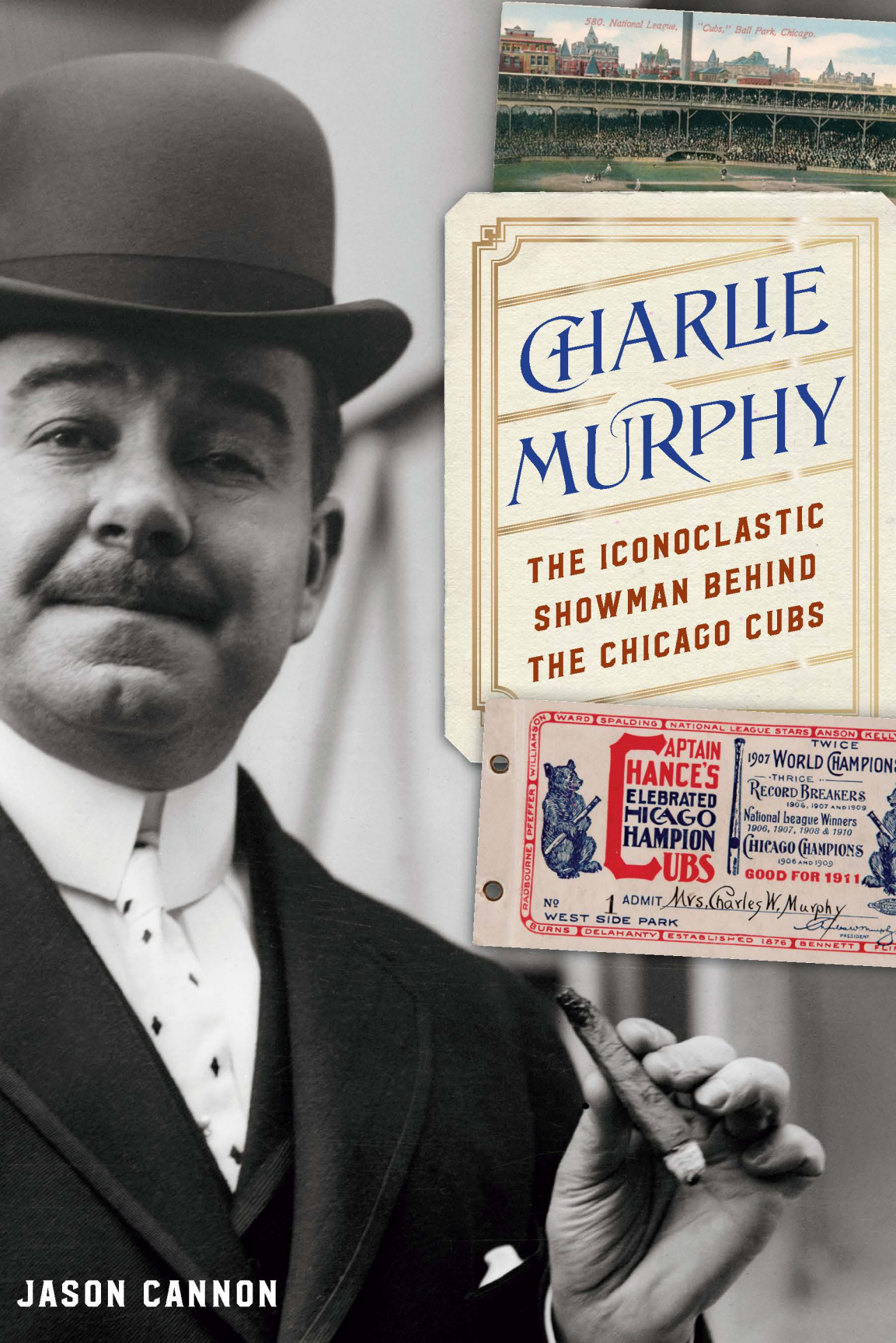
580. National League, "Cubs," Ball Park, Chicago.
CHARLIE MURPHY
THE ICONOCLASTIC SHOWMAN BEHIND THE CHICAGO CUBS
WARD SPALDING NATIONAL LEAGUE STARS ANSON
CAPTAIN CHANCE'S CELEBRATED CHICAGO CHAMPION CUBS
TWICE 1907 WORLD CHAMPIONS
THRICE RECORD BREAKERS 1906, 1907 AND 1909
National League Winners 1906, 1907, 1908 & 1910
CHICAGO CHAMPIONS 1906 AND 1909
GOOD FOR 1911
No 1 ADMIT Mrs. Charles W. Murphy
WEST SIDE PARK
RADBOURNE PFEFFER WILLIAMSON
BURNS DELAHANTY ESTABLISHED 1876 BENNETT
JASON CANNON


CHARLIE
MURPHY

The Iconoclastic Showman behind the Chicago Cubs

JASON CANNON

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Set in Lyon Text by Laura Buis.

For Reagan

For a real wonder-story, the history of Charles W. Murphy outranks anything in baseball records.

—EDWARD MOTT WOOLLEY, *McClure's*

CONTENTS


CHARLIE
MURPHY

INTRODUCTION

"He Was a Showman . . ."

On October 16, 1931, Charles Webb Murphy's troubled heart, wracked with the repercussions of a stroke and hypertension, gave out. At sixty-three, Murphy's death returned him—if only momentarily—to the public spotlight after a decade of relative obscurity. In his heyday, primarily the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the team he owned, the Chicago Cubs, won four pennants and two World Series championships from 1905 through 1914, Murphy's activities and comments routinely appeared in America's sports pages. During his years in charge of the Cubs, Murphy upended the typical personality of the baseball magnate. He spoke exuberantly and frequently with newspaper reporters in much the same way as one of the Progressive Era's most powerful figures, Teddy Roosevelt. Unlike his peers, many of whom fought their battles privately, Murphy's relentless public exposure of the underbelly of baseball's business side made him a target of the establishment's wrath.

Hugh Fullerton proved to be an exception. A sportswriter now enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Fullerton covered baseball for decades and famously played an important role in uncovering the Black Sox scandal in 1919. Most uniquely, Fullerton proved to be one of the few people around the game of baseball who shared a genuine personal friendship with Murphy. Fullerton met Murphy during their teenage years, before professional baseball made either man famous. They hailed from neighboring Ohio towns: Murphy lived in Wilmington, a small rural community triangulated in the west by

Cincinnati, the north by Dayton, and the northeast by Columbus. Fullerton grew up in Hillsboro, a tiny enclave just over twenty miles to the southeast of Wilmington. They shared a passion for baseball in addition to their roots. "Murph was my friend from boyhood," Fullerton reminisced. "We were friends when he worked in a drug store in Wilmington and spent his meager money to back the Wilmington baseball team against the world."[1] Fullerton's awareness of Murphy's spending habits suggests he knew another reason for his friend's employment that transcended supporting the local nine. Charlie worked at the drug store to support his mother and three younger siblings, who desperately needed money after his father, who suffered an inordinate number of personal tragedies, drank himself into insanity, which forced the oldest son to become a vital financial resource for the family at the age of fifteen. Fullerton knew the fragile, abused Murphy underneath the latter's layers of bluster, hustle, impetuousness, and explosions of creativity. Nearly five decades after meeting Murphy, Fullerton captured the incomparable personality of his old friend and the impact it had on baseball in a eulogy.

> Murphy is dead. The jolly, turbulent little Irishman from Wilmington, who came out of Cincinnati to start more trouble and to make more baseball news than any man in the history of the game, finally lost out in his battle for health and the end came after years of suffering.
>
> Charles Webb Murphy, son of Patrick and Bridget Murphy, was for half a dozen years the central figure of major league baseball and the most hated and upsetting figure in the game.[2]

Yes, Murphy antagonized and annoyed people, including players, fans and, especially, his fellow owners. "Frequently he did foolish things and aroused bitter criticism. Most of his mistakes were made by impetuosity. He did things like a flash, for which he afterwards was sorry, but instead of admitting it, he fought it out," recalled Fullerton. And Fullerton was not immune to Murphy's quirks or impulsivity, but he remained drawn to his friend's ebullient personality. "As I used to

tell Murph many times: 'Murphy, I love you but somehow I don't like a darned thing you ever do,'" he wrote.[3] However, history remembers Murphy's faults all too thoroughly while ignorantly belittling his successes as the accidental results of consistently being in the right place at the right time.

Throughout his career, Murphy delighted in stoking the ire of American League president Ban Johnson, much to the chagrin of the other National League owners, who frequently found themselves caught in the crosshairs of the infuriated Johnson's return fire. During one particularly heated squabble in 1911, Johnson fumed over Murphy in a letter to August "Garry" Herrmann, president of the Cincinnati Reds and member of the National Commission, in which he threatened to sever ties between the American and National Leagues. "The American League regards C.W. Murphy as a menace to the integrity and good repute of baseball. If the National League can tolerate such a Club Owner, then we cannot with safety have close affiliation with the organization. The gentlemen who endorsed the resolution love peace and harmony, but it cannot be purchased at a sacrifice of their dignity and honor," Johnson warned.[4]

Several days before Johnson penned his letter to Herrmann, Brooklyn owner Charles Ebbets complained about the impending fallout from the latest of Murphy's transgressions: "I do not think it is fair and just to the other members of this League (I am speaking for myself alone; the balance can speak for themselves) for Mr. Murphy, because he does not agree with Mr. Johnson in some things, to inject his personal differences with Mr. Johnson into the affairs of the League, to the extent that Mr. Johnson retaliates, as any man with red blood in his veins would, and punches the National League."[5]

Murphy routinely responded to the controversy he created by profusely apologizing and using his self-deprecating sense of humor to ratchet down the tension and smooth over any ruffled feathers. Fullerton once described Murphy as "a small, plump man, quick of wit, brilliant in repartee, quick of temper, quick to forgive, even quicker than he is to seek forgiveness."[6] Fullerton recalled an episode that exemplified how Murphy wriggled out of trouble with his peers by

applying his traditional wink and a nod. "The entire National League turned against him. At one winter meeting in Chicago the President and the seven club owners were all set to force him out of the game. They were going to call him in, and lay down the law. Murph called me aside, chuckling as he did so, and showed me seven papers, all addressed, one to each rival club owner. Each was a blanket apology for everything he had done. He took those typewritten apologies into the meeting and gravely passed them around—and they forgave him," Fullerton marveled.[7] So it routinely went until the next time he stirred up trouble.

In the midst of Murphy's theatrics, the Cubs proved to be wildly successful on the field, giving him plenty to crow about, which only further infuriated the baseball establishment. Fullerton readily acknowledged Murphy's faults but suggested that they distracted observers from the reality that the wily owner knew what he was doing far more frequently than he was given credit for. According to Fullerton, "Murphy's spectacular success, and his brilliant showmanship naturally made enemies, especially among other club owners. He out-witted them, out-traded them and out-talked them."[8] Murphy forged a close bond with manager Frank Chance after officially taking over as team president following the 1905 season. Together, they successfully deployed the greatest professional baseball team the world had ever seen.

In addition to their shared roots, frequent laughter defined Fullerton's friendship with "Murph." One evening in New York, during the Cubs' heyday, Murphy treated Fullerton, Frank and Edythe Chance, and Secretary Charlie Williams to a night on the town. They went to a play followed by a nice dinner. The bill ran upward of $200, and Murphy paid the check without hesitation. Suddenly, he burst out laughing. Tears squeezed out of the corners of his eyes as his puzzled dinner guests tried to ascertain what had happened. "I just got to thinking how I used to work all day in the drug store, sleep behind the prescription counter to answer the night bell, and got $3 a week," Murphy managed to tell them between chuckles. Fullerton immediately understood that Murphy was thinking about just how far he had

come from his modest upbringing. "It was the most magnificent dinner I ever sat down before," Fullerton said.[9]

Murphy's tendency to exaggerate the truth got him in trouble at times, so Fullerton decided to have fun at his friend's expense by using an aggrandized version of the tactic. One day, Fullerton was chopping wood when a large piece of bark flew up, struck him in the face, and gave him a deeply bruised eye. "The color scheme ranged from egg plant to vivid red," Fullerton recalled. Rather than suffer any embarrassment by admitting he had hurt himself, Fullerton put on grave airs and answered an inquirer that Murphy and he were arguing when Murphy threw an inkwell at Fullerton that smashed his face. Two days later Fullerton picked up his ringing telephone and heard the confounded voice of Murphy on the line asking incredulously what had happened, and why were other reporters upset with him. A thoroughly amused Fullerton laughed at his successful prank. "It was a triumph of mendacity," he crowed.[10]

However, as the years wore on, Murphy grew increasingly petulant. The survival reflexes he had developed in his younger days proved to be his undoing when the team's success simply required him to thrive. As the sport skyrocketed in popularity, baseball executives needed to craft a product that met the emerging standards of the Progressive Era. To be more specific, Ban Johnson wanted to root out owners who did not care about the perception of Organized Baseball as a whole. Murphy used the press as a stereotypical Chicago "booster" would have to promote his local team. However, Johnson wanted public attacks on the leagues themselves to cease because they made Organized Baseball appear weak. One of the most well-known anecdotes about Murphy relates how his ill-timed firing of Johnny Evers opened the door for Johnson to get his way and oust the Cubs' owner in 1914. Originally, Murphy had tried to position himself as a champion of the National League, but the other owners suspected otherwise, so he gave up and favored his own franchise. In 1914 Murphy's unwillingness to elevate league loyalty above his interest in the Cubs during Organized Baseball's hostilities with the Federal League threatened the establishment

and led to his ouster. The result is that the burned ashes of Murphy's entire career have been thrown to the wind.

This book pieces together the scattered fragments of Murphy's personal and professional life to revisit and reassess his role in baseball and beyond. It examines how Murphy's influence extended outside of Chicago to include his contributions to his hometown of Wilmington, where he built a luxurious theater for his former neighbors to enjoy, but it is mostly about baseball, and one man who set the sport on its ear. In various contexts, historians have called Charles Webb Murphy an "odd duck with a big mouth," an "insufferable blowhard," and "little more than a salaried flunky."[11] Frankly, in moments of time, those assessments hold kernels of accuracy. Murphy made his share of egregious gaffes, but his foundational successes have not been rigorously analyzed. Too frequently, they have been taken for granted or dismissed as inevitable. Murphy has been presented as a poorly written stock character from a bad novel who bumbled his way to the top of the baseball world through comedic luck. Upon closer examination, someone much more complex emerges: a complicated, brilliant human being immersed in the world of Organized Baseball during the Progressive Era. Hugh Fullerton summed up his friend this way: "He was a showman, a baseball fanatic, a quick-thinking, quicker-acting fellow, whose fiery, impulsive temperament kept the entire baseball world bubbling."[12]

WILMINGTON

Beginning in 1845 a deadly microscopic pathogen devastated the lives of Ireland's farmers by infiltrating their primary source of food: potatoes. Fueled by the windy, wet weather of the isle, the organism, *phytophthora infestans*, embedded itself into the leaves of the crops before insidiously working its way through the tubers of the plant en route to the potato itself. Within days, the fungus completely corrupted the integrity of the vegetable and left behind a rotten, inedible mess along with a myriad of hungry onlookers. The disease quickly spread to nearby crops as the spores multiplied and either fell to the ground and invaded the soil or rode the wind to nearby plants to start the cycle anew. This blight wreaked astonishing havoc throughout Ireland. Without potatoes to eat, one million Irish, many of them farmers or laborers, along with their families, died between 1845 and 1851, a tragedy known today as the Great Famine.

As the potato crops rapidly deteriorated, a million and a half starving Irish fled from their homeland before death overtook them too. They scraped together enough money to buy passage across the Atlantic Ocean to America in their desperate race for sustenance. Simultaneously, absentee landlords, many of whom resided in England, exacerbated the laborers' hardship. Scores of property owners foisted tickets to the United States onto their tenants, whether they wanted to relocate or not, because the overseas passage cost them less money than the taxes they were required to pay for having inhabitants on their land. Upon arrival, many of the Irish immigrants decided to begin their lives anew on America's Eastern Seaboard, but a number of them embarked

on a westward journey into the interior of the unfamiliar land to find a different environment. They discovered Southern Ohio, a region with ample land and traces of a familiar Irish Catholic population.

A number of immigrants established new homes in and around the city of Cincinnati, a growing trade center on the northern shore of the Ohio River that owed its expansion in no small part to the contributions of several ingenious Irish immigrants. Francis Kennedy, Cincinnati's inaugural Irish settler, arrived in 1788 and created a ferry system that facilitated the transportation of people and goods in and out of the city. James Gamble, born in Enniskillen, Ireland, opened his first store in Cincinnati, and in 1837 he formed a new company with his brother-in-law, Englishman William Procter, that soon bolstered the city's economic reputation. From a cultural perspective, the Catholic Church developed an influential presence in town. The newly arrived Irish families recognized a bit of home and settled in Southern Ohio.[1]

Patrick J. Murphy was born in County Cork, the large coastal region located along the southern edge of Ireland, around the time the devastating potato blight appeared in 1845.[2] Although he was too young to recognize its condition, baby Patrick's community was actually being upended for a second time. Eroding economic conditions in County Cork earlier in the nineteenth century compelled artisans and farmers to immigrate to America. Now, the blight had severely compounded the problems for the Irish working class. Without hope of harvesting a successful crop, a swelling number of local Irish joined the migration to the United States.[3]

Although details remain elusive, young Patrick Murphy sailed west in this immigration wave. It is nearly impossible to pinpoint exactly when. However, he likely boarded a ship in Queenstown, today known as Cobh (pronounced "Cove"), on the south side of the Great Island in Cork Harbour, a port that became known as the "Harbor of Tears" because it was the setting of so many sad separations. Thousands upon thousands of family members said their final goodbyes to one another on that shore, and the weeping Irish aboard the ships tragically watched their loved ones and cherished homeland disappear as they

sailed into the gaping waters of the open sea.[4] Census data suggests Patrick was born in either 1845 or 1846, and he very well could have been just a small child when he left Ireland.

Most likely, the ship carrying Patrick initially sailed across the Irish Sea to England, where he transferred to another vessel destined for America. It is uncertain who brought Patrick to the United States, but he was probably too young to travel alone. His crossing was probably difficult. The vast majority of Irish immigrants endured horrific journeys plagued by a lack of provisions, grueling weather, deck fires, icebergs, cruel treatment at the hands of crewmen, and the constant threat of disease, particularly typhus. One former ship's surgeon described the utter misery of their experience. "The torments of hell might, in some degree, resemble the sufferings of the emigrants on board . . . Take all the stews in Liverpool, concentrate in a given space the acts and deeds done in all for one year, and they would scarcely equal in atrocity the amount of crime committed in one emigrant ship during a single voyage," he dejectedly wrote.[5]

Deciphering exactly when Patrick arrived in the United States is equally challenging. What is known is that a fourteen-year-old Patrick Murphy appears in the 1860 census at a Cincinnati boarding house run by a thirty-year-old saloonkeeper of the same name.[6] He is listed among the boarders rather than as a member of the Murphy family, suggesting he was simply living with people who shared the same last name. The census records Patrick's birthplace as Ireland and his vocation as plasterer, two important pieces of corroborating evidence that strongly suggest he is our guy. How he arrived in Cincinnati remains a mystery, yet it is likely that this is the same Patrick Murphy who settled in Wilmington, Ohio, several years later.[7]

Young Murphy developed his plastering skills in Cincinnati, but he decided to strike out on his own and go into business for himself. He relocated to Wilmington, a rural community located fifty miles to the northeast, in 1861. Murphy arrived in Wilmington on the cusp of its population boom. The town more than doubled in size during the 1860s—to just over two thousand residents by 1870—which offered Murphy a robust market for his new enterprise.

Established in 1810, Wilmington was located in the heart of Clinton County, a thickly wooded region in the days before settlers began carving out swaths of trees to construct homes. Wilmington underwent a dramatic transformation over the next fifty years. Winding Indian trails ushered newcomers safely through the forest's thick brush underneath a canopy of tall trees, including the sugar maple, with its sap providing the early settlers with "an almost invaluable article in the economy of their households."[8] Over the next couple of years, surveyors created a series of roads that linked community members to one another, as well as to the outside world. Work on a road that linked Wilmington to Cincinnati received approval from the Ohio state legislature in 1823. Another road, which connected Wilmington to Dayton, was laid in 1835.[9] As early as 1827 local citizens met to strategize on how they could entice a railroad company to include their young town on its travels through the region. It took several decades but, by 1851, locals had approved the allocation of $200,000 from the Clinton County coffers toward building a railroad line. After several delays, the first train arrived in Wilmington on August 11, 1853. The town held a massive celebration, gathering more than ten thousand people together for a community barbecue of epic proportion. On August 15 trains began running their regular daily route between Wilmington and Cincinnati. A one-way fare cost $1.60.[10]

Murphy arrived in town in the midst of Wilmington's dramatic development. Three years later, on September 11, 1864, as Abraham Lincoln pursued reelection, Patrick married Ellen Murray, a local girl who had also immigrated to the United States from Ireland. Father John O'Donoghue performed the ceremony, likely inside Preston's Hall, a local building the parish used for gatherings, after Ellen's father, Michael, gave his legal blessing for his underage daughter to wed the eighteen-year-old Murphy.[11] Although public records do not provide her birthdate, the 1860 census recorded Ellen as being twelve years old, making her either sixteen or seventeen on the day of the wedding.[12]

It is unknown precisely when the Murray family left Ireland, but six-year-old Ellen, along with her parents, Michael and Mary, and her three-year-old sister, Bridget, sailed from Liverpool aboard the

Iowa and arrived in New York on June 1, 1853.[13] Perhaps a key reason the family sailed for America two years after the Famine ended was Michael Murray's vocation as a day laborer. During a period when the cost of passage fares frequently prevented all family members from immigrating together, Michael had saved enough money to purchase transportation for his family of four on the same ship.

Eleven years later, Michael affixed a prominent "X" onto the left side of his daughter's marriage license, indicating his approval of Ellen's union to Patrick while simultaneously revealing his illiteracy. The most logical reason for his consent to the marriage of his young daughter appears to have been Ellen's discovery, earlier in the year, that she was pregnant.[14]

Just over three months later, on Thursday, December 15, 1864, tragedy struck Patrick and the Murray family. Ellen went into labor and delivered a baby boy, but she did not survive childbirth. After experiencing the destruction of lives through famine, and the hardship of migration, Patrick was now faced with the sudden loss of his young wife. The following day, grief-stricken mourners laid Ellen to rest, just west of town, in Sugar Grove Cemetery. The baby boy received the name William, and he split time during his younger years between the homes of his father and maternal grandparents.[15]

Over the next several years, Patrick settled into Wilmington and became a well-known figure about town. He developed his plastering business, and locals took to calling him P. J. In 1866 Murphy married Bridget O'Donnell, an Irish immigrant from County Tipperary. On November 29, Thanksgiving Day, P. J. and Bridget took their vows under the administration of Father O'Donoghue.[16] The couple settled into a home in the heart of town, a house on Mulberry Street, located just one block south of Wilmington's Main Street, that P. J. had purchased for $500.[17] Less than a year later, P. J. acquired an adjacent lot for another $500, notably expanding the footprint of the Murphys' homestead.[18]

As with P. J., a lack of evidence makes tracing Bridget's life before the wedding difficult. We do know that her mother's name was Catherine although her father was unknown.[19] Ship passenger lists do include a mother and daughter of the same names arriving in New York from

Liverpool, aboard the *Columbia*, on December 11, 1863. Bridget would have been eighteen at the time. What little corroborative evidence exists suggests this very well could be P. J.'s second wife and new mother-in-law, but there is no way to know for certain.[20] Regardless, Bridget belonged to a wave of women who immigrated to the United States from Ireland. Historian Janet Nolan contends that "while the Famine affected men and women alike, it had greater impact on women in terms of their social and economic roles in Ireland and their subsequent mass migration abroad."[21] This development compounded the unemployment issues that had already been created, in the decades prior to the Famine, when cheaper British goods entered the Irish market and greatly diminished the size and scope of women's employment in domestic textile manufacturing. Decreasing opportunities to marry during the Famine exacerbated the increasingly woeful outlook for many single Irish women, whose familial and economic roles quickly faded. "As a consequence, hundreds of thousands of young women without prospects at home chose to emigrate permanently," explains Nolan.[22]

Overnight, the newly wed Bridget Murphy established herself as both wife and mother, as young William joined her and P.J. for stretches of time in their home. Additionally, she assumed an important economic role in the family as the Murphys rented rooms to boarders to supplement their income.

Bridget and P. J. immersed themselves in a bustling environment. P. J.'s plastering business expanded, and he hired Webster Ferguson to help him meet the increasingly demanding workload. P. J. and "Webb," as everyone called him, became close friends, and Ferguson, along with six other boarders, quite possibly some of whom worked for P. J., lived together in the tight quarters of the Murphy home.[23] On January 22, 1868, just one week after Ohio rescinded its ratification of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment, Bridget and P. J. celebrated the birth of their first child, a boy, whom they named Charles Webb, giving the baby the middle name of P. J.'s best friend.[24] Toward the end of 1868, perhaps with an eye toward building a home with more space for his growing family, P. J. acquired nearly four acres of land,

the day after Christmas, for $900.[25] Just over two years later, P. J. and Bridget welcomed another baby boy, Frank, into the world in early 1870.

P. J. Murphy emerged as a reputable businessman, and community members frequently hired his plastering company to work on their buildings. Murphy offered two different plastering services: plain and ornamental. Clients often called upon him to reinforce flat walls, but Murphy handled more creative challenges with aplomb. Wilmington served as the governmental seat of Clinton County, which meant a substantial amount of available work on governmental edifices. He reinforced the walls of buildings on the Wilmington College campus. He also helped forge city hall, an "imposing structure" with features in which residents could take pride. "The clock in the middle tower was, at the time of its erection, the largest of its kind in the United States, outside of the clock on the city hall in Philadelphia," recorded one historical account.[26]

The 1870s began optimistically. P. J.'s business was growing, and so, too, was his family. He had also increased his land holdings. Life appeared to be going smoothly for P. J., but tragedy again crashed the party. His partner and friend, Webb Ferguson, began to lose his grip on reality. Ferguson experienced manic episodes and became "at times dangerous in his delirium."[27] By 1873 he had engendered enough fear in authorities, and presumably the Murphys as well, that he found himself confined inside the Clinton County Infirmary. "Fastened in an iron cage," Ferguson responded by staging a pair of boycotts that transfixed the community. First, he refused to speak with anyone for a year, and then he doubled down by refusing to eat. His abstention from food began eleven months after he ceased speaking. Ferguson aimed to abstain from food longer than Jesus went without sustenance during his forty-day fast in the desert. However, Ferguson miscalculated and ate a tiny morsel for breakfast on July 10, the fortieth day of his fast. He settled for a tie with God.

The medical personnel at the clinic slowly began to nurse Ferguson back to health. He initially received only small bites of food so as not to overload his system. During his fast, Ferguson had only consumed an occasional drink of water. It seemed like a minor miracle he had

even survived. He lost about half of his original two hundred pounds. On the day Ferguson broke his fast, he resumed talking. Shortly thereafter, medical authorities declared the twenty-eight-year-old Ferguson insane and admitted him to the Dayton Asylum for the Insane on November 6, 1874, where he, according to one slightly miscalculated account, was "doubtless the only man living who can boast, as he does, of exceeding Jesus Christ in the length of his fasting."[28]

Webb's institutionalization devastated P. J. personally and professionally. Without his right-hand man, Murphy needed to partner with someone new to help him tackle his next building: First National Bank of Wilmington. Murphy hired P. J. O'Leary, and they successfully guided the plastering project to completion. Pleased with the end result, Murphy and O'Leary referred to the bank in their public advertisements that appeared in the fall of 1872 as a "specimen of their work" and boasted that they could "execute all kinds of plain and ornamental plastering at any season of the year, in Clinton and adjoining counties."[29] As Murphy moved about the region where his business took him, Bridget remained at home to keep a close eye on her boys, Charlie, now four, and Frank, two, and tend to the boarders. On April 11, 1872, she gave birth to their third son, James. As his family grew, P. J. diversified his business interests, but he began having a difficult time generating more income.

Despite P. J.'s completing a series of notable jobs throughout the community, several pieces of evidence suggest the family continuously struggled to make ends meet financially. Webb's illness impacted the plastering business, and it's highly likely it adversely affected the boarders living with the Murphys. P. J.'s initial burst of property purchases, which tied up three pieces of land in three years in the late 1860s, had to be unwound beginning in 1871. He had acquired additional pieces of real estate over the years, but those had to be liquidated as well. On September 25, 1871, P. J. and Bridget sold a piece of property they had bought near the Wilmington Turnpike.[30] In the late fall of the following year, they parted with another two lots from their portfolio.[31] Despite the flurry of sales, the family held on to its house on Mulberry Street.

The following spring, debt swallowed Murphy. The probate court of Clinton County ordered him to sell additional pieces of property

because he could not pay either his creditors or his taxes. Notices for the sale first appeared in the *Clinton Republican* on March 26, 1874. It read in part, "Lots Nos. Four, Five and Six, in P. J. Murphy's addition to the town of Wilmington, Ohio" would be offered "at Public Sale, at the door of the Court House" on Thursday, April 23, 1874.[32] Officials appraised lots four and five at $200 apiece and lot six at $400, but only the latter garnered a satisfactory bid. In February 1876, nearly two years after the initial offering, lots four and five remained available. The *Wilmington Journal* printed a notice stating that the appraised value of lot four had been lowered to $150 while lot five could be had for even less, at $125.[33] However, the properties did not even fetch those amounts as they sold in April for less than $200 combined.[34] Murphy tried to stay financially afloat. He advertised to school directors in the region that he was "prepared to put on Blackboards in school-houses, which, for excellence and durability, can not be surpassed."[35] In the midst of their money woes, the Murphys welcomed their fourth child, daughter, Katie, born in 1875.

Four years later, on September 9, 1879, the Murphy family nearly suffered an unimaginable loss that nonetheless left nine-year-old Frank seriously injured. The young lad, presumably with his family, visited the local fair and took a particular interest in a group of racehorses being exercised on the track as part of their race preparation. Surrounded by taller onlookers, Frank climbed a fence alongside the track to get a better sight line. Suddenly, someone knocked Frank off the fence directly into the path of an oncoming steed. Without any time to react, the rider could not tug on the horse's reins fast enough to avoid him. The horse trampled Frank. Onlookers gasped in horror as the boy grabbed his leg. The horse crushed Frank's femur just above the knee but miraculously missed the boy's head. A hack rushed Frank home while frantic calls for Dr. A. T. Davis reached him quickly. Dr. Davis hurried to the Murphy home and set the youngster's broken leg. The *Wilmington Journal* reported that, "the little fellow bore it like a hero, seeming more anxious about the time he should miss from school and lest he should receive blame from his parents for an accident which he could not possibly have prevented, than about the pain in his limb."[36]

Like his brothers, Frank loved baseball, and later in life he worked as an umpire in the Western League for a brief spell before the physical toll of the job proved too demanding. The injury Frank suffered as a boy may well have cut short his career in baseball.

Their father's financial hardships did not preclude the Murphy children from successfully immersing themselves in school life. In 1880 the three boys, Charlie, twelve; Frank, ten; and Jim, eight, attended school while five-year-old Katie remained at home.[37] The following spring, Charlie and Jim both received public accolades for their academic achievements. The *Wilmington Journal* reported that Charlie garnered 90 percent in his B Grammar class while Jim also achieved the 90 percent mark in B Primary.

Beyond the classroom, Charlie was developing into a rambunctious adolescent unafraid to put his precocious personality on public display. On March 8, 1881, a crowd of five hundred Wilmingtonians filed into the hall of the public school for a theatrical performance by the grammar school students. Young Charlie stole the show during a musical rendition of *King Lear*. "Charlie Murphy, who manipulated the 'fiddle' in 'His Time for Fiddling,' brought down the house. He furnished his hearers with genuine fun which was highly enjoyed," reported the *Wilmington Journal*.[38] Charlie's performance punctuated the show, one of the highlights of the school year. "The audience went away delighted and in order to get out another big crowd, it is only necessary to announce that another literary performance will take place in School Hall," the *Journal* noted.[39]

Charlie also loved sports, and he wanted to try everything, a perfect combination for a new pastime brought to Wilmington by its enterprising city officials, who transformed city hall into a roller-skating rink. Inquisitive locals showed up in droves to experience it. "Every one that tried it said that roller skating was so fascinating that they could not resist the temptation to visit the Hall every time that an opportunity was afforded them to practice," relayed the *Wilmington Journal*.[40] All members of the community received the opportunity to participate.[41] Thirteen-year-old Charlie jumped at the chance and skated as if his life depended on it. He displayed the same burst of energy at the rink

that he had during his musical number the prior week, and everyone couldn't help but notice him. "Charlie Murphy is one of the most active lads on the floor," observed one local reporter.[42]

The Murphy boys received an education on what it meant to be small-town American kids playing baseball, a popular pastime in Wilmington. Together, the three sons of Irish immigrants, Charlie, Frank, and Jim, developed into a "baseball family" on the fields of Clinton County. Charlie found a number of outlets for his copious amounts of energy, but baseball provided him with an escape from the increasing stresses of home life. Charlie impacted the games in which he played with his competitive spirit, which nonetheless had to conform to the rules of the game. Charlie played with an edge, frequently from behind the plate as he "held down the catcher's department." Charlie was a bright kid, who not only wanted to play baseball but learn all he could about its strategies, and he worked hard to do so. Later in life, Charlie's nephew, Tom, described his uncle as a "brilliant student" during his high school years: "As you trace his career, from start to finish, you find him upright, honest and industrious, and at all times a hustler." As Charlie grew older, he played a little baseball with players from the Wilmington College team, although he paid the physical price of several broken fingers as a result. Frank and Jim loved the sport as well. Although Frank's childhood injury curbed his ambitions in baseball, Jim played minor league baseball for a spell before he became a scout for the Chicago Cubs after Charlie bought the team.[43]

Years later, in a piece for *Baseball Magazine*, Charlie identified baseball as an instructive tool for properly developing boys into productive members of American society, an experience shared by the three Murphy brothers. "Baseball has been one of the most tremendous influences in the training of the young which the world has ever known. Nine-tenths of the normal healthy boys in this country dream of the day when they, too, will be big league players. Nine-tenths of the boys in this country set as a model for much of their conduct, the careers of big league stars," he wrote. Charlie praised organizations that utilized baseball to "furnish the boys with the best of physical, moral and mental training."[44] Baseball gave Charlie the chance to exercise, but

it also provided him and his brothers with a structured environment through which they could avoid their increasingly tumultuous life at home. Simultaneously, the Murphy boys became "Americanized" as a by-product of playing a sport quickly gaining popularity around the country.

After the ballgames ended, the boys returned home to a growing crisis. P. J. Murphy had endured some traumatic tragedies as a young man. He escaped the horrors of the Great Famine only to watch his young wife Ellen die after delivering their son. In 1880, as financial pressure and the continued insanity of his best friend, Webb, tormented him, P. J. coped by increasingly turning to alcohol.[45] He brooded intensely and lashed out at his wife and children in angry tirades. The already teetering stability within the Murphy home collapsed after P. J. exacerbated his drinking by using opiates. On several occasions, Murphy found himself locked up in the city jail.[46] By 1883 Bridget and the children could no longer rely on P. J. to provide income for their basic needs, so Charlie, now fifteen, took a job working at a local drug store for an annual salary of $100 to help support his mother and younger siblings.[47] P. J. reacted angrily to his son's employment and attempted to swipe Charlie's money from him before he could give it to his mother. But Charlie had learned how to handle his unpredictable father. A determined Charlie skillfully summoned his persuasive powers and deflected P. J.'s antagonism with soothing words. Rather than acquiesce, loquacious Charlie talked his father out of taking his hard-earned money from him. Relying on his remarkable abilities as a wordsmith, Charlie stood firm against his father and refused to relinquish his wages. Later in life, Charlie referred to his verbal skills as his ability to spread "salve."[48] Unable to purloin Charlie's earnings, P. J. changed tactics and threatened to sell the family's remaining property to sabotage his wife's ability to remain solvent. Unable to protect either herself or her children from her husband's increasing hostility, Bridget took P. J. to court for "reasonable alimony" in addition to garnering protection from his intrusions.[49] Bridget received a favorable decision on June 21, and P. J. received the court petition the following day.

As the calendar flipped from 1883 to 1884, P. J.'s vices continued to corrupt his formerly affable personality, with chilling consequences for his family. Two behavioral episodes, or "attacks," late in the year roiled up within Murphy an "inordinate" jealousy of his wife, and his behavior again spiraled out of control. During a ten-day manic episode in October, Murphy threatened suicide and issued warnings of violence against Bridget and the kids. "Yes, Lord I'll do it," P. J. was overheard murmuring to himself as he clutched a large knife in his hand.[50] A terrified Bridget worked with local law enforcement to have P. J. declared insane by the local court.

Persons thought to be insane living in Ohio during the nineteenth century did not have any legal rights against being committed to an asylum. The recommendation of a probate court judge, who relied extensively upon the result of a physician's examination, played an influential role in an individual's fate. After listening to arguments, a judge sent his opinion to the superintendent of the asylum where the patient could be committed. The superintendent then offered the final verdict on committing the individual.[51] The task of evaluating P. J. fell to Dr. George Hill, who assessed Murphy's condition on October 13, 1884. "The said Murphy has for some years been addicted to the use of alcoholic drink + opiates + is now insane from chronic alcoholism," Dr. Hill noted.[52] Bridget signed an affidavit that stated P. J. was insane and a danger to the community. The following day, Murphy was delivered to Joseph Stephens, the superintendent of the county infirmary, who released him, but it wasn't over.

Another episode—this time a seven-day fit during the holidays—led to an additional evaluation of Murphy by Dr. Hill on Christmas Eve. "I hereby certify that from his present condition and from my knowledge of his known history + habits up to the present time am of opinion that he is insane + a dangerous person to be at large," he concluded.[53] In response to the doctor's assessment, Judge John Matthews committed Murphy to the Dayton Asylum for the Insane. However, Dr. C. W. King, the superintendent of the facility, drafted a letter to Judge Matthews, on December 27, to inform his honor that the overcrowded facility did not have space for Murphy. "The male department of this asylum

is very full at present, and Clinton County has several more than her quota here now; therefore Murphy cannot be admitted unless some one is removed to make room for him," Dr. King wrote. The superintendent proposed an ironic solution to create room for Murphy. "If you will remove Webster Ferguson, we will admit Murphy if he is provided with clothing as the law requires," he suggested.[54] Judge Matthews must have declined King's offer. The Dayton Asylum for the Insane didn't release Ferguson until May 14.[55]

With P. J.'s manic episodes becoming more dangerous, a separation from her husband emerged as Bridget's best solution to protect herself and the children. On July 8, 1885, the *Wilmington Journal* published a notice announcing a new case in the Common Pleas Court that simply read, "Bridget Murphy vs. Patrick Murphy; divorce," but a lack of documentation suggests that a legal divorce through the courts did not occur.[56] Nevertheless, brave Bridget made her disassociation from P. J. public news, although she continued using her married name throughout her life.

Evidence strongly suggests that P. J. began using an alias: Harvey A. Murphy. He had managed to avoid a commitment to the Dayton Asylum for the Insane, but he could not dodge the law forever. During the early morning hours of March 27, 1886, "Harvey" broke into Zephaniah Underwood's barn and stole two bushels of corn along with several other items, presumably to resell them to generate cash.[57] Murphy was arrested and pleaded not guilty, but a stream of witnesses, including Zephaniah and David Underwood, testified against him. In June, a jury convicted Murphy of burglary and sentenced him to a year in jail.[58] On January 5, 1887, the *Wilmington Journal* published a description of several town lots under their owner's names. Lot numbers 19 and 30 now listed Bridget Murphy as the holder, indicating that she had assumed control of the family's assets from her husband.[59]

The Murphy family adjusted to life without P. J. over the next several years. One month after Charlie turned twenty, he and Frank, now eighteen, decided to go into the food business together. In February 1888 the two brothers bought the Long & Coleman restaurant on Wilmington's Main Street and changed its name to Murphy Brothers with the goal

of continuing the eatery's operation.[60] This transaction appears to be the first time Charlie went into business for himself, albeit alongside Frank, the younger brother whom he loved and trusted.

It is at this point that Charlie Murphy's trail goes cold for about two years, until he appears in the 1890 Cincinnati City Directory listed as a drug clerk, a job similar to the one he had held as a fifteen-year-old. In future years, several newspaper writers suggested, without citing evidence, that Murphy moved to Cincinnati to attend pharmacy school. Perhaps he did, but regardless of the reason for his relocation, Murphy's time in the Queen City changed the trajectory of his life forever.

ON TO CINCINNATI

By 1890 Charlie Murphy had uprooted himself from Wilmington and moved to Cincinnati. He landed employment as a drug store clerk and settled into new living quarters just north of downtown, at 140 W. Eighth Street.[1] The flourishing cultural life of Cincinnati inundated Murphy with new and exciting opportunities and experiences, but his exposure to the world of professional baseball dwarfed everything else. Initially formed in 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings shone as one of the Queen City's crown jewels. Several unrelated versions of the team, called the Cincinnati Reds, had fielded squads during the ensuing decades, and the latest iteration ushered in a new era, in 1890, as a member of the National League.

Murphy had followed the Reds while he was growing up in Wilmington, and now he desperately wanted to participate in the 1890 Opening Day events but, annoyingly, he had to work. Opening Day was a holiday in Cincinnati. Businesses closed so that workers could attend the afternoon parade that celebrated the beginning of the baseball season. However, drug stores remained open in case patients needed their medications, which left Murphy stuck behind the counter dreaming of baseball. "I wished that I had been anything else save a drug clerk on that day," he recalled. Undeterred, he developed an elaborate scheme to escape the clutches of the pharmacy.

Confessed Murphy:

> I visited a friend and told him to call me on the telephone at 2 o'clock. He did and I carried on a conversation with an imaginary

customer, for it was my duty to sell to the retail stores as well as to fill prescriptions. Then I went to my employer, an old German, and told him that a druggist in the outskirts of the city wanted to buy a bill of goods and that he had instructed me to come at once.

It worked like a charm and away I went—to the ball park. I had the time of my life, and when I returned I told my employer that the druggist whom I had visited was the worst price shaver I ever saw and that we couldn't get together on anything and that I made no sale.

The old German gave me all the rope I wanted, and when I finished he casually informed me that So and So was in and said I made more noise than anybody at the ball game.

And I was out of a job.[2]

The Cubs defeated the Reds 5–4 that day, but Murphy brushed aside both setbacks. He found work down the street at Keeshan's drug store, although his employment status remained tenuous. He gained a reputation for skipping out on his assigned shifts to watch baseball.[3]

Working at the pharmacies enabled Murphy to meet many folks who lived in the neighborhood, and the young extrovert soon cultivated a social network in the community. He provided good service, and customers knew him for his boisterous nature. Murphy struck up friendships with a number of the city's journalists who frequently shopped in the store.[4] He must have been enthralled by the bustling nature of his new environment. The people, the buildings, the streets, and the busyness of Cincinnati engaged his attention despite its penchant for wandering.

During the following spring, in 1891, Murphy's industry connections paid dividends. The city infirmary needed to replace its druggist, who had recently resigned. Impressed by his credentials, the infirmary's directors selected Murphy, who they called "a competent man for the place, having had a number of years' experience in the capacity of prescription clerk for different prominent druggists." Murphy began his new job at the beginning of April.[5] Murphy's new employer had operated under the supervision of two directors, but that structure

underwent changes after Ohio passed a new charter bill that reconfigured the organization. The responsibilities heretofore carried out by the Board of City Infirmary Directors shifted to a newly created four-man committee called the Board of Administration. Cincinnati mayor John Mosby appointed the board's new members, including thirty-one-year-old August "Garry" Herrmann, an up-and-coming member of the city's Republican establishment. Although Murphy did not report directly to Herrmann, his chain of command led to the upstart political figure. Their careers would intertwine for the next twenty-five years.[6]

Just as Murphy joined the city infirmary, John Tomlinson Brush, a retail mogul from Indianapolis, was going through the process of buying the Cincinnati Reds. Born in upstate New York in 1845, Brush grew up on his grandfather's farm after the untimely deaths of his parents. Following the Civil War, in which he served in the First New York Artillery Regiment, Brush took a job with Owen, Pixley & Company, a retail venture. He fastidiously learned the business and, ten years later, his employer sent him to Indianapolis as part of its strategy to expand the company's footprint. Brush moved west and tackled the outfitting of a new, sizable company store. Locals frequently stopped by the site to assess its progress toward completion. Brush had a sign on the building with the date of the store's grand opening. However, construction issues delayed the project and forced Brush to change the date on the sign. Bombarded by inquisitors, Brush finally erased the date from the display board and replaced it with a one-word question: "WHEN?" On March 20, 1875, the newly dubbed When Store at last opened for business.[7]

Brush entered baseball circles in the mid-1880s to promote the When Store. Originally, he bought into the Indianapolis Western League franchise. In 1887 Brush purchased the Indianapolis Hoosiers of the National League, but the league exited the market three years later, and the franchise went defunct. Brush was compensated for losing the Hoosiers, but he no longer owned a local team. Brush wanted to remain active in baseball ownership, so he purchased a minority stake in the New York Giants in 1890. Now fifty-five, Brush had his sights

set on obtaining a controlling interest of a team in the Queen City. Brush possessed a clear vision: he wanted to buy a franchise, keep it in the Cincinnati market, and retain a spot in the National League. It was a sure path to profit.

Some of the locals in Cincinnati eyed Brush suspiciously because he was an outsider and, therefore, could not be trusted. Brush's reputation as a businessman also hurt him. Some baseball fans in Cincinnati believed that he had cared more about using the Hoosiers as a vehicle to promote his clothing business in Indianapolis than about winning championships.[8] They weren't necessarily wrong, but Brush also wanted a winning club to keep fans pouring through the turnstiles.

Brush acquired the Reds amid withering criticism from local newspaperman Byron Bancroft "Ban" Johnson, who suspected the new owner of underhanded business practices. Johnson, a bulky blowhard with tightly cropped hair, was a twenty-seven-year-old sportswriter for the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*. Johnson was convinced Brush didn't care about running a winning baseball franchise as long as it was a profitable marketing vehicle. "With all regard to Mr. Brush as a gentleman and a clever business man, still he never honestly earned his great reputation as a base ball manager . . . While the local patrons of the game wish Mr. Brush all the success possible in his base ball ventures, still they would prefer that he would confine his speculations to some bailiwick outside of the Queen City," Johnson sniped.[9]

Johnson wanted to sow suspicion among his readers toward Brush, so he created several nicknames for the Indianapolis clothing magnate, including "Mysterious Brush," but, ultimately, he failed to prevent Brush from completing the transaction in February. Johnson questioned the integrity of the sale's process and fumed over Brush's tactics. "John T. Brush was given the Cincinnati franchise by the National League for $10,000 in paper. He watered the stock up to $100,000, and he claimed last night that he had disposed of it all. Sleek Brush. He knows when he has a good thing, and no one is better able to work it," Johnson admitted. Brush's alteration of the franchise's business structure annoyed Johnson to no end. As to Brush incorporating the ball club, Johnson retorted, "Incorporated on what? Wind?"[10]

Charlie Murphy most likely read Johnson's reporting, and therefore familiarized himself with key baseball operatives in Cincinnati and the process of conducting business with other baseball executives. He read Johnson's stories in the *Commercial Gazette* about the orchestrations undertaken by the National League to force its primary competitor, the American Association, to leave the Cincinnati market. However, Murphy also saw how the association refused to allow the National League to monopolize the city's sports sections, which was made possible, in large part, because the association's franchise, the Cincinnati Kelly's Killers, featured Mike "King" Kelly, the most electrifying star in baseball. Kelly's Killers and the Reds shared the Cincinnati market in 1891, but four American Association teams merged with the National League following the season, which effectively ended the American Association's existence as a stand-alone league. Now Brush possessed the Reds with the market to himself.

Murphy's life took a monumental turn in 1892. A naturally gregarious storyteller, Murphy again used his connections, this time with the local scribes, to escape the world of prescription drugs. He found a new vocational calling in journalism as he joined the staff of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as a reporter.[11] John McLean, a powerful Democrat and city booster, bought the *Enquirer* in 1881 and transformed the paper into a regional media powerhouse, as its circulation increased nearly sixfold under his ownership.[12] In 1869 McLean had played a critical role in organizing the Cincinnati Red Stockings as a tool of civic promotion.[13] Now his paper gave Murphy the opportunity to spin yarns in its pages.

Just as Murphy began his journalism career, the Reds gave Queen City baseball fans a reason to fall in love with their team again. In 1892 Brush hired a new manager, Charlie Comiskey, who had spent nine of the past ten years in the American Association. The Reds' poor performance in recent years had alienated a large portion of their fan base, which retaliated by boycotting games. However, Comiskey's arrival sparked a new excitement in the community for the 1892 season. Fans immediately recognized the team's potential and flocked back to the ballpark. According to the *Enquirer*, "a tremen-

dous gathering of 15,948 fans filled League Park to capacity for the first Sunday home game played by the Reds in two seasons."[14] The crowd enjoyed a robust offensive performance by the Reds as they whacked the St. Louis Browns, 10–2. Comiskey led the Reds to an 82-68 record, good for a fifth-place finish, in his first year at the helm, a distinct improvement over the team's 56-81 mark the previous season. Murphy was not yet covering sports full time, but he took in games at League Park as a fan.

Murphy, Brush, Comiskey, and Johnson mixed together in baseball and media circles in Cincinnati for at least the better part of 1892. Just as Murphy's journalism career was getting underway, Ban Johnson's was coming to a close. Johnson, who had covered the Cincinnati sports scene since 1886, embraced an opportunity beyond journalism. Comiskey and Johnson had developed a close friendship, and Comiskey recommended the newspaperman to Western League executives searching for a new leader the following year.[15] Brush heartily supported Comiskey's recommendation because he wanted to get his foil, Johnson, out of town. Johnson accepted the position and signed a contract in November of 1893 that made him the president of the Western League. Comiskey's and Brush's political machinations changed baseball history forever, as Johnson soon transformed the Western League into the American League and took on the National League for baseball supremacy.

Newly minted as a bona fide journalist Murphy, now twenty-five, upgraded his living situation. In 1893 he moved to 269 Walnut Street, in the heart of downtown, just two blocks north of the Ohio River, where he spent the next several years. Murphy quickly made a name for himself in the newspaper business. How do we know? On June 12, 1893, the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* reported, "Mr. Charles W. Murphy, the well known journalist is confined to his apartments . . . with a severe attack of inflammation of the bowels."[16] A nod to a good reporter, or a cheap shot at a rival scribe? Either way, the *Commercial Gazette* informed its readers about Murphy of the *Enquirer*, a victory of sorts for the young journalist.