

Maine State Library

Digital Maine

Indian Affairs, Bureau of

State Documents

Louis Francis Sockalexis : The Life-story of a Penobscot Indian

Trina Wellman

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalmaine.com/indian_affairs_docs

Louis Francis Sockalexis
The Life-story of a Penobscot Indian

by

Trina Wellman

Bangor, Maine

1975

Louis Francis Sockalexis

This is bounding Sockalexis,
Fielder of the mighty Clevelands.
Like the catapult in action,
For the plate he throws the baseball,
Till the rooter, blithely rooting,
Shouts until he shakes the bleachers.
"Sockalexis, Sockalexis
Sock it to them Sockalexis!"

Like the bison on the prairies,
Plunging from the flames-up-leaping
Snorting at the crimson billows
That his hinder members frizzle
Till the condor notes the odor,
And his wings flap in the prescience
Of a rich and luscious banquet-
So spry Sockalexis capers,
Leaving far behind the whirlwind,
When he starts upon a home run.

All the crowd cries, "Sockalexis,
Sockalexis, Sockalexis!"
When he circles like the eagle
Round the bases, or serenely
Slides upon his solferino
Pie and doughnut padded stomach,
Wiping all the glaring war paint
Off his nasal in a jiffy.

Such is merry Sockalexis
Who can bat and knock the home run,
Who can scalp the blooming umpire
Till the rooters in their glory
Knowing no fit-terms of praise, all
Lift their voices, "Sockalexis!"
Till the welkins madly splitting,
And the purple cave of echo
Sends back all the surging chorus:
"Sockalexis, Sockalexis,
Sock it to them Sockalexis!" 1

This poem, written in 1897, expresses the sentiments, felt at the time, towards Louis Francis Sockalexis (commonly known as "Chief" or "Sock"). The life of Sockalexis is a story of a minority member of American society who made an international claim to fame. He moved from Indian life on an island reservation in Old Town, Maine, to the top of the list of great major league baseball players. However, Sockalexis' position at the top lasted only a short while before the influences of society, fans, and fellow baseball players,

led to the ruin of this fine athlete and human being.

* * *

* * *

* * *

* * *

* * *

* * *

Louis Francis Sockalexis was born October 24, 1871, near Old Town, Maine, on Indian Island, located in the Penobscot River above Bangor. Sockalexis was a member of the influential Bear clan, a group which is a sect of the Penobscot Indian Tribe, of which his grandfather was chief. The Penobscots are a division of the Abenaki Confederacy, the only Indians on record who turned back the Iroquois with such heavy losses that the fighters of the Six Nations, who had whipped everybody else from the Gulf of the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, drew a blue circle around the state of Maine from that time on.²

Sockalexis spent a normal life of a child on the reservation. He attended the local school conducted by Jesuit priests and went to the old village chapel each Sunday. He was an outstanding youngster for he was lithe and quick as a cat in all the hopping, skipping, and running games of childhood.

Later, Sockalexis attended St. Anne's Convent School (now Old Town High), where he stood out in football, track and especially baseball. He batted left and threw right with such great strength that later at Poland Springs he won a dollar in a bet by successfully throwing a ball over the top of the tower of Hiram Ricker's Hotel. Sockalexis' first cousin, Henry Mitchell, says one of Sockalexis' favorite stunts was to give exhibitions at fair time in Bangor when he would throw a baseball over the length of the grandstand to someone at the other end, and also to easily toss it over the top of a towering flag pole at the grounds.³ Sockalexis was also known to throw a baseball from Indian Island across the river to Old Town (the old ferry crossing).⁴

At any rate, Sockalexis' big career as a baseball player all began one day when a priest took notice of the power and grace of his swing and the coordination of his eye, and suggested that Sockalexis continue his schooling at St. Mary's School in Van Buren, Maine, to further his education and "perhaps

polish his game."⁵

After only two semesters at St. Mary's, however, in 1900, a Houlton town baseball team made up mostly of boys from Ricker Classical Institute, under the coaching of Professor L. W. Felch, were playing a game at Orono and saw this Indian boy in action. Needless to say, they were impressed by Sockalexis's ability and the Houlton boys talked with "Soci" (as they called him) and asked him to come to Ricker to go to school and play ball with them on the Houlton team in the summer. As they got paid for playing, "Soci" agreed to come and pitch for the team and made his home with a family in Houlton.

The first season that Sockalexis played with the Houlton town team, a member of the Maine-New Brunswick League, they won twenty-six out of twenty-eight games and the league title. After the season closed, Horace Newenham, a pitcher who had played all season with them, said he would go down state and pick up some college players and bring them to Houlton to beat them. He got the players, but they did not beat the Houlton team. Newenham, who knew just how to pitch to each of the Houlton team, would not throw a strike to Sockalexis but passed him the first three times he came to the plate. As Sockalexis went to bat the fourth time, he said to them, "Let him pass me again and I will score." He was passed and Sockalexis proceeded to steal all four bases. He would run like a deer (sometimes know as "Deerfoot of Diamond")⁶ and slide the remaining distance. On his run from third to home, he knocked the catcher down. The Houlton team was victorious by a score of one to nothing.⁷

Harry Grayson, noted baseball authority, in his book on the game's great players entitled, They Played the Game, credited Sockalexis and his accomplishments as being the basis of Frank Merriwell's Yale's fictional immortal. Grayson says, "While playing with college men in the Knox County League in Maine, Sockalexis inspired the manager of one of the clubs to create the immortal Frank Merriwell under the pen name of Burt L. Standish."⁸

Sockalexis continued to play baseball in Houlton for two summers with

coach "Doc" Powers, who was captain of the Warren Team in the Knox County League and of the Holy Cross Nine. (This man met an untimely death while with the Athletics.) It is a small wonder that word got through to the college of Holy Cross at Worcester, Mass. previous to their offer to Sockalexis to join them. (Sockalexis at this point in his life received an offer from the New England League, but he preferred to remain in the ranks of amateurs and continue his studies.)⁹ When Sockalexis consented to enroll in Holy Cross College, feelings were strong that with the addition of this Indian, '95 looked like a banner athletic year.

However, as legend has it, Sockalexis's father was angered when his son became engrossed "in the sport of the white men." In fact, he was so upset, he journeyed in a canoe down the Penobscot to the sea, and along the Atlantic coast to Washington, where he visited President Grover Cleveland to procure the papers which would make his son Louis the Chief of the tribe. This was a desperate move by the elder Sockalexis to bind his son to the tribe; to make the call of the woods stronger than the call of the diamond. When the father returned from his long canoe trip, however, he found that his son had already departed. The love of the game had been too potent and Sockalexis had gone away to Holy Cross College."¹⁰

At college, Sockalexis was a sensation. When he was not playing the outfield, where he attracted the greatest attention, he was the team's star pitcher. He hurled a number of shutouts during his college days, including three no-hitters. In his very first game with Holy Cross, he hit three triples and in another game in 1895 against "Brown University's greatest team"¹¹ a strange incident took place. A member of the Brown team injured his ankle, and their captain selected a player to run for him. He designated a lazy-looking Indian (Sockalexis) who was lying on the ground near the baselines. The records of that game show that Sockalexis stole two bases while running for himself that afternoon, and four more while running for Curley, the injured Brown player;

a total of six stolen bases in a nine-inning college game. At bat he made four hits; one of them a home run that went over the fence and smashed a window in the Brown University Chapel. The final score was thirteen to four (13-4); a victory for Holy Cross.¹² Another incident that exemplifies Sockalexis's achievements at Holy Cross was when he made his famous, "lightning throw" against Harvard. The ball had been hit out of the playing field which had no fence, beyond some trees and into a tennis court, where Sockalexis, who was in center field, caught up with it. "He was after the ball in a flash, and made a lightning throw, directly into the pitcher's box, reducing a home run to a triple."¹³ Lewis Berry, a renowned headmaster of Phillips Exeter Academy, remembers Sockalexis and his awesome swing. Berry told a story of the time he played at Worcester as a member of the Williams College team against Holy Cross. Sockalexis hit a ball on the line over the center fielder's head and was across home plate before the fielder had caught up with the rolling ball. Berry said it was murder for a man to try to score from second on any outfield single that Sockalexis could get his hands on. His throw to the plate was so swift and accurate that the runner found the catcher, ball in hand, daring him to slide in. Sockalexis never made a bouncing throw to the catcher; they were always "special deliveries on the line."¹⁴

In 1897, after Sockalexis had been at Holy Cross for two years, his coach, "Doc" Powers, moved to Notre Dame College in South Bend, Indiana. Sockalexis was induced to follow him there. However, he did not remain there long, for it was at Notre Dame that he was spotted by Jesse Burkett, who was scouting for the Cleveland Spiders, a National League Baseball team. Burkett persuaded Sockalexis to come to Cleveland and there he was immediately signed on at sight by manager Patsy Teabeau at a salary of \$1500 a year. No Indian had ever played major league baseball before that time, and he created quite a sensation. Sockalexis became the most discussed player in the business and "his bat began swishing customers through the turnstile at a rate that warranted a mid-season raise to \$2400. Fans came to see him with the same curiosity that had attracted others to Barnum's

Museum." ¹⁵ (Barnum's Museum is an American museum of freaks and curios). However, there was a slight degree of resentment, after this first full-blooded Indian came and pushed an Irishman to the bench; many players felt that no one but a white man should be allowed to play in the league. Mike Delehanty said, "The League is all gone to hell now that they're lettin' them damned foreigners in." ¹⁶

Sockalexis's professional debut took place at the New York Polo Grounds and none of his fans will ever forget it. For weeks beforehand, there had been a build up in the press; though a mere rookie, he had been billed as a "wonder player." ¹⁷ New York writers scoffed at the spectacle to come when this poor red man would face the fabulous Amos Rusie, pitcher for the Giants, owner of the most savage and elusive curve ball in the leagues.

In those days, at the age of 26, Sockalexis was tall, about 5'11", and weighed about 197 lbs. He was broad-shouldered, lithe-limbed, with clear eyes and a dark shock of hair that bushed out from under his cap to shade his high cheekbones. Sockalexis was a perfect specimen of his race, the truest type of American.

The fans were on edge the day of the big game. Everyone was there to see if Amos Rusie could strike out this Indian as he proclaimed he would. ¹⁸ When Sockalexis came to bat for the first time, the New Yorkers rose in a mass gesture, beating their cheeks and yelling war whoops. Sockalexis walked up to the plate with no more outward emotion than if he were facing a Williams College pitcher back at Holy Cross. For him, baseball was fun--a case of doing what came naturally. ¹⁹

Rusie made his first ball his famous fast breaking curve (faster than most pitchers' speed ball) and Sockalexis, undismayed by the war whoops, came across with a "velvet swish", ²⁰ and the ball sailed over Mike Tierman's (centerfielder) head for a home run. Needless to say the jeers from the crowd ceased.

A number of baseball critics have put into words their sentiments about Sockalexis. Hugh Jennings, one of the best judges of a player who ever lived, said that potentially Sockalexis was the greatest player who ever donned a suit. ²¹ According to one New York writer, "His fielding was spectacular, his base running



THE SOCK AT HIS PRIME — Louis Sockalexis is shown at his prime before leaving the East to join the Cleveland baseball team. Powerfully built he stood five feet eleven inches tall and weighed 197 pounds in his youth.



LOUIS SOCKALEXIS—This is the only available photograph of Louis Sockalexis of the old Cleveland Spiders who is rated by many experts as baseball's greatest player. Photo was taken after Sockalexis' retirement for a postcard sold to tourists who visit the Penobscot reservation in Old Town.

supreme, and an ease and grace marked his playing which rarely, if ever, has been equalled." ²² A Boston scribed wrote: "His batting was wonderful, his fielding marvelous, and his great speed (Sockalexis could run 100 yards in ten seconds flat), enabled him to steal bases at will." ²⁴ Andy Coakley, who pitched for the Athletics in the days of Waddell Bender, Plank and Coombs, called Sockalexis the greatest ball-player he had ever seen. Speaking of the Maine Indian he said, "He had a gorgeous left hand swing, hit the ball as far as Babe Ruth and was faster than Ty Cobb. He had the outfielding skill of Tris Speaker and threw like Bob Mousel, which means no one could throw a ball farther or more accurately." ²⁵

Needless to say, the Indians back in Old Town followed Sockalexis's record with pride. "Soci" had made it. In his first season (1897) for the Spiders he hit an average of .338 in 66 games. He did not strike out once in his 278 times at bat and stole 16 bases. Few players have broken this record.

However, the turning point in Sockalexis's tremendous career came suddenly (and tragically) on the heels of blazing success. It occurred in Chicago, where Cleveland was playing the White Sox in the opening game of the series. The Spiders were trailing by three runs in the ninth inning with two outs. Sockalexis was at bat with the bases loaded. The mighty "Sock" blasted a grand slam to put his team ahead 4-3. At the bottom of the ninth, Chicago had two on base with two outs when the hitter drove a ball deep into the outfield. Sockalexis was playing way in so he raced back and made an impossible one-handed catch in mid-air. This move saved the game and the Cleveland fans in attendance swarmed the field to exhibit their joy. They swept Sockalexis off his feet and took him to the local bar to show their gratitude for his fine play. Sockalexis, the star athlete of two Catholic College teams, had never tasted anything stronger than milk or water. ²⁶ However, he was finally convinced to take a drink by the jibes of his intoxicated white companions and this debauch was the clincher. ²⁷ Sockalexis liked his first taste of liquor and its effects. From that time on he was

a slave to whiskey and became a hopeless drunkard.

Sockalexis's downfall may have been because the white man's pace was just too swift for him, but more than likely it was simply that after one drink, he could not stop. Some people seem to become instant alcoholics, as was the case with Sockalexis. Hypoglycemia may be a factor in this biochemical predisposition to become addicted to alcohol.²⁸ Hypoglycemia, an abnormal condition characterized by a decreased amount of sugar in the blood, is often found in Indians. Drinking can temporarily satisfy this condition, so that a dependence is developed on alcohol to maintain a stable level of sugar in the blood stream. But alcohol makes the condition worse and more and more must be consumed. A vicious circle is quickly established.

The rise of Sockalexis was rapid, but not any more rapid than his fall. Never had an athlete hit bottom so quickly as this Indian.²⁹ He now was drunk practically all the time and no longer of any use to the Cleveland team, but Teabeau held on to him, hoping that by fines and suspensions, he could save Sockalexis for baseball. Teabeau said, "No other player to my knowledge ever sacrificed so much on the altar of his appetite than did this red man. When he began to drink and stay out all night, I promised him \$6000 for the next season and \$10,000 for 1899 if he would stay sober and play ball. He promised all right but he couldn't let the strong stuff alone.

"He celebrated the 4th of July by an all-night carousal in a red light joint; during which he jumped out a second-story window. His right foot was badly broken in the fall, but he bandaged it up and went with the other players to Pittsburgh that night. I went over the next day and hurried out to Exposition Park and there in the bus was Soc, his broken foot swollen four or five times its natural size. I sent him back to Cleveland, where a doctor put his foot in a plaster cast and ordered him not to even turn over in bed.

"But do you know, he would get up during the night and walk a block on his plaster foot to get a drink of whiskey. Poor Soc--he could have made \$10,000

or \$12,000. He was worth that for not just his playing alone but also as an attraction. Nobody ever heard of Cy Young, Bobby Wallace or any of the others when Soc was with us." ³⁰ (Note that Teabeau seemed more interested in the money aspect of the situation than the tragic deterioration of Sockalexis as a human being.)

In 1898, his second year with Cleveland, Sockalexis played only 21 games and hit a weak .224 average. He made 16 outfield errors and drew his walking ticket. In 1899 he only played in a mere 7 games.

One day the Indian was missing. While he kept up his drinking, he still usually remained around the hotel or clubhouse, but now he fail to do even that. Teabeau sent out several messengers to locate Sockalexis but they could not find him. That afternoon as the Spiders rode to the ball park in an omnibus, they saw Sockalexis. He was stretched out on the sidewalk in front of a saloon, hatless, collarless, and coatless. That night Teabeau gave Sockalexis his release from the Cleveland Spiders. ³¹

Sockalexis sacrificed more than just his baseball career; he wound up literally a beggar on the street. He struggled East and played for Hartford and Lowell in the Eastern League. (Now the International League.) But even with lessened pressure in the minors he was continually under par, for he was no longer able to hit and run well because the constant drinking had affected his eyes and turned much of his muscle into fat. He was soon dropped from this league.

Sockalexis then tried the Connecticut State League where so many players have found a few years of 'grace. But he could not even do well enough there to hold a job.

A story published in a Holyoke, Mass. newspaper on August 24, 1900, added to the tragic story of Sockalexis's downfall: "Louis Sockalexis, the once famous National League baseball player, appeared in court this morning on a charge of vagrancy and was given thirty days in the county jail. He was arrested last



Louis Sockalexis

SOCKALEXIS, LOUIS FRANCIS (Chief)
 B. Oct. 24, 1871, Old Town, Me.

B. 18
 D. Dec. 24, 1913, Bangton, Me.

1897 CLE N	66	278	94	8	8	3	1.1	43	42	18	16	328	487	6	0	69	68
1898	21	67	15	2	0	0	0.0	11	10	1	0	229	284	4	1	68	68
1899	7	22	6	1	0	0	0.0	0	3	1	0	273	398	2	0	69	68
3 yrs	94	367	115	12	8	3	0.8	54	55	20	16	313	414	6	1	OF 67	

night by Patrolman Greaney, who found him sleeping in a tumbledown barn in Ward one."

"At the police station, Sockalexis presented a sorry appearance. His clothing indicated that it had been worn for weeks without change. His hair was unkempt, his face gaunt and bristly with several weeks' growth of beard, and his shoes so badly broken that his toes were protruding."

"In court this morning, he attributed his downfall to firewater. He said, 'They liked me on the baseball field, and I like firewater.'" ³²

Completely broken, Sockalexis finally returned to his own people, the Penobscots, in 1901. Arthur Putnam recounted the story of the time he was in Bangor on his way home to Houlton. At the train station he noticed a man who was drinking and having trouble with the trainman. The man was "Soci" and he wanted to go home to Old Town. Mr. Putnam had played ball with him at Ricker, so he told the trainman to let Sockalexis get on the train and he would be responsible for him. The trainman consented and Mr. Putnam helped Sockalexis off in Old Town and never heard of him again after that. ³³

Once back on Indian Island, Sockalexis pulled himself together. He eventually married ³⁴ and settled down to the quiet life of the reservation. Sockalexis began coaching ³⁵ many baseball teams in the area, but he was a shy and modest gentleman, almost too considerate of others' feelings to be a good coach. He could show his boys how to execute a play by doing it but would never tell them when they failed to do it right. ³⁶

Walter Ranco, (once proprietor of a small store in Old Town) a tall, soft-spoken Indian, played, as a small boy, on a juvenile team Sockalexis had organized and coached on the reservation. (Five of Sockalexis's boys later made the New England League, including Joe Neptune, who played for Lewiston and later for Jersey City and Teddy Mitchell, a star among Waterville fans.) "Sock taught us to get on base and not to worry about the extra base hit", said Ranco. "He showed us all the tricks of working a walk from a pitcher. He told us if a

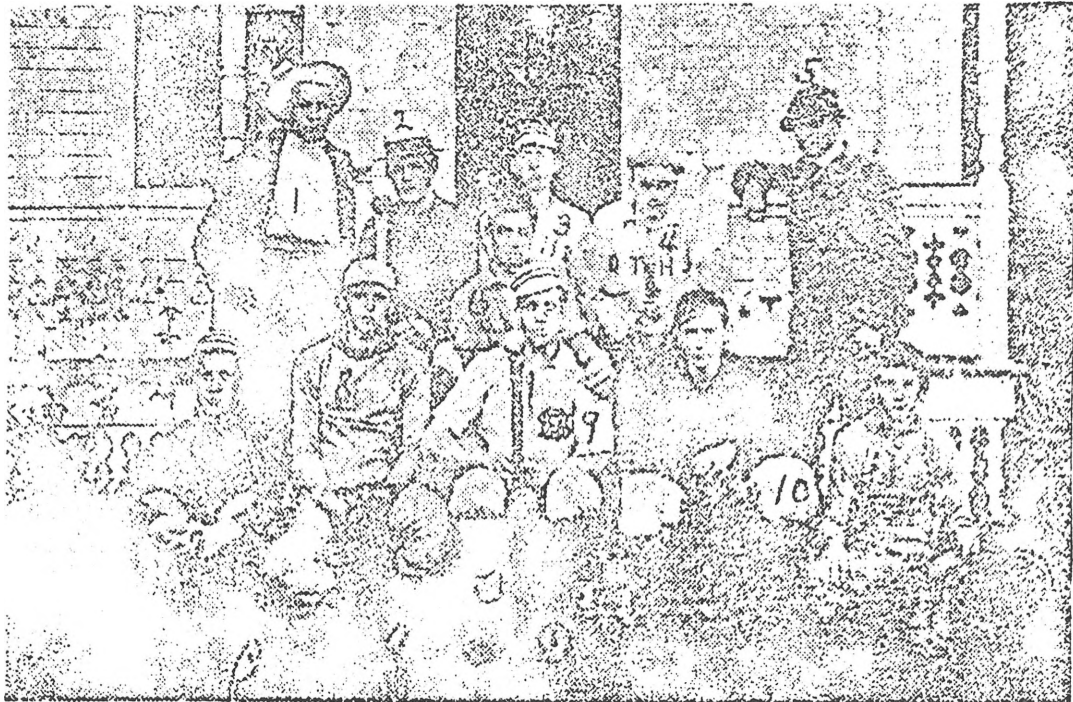
pitch was too hot, just to dunk it. We were proud to play for him, because he could do anything we tried to do--and do it much better." ³⁷ (Sockalexis could still hit the ball a mile but he had lost most of his speed. ³⁸

However, coaching was not Sockalexis's sole pastime, for he now worked as a woodcutter at a lumber camp in Burlington, Maine, during the winter months. His salary was a mere \$30 a month. The rest of the year he worked as the ferry man. (There was no bridge from Old Town to the reservation at that time.) Sockalexis's downfall had broken his heart and in the evenings he would "bring out his trunk and read over the clippings that he had saved during his big league career. These clippings were the chapters that told the story of his greatness. He would read each one over and over, memorizing each word." ³⁹

One interviewer, who visited Sockalexis on the reservation described him as "just one of the fat, smoky, carefree Indians of the little village." ⁴⁰ The truth of this statement is questionable, for Clifford Ellis of Alton, Maine, gave an account of how in the winter Sockalexis would run up the river and then Birch Stream, about ten miles or more. He had a little dog that used to go with him. Sockalexis would have to carry the dog because it could not run through the deep snow. When he got to Angve, he would find a deeryard, turn the dog loose, and stand in the paths until a good deer ran by. He would shoot it, put what meat he wanted in his back pack, pick up the dog and run all the way back to the island. ⁴¹

Little has been written about the last days of Louis Francis Sockalexis besides the previous information, but Francis W. Hatch, a summer resident of Castine, attempted to complete the story of his life with some touching tales. ⁴² Hatch wrote in an article for Downeast Magazine in 1963 that Sockalexis used to paddle down the Penobscot from Old Town to Castine in June for a vacation. He would spend a good part of the summer there in Castine with his Uncle Joe Sockalexis and Joe's wife and children in a tent at the north end of the town. Joe and his family returned every summer to Castine to enjoy the area and make a living.





REMEMBER WHEN? — This was a team that veteran baseball fans in the area will remember. It played in this area in 1906, and had the following members: (1) Sockalexis (coach); (2) Googin, 2nd base; (3) Lancaster, 1st base; (4) Bodreau, right field; (5) Drew, substitute; (6) Campbell, pitcher and captain; (7) LeBrun, 3rd base; (8) A. McClellan, left field; (9) Stevens, center field and manager; (10) Martin, shortstop; (11) Earl McClellan, catcher. The photograph is the property of Waldo W. Burnham.

The entire family would gather sweet grass and from the grass (once it was dried) they wove all shapes and sizes of baskets, reinforced with ash.

Hatch remembers opening the door to a soft knock to find a large Indian usually accompanied by a shy Indian child bearing a sheet full of baskets and toy birch bark canoes which would be laid out on the livingroom floor for inspection. Meanwhile, Sockalexis could usually be seen paddling around the coves and bays with his uncle, in search of birch bark or on outer islands digging clams for dinner.

Hatch vividly described Sockalexis as mild-mannered, courteous, and the big attraction on the ball field on Saturday afternoons when he played with the rest of the town.

The diamond at Castine on which they played was still intact in 1963. It was laid out on the parade ground within the ramparts of the 18th century fort. Spectators sat in a natural grandstand on the grassy banks mounded up by King George's men to repel Yankee cannon balls. The informal town club of Sockalexis's time was supported by the summer residents who lined the banks when Bucksport, Belfast, or Bluehill came to challenge Castine. They had some good players, including George McKinnon and Noah Hooper. But these men amounted to nothing when one could watch the great Indian. Sock was the hero and never disappointed the fans. If the opposing pitcher tried to walk him, with an extra wide pitch, Sockalexis merely stepped across the plate and slapped it over the right field embankment so the fielder, high on the rampart, could only make a futile attempt to catch the ball and then scramble out of sight down into the mote to retrieve it. By this time, Sockalexis would have leisurely made his way around the sacks. Noah Hooper related how Sock had a way when he was on first of talking with a batter and getting him all balled up. He did not raise his voice or appear to be working on the man, but somehow he got him confused to the point of striking out.⁴³

Thus, life seemed to be running quite smoothly for 42 year-old Louis

Francis Sockalexis. However, on the day before Christmas in the year of 1913, when the day shift at the Burlington lumber camp came in for dinner, Old Sock was missing. After a search, one of the crew found him dead in the woods. It is said that Sockalexis had been stricken with heart disease and died instantly.⁴⁴ When the men took off Sockalexis's blue-flannel shirt, back in the bunkhouse, they found in the pocket a wad of newspaper clippings--accounts of Sock's great ninth inning against the White Sox back in 1897. One heading read:

Sockalexis Wins For Spiders;
Cleans Up Sacks With A
Homer In Ninth
Great Indian Then Saves Game With
Brilliant Catch; Final Score
4 to 3 in Cleveland's Favor.⁴⁵

Louis Francis Sockalexis was buried in a remote corner of the Indian reservation. His grave was marked only by a wooden cross with his name burned on it--a small tribute for such a great man.

One wonders how Sockalexis's career as a baseball player would have gone if it had not been for alcohol. Able authorities such as Hugh Jennings and John Joseph McGraw maintain that if Sockalexis had stayed at the top for five years, he could well have been better than Babe Ruth, Nap Lajoie, Cy Young, Ty Cobb, or Christy Mathewson, all men who made history for baseball.⁴⁶ Jennings managed the Detroit Tigers from 1907 to 1921. And during those 14 years, his star player was an outfielder named Ty Cobb. Yet Jennings believed that Sockalexis was potentially a greater ball player than Cobb. "Sock had the most brilliant career of any man who ever played the game. At no time has a player crowded so many remarkable accomplishments into such a short period of time as Sock. He should have been the greatest player of all times."⁴⁷

Unfortunately, only a handful of today's fans have ever heard of Sockalexis. His name will live forever in baseball, however, for the fans in Cleveland did not forget Sockalexis in the least. In 1913, after Sockalexis's death, they erected a huge diamond shaped marker that read, "This is the grave of the famous

Louis Sockalexis, who was the first Indian to become a Major League baseball player..."⁴⁸ In 1915, a Cleveland newspaper ran a contest in which people were to think up an idea for a name for the city's American League baseball team. The winning name was suggested by a fan who wanted the club to be called the "Cleveland Indians" as a tribute to Louis Francis Sockalexis, the first American Indian to play in the big leagues. This honor continues to this day.⁴⁹

Although he was never added to the scroll in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, (he was nominated), Sockalexis, a Holy Cross College man, was the first ever elected to the newly established Holy Cross Athletic Hall of Fame in January, 1956. His name was the first placed on the row of athletic greats at the second annual Varsity Club dinner. Ralph Ulmer, President of Old Town's City Council represented the town in accepting the honor in behalf of the former Major League baseball player, presented by C. Keefe Hurley, President of the Holy Cross Varsity Club.⁵⁰

However, feelings were high on Indian Island, "When an Indian gets in trouble, he's from Indian Island," said Governor Albert Nicola (elected executive of the tribe), "but when he does something great they say he's from Old Town."⁵¹ Members of the Penobscot tribe made known to officials at the college their feelings that an Indian, and not a white man of Old Town, should have been asked to be present to represent the athlete's home town. Governor Nicola wired Reverend Joseph A. Glavin, moderator of athletics at Holy Cross, protesting that the Indians had not been consulted in the naming of a suitable person to represent Sockalexis. Governor Nicola said that the Old Town City Council Chairman, Ralph Ulmer, had not told members of the tribe that he was going to Worcester to be present at the testimonial banquet. There were many Penobscots who could well have represented the athlete, the Governor said. Edwin Mitchell attended Holy Cross and was a cousin of Sockalexis. The athlete's niece, Mrs. Katherine Paul, was his nearest living relative. Mrs. Paul had been asked for information about Sockalexis but she was not told that there was to be anyone from Old Town present.

The Indians of Old Town were disturbed. They had been kept in the dark about plans in which they should have had a voice⁵² ---the white men had taken over the life of Sockalexis. They had tempted him with liquor which caused his downfall and then took the credit for his greatness. The Penobscots had every right in the world to be distraught, and naturally they condemned the white man.

Even before this incident, the Indians had realized what a wonderful representation Sockalexis had been of their people. As if to make up for the injustice they did him by merely placing a wooden cross above his grave, in 1934, the Penobscot Indians went to great trouble to raise \$400 so that Sockalexis's resting place could be rededicated and a memorial erected to his remarkable feats.

At the completion of the memorial, the State of Maine staged a formal and dignified unveiling ceremony in the lonely Indian cemetery. The monument bore a plate containing crossed bats beneath a baseball on which was inscribed:

In memory of Louis Sockalexis whose
Athletic achievements while at Holy
Cross College and later with the
Cleveland Major League baseball team
won for him national fame.
Born Oct. 24, 1871--Died Dec. 24, 1913. 53
Erected by his friends.

The unveiling of this monument brought together Holy Cross men, baseball players, sportswriters, and fans, many of whom participated in the ceremony. One of the outstanding numbers on the program was the reading of a ballad written by John A. Fitzgerald, a writer and translator, a Holy Cross man of Sockalexis's time, recounting a few high spots of Sockalexis's career and paying him tribute. The ballad reads:

"Louis, we've gathered here today
Tribesmen and sportsmen, we all attend
To mark the spot where your mortal clay
Came to our universal end.
More than one epitaph's been penned
Of the player that never had a peer,
But here's your meed, from an oldtime friend:
'He was loyal and brave, and his
heart sincere.'

We could write: "At the start of the
season's play.
When the Bruins brown were all set
to rend.
You "stole" six times on that Patriots'
day.
--A record that none can tie or
mend--
And cracked a homer its way to wend
Through their chapel window, from
out the clear,
But no! 'Tis a finer tribute to send;
"He was loyal and brave, and his
heart sincere."

As a batter, no pitcher could say you
nay,
You straightened whatever they could
bend;
And on Giant-Indian opening day,
And the Gotham fans came in crowds
to tend--
"Rusie will fan him!" So they intend,
But--"the first ball a homer, into the
Clear!"
What a line! But a greater one, old friend,
heart sincere."

Louis, with saddened hearts we send
This tribute to one who had no peer,
To one of the few who met his end
Loyal and brave, and his heart sincere." 54





ANDREW SOCKALEXIS [1892-1919] was one of the most remarkable distance runners of his time. He won many races in this country and was a member of the American Olympic Team at the Fifth Olympiad held in Stockholm Sweden in 1912. Andrew Sockalexis lived and grew up on Indian Island; he died of tuberculosis at the age of 27 years. In those 27 years he brought considerable fame to his tribe, his nation and himself. The story of this remarkable man has been compiled by Mike Ranco, Indian Island. Anyone interested in receiving a copy of this story may do so by requesting such from the Indian Resource Center, 95 Main St., Orono, Me.

*Andrew was Louis Francis Sockalexis's
second cousin.*

Footnotes

1. "The Young man who is baseball wonder of the country." Bangor Daily News.
2. "John A. Fitzgerald of Utica Pens Poem about Famous Indian Baseball Player, Sockalexis, for Monument Dedication." (Paper and date unknown).
3. Nick Mayo, Jr., "Memories of Baseball Greats Bring Back Fabulous Deeds of Sockalexis." (Paper and date unknown).
4. Information from Clifford Ellis of Alton, Maine. April 23, 1967.
5. An outline of the life of Louis Francis Sockalexis from the Bangor Public Library.
6. Frederick John, "Sockalexis, the Greatest Baseball Player of them all." Bangor Daily News. March 24, 1973.
7. Olen B. Rideout, "Playing Baseball in Houlton, Maine with Louis Francis Sockalexis." Down East Magazine, August, 1965, p. 93.
8. Francis W. Hatch, "Maine's all-time Greatest Baseball Player." Down East Magazine, August, 1963, p. 37.
9. Ibid.
10. John. Op. Cit.
11. Ibid.
12. "John A. Fitzgerald...Monument Dedication."
13. John. Op. Cit.
14. Hatch Op. Cit. p. 38.
15. Ibid.
16. Op. Cit. "John A. Fitzgerald..."
17. Ibid.
18. Op. Cit. "John A. Fitzgerald..."
19. Hatch. Op. Cit.
20. Ibid.
21. Harry Grayson, They Played the Game, New York, A.S. Barnes, 1944. pp. 67-68.
22. John. Op. Cit.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Outline of the life of Sockalexis from the Bangor Public Library.
26. Hatch. Op. Cit.
27. Ibid.
28. Letter from Susan M. Stevens, March 17, 1975.
29. Hugh A. Jennings, "Rounding Third". North American Newspaper Alliance, copywrite 1926.
30. Hatch. Op. Cit. as quoted from Patsy Teabeau.
31. Jennings. Op. Cit.
32. John. Op. Cit.
33. Told to Mrs. Marion Foster of Monticello, Maine by Mrs. Margaret Churchill of Houlton, Maine. It was told her by Auther Putnam.
34. John. Op. Cit. (However, no other reference was made towards Sockalexis's marriage so one wonders whether this is a true statement.)
35. Sockalexis also did some umpiring and played in some semi-professional games.
36. Rideout, Op. Cit.
37. Hatch. Op. Cit.
38. John. Op. Cit.
39. Jennings. Op. Cit.
40. John. Op. Cit.
41. Information from Clifford Ellis of Alton, Maine, April 23, 1967.
42. Concerning the years 1905-1910.
43. Hatch. Op. Cit. p. 59.
44. Jennings. Op. Cit.

45. Ibid.
46. Mike Miller, Hot Box. (Newspaper and date written unknown).
47. John. Op. Cit.
48. Miller. Op. Cit.
49. John. Op. Cit.
50. "Sockalexis To Go Into Hall of Fame", Penobscot Times. January.
19, 1958.
51. "Indians Feel Slighted as Sockalexis Honored", Bangor Daily News,
January 20, 1956.
52. Ibid.
53. John. Op. Cit.
54. Op. Cit., "John A. Fitzgerald of Utica..."

* * * * *

Bibliography

Books:

Grayson, Harry. They Played the Games. New York: A.S. Barnes, 1944.

Handbook of American Indians. Bureau of American Ethnology.
Smithsonian Institute Bulletin 30.

People:

Interviews and Correspondence--

Clark, Peter. Exhibit Curator at National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, N. Y. Letter: March 10, 1975.

Emerick, Dr. Dick. Telephone conversation, March 13, 1975.

Grey, Ruth. Resident of Old Town, Maine. Letters: March 22 and March 31, 1975.

Johnson, Fred. Retired curator of Andover Archaeology Museum, Andover, Massachusetts. Telephone conversation, March 26, 1975.

Ives, Dr. Sandy. Department of Anthropology, Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, University of Maine, Orono. Letters: 2/20/75.

Mitchell, Ted. Penobscot Indian. Onward Office, University of Maine. Interview: 3/14/75.

Smith, Prof. David C. Department of History, University of Maine. Letters: 3/2/1975.

Stevens, Susan. State of Maine Department of Indian Affairs, Alcoholism Research Program, Statehouse, Augusta, Maine.
Letter and Program Proposal for Community Alcoholism Services, submitted to NIAAA, 3/17/75.

Vickery, James. Brewer, Maine. Telephone conversation, 3/10/75.

Newspapers:

Jennings, Hugh. "Rounding third". North American Newspaper Alliance. Copyright 1926.

John, Frederick. "Sockalexis, The Greatest Baseball Player of Them All." Bangor Daily News. March 24, 1973.

Mayo, Nick, Jr. "Memories of Baseball Greats Bring Back Fabulous Deeds of Sockalexis." (Paper and date unidentified).

Miller, Mike. "The Hot Box." (Paper and date unidentified).

"Sockalexis to go into Hall of Fame." Penobscot Times. January 19, 1956.

"Great Baseball Star Born on Reservation." Penobscot Times. January 26, 1956.

"Sockalexis". Old Town Enterprise. May 31, 1934.

"Indians Feel Slighted as Sockalexis Honored." Bangor Daily News. January 20, 1956.

"The Young man who is Baseball Wonder of the Country." Bangor Daily News. May 6, 1897.

Wabanaki Alliance. Vol. 1, No. 3. December, 1973.

Wabanaki Alliance. Vol. 3, No. 1, January, 1975.

"John A. Fitzgerald of Utica, Pens Poem About Famous Indian Baseball Player, Sockalexis, for Monument Dedication." (Paper and date unidentified.)

Encyclopedias:

Baseball Encyclopedia, "Baseball Records", MacMillian, New York, 1969.

Colliers, "Barnums Museum", Vol. 3, P.F. Collier & Son, New York, 1954. p. 186.

Magazines:

Hatch, Francis W. "Maine's All-time Great Baseball Player." Down East. August, 1963. pp. 37-39, 59.

Rideout, Olen, B. "Playing Baseball in Houlton, Maine with Louis Francis Sockalexis." Down East. August, 1965. p. 93.

Miscellaneous:

Louis Francis Sockalexis: Notes from the Bangor Public Library.

"My Favorite Penobscot Hero, Andrew Sockalexis, The Determined Runner." Marie Ranco.

Excerpts on the life of Louis Francis Sockalexis from the University of Maine Archives:

127:25, 26.- Information from Clifford Ellis of Alton, Maine, 4/23/67.

133:6 - Legend told to Mrs. Marion Foster of Monticello, Maine by Mrs. Margaret Churchill of Houlton, Maine.

55:42 - Information obtained by Mrs. Margaret Churchill from Fred and Arthur Putnam, Arthur McElwee and Cedric Osgood.

255:30 - "The Baseball Player" as told to Madelyn McCann by Marion Foster.