to have a recollection of Rice, recalled him as a "nice fellow and a good athlete" in their student days at the old Rhode Island Country School in rural Iroquois County, Illinois.

One of the five children of Charles and Louise Rice died at a very early age. This was one of several misfortunes that plagued the Charles Rice family. At one point in his farming career, his livestock herd was struck by a disease and died. In 1907 a hailstorm, possibly spawned by a severe tornado destroyed his crops. In 1910 fire destroyed the family home.

Sam Rice was married to the former Beulah Stam of Iroquois, Ill., on September 17, 1908, and they established their home in Watseka, Ill. One of Rice's sisters, Mrs. Mabel Rice Cross was also married and lived at Iroquois, Ill. Sam and Beulah Rice had two children, a son, Bernie, born in 1908, and a daughter Ethel in 1910.

As Ray Webster noted Sam Rice was a good athlete. He was not big, standing 5'9" and weighing 150 pounds, but he was an exceptionally fast runner. The details of this early part of his life are sketchy, but his love of sports, especially baseball, led him to try out for the local Watseka team. As a sportswriter stated in 1933, "Rice's start in the game was notable for its complete lack of success. For instance, he couldn't make the team at Watseka, Ill., where the boys got three bucks for Saturday games and five on Sunday. Then (in 1912) he got a tryout as a pitcher with Galesburg, (Ill.) of the Central Association with the same result. He tried all the teams in the league but couldn't make the grade. He was let out by the last of them about the middle of June 1912. Then he started wandering.

What that sportswriter of a half century ago did not know was that there was more than a lack of success on the baseball diamond which contributed to Sam Rice's "wandering." It was April 1912 when Sam Rice went to Galesburg for his baseball tryout. While her husband was to be in Galesburg trying to make the team, Beulah Rice packed up Bernie, then three, and Ethel, age 18 months, and went to visit her in-laws at their farm home near Morocco.

On Sunday, April 21, Charles Rice, his wife and two daughters, Bernadine, eight and Genevieve, two and one-half and his daughter-in-law and two

grandchildren went into Iroquois, Ill., to visit friends. After enjoying a pleasant day with their friends, they returned to their farm around 6 p.m. Shortly after arriving home the skies darkened and storm clouds began moving in from the southwest. Around 6:30 p.m. Louise Rice and her two children and Beulah Rice and her two, along with Martin Graves, 21, the Rice's hired man, were in the Rice home. Charles Rice lingered outside briefly. Just as he entered the house, the full brunt of what the *Kentland Democrat* termed "the most terrific tornado that had ever visited Newton County" hit the Rice home.

As accounts of the storm in the *Democrat* and the *Enterprise* of the period reported: "It's (the storm) work there was almost too terrible to relate. The house was blown entirely away as were other buildings, but a tool shed which was untouched. The timbers of the house and barn were scattered for nearly a quarter of a mile to the southeast. The furniture and contents of the house were twisted into shapes which would seem impossible to accomplish, and when the wreck had passed, every member of the family except Mr. (Charles) Rice lay dead either in the yard or adjoining fields... The bodies were found as far as 60 rods from the house, nearly stripped of clothing, bruised and broken."

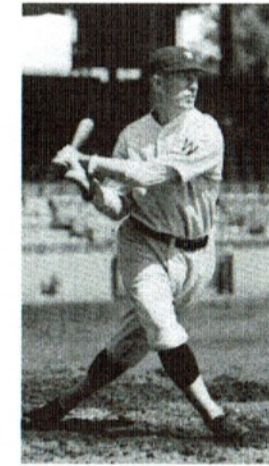
According to those contemporary reports, when the tornado passed the Rice farm, neighbors hurried to the scene to see what assistance they could offer. They found "Charles Rice running distractedly about among his dead dear ones in a ravine, carrying in his arms one of the children that showed evidences of life but died a few moments later."

Neighbors took Charles Rice and the bodies of the seven victims at his farm to the home of a neighbor, Charles Johnson. There Charles Rice was attended by a nurse, and the bodies of his wife, two children, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren and hired man were removed to a mortician.

Sam Rice returned from Galesburg in time for the funerals. One thousand persons attended the triple funeral of Mrs. Charles Rice and her two children which was held at the neighboring Johnson home on the following Tuesday, April 23. These three victims were laid to rest at the Swedish Cemetery near where the Rice Farm had stood.

On the following day, a second triple funeral was held for Mrs. Sam Rice and her two children. These services were held at the home of Mrs. Rice's parents in Iroquois, and these three victims were buried at the nearby Prairie Dell Cemetery.

The hired man, who had no immediate relatives, was buried on the next day, with people of the area chipping in to pay the expenses. He was also buried in the Swedish Cemetery.



But the tragedy had not yet run its course. Charles Rice, 50, who was referred to in one newspaper account as, "a good, kind, solicitous husband, parent and neighbor, a hard-working man (who was) seemingly marked by fate," lingered at the Johnson house while a nurse attended to his injuries. Little hope was held for his recovery because, according to press accounts, he had apparently lost his will to live. On Tuesday, April 30, he passed away, and was buried at the Swedish Cemetery, near the site of the tragedy.

These were the events which preceded what the sportswriter of 1933 called his wandering - and wander Sam Rice did. He bottled whiskey at a Louisville distillery, worked in the wheat fields of the Dakotas and Minnesota and as a railroad section hand. Eventually he drifted to Norfolk, VA., where he enlisted in the U. S. Navy.

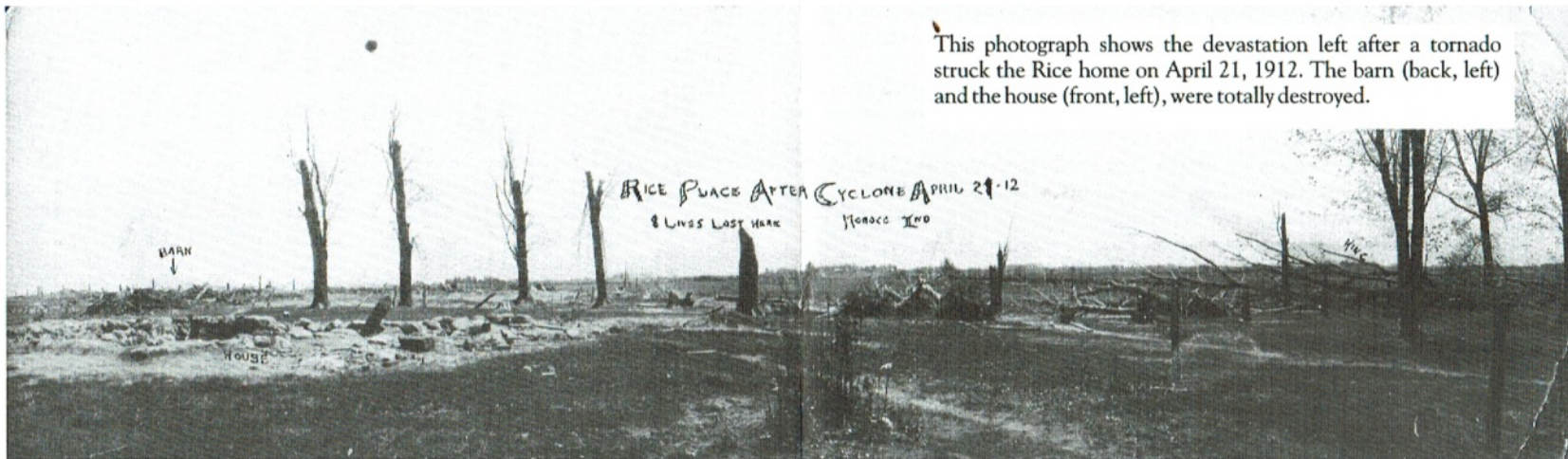
Rice was assigned to the U. S. New Hampshire. In 1913, when the Mexican reactionary Victoriano Huerta deposed the reform President Francisco Madero, Rice's ship was among the American forces sent in to quell the ensuing disturbance. He was among the Americans in Vera Cruz when 19 of his shipmates were killed in the fighting.

Rice also continued playing baseball while in the Navy. He was a member of his ship's team and played winter ball at Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba. In late 1914, he tried out for that city's Virginia League team, and made the squad as a right-handed pitcher, leaving behind the U.S. Navy. Sam Rice had some initial success with the Petersburg team, winning the first five games he pitched and compiling a 9-2 record on the season.

In fact, his career was more successful than that of the team as a whole. The Petersburg team did not do well at the box office. The owner of the Petersburg club had some debts, including one of \$800 to Clark Griffith, owner of the Washington Senators. When Griffith pressed the Petersburg owner for the money, he got a letter stating, "Sorry we haven't the cash to pay you that \$800. But we have a young pitcher who, within the next year or two, may be worth a lot more than \$800. Suppose you take him and call it square?"

Griffith was amused by the proposition and took him up on it. On August 12, 1915, Sam Rice reported to the Washington Senators as their new right-handed hurler. He appeared in five games at the start of 1916 season and was tagged with one loss. However, Rice was sent in as a pinch hitter one day and lined a base hit. The next day he did the same thing, except with his extraordinary speed he stretched the hit to a double. Griffith was quoted as saying, "I don't think this boy is a pitcher, but he's something or other, and I'm going to find out just what he is." When Griffith learned that Rice had also played a little outfield at Petersburg, he tried him in right field. By the end of the season, Rice was doing so well as a left-handed hitter that the Senators traded their regular fielder, and Sam Rice became a regular. He played in only 58 games but finished the year with a highly respectable .299 batting average.

Rice's bat earned him a starting post in the Senator's outfield which he



This photograph shows the devastation left after a tornado struck the Rice home on April 21, 1912. The barn (back, left) and the house (front, left), were totally destroyed.

RICE PLACE AFTER CYCLONE APRIL 21-12
 & LINDS LAST MARK
 MORRIS ILL