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*Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County*

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## Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

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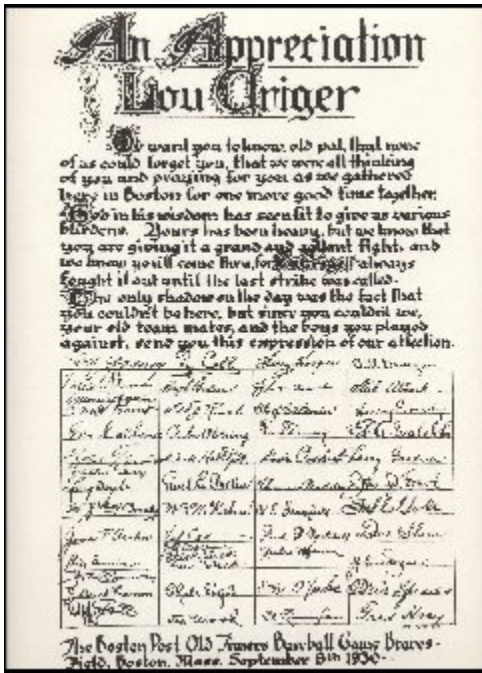
15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

March 2013

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### Lou Criger - Hugh Bedient - Boston Old Timers Game 1930



While cataloging a collection of baseball artifacts donated by 2012 CSHOF inductee Greg Peterson, a poster (left) titled “An Appreciation - Lou Criger” was among the items. The poster read as follows:

*We want you to know, old pal, that none of us could forget you, that we were all thinking of you and praying for you as we gathered here in Boston for one more good time together.*

*God in his wisdom has seen fit to give you various burdens. Yours has been heavy, but we know that you are giving it a grand and gallant fight, and we know you'll come thru, for Lou Criger always fought it out until the last strike was called.*

*The only shadow on the day was the fact that you couldn't be here, but since you couldn't we, your old team mates, and the boys you played against, send you this expression of our affection.*

Below the text were signatures of about 50 baseball players. Among those names were several who are enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown: *Ty Cobb, Cy Young, Tris Speaker, Honus Wagner, Johnny Evers, Chief Bender, Jimmy Collins, Fred Clarke, Harry Hooper, Bill McKecknie, Edd Roush, and Ed Walsh.*

Also among the signers of the poster was CSHOF inductee *Hugh Bedient.*

Along the bottom of the poster were the words *The Boston Post Old Timers Baseball Game, Braves Field, Boston, Mass., September 8, 1930.*

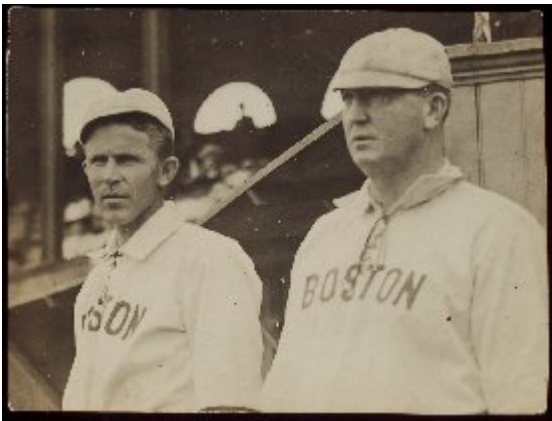
## Who was Lou Criger?



A Google search returned the following: Small and agile, light-hitting Lou Criger (left) lasted 16 years in the majors (1896-1912) because of his ability as a catcher. Beginning in 1896, he was the battery-mate of Cy Young in Cleveland and St. Louis of the National League, and Boston in the American League. Criger caught most of Young's 511 victories; the two played together until Criger's December 1908 trade to the Browns.

From another source: Feisty, slender and packing a strong, accurate throwing arm, the smarts to call pitches for the winningest pitcher of all-time, and the resiliency to last despite facing many physical ailments, catcher Lou Criger was regarded by his peers as one of the best backstops of the Deadball Era. At 5'10" and 165 pounds, Criger made an inviting target for bigger opponents, but the slender receiver took the punishment and held his ground. "Many players tackled Criger because he looked like a weakling," said Louie Heilbroner, who managed Criger in St. Louis before the respected receiver jumped to the American League. "But Criger would fight any six men on earth in those days, and if someone didn't pull them apart, Lou would lick all six by sheer perseverance."

Wrote Boston writer and former player Tim Murnane, "Criger is the man who can turn back the fleetest base runner, a man who can nip the boys at first and third unless they are ever on the alert. Criger is the backstop that never drops a ball that he can reach, and who can throw harder and quicker to second than any catcher in the profession."



Cy Young called Criger "the greatest catcher that ever stood behind the plate. I've pitched to him so long that he seems a part of me. Lou is a great student of the game and knows the weaknesses of every batter in the league. So confident am I of his judgment that I never shake my head."

As *Sporting Life* put it in 1908, "What battery still serving in the major leagues has more inseparable service than the firm of Criger and Young?"

Recalled Lou's son, Harold Criger, "I remember when the ball hit the mitt, it sounded like a pistol shot, and when dad was home, he soaked his hand in hot water, and it was red as fire. Sometimes he put a slice of beefsteak in his mitt for more padding, and Cy beat it to bloody shreds."

## Boston Old Timers Game

By 1930, Lou Criger was in poor health. He had suffered the loss of a leg due to bone tuberculosis caused by many injuries during his baseball career as shin guards for catchers were not used prior to 1908.



Criger, who had played for Boston Red Sox (nee Americans) from 1901-1908, was honored at a tribute game on September 8, 1930. The event, organized by the *Boston Post*, featured Boston Old Timers versus Old Timer Stars. Former teammates and opponents appeared to show their respect for Lou Criger.

Five days after the game, Lou Criger wrote a letter to a friend, Tom Regan. Excerpts are below:

*I wish to thank you very kindly for your very nice letter and would you believe me if I tell you that I received more than 80 letters and all very fine letters in the past four days. I cannot attempt to answer all of them, as I am afraid it would be too much for my strength.*

*I certainly thought of Boston and my old pals on Monday, Sept. 8. The day was really a sad one for me. I wanted so to be there. Boston fans will never realize how I longed to be in the dear old Bean Town just once again. I doubt if I could have made my way out to the plate, for as you may or may not know, my left limb is gone and naturally, I'm not in what the trainer would call first class playing condition.*

*I never knew the human body could go through what mine has been through in the past 17 years. The score is a tie - 1 to 1, and there are three balls and two strikes on me now. It seems to be merely a matter of what the Great Umpire above wills to call the next one, but I'm going to do my best to hit it out of the park.*

*I know I missed a great treat on September 8, and I assure you that nobody back there could possibly feel as badly about it as I did. I had a fair summer in Flagstaff. Mrs. Criger is a good, cheerful pal and I couldn't possibly have gone even as far as I have without her.*

*Letters, letters, are coming from every town within 100 miles of Boston and further. I can't tell you how I enjoyed reading them and how good it makes a fellow feel to realize that his old friends haven't forgotten him. Many of them brought the tears. Some gave me a good laugh. Many of them said they were praying for me, and I am one who can truthfully say that a prayerful life is a fine life to live. I found this out 10 years ago and God has wonderfully blessed me ever since.*

*Oh well, times change, just the same as we change. I am only a shadow of the self I once was. I weigh 121 pounds and I gained eight of that this summer. I caught the 1903 World's Series at 143.*

*Well Tom, I'm tired and you'll be tired reading my scratching, so I'll say good-bye. Louis*

## Bedient – Criger Connection



Falconer's Hugh Bedient participated in the tribute game as a member of the Boston Old Timers, a squad composed of former players of either the Boston Red Sox or Boston Braves. Their paths crossed in 1912 during Criger's last season when he was a member of the American League's St. Louis Browns and Bedient was a rookie pitcher for the Red Sox.

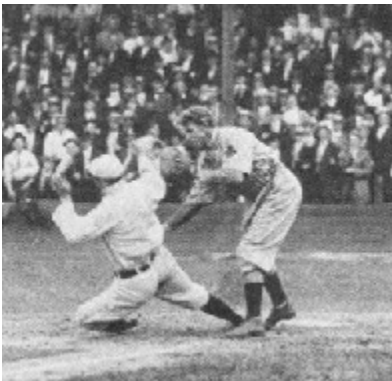
Bedient is pictured at the Criger tribute game standing in the top row, third from left, wearing a white cap. He is flanked by former Red Sox teammate Harry Hooper and Frank "Home Run" Baker.

Lou Criger also had a connection to two other CSHOF inductees, Tommy Leach and Ray Caldwell. Leach, born in French Creek, was the third baseman for Pittsburgh while Criger was the catcher for Boston during the very first World Series in (1903). Caldwell, a one-time resident of Frewsburg, was a teammate to Criger on the 1910 New York Highlanders, later renamed Yankees.

## More Criger Tidbits

During the 1903 World Series, Lou was approached by a gambler and offered a bribe to throw the World Series. When asked why they approached him, he was told that he was the one that had the playing ability to do this and wanted him to approach Cy Young also. He rejected the bribe, telling only Cy Young about it at the time.

The fact of this attempted bribe was revealed by the great catcher in an affidavit to American League President Ban Johnson in 1923 when Criger, failing in health, believed he had only a few weeks to live. This was after the Black Sox Scandal that followed the revelation of gamblers fixing the 1919 World Series. Ban Johnson did not forget this, and when Lou was struggling to regain his health Ban Johnson gave him a pension.



There was an intense rivalry between catcher Lou Criger and famed base-stealer Ty Cobb. The rivalry was both verbal and physical, and took place both on and off the field. Here is a 1909 photograph of Ty Cobb sliding into home. Lou Criger is the catcher.

Apparently rivalries were forgotten because The Georgia Peach signed the poster and played in the tribute game for Lou.

Lou Criger died in 1934.