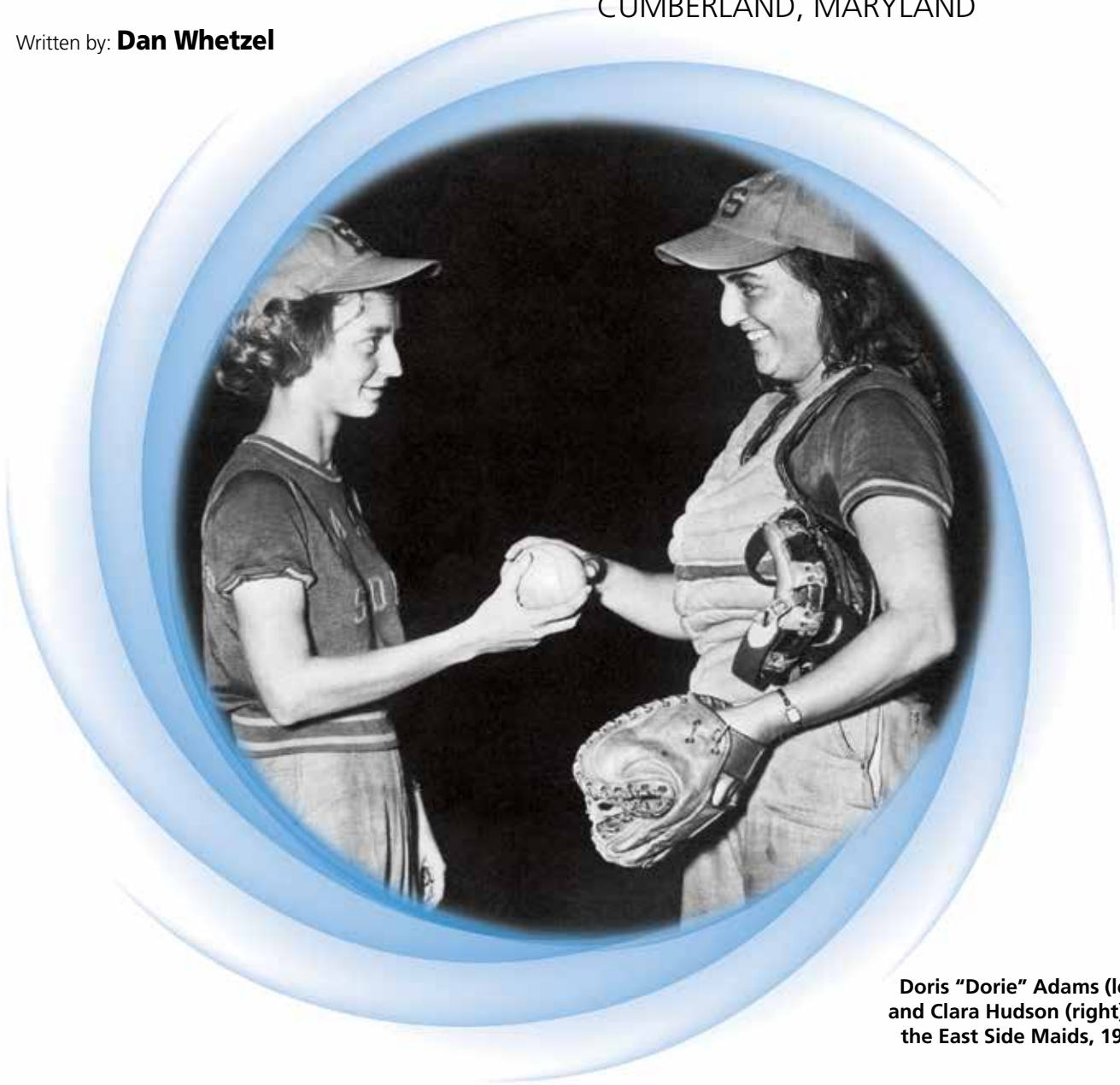


Fastpitch '50s

Women's Softball in the Queen City

CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**



**Doris "Dorie" Adams (left)
and Clara Hudson (right) of
the East Side Maids, 1950.**

Allegany County, Maryland, did not offer comprehensive sports programming for women following World War II. This was particularly true for scholastic competition when young women were denied opportunities to play sports their male counterparts enjoyed. The City of Cumberland and interested individuals partially filled that opportunity gap when fastpitch softball leagues formed during the

early 1950s. The summer time competition proved to be successful, as young women joined teams that became worthy of notoriety. Senior residents still recall the excitement of league and independent fastpitch games that attracted fans at local venues. Sponsors and athletes deserve credit for breaking gender barriers long before federal laws prohibiting discrimination became a reality.



The East Side Maids defeated the Moose Lassies 5-0 in the final game of the best of 5 series to become the Queen League champions, 1950.

Middle Row (l to r): Ruth Hawse, Jeannie Walters, Mary Ann Naughton, Clara Hudson, Norma Robosson.

Back Row (l to r): Barbara Rohman, "Mackie" Zehrbach, Jeanne Hale, Dorie Adams, Helen Winebrenner, Wanda Adams, Darus Zehrbach, manager.

Front: Eileen Naughton, bat girl.

One of the first city softball leagues acquired the name "Pigtail." According to newspaper reports the circuit welcomed girls up to 15 years of age (later 18) who were supervised by Ed Hoey of the Cumberland City Parks and Recreation Department that oversaw a host of summer activities. Pigtail teams anchored at neighborhood playgrounds, including Mapleside, Post, Columbia Street, Pine Avenue, Centre Street, Johnson Heights, Gephart, Pennsylvania Avenue, and North End. Playground leaders became popular personalities who facilitated activities at the sites, including additional entry level softball games. The local newspaper regularly reported Pigtail results into the early 1960s.

According to Doris (Adams) Kessell, standout pitcher from the 1950s, "The only activity for women during the summers of the 1950s was on the playgrounds. After playing in the

Pigtail League, the young ladies would move on to the Queen City Softball League that was for older girls."

The Queen City Softball League, often referred to as the Queen League, proved to be a competitive fastpitch circuit with skilled pitchers. Organized in 1949, teams included the Moose Lassies, East Side Maids, Ellerslie Blue Bonnets, Gephart Playground, Hyndman Keystoners, and Kelso's, although some teams changed in subsequent years to include Rice's Market, Clinebell's Bakery, Crystal Laundry, and Central Lunch. Competition between the Lassies and Maids highlighted the inaugural season with the East Side squad winning the championship game 13-6 before an overflow crowd at Community Ballpark on Wineow Street.

34 MOUNTAIN DISCOVERIES

AT East Side Maids

UMPIRES

TIME 2:05

RBI	PLAYERS	Pos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	AB	R	H	DO	A	E
	JACKSON	1															4	1	1			
	SHEPHERD	7															4	1	1			
	S. BIGGS	5															4	0	2			
	M. BECKWARD	6															3	0	1			
	M. FRAZIER	3															3	0	0			
	J. BECKWARD	4															3	0	0			
	M. Hamilton	2															3	1	1			
	A. Washington	10																				
	J. Stephens	8																				
	J. Leath	9																				

AT East Side

UMPIRES

TIME 3:00 PM.

RBI	PLAYERS	Pos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	AB	R	H	DO	A	E
	HAWSE	6																				
	ADAMS D.	1																				
	FRIEND	4																				
	WINEBRENNER	7																				
	NAUGHTON	2																				
	CRABTREE	5																				
	ZEHRBACH	3																				
	DAVIS	8																				
	ADAMS F.	9																				

TOTALS

ER Left Sacrifices

BB 2-B PB

SO 3-B WP

HR HB

DP SB Balks

Darus Zehrbach's scorebook provided a detailed summary of Queen League softball games from 1951-1953.

Ritz team lineup, 1952, (top page) and East Side Maids, 1952 (bottom page).

A key figure in the organization of the Queen League was Earl Nonnenmann, owner of the Sports Shoppe on North Centre Street. Elected president in 1951, Mr. Nonnenmann oversaw a 16 game schedule and provided trophies and other awards for the athletes. The business owner continued to be known as an athletic booster for decades.

Some teams were fortunate to have business sponsorships, but most players sought individual sponsors or paid their own way—a testament to the athletes eagerness to compete. One former player recalled, “John Ankeney (owner of a downtown Cumberland office supply store), sponsored one player, but most had to secure their own way.” Donna



(Decker) Harris who played second base position for the East Side Maids also noted, “We all had to sponsor ourselves.”

The Queen League’s standout team proved to be the East Side Maids and its star pitcher, Doris (Adams) Kessell. Comments about Doris’ skills appeared regularly over the years, including a letter (printed in a 1989 Cumberland newspaper) reminiscing about softball nearly four decades earlier. The author wrote, “One of the people I remember was the pitcher for the Maids, Doris Adams. She could pitch a softball faster than anyone I have ever seen.”

Darus Zehrbach, Maids manager, mentored the team to championships in 1949, 1950, and 1952. Lovers Leap (formerly the Lassies) won the circuit in 1951 and Central Lunch in 1953.

Included in the league was the Ritz, the only recorded all black softball team in the Tri-State area. While the Queen League teams proved to be groundbreaking as a league, the Ritz highlighted a disparity that negatively affected life in the area—segregation. Racially diverse youngsters socialized outside of school, but not all were permitted to participate

The Hermanettes, with uniforms featuring the caricature “Herman,” circa 1954.
Front Row (l to r): Cora Leatherman, Darlene Weimer, Darlene Lease, Annabell Leatherman, Elsie McGee, Rosalie Bowers, Dot Heavner. **Second Row:** Jeanne Hale, Becky Lechlitter, Pat Metzger, Pat Thompson, Nancy Belt, Francis Duckworth, Assistant Manager, Eileen Hite. **Back Row:** Ed McGee, Assistant Manager, Gene Scaletta, Manager, L.N. Duncan, General Manager of the Queen City Brewing Company, Arch M. Hutchinson, Secretary of the same firm.

together in scholastic play and other activities. Ritz players attended Carver School, the regional grades 1 through 12 facility for African American students located on Frederick Street in Cumberland. Since players were prohibited from participating in local school events, they competed against African American teams in nearby cities. In contrast to prevailing attitudes, the local Dapper Dan Little League for boys integrated at its inception during the same time frame.

The best known of the women’s fastpitch teams from the 1950s represented a local brewery that sponsored it. The Old German Hermanettes featured uniforms with a caricature of a small German man (Herman) wearing lederhosen—the official logo of Old German beer produced by the Queen City Brewing Company of Cumberland.



This photograph was labeled "Korner Kids" and was likely a playground team from the early 1950s. No names available.



Believed to be GEPHART PLAYGROUND PIGTAIL LEAGUE — Front Row (l to r): Bonnie Lippold, Barb Yankolevich, Pat Thompson, Barbie Balaban, Sheila Fram, Carol Kelley, and Pat Lippold. Back Row: Coach Mullaney, Joann Dickel, _____, Pat Cioni, Mary Jo Rowan, Judy O'Neal, _____, Mary Jane Curtis, and Jean Hale.



CENTRAL LUNCH — Front Row (l to r): Jeanne Hale, Pat Thompson, Jean True, Mary Ann Naughton, _____, and _____.

Middle Row: Joann Dickel, _____, Dottie Heavner, and Pat Metzger

Back Row: Rosie DeHaven, _____, _____, Gene Scaletta, coach, Ed McGee, and Elsie McGee.

The Hermanettes began with conversations between Gene Scaletta, manager, and officials from the brewery in early 1954. Mr. Scaletta sought sponsorship for a team whose players would be drawn from the former Queen League. Negotiations proved useful and plans developed for both sponsorship and league play.

Instrumental in achieving franchise status were team organizers, Gene Scaletta and Ed McGee, who officially accepted membership in the Atlantic Coast Girls Softball League. Teams included Garvin's Grill (Washington, DC), National Rebuilders (Altoona, PA), Spittel's Tavern (Baltimore, MD), and Crystalettes (Reading and Elizabeth, PA). The schedule called for doubleheaders on weekends with five home and five away dates.

The Hermanettes made their debut at Penn Avenue field against the Garvin's Grill where Mayor Roy Eves threw the first pitch and the Lonaconing City Band provided musical entertainment that was broadcast on local radio. Press coverage included a team photograph and story in the *Cumberland Evening Times* (April 1954). Ongoing newspaper coverage featured "Meet the Hermanettes" biographical summaries with accompanying photographs.

In addition to league play the Hermanettes competed against independent teams throughout the season. The



A rare action photograph of the Hermanettes at Penn Avenue field.



Nancy Belt (left) and Eileen Hite (right) at Penn Avenue field. The players uniforms were the first version worn by the Hermanettes.



Pat Metzger (left) and Darlene Weimer (right) at Penn Avenue Field.

Newberry Sluggers of Williamsport, PA, became one of the first nonconference teams to appear when it arrived in Cumberland in June 1954. Additional nonconference success came when the Hermanettes finished second in the state softball tourney featuring highly competitive city teams, including champion Baltimore Phillies.

The 1955 season saw the return of Gene Scaletta and Ed McGee as manager and coach. Once again the Hermanettes faced formidable scheduling that included the Hubbard Girls (Hubbard, OH) who appeared at Penn Avenue stadium. A unique fundraiser during the 1955 season saw the Hermanettes face off against the Old German men's baseball team.

The Hermanettes maintained schedules through the 1963 season when the Old German sponsorship ended—the team subsequently became known as the Cumberland Clippers. The Clippers continued for several years and then ended competition as a



EAST SIDE MAIDS — Front Row (l to r):
Cora Leatherman, Frances Adams, Ruth
Hawse, Dorie Adams, Jean Davis, and
Donna Smith.

Back Row: Darus Zehrbach, Annabelle
Leatherman, Helen Winebrenner, Clara
Hudson, Elizabeth "Liz" Crabtree, Patty
Palmer, and Norma Robosson.



CENTRAL LUNCH —

Front Row: _____, _____, _____, and
_____.

Middle Row: Mary Ann Naughton, Joann Dickel, Jeanne
Hale, Elsie McGee, _____, Jean True Clontz, and
Becky Lechlitter.

Back Row: _____, Gene Scaletta, Manager, Sara Mae
Stewart, and _____. *PHOTO COURTESY MARTY CRUMP*

fastpitch team. Ending competition did not mean the Hermanettes disappeared from memories. Over the years the trailblazers became a frequent topic of conversation among local sports fans who recall spirited women welcoming challenges to play the sport they loved.

In a 1992 newspaper article, Hermanettes reflected on their challenges and highlights. One vivid memory involved a field affectionately known as "bug stadium." The field located on Mason Road hosted women who enjoyed the sport and were willing to endure the pesky insects surrounding them during games. Practices were sometimes held at a sandlot field on Shades Lane, near Nave's Crossroad.



CENTRAL LUNCH, sponsor of the Queen League team, was a restaurant located at 74 North Centre Street, Cumberland, opposite City Hall. Central Lunch won the first half championship of the Queen League with a 13-6 record. *Photograph July 1953.*

Front Row (l to r): Clare Kreigline, Pat Metzger, Pat Thompson, Joann Dickel, Jeanne Hale, and Darlene Weimer.
Back Row: Dottie Heavner, Kathy Mullaney, Mary Ann Naughton, Gene Scaletta, Manager, Rose Bowers, Ed McGee, Elsie McGee, Eileen Hite, and Jean True Clontz.

PHOTO COURTESY MARTY CRUMP

Kathleen Lindner, first base position, remembered the absence of organized leagues for girls, and the taunting and stereotyping players sometimes endured.

Jeanne Hale concurred, "If you played ball or wore jeans, you were considered a tomboy." But Jeanne didn't care about the stereotypes, she just "loved to play."

Pat Metzger, second base, catcher, and sometimes pitcher, recently told the story about a friend who was discouraged from playing pickup baseball with boys because her parents believed it was not a "lady like" activity. A couple of years later both Pat and her friend joined the Queen League and soon after the Hermanettes where they enjoyed success.

Carol Hardman knew the Hermanettes as being a close group. "If a new player came on the team and she was a good ball player, there wasn't any jealousy." Sacrifices were involved. "You gave up your Sundays, your weekends, but you didn't mind," Hardman stated, "You loved to go."

Pat Metzger summarized the experiences of women who joined the 1950s teams, "We were pioneers for the local sports and I was happy to be a part of it."

Much has changed since the early days of women's fastpitch softball in the city. One important improvement occurred decades later when the Allegany County Board of Education accepted a recommendation by Jim Thompson, Supervisor of Physical Education and Athletics, to introduce fastpitch softball competition into high schools (1995). Since the sport's inception, both Fort Hill and Allegany High Schools have captured state titles. Nearby Mountain Ridge High School added to the list of state championships with consecutive titles in 2012-2013.

Additional recognition for county softball came from Winner Brothers Coalettes team. Competing in **slowpitch**



HERMANETTES — The later Hermanette uniforms replaced "Herman" with block lettering.

Front Row (l to r): Pat Donahue, Carol Hardman, Pat Metzger, Pat Cioni, and Teresa High.

Middle Row: Ed McGee, manager, Darlene Jordan, Ruth Robertson, Fluzz Ketterman, Beverly Warnick, and Coach Ralph Miller.

Back Row: Sharon Miller, Pat Amato, Peaches Raley, Dianna High, Virginia Powell, and Linda Haines.

Absent: Pauline Miltenberger and Coach Denver High.

PHOTO COURTESY MARTY CRUMP



UNKNOWN LOCAL TEAM — Front Row (l to r): _____, _____, Pat Thompson, and Joann Dickel.

Back Row: Bev Warnick, Sarah Mae Stewart, Eileen Twigg, Jean Hinds, and Shirley Kelso.

PHOTO COURTESY MARTY CRUMP

Left: Pat Metzger, one of the pioneers for women's softball locally, proudly wears her original 1950s Hermanettes uniform. She played on several teams in the fifties, including Central Lunch. Pat is the second person from left in the front row of photo on facing page and also middle of first row in top photo. *PHOTO BY MIKE CALHOUN*

games, the Coalettes became the only team from Maryland to capture an Eastern Division Championship of the United States Slowpitch Softball Association (1985).

The most sweeping support for women's scholastic athletics occurred in 1972 with the enactment of Title IX, a law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational programming and activities that receive federal assistance. Title IX permeated all aspects of athletics and increased opportunities for women.

Today, opportunities are sometimes taken for granted in sports programming, but it was not long ago that women's participation could not be assumed. Concerned individuals who recognized the limitations surrounding sports and took action deserve recognition. Also worthy of accolades are the young women who overcame obstacles and paved the way for today's success stories. It is inspiring to recall that local gender barriers began to fall when Cumberland's 1950s fastpitch softball teams took the field.