

Museum's Name Honors Negro Leagues Player, Army Veteran

(Milbert O. Brown Jr., a BBRC member, is a board member of the Hubert V. Simmons Museum of Negro Leagues Baseball)

By Milbert O. Brown Jr.

The year 2008 was memorable for Hubert V. Simmons, who was affectionately called "Bert," once known as a better-than-average baseball player. The Orioles drafted Simmons; a seemingly ageless 84-year-old pitcher. Major League Baseball wanted to highlight several former Negro Leagues players who were denied an opportunity to play in the major leagues by drafting them as honorary members of MLB teams.

Also, in 2008, on June 28, Bert Simmons, along with his wife Audrey L. Simmons, and good friend Rayner "Ray" Banks, met to discuss plans to develop a Negro Leagues baseball museum in the greater Baltimore area. The timing for this museum project was perfect, as there was a rising interest in the Negro Leagues' importance. Many of former Negro Leagues player were considered "the greatest" of their time. Simmons, a former Negro Leagues player, refused to face the possibility of losing such an essential part of baseball history. Later that year, Simmons, a member of Lochearn Presbyterian Church, convinced the church leadership to let him renovate an unused auxiliary area of the church to launch the first Negro Leagues museum in the Baltimore area.

Simmons began to collect artifacts and memorabilia featuring Negro League players and teams. "A lot of the signed autographs, baseball bats and old newspaper articles were sent to Bert to support his desire to start the museum," said Audrey Simmons.

Bert Simmons' dream of establishing a large facility to house his collection was realized four years after his 2009 death. On November 20, 2013, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz announced the permanent location for the museum at the new Owings Mills Metro Centre complex. The space is inside the Owings Mills branch of the Baltimore County Public Library. The Hubert V. Simmons Museum of Negro Leagues Baseball, Inc. officially opened in the spring of 2014.

The purpose of the Hubert V. Simmons Museum of Negro Leagues Baseball is to educate, advocate, and generate widespread interest in the Negro Leagues. The museum provides an awareness of the cultural, social, and economic impact on the surrounding communities. The museum features an extensive collection of photographs, books, oral history interviews, and memorabilia that tells the story of the Negro Leagues from the 1800s to the 1950s. Additionally, the SMNLB focuses on youth programs and the importance of good sportsmanship. Through its educational component, the museum hopes to foster community conversations about the "love for the game and Negro League contributions to baseball."

Who was Hubert Simmons?

Hubert Simmons returned home to North Carolina after serving in the Army during World War II. One of Simmons' major activities before joining and after his service was baseball. He was good. He could play every position, but his most notable spot on the baseball diamond was as a knuckleball pitcher. In 1941, he played for the Raleigh Tigers, a semi-pro team. He doubled as a pitcher and outfielder. Even during his time in the Army, he played baseball. Shortly after his discharge from the Army, Simmons enrolled in North Carolina A&T State University. He graduated with a B.S. de-



gree in business administration.

Of course, he played baseball and was a four-time All-Colored (now Central) Intercollegiate Athletic Association player (1946-49) and was inducted into the North Carolina A&T Sports Hall of Fame in 1978. He played for the Goshen/Greensboro Red Wings, a Negro Southern League team, from 1946-1948. Simmons played for a season with the Farley Stars of Atlantic City, New Jersey which was managed by Hall of Famer and Negro

Leagues great John Henry "Pop" Lloyd. In 1949, he joined the Asheville Blues, a Negro Southern League team. In the final year of the Baltimore Elite Giants' existence, 1950, Simmons played for the Negro American League team. He ended his baseball career in 1952 with Baltimore's Yokely Stars, an independent team.

After baseball, Simmons worked as a teacher for the Baltimore City Public Schools for 30 years. He coached baseball at the Little League, high school, and college levels for many years. After retiring as a teacher in 1984, he opened Simmons, Inc., which sold customized team uniforms and unique clothing for churches, schools, and fraternal organizations. It was his business and love for Negro Leagues history that spurred him to create the museum.



Planning to Visit the Museum?

The museum shares space on three floors of the Owings Mills branch of the Baltimore County Library, 10302 Grand Central Avenue, and is open during regular library hours, Monday-Thursday 9 A.M.-8 P.M. and Friday-Saturday 9 A.M.-5 P.M. For driving and transit directions, see <https://www.bcpl.info/locations/owings-mills/index.html>.