

## Was White Baseball's First Black?

University of Michigan Press author Peter Morris may have found baseball's first black player.

Credit for being the first black player usually goes to Moses Fleetwood Walker. Walker played 42 games for the Toledo Blue Stockings in 1884. That was before Peter Morris of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) picked up the trail of William Edward White.

White had been on SABR's list before. SABR -- an organization devoted to cataloging the biographical information for all 16,002 men who played in the majors -- knew, for example, that White had attended Brown University, that he'd filled in for the big-league Providence Greys one day in 1879, and that he was listed in the 1880 census.

But not much more was known about him, until Morris contacted Civil War historian and baseball sleuth Bruce Allardice, who asked if White might be black. Allardice had talked to a White family genealogist, who found records showing an A.J. White on the 1860 census owning 70 slaves. Hannah White, who appeared on the 1870 census, was one of them, and she lived with a 9-year-old mulatto boy named William White.

The pieces began to fit together. In 1880, William White would have been of college age. Brown University was affiliated at the time with the Baptist church, and A.J. White built the Baptist church in his home town. And White left his estate to William Edward White, Anna Nora White, and Sarah Adelaide White, "the children of my servant Hannah." The mystery appeared to have been solved, and the timeline for baseball's first black player moved back five years.

Peter Morris is author of the acclaimed [Baseball Fever: Early Baseball in Michigan](#) (University of Michigan Press, 2003), in which Morris showed how baseball first invaded the country's heartland and became the national game.

Morris, a former English instructor at Michigan State University, is a specialist in nineteenth-century baseball and is an active member of the Society for American Baseball research.