



Professional Baseball in Louisiana

by

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Baseball has been played since the 1850's throughout Louisiana, but it was not until 1887 that the New Orleans Pelicans became the state's first professional baseball club. New Orleans still hosts a professional baseball team – the Zephyrs of the AAA Pacific Coast League.

But New Orleans is not the only city to sponsor professional baseball. In fact, twenty cities throughout Louisiana have hosted professional teams over the years. They played in a total of fourteen different leagues covering the spectrum from independent leagues to Class AAA.

In 1895 Shreveport became the state's second city to promote professional baseball when the Shreveport Grays took the field in the Texas-Southern League. Although they finished in fourth place and disbanded in early August before the season finished, Shreveport would become a major hub of professional baseball and remains so today with the Shreveport Sports of the Class AA American Association.

Baton Rouge became the state's third city to have a professional baseball franchise when the Baton Rouge Cajuns in the Cotton States League finished the 1903 season 53 – 54 (.495) in second place, just 2-1/2 games behind the Natchez Indians.

From the six teams that made up the Louisiana State League which operated for a single season in 1920, to the Dixie League which operated between 1933 and 1935, to the better known Cotton States League, the Evangeline League, and the Southern League (later reformed as the Southern Association), cities across Louisiana fielded teams and captured their share of league championships.

What follows is a closer look at the three professional baseball leagues most associated with Louisiana and Louisiana-based teams: the Cotton States League, the Evangeline League, and the Southern League/Southern Association.

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Cotton States League

Class D: 1902 – 1908, 1910 – 1913, 1922 – 1932

Class C: 1936 – 1941, 1947 – 1955

Louisiana	Alabama	Arkansas	Florida	Mississippi	Texas
Alexandria	Mobile	El Dorado	Pensacola	Brookhaven	Marshall
Baton Rouge	Selma	Helena		Clarksdale	Port Arthur
DeQuincy		Hot		Cleveland	Texarkana
Lake Charles		Springs		Columbus	
Monroe		Pine Bluff		Greenville	
New Orleans				Greenwood	
Opelousas				Gulfport	
				Gulfport- Biloxi	
				Hattiesburg	
				Jackson	
				Laurel	
				Meridian	
				Natchez	
				Vicksburg	
				Yazoo City	

The Cotton States League appeared shortly after the turn of the 20th century and for thirty-seven seasons off and on between 1902 and 1955 entertained fans across six states. Baton Rouge captured the league pennant in 1903 and again in 1932, while Alexandria reigned as champion in 1929. However, the most successful Louisiana team hailed from Monroe, winning five Cotton States titles during twenty-one seasons, including three in a row (1939 – 1941). New Orleans sponsored a team during the 1912 season – the New Orleans Little Pels – but they moved to Yazoo City, Mississippi, on May 9th and eventually folded on August 3rd.

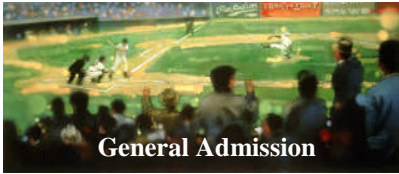
The most notable players to spring from the Cotton States League were Bill Dickey (1927 Jackson Red Sox) and Billy Herman (1928 Vicksburg Hill Billies).

Evangeline League

Class D: 1934 – 1942, 1946 – 1948

Class C: 1949 – 1957

Louisiana	Mississippi	Texas
Abbeville	Natchez	Port Arthur
Alexandria		Texas City
Baton Rouge		
Crowley		
Hammond		
Jeanerette		
Lafayette		
Lake Charles		
Monroe		
New Iberia		
Opelousas		
Rayne		
Thibodaux		



The wildly popular Evangeline League emerged during the Great Depression and lasted for twenty-one seasons, interrupted only by World War II. Thirteen Louisiana cities were represented and four teams – Alexandria, Lafayette, New Iberia, and Houma – captured three league titles each. Lafayette fielded the most successful club, finishing in the top half in eleven out of seventeen seasons and winning three pennants.

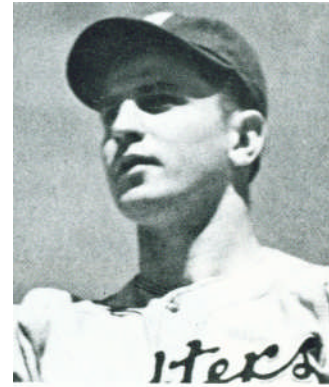
The Evangeline League produced many exceptional baseball players, including Paul Bruno, Sid Gauthreaux, Cecil Dunn, Conk Meriwether, and Roy Sanner.



Paul Bruno



Sid Gauthreaux



Pete Thomassie

Southern League/Southern Association

1885 – 1888, 1892 – 1896, 1901

Class A: 1902 – 1935

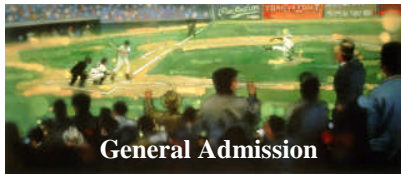
Class A1: 1936 – 1945

Class AA: 1946 – 1961

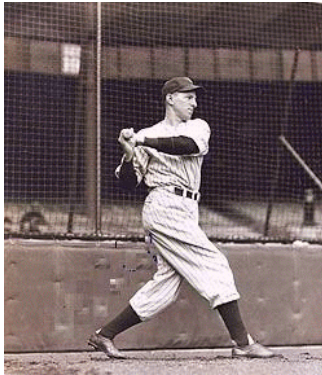
Louisiana	Alabama	Arkansas	Georgia	Tennessee	Others
New Orleans Shreveport	Birmingham Mobile Montgomery Selma	Little Rock	Atlanta Augusta Columbus Macon Savannah	Chattanooga Knoxville Memphis Nashville	Charleston (SC) Evansville (IN) Pensacola (FL)

The Southern League featured the first professional baseball team in the state of Louisiana – the New Orleans Pelicans – who captured league honors in their first season in 1887, then again in 1889 and 1896. New Orleans was among the three cities that formed the Southern Association from the ashes of the Southern League in 1901. Over fifty-nine seasons, New Orleans would finish in first place nine times and would finish in the top half of the league more than seventy-one percent of the time.

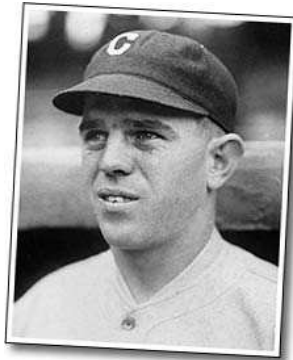
The franchise would produce four future Hall of Famers – Joe Sewell, Dazzy Vance, Bob Lemon and Earl Weaver – along with dozens of other major leaguers like Shoeless Joe Jackson, Tom Henrich, Zeke Bonura and Roy Face.



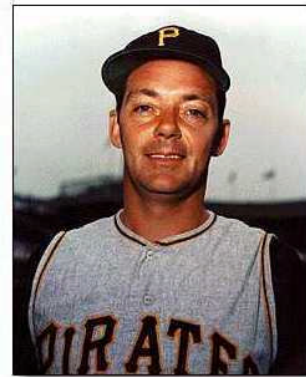
General Admission



Tom Henrich



Joe Sewell



Roy Face

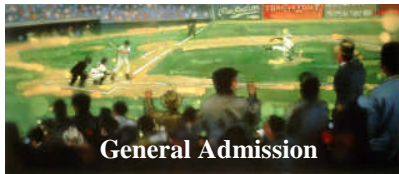
New Orleans native Larry Gilbert became the club's player-manager in 1923 and would lead his club to their ninth Southern League/Southern Association pennant. Gilbert would manage for twenty-five years in the Southern Association, compiling a record of 2,128 – 1,628 (.567) to become the most successful manager in the league's history.



The New Orleans Pelicans would also produce Abner Powell – the father of New Orleans baseball and one of the game's true pioneers (at left). Powell became the team's first captain in 1887 and would go on to become the team's manager and eventually owned the club until 1903.

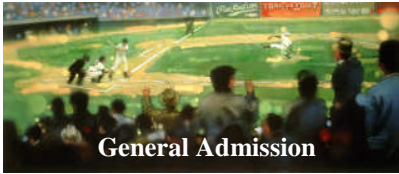
He introduced the practice of covering the infield with a waterproof tarpaulin when it rained, popularized Ladies' Day as a regular feature on the schedule, established *The Knothole Gang* for neighborhood kids to get into ballgames free, and began issuing detachable *Rain Checks* – all in 1887!

Louisiana has a rich history of professional baseball that spans nearly 120 years, from the 1887 New Orleans Pelicans to the present day New Orleans Zephyrs of the Class AAA Pacific Coast League and the Shreveport Sports of the Class AA American Association.



Professional Baseball in Louisiana

City	League	Year(s)
Abbeville	Louisiana State	1920
	Evangeline	1935 – 1939, 1946 – 1950, 1952
Alexandria	Gulf Coast	1907 – 1908
	Arkansas State	1909
	Louisiana State	1920
	Cotton States	1925 – 1930
	Evangeline	1934 – 1942, 1946 – 1957
	Texas	1972 – 1975
	Texas-Louisiana	1994 -
Baton Rouge	Cotton States	1902 – 1906, 1929 – 1932
	Dixie	1933
	East Dixie	1934
	Evangeline	1946 – 1957
	Gulf States	1976
Crowley	Gulf Coast	1908, 1950
	Evangeline	1951 – 1957
DeQuincy	Cotton States	1932
Hammond	Evangeline	1946 – 1951
Houma	Evangeline	1940, 1946 – 1952
Jeanerette	Evangeline	1934 – 1939
Lafayette	Gulf Coast	1907
	Louisiana State	1920
	Evangeline	1934 – 1942, 1948 – 1957
	Texas	1975 – 1976
Lake Charles	South Texas	1906
	Gulf Coast	1907 – 1908, 1950 – 1953
	Cotton States	1929 – 1930
	Evangeline	1934 – 1942, 1954 – 1957
Leesville	Gulf Coast	1950
Monroe	Cotton States	1903 – 1904, 1908, 1924 – 1932, 1937 – 1941, 1950 – 1955
	Arkansas State	1909
	Gulf Coast	1907
	Evangeline	1956
Morgan City	Gulf Coast	1908
New Iberia	Louisiana State	1920
	Evangeline	1934 – 1942, 1946 – 1956
New Orleans	Southern	1887 – 1888, 1892 – 1896
	Texas	1888
	Southern Association	1901 – 1959
	Cotton States	1912
	American Association	1977
	Pacific Coast	1993 -



City	League	Year(s)
Oakdale	Louisiana State	1920
Opelousas	Gulf Coast	1907
	Cotton States	1932
	Evangeline	1934 - 1941
Rayne	Louisiana State	1920
	Evangeline	1934 – 1941
Shreveport	Texas-Southern	1895
	Southern Association	1901 – 1907, 1959 – 1961
	Texas	1908 – 1910, 1915 – 1932, 1938 – 1942, 1946 – 1957, 1968 – 2002
	Dixie	1933
	East Dixie	1934
	West Dixie	1935
	American Association	2003 -
Thibodaux	Evangeline	1946 – 1954, 1956 – 1957

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