

A BASEBALL LEGEND

with Local Roots

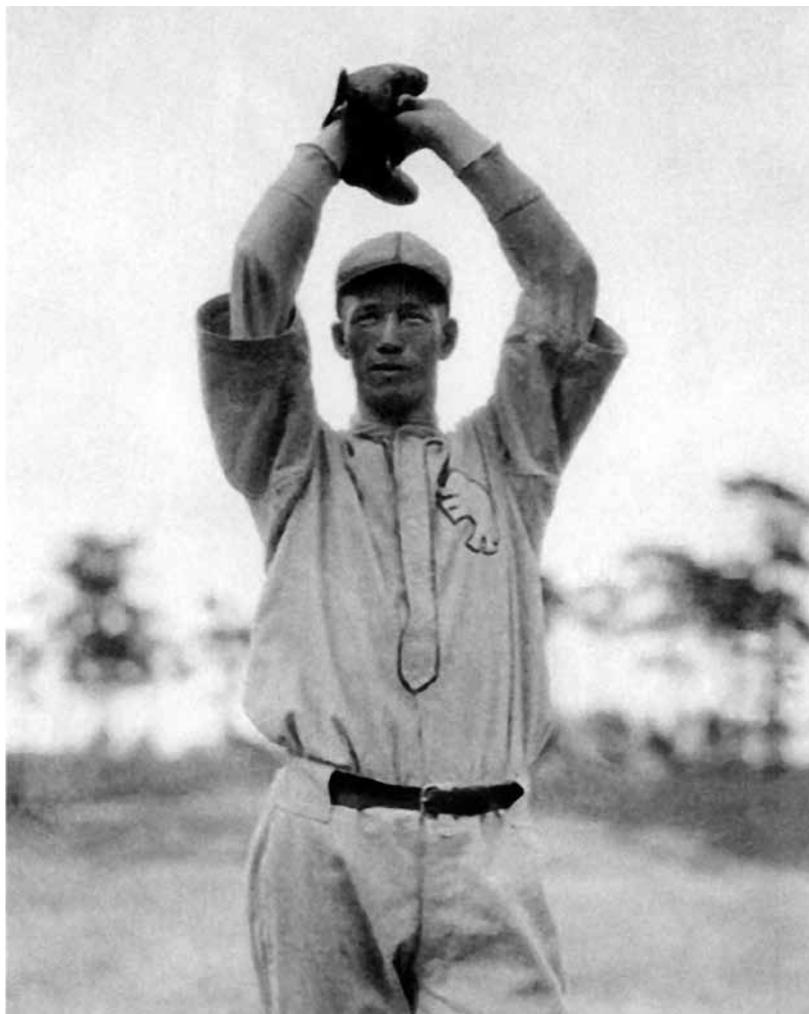
LONACONING, MARYLAND

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

“Lefty” Grove is finally getting the local recognition he deserves. The Major League Baseball Hall of Fame member will soon be immortalized when a larger than life statue is formally dedicated in his hometown of Lonaconing, Maryland. The story of how a small town kid from Western Maryland became one of the greatest to play the game will be readily available for all to see in a setting that would make the left-hander proud.

Robert Moses “Lefty” Grove grew up in a hard scrabble region where work was often defined by long hours in underground coal mines. The George’s Creek region had long hosted coal mining operations, and Lefty was familiar with its workers — family members and neighbors regularly trekked up the mountain to work the “Big Vein” coal seam. But the dark mines were not in Lefty’s future; two weeks of removing the black rocks proved to be sufficient.

Lefty Grove found alternative employment in various local businesses before finding his way into organized baseball in 1920 with the Blue Ridge League, and later during the same year, with the minor league Baltimore Orioles. It was not with the Orioles that Lefty would achieve stardom, but rather the major league Philadelphia Athletics and Boston Red Sox where from 1925-1941 he would win 300 games while compiling a 3.06 earned run average. Lefty’s accomplishments earned him many awards, including the first American League Most Valuable Player trophy in 1931, an artifact that remains in his hometown library for all to enjoy.



Lefty Grove was in the midst of seven consecutive 20 win seasons, including back-to-back seasons in 1930 and 31, when he was 28-5 and 31-4! That means in a two-year stretch he was an astounding 59-9! And he led the league in ERA for four consecutive seasons as well. In his 62 starts in those two years, he threw 49 complete games!

Following retirement, Lefty continued to reside in Lonaconing where he operated a bowling alley near the center of town. Sometimes he would be invited to baseball events and commemorations, but he typically

maintained a low key schedule in Allegany County until moving later in life to his daughter-in-law's home in Ohio.

As the years passed, Lefty's story began to fade and the only public recognition of his accomplishments found in Allegany County was a small plaque located in Lonaconing's Furnace Park. All of that was about to change when a committee convened in 2014 for the purpose of creating an appropriate memorial to the baseball legend.

According to Bucky Schriver, Chair of the Lefty Grove Memorial Committee, a group of approximately 16-18 members met over a period of months to discuss the possibility of financing a bronze statue of Grove. As plans progressed in 2015, sculptor Susan Luery was commissioned for the purpose of bringing Lefty to life in his hometown. Luery, creator of "Babe's Dream" that graces Oriole Park at Camden Yards, extensively researched Grove by studying time period photographs and uniforms. After discussions and research, it was decided



Robert Moses "Lefty" Grove

that Lefty's likeness would be depicted as delivering a fast ball in a slightly larger than life size form. A photograph clearly showing Grove's facial features was a primary resource for Luery, as she completed clay models and later a maquette, or scale model.

Positive comments about the preliminary work prompted the sculptor to undertake the remaining work associated with the project. The bronze statue will be ready for display by 2018.

As often occurs, one task prompts additional opportunities. In this instance the committee's commissioning of Susan Luery created discussions of where to permanently display the statue upon its arrival.

The committee arrived at a unique solution—Lefty would be displayed on a pitcher's mound in an old-time ballpark setting. Lefty Grove Memorial Park, to be developed at the corner of Main and Union Streets, will incorporate exterior features of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, while the interior will capture the ambiance of a baseball park.



1931 Baseball All Star Tour of Japan

Back row: Larry French, Mickey Cochrane, Lefty O'Doul, Fred Lieb (sportswriter), Lefty Grove, Herb Hunter (tour promoter), Billy Cunningham, Tom Oliver, George "High Pockets" Kelly, and Lou Gehrig.

Front row: Willie Kamm, "Rabbit" Maranville, Frankie Frisch, Muddy Ruel, Al Simmons, Ralph Shinnars, and Dr. Leonard Knowles (trainer).

One can only imagine the emotional experiences of baseball fans when they face the formidable Lefty Grove delivering a fast ball from a distance of 60 feet, 6 inches! A variety of interpretive signs highlighting the baseball legend's life will be displayed along a pathway throughout the interior of the park.

According to Bucky Schriver the total amount of money required to complete both parts of the project is about \$250,000. To date, more than two-thirds of the funding has been secured from community members and government support. Private fundraising has been accomplished through the sale of limited edition Lefty Grove baseball cards and major private donations. Jim Blair and his wife Marsha, currently residents of North Carolina, pledged \$50,000 while a second large contribution was recently provided by Joe Ross.

An unexpected supporter of the Lefty Grove project was Maryland Comptroller Peter Franchot, a baseball fan and ardent proponent of a "Brew and Baseball Tour" for the state of Maryland. Lefty Grove Memorial Park will be a model for the proposal that hopes to link the eight hometowns of Maryland's Major League Baseball Hall of Famers with the growing microbrewery industry.

Comptroller Franchot spoke on behalf of the Lefty Grove proposal at a bond bill hearing before the Maryland Board of Public Works. The 2016 Maryland Bond Bill, sponsored by the Allegany County delegation, requested that \$75,000 be provided for a bronze statue and surrounding enhancements to a town park in Lonaconing. The board unanimously approved the bond bill. As Schriver noted, "Peter Franchot's support was very important and will lead to bigger things for our area. The statue and self-guided driving tours will draw visitors to Allegany County."

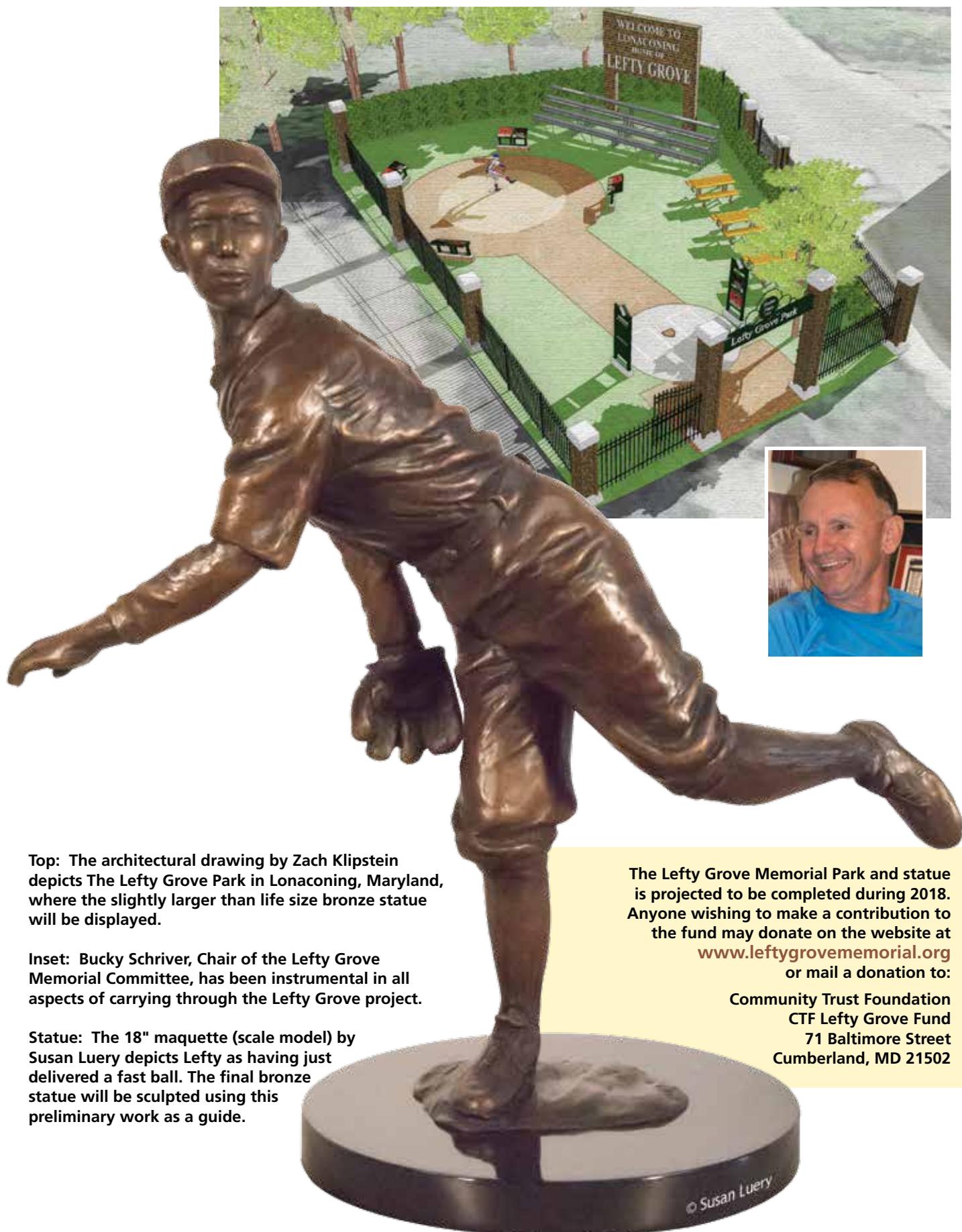


Top: After his baseball career, Lefty Grove resumed full-time residency in Lonaconing where he operated a bowling alley near the center of town. Lefty moved to Norwalk, Ohio, in 1961 (after the death of his wife) where he lived with his son and daughter-in-law, until his death in 1975.

The first "American League Most Valuable Player" trophy (left) was awarded to Lefty Grove in 1931. This artifact and other memorabilia remains in his hometown of Lonaconing, Maryland, in a special display case at the George's Creek Library, 76 Main Street (301-463-2629).

Below: Lefty Grove's pitching mitt – a Draper & Maynard "Rube Lutzke" model, circa 1920-1930.





Top: The architectural drawing by Zach Klipstein depicts The Lefty Grove Park in Lonaconing, Maryland, where the slightly larger than life size bronze statue will be displayed.

Inset: Bucky Schriver, Chair of the Lefty Grove Memorial Committee, has been instrumental in all aspects of carrying through the Lefty Grove project.

Statue: The 18" maquette (scale model) by Susan Luery depicts Lefty as having just delivered a fast ball. The final bronze statue will be sculpted using this preliminary work as a guide.

The Lefty Grove Memorial Park and statue is projected to be completed during 2018. Anyone wishing to make a contribution to the fund may donate on the website at www.leftygrovememorial.org or mail a donation to:

Community Trust Foundation
CTF Lefty Grove Fund
71 Baltimore Street
Cumberland, MD 21502