

# Is Legendary Fleischmanns Baseball Photo A ‘Honus’ Mistake?

By Collin Miller

Through connections made in a town history group on social media, a legendary photograph of the Fleischmanns Mountain Athletic Club (M.A.C.) from the late 1890s has returned home.

In July 1963, the centennial edition of the Catskill Mountain News (CMN) ran a picture of the famous local baseball team claiming to be from 1895 and featuring Honus Wagner – regarded by many to be the greatest shortstop ever and a member of the first class inducted to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936. Even Harry M. Stevens, the famous concessionaire from Niles, Ohio credited with inventing the drinking straw, the modern score card (and perhaps the hot dog) was also listed in the caption as having umpired for the M.A.C. It also may be the only image of the team's founders Julius and Max Fleischmann in uniform. The photo was loaned to the CMN by John Kelly who was the postmaster in Fleischmanns in the 1940s.

As I got deeper into researching M.A.C. team history for an official historic-place designation at Fleischmanns Park in 2020, I wanted to correctly date the photo. But my research found that the famous shortstop Wagner played for five other teams in Ohio in the Iron & Oil League during his rookie year of 1895 making it highly unlikely he would be in Upstate NY and in this photo.

### What's in a name?

Furthermore, there's no evidence of the team being called the Mountain Athletic Club until the Pine Hill Sentinel mentions them in 1897, a year when they debuted their blue and red uniforms with the word "Mountain" emblazoned across the chest (as depicted in this photo).

Another wrinkle is that so many sports card collectors like me who came of age in the 1980's could not mistake the face of young Honus Wagner because of his 1909 tobacco card that fetched \$451,000 at auction to hockey great Wayne Gretzky back in 1991 – a record price paid for any sports memorabilia at the time. Because of the notoriety of the card, Wagner's face is among the most recognizable images of any ballplayer and the card is among the rarest and most valuable in the world. It is the baseball card equivalent of the Mona Lisa. In August 2021, the Wagner card in near mint sold for \$6.6 million, another record at the time.

Despite all the local hype in the past about the Wagner connection



Mountain Athletic Club ca. 1897 in Griffins Corners, NY (present day Fleischmanns). It is likely the first team photo of the M.A.C. and was recently rediscovered in Utah in the possession

of a granddaughter of John Kelly who was former postmaster of Fleischmanns in the 1940s. The player standing at top left has likely mistakenly been IDed as Honus Wagner.

to the M.A.C., I was not convinced that Honus was in the photo and that it was taken in 1895. But I thought that if I could find the original photo, maybe it would yield the correct identification of each of the players (with writing on the rear of the photo) and rule out the Wagner connection purported by the CMN in 1963. Players identified correctly could give me more clues as to when the photograph was taken.

I reached out to a local Facebook group called "Memories of the Town of Middletown." I asked the group if anyone knew if John Kelly (original owner of the photo) had any offspring and if so, were they reachable. To my surprise, a distant cousin of Mr. Kelly responded and put me in contact with John's son, Robert who is now in his 90s and lives in Florida.

### Picture this

I contacted Robert and was delighted to learn that the photo was indeed still in the family's possession. He agreed to put me in touch with his daughter Jane (Kelly) Ebberts who put the photo into storage near her home in Utah.

Months went by and I was getting concerned. "Could something have happened to Robert?" I wondered. Then, on February 24, 2020 (serendipitously Honus Wagner's birthday), Robert's daughter Jane (Kelly) Ebberts called me from Utah, and we talked about the photo. She explained that she had the photo appraised some years ago following the market frenzy brought on by Gretzky's purchase of the Wagner card. While the appraisers found the photo intriguing, according to Jane, they could not verify that Wagner was in the photo or that he had

ever played in Fleischmanns. And so it was tucked away and not thought about much until I reached out to the family. When I finally heard from Jane, I was pleased to learn that my suspicion was correct; it did have names of the men handwritten on the photo back. Jane explained that it was her grandmother's handwriting and she had most likely written it sometime in

the 1950s.

It was exactly as it had been printed in the caption in the CMN in 1963. Some men were labeled correctly, but others were not. One man listed in the photo with early connections to the founding of the team was Delaware County native, Arthur Reynolds who worked for several years as a distiller in the Fleischmann's yeast factory in Peekskill and lived in

Grand Gorge later in life, passing away in Stamford in 1965. However, another ballplayer from Rhode Island was incorrectly identified in the photo and his name was Andy Coakley. He would've only been 13 years old in 1895 if it were really him. Although Jane thinks that her grandmother may have been confused, we may never know why some of these men were identi-

fied incorrectly.

Despite not having the information sufficient to positively identify all the men of the M.A.C. circa 1897, it is a wonderful photograph with many of the key figures that led to the team's development into one of the most famous semi-professional teams of the late 1800's. It has a level of detail not visible in the copy printed in the CMN and it is highly valuable to local baseball history.

### Headed home

Last November, the photograph was pulled out of the family's storage unit in Utah and sent to me with the agreement that it be put on public display in honor of the photo's original owners, Jane's grandparents John and Iva Kelly.

A pre-game ceremony is planned for the Mountain Athletic Club Vintage Base Ball's home opener on May 20th at Fleischmanns Park when the photo will be donated to the Skene Memorial Library in Fleischmanns for permanent public display.

For more information on the new incarnation of the M.A.C. and much more about the team's illustrious history, visit [macvintagebaseball.org](http://macvintagebaseball.org)



## PROGRAM SCHEDULE

	6:00PM - Citizen News Bureau - Lori Fairbairn brings you the Weekend Weather report for the Catskill Region. 6:30PM - WARK Community Television Archives - The Larry Smith Show. Watch as Larry takes to the slopes at Belleayre Mountain. (Airdate Early 80s). 7:00PM - Mostly Folk with Artie Martello - Artie talks with Tom Chapin, an American musician, entertainer, singer-songwriter, and storyteller. He talks about his new album "Hold Our Ground", his music career and his brother Harry and his commitment to fight world hunger. 8:00PM - Focus on the Arts - Elizabeth Mami talks with BT Bard who is an illustrator, poet, and artist. She's written and illustrated 4 books, ranging from children's issues to adult, fiction to nonfiction. 8:30PM - The Sonny Rock Show - Sonny visits the shop of Ron Stetkewicz, who is not only a musician but creates miniature art.
1/20 Fri	
1/21 Sat	6:00PM - Delaware County News Update - Julia Marks and Matt Avitabile bring you the latest news from the Delaware County Region. 6:30PM - The Hikers Trash Husbands - Join Jeff and Moe as they hike the Middle and North Tripyramid Mountains, which are located in the Sandwich Range Wilderness of the White Mountain National Forest of New Hampshire. 7:00PM - Downstater - A comedy web series about two New Yorkers who leave big city life for the Catskills. In this episode, Jess & Beth vow to clean out their closets and turn in their stilettos for snow boots, but find it hard to resist the local treasures. 7:30PM - Focus on the Arts - Elizabeth Mami talks with local author, Peg DiBenedetto about her book, Silver Dollar Girls. In this book, DiBenedetto weaves a realistic tale of life in a rural farming town—the friendships, hardships and rewards. 8:00PM - CabaRadio - Tune in to see the most recent performance as recorded at the Pine Hill Community Center.
1/22 Sun	6:00PM - Grocholl Homestead - A new episode from Ashton as we learn about the ins and outs of owning chickens. 6:30PM - The Catskill Center - Join Visitor Center staff member Olivia Bernard on a fall foliage tour of the fire tower and see the mountains in the surrounding Esopus Valley. 7:00PM - WARK Community TV Archives - The Larry Smith Show. Join Larry as he visits the renovation of one the buildings in Margaretville. 7:30PM - The Sonny Rock Show - Sonny visits the shop of Ron Stetkewicz, who is not only a musician but creates miniature art. 8:00PM - Catskill Mountain Cycling Challenge - A story about the cycling challenge from local resident and filmmaker Kent Garrett. 8:30PM - Boots in the Barnyard - Watershed Agricultural Program presents stories from two farms. Clark Farms is a fourth generation dairy farm in Delhi, NY and Gladstone Farms in Andes, NY.
1/23 Mon	6:00PM - Focus on the Arts - Elizabeth Mami talks with Jennifer Prevatt. Jennifer is a Visual artist, Children's book illustrator and a Scientific illustrator. 6:30PM - Little Red Cottage of Nowhere - The autumn colors are amazing this year! Spend an ordinary fall day with Andrea running errands and doing chores while soaking up the extraordinary sensations of the season. 7:00PM - Mostly Folk with Artie Martello - Artie talks with Ray Lambiase and Lanny Sichel. Ray is a well accomplished folk musician with albums to his credit and a 5th being worked on. 7:30PM - SMACKED! Heroin Addiction & Recovery in Rural America - A documentary by Hamden resident and filmmaker Jessica Vecchione.
1/24 Tue	6:00PM - Weekly Weather Forecast - Lori Fairbairn brings you the Weekly forecast for the Catskill Region. 6:30PM - Medicare With Robin - Join Julia Marks as she asks important questions about Medicare with Robin Williams, a licensed insurance agent. Tonight's episode: The Basics of Medicare. 7:00PM - The Hikers Trash Husbands - Join Jeff and Moe as they hike The Middle and North Tripyramid Mountains, which are located in the Sandwich Range Wilderness of the White Mountain National Forest of New Hampshire. 7:30PM - The Little Red Cottages of Nowhere - Andrea visits the Wolf Mountain Nature Center in Smyrna, NY. 7:00PM - The Walton Theatre presents a Film Artist Talks with Catskill filmmaker Tobe Carey. 8:30PM - The Sonny Rock Show - Sonny visits the shop of Ron Stetkewicz, who is not only a musician but creates miniature art.
1/25 Wed	6:00PM - Grocholl Homestead - A new episode from Ashton as we learn about the ins and outs of owning chickens. 6:30PM - Focus on the Arts - Elizabeth Mami talks with BT Bard who is an illustrator, poet, and artist. 7:00PM - Medicare With Robin - Join Julia Marks as she asks important questions about Medicare with Robin Williams, a licensed insurance agent. Tonight's episode: The Basics of Medicare. 7:30PM - Citizen News Bureau - The Catskill Center's Jenny Flavin talks about the Steward Program. 8:00PM - The Sonny Rock Show - Sonny talks with Adam Ippolito, keyboard player for John Lennon's band, Elephant's Memory. 8:30PM - The Reporter reports on Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's visit to Delaware County to talk about The Critical Access Hospital program which allows rural healthcare providers to receive federal reimbursements to help ensure they are able to service patients.
1/26 Thu	6:00PM - Citizen News Bureau - Lori Fairbairn brings you the Weekend Weather Report for the Catskill Region. 6:30PM - Mostly Folk with Artie Martello - Artie's guest for this show is Sonny Ochs. Sonny is known internationally as a producer, radio program host and recipient of numerous awards for her dedication to folk music. She is Phil Och's older sister. 7:00PM - Downstater - A comedy web series about two New Yorkers who leave big city life for the Catskills. In this episode, Jess & Beth vow to clean out their closets and turn in their stilettos for snow boots, but find it hard to resist the local treasures. 7:30PM - WARK Community Television Archives - The Larry Smith Show. Join Larry as he visits the renovation of one the buildings in Margaretville (Airdate Early 80s). 8:00PM - CabaRadio - Tune in to see the most recent performance as recorded at the Pine Hill Community Center.

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