

# Pontiac's Cook sisters leave family with harmonious memories

By CAROL MARTINO,  
Leader Staff Reporter

Old-time melodies triggered food-lime memories for Marie (Cook) Follert and Jim Quinn Cook of Pontiac and their cousin Bette Scanlon of Chicago.

The three grew up basking in the rich harmony of "The Cook Sisters" who graced the family in song when they all got together during the holiday seasons.

"They sounded just like angels when their voices blended together," said Mrs. Follert.

It was that sound that made the quartet famous when they left their Pontiac home in the early 1900s to tour the Pentages circuit.

The sisters, Harriet, Bess, Marie and Helen, were the daughters of Jim and Rose Cook of Pontiac. The Cooks had three other children, Vesta, who later joined her sisters on stage, and Jim Jr. and Harold.

Mrs. Follert and Jim Quinn Cook were the children of Jim Cook Jr. and Miss Scanlon was the daughter of Marie.

While growing up in Pontiac, the sisters sang at church and school events and also at the Chautauquus. They were applauded locally and encouraged to tour the states with their delightful repertoire.

They took that advice and eventually toured it big touring the Pentages circuit and playing at the New York Palace Theater with top names like Jack Benny and the Marx Brothers.

As one newspaper reported in 1913, they threw "a spell of fascination over the audience at Pentages theatre... and were called back time and again..." Miss Scanlon said, "My main was not quite 16 when Grandpa Cook agreed to let them go singing around the country. Bill De

The sisters made Chicago their home base and their parents left Pontiac and moved to Chicago's South Side where they lived with the Weavers.

Mrs. Follert remembers getting together with the family at the Weaver home. "My dad really adored his sisters and after dinner we'd all be sitting in the living room relaxing and he'd say 'well, let's hear it.'"

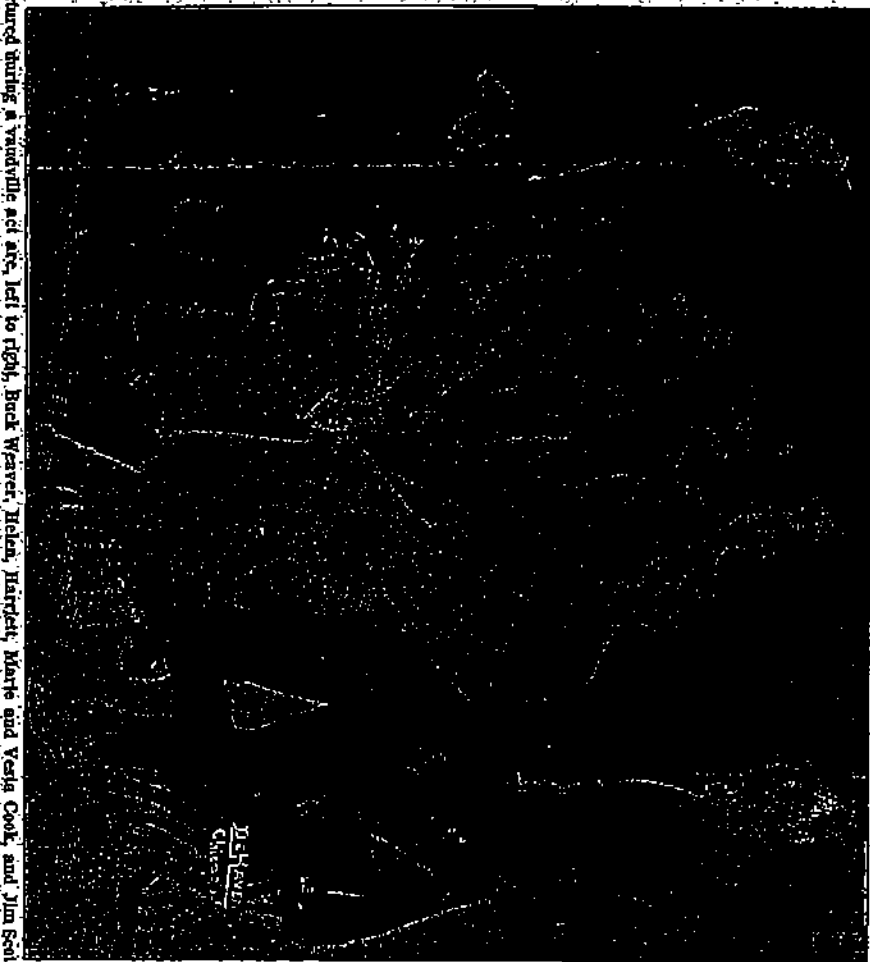
And the four would begin singing "I want a girl just like the girl that married dear old dad" and other "ragtime favorites." Uncle Harold had a beautiful tenor voice and would often join them," she said.

Miss Scanlon said her Aunt Hattie (Harriett) was the "outgoing" one of the sisters. "My moon, who was the shy one, used to get to the theater ahead of time to get the costumes ready. Aunt Hattie would be out meeting the orchestra and technicians. She always knew everybody in the theater."

Her Aunt Bess, was the manager of the group. "She wasn't as outgoing as Aunt Hattie, but she was very deft in the business and dealings," she said.

Mrs. Follert was born on her Aunt Helen's birthday, March 2, and named Margorie, Helen. "My aunt was playing at the Palace Theater at the time and was so tickled she let the show to come see me," said Mrs. Follert. Vesta filled in for her during her absence, she said.

The family has a large collection of newspaper stories written about the sisters. One reads, "Imagine four girls, all young, pretty, graceful and with pleasing voices. Add smart evening gowns which have the hallmarks of a Paris dressmaker and you have the ensemble of 'The Four Cooks'... they sing well together and the almost masculine voice



Pictured during a vaudeville act are, left to right, Beck Weaver, Helen, Harriet, Marie and Vesta Cook, and Jim Scott.

By CAROL MARTINO  
Leader Staff Reporter

Chicago was ripe for excitement in 1919, with the White Sox pitted against the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series.

It was soothing news after Chicagoans had been consumed with daily reports of stealworkers and coal miners striking and race riots taking place throughout the states. And though the war-torn world may have dampened the cheer of fans during the 1917 Series when the Sox beat the Giants, that war was over.

In 1919, it was time to root. Another world championship was a dream for both the team and its town. But that dream never came true.

Not only did the club lose the Series, several players allegedly threw it. And the dream soon turned into a nightmare when a reporter exposed the story of a conspiracy that shattered the glory of eight players, branding them forever the "Chicago Black Sox."

**THIRD BASEMAN BUCK WEAVER**, the uncle of Marge Follett and her brother Jim Cook, Pontiac, was among those accused.

Today, nearly 70 years after the scandal headlined newspapers nationwide, they defend his innocence along with another niece, Bette Scanlon of Chicago.

And scores of others could be added to the list of people who believe in Weaver's innocence, according to newspaper reports written over the years. The two nieces and nephew talk about their Uncle Buck and the injustice he suffered after some of his teammates knuckled to the promised big bucks of gamblers who wanted the Series thrown so they could fatten their own pocketbooks.

They talk about the man behind the striped uniform who was "honest and kind," who took pride in being a White Sox player and "never took a dime" during the biggest swin-

## Chicago's heroes 'Black Sox' become

William Scanlon, Bette's father, at a drugstore on Chicago's South Side.

He also worked as a part-time clerk at Sportsman's Park and did whatever other odd jobs he could "to make an honest living," according to Cook, who said sometimes his uncle worked three jobs a day.

Weaver told Chicago's Sun Times columnist Gene Kessler in 1953, "It's never been easy earning a living, but I have been able to live with my conscience."

Mrs. Follett said her uncle was born in Stowe, Pa., and christened George Daniel Richard Weaver, but he was known mostly as "Buck." As a youngster, his first love was football, but after breaking his arm, Weaver's heart turned to baseball.

In 1911, at age 21, he signed with the Chicago White Sox, owned by Charles Comiskey, and was sent to play for a minor league team in San Francisco. A year later, he earned his way to the majors and played with the Sox from 1912 to 1920. He was considered one of the great infielders of that era.

In the 1917 World Series, the Sox defeated the New York Giants four games to two. For their efforts, club owner Charles Comiskey awarded them with a "bonus," which amounted to a few bottles of flat champagne.

**TWO YEARS LATER**, the team had another crack at the gag. Their manager, William "Kid" Gleason, boasted about his players being the best team around and was optimistic about a victory.

But that confidence was shattered by the duplicity of timora gamblers who moved in along with the big boys and

ed after their team lost the first two games in Cincinnati, 9-1 and 4-2. But when the Series moved to Chicago, their spirits were lifted. In game three on Oct. 3 when the Sox defeated the Reds 3-0, on the strength of a brilliant performance by pitcher Dickie Kerr, who was not on the take.

*I've cried many tears for Buck Weaver and if there's one thing I could do in my lifetime, it would be to clear his name. — Marge Follett*

The Pontiac Daily Leader reported on that day that the game was attended by "a howling and optimistic mob...Chicago fandom had far from abandoned the Sox cause as a lost one and the radical South Side rooters were behind their club today with every pound of lung power that could be packed into the big stands at Comiskey Park."

**IN THE NEXT TWO GAMES**, the Reds beat the Sox again 2-0 and 5-0. In the sixth game of the Series, the Sox grabbed their second win, 5-4, and Gardner singled home Weaver in the tenth inning with the winning run.

Together win came for the Sox in the seventh game, 4-1. But the Reds won the Series by taking the eighth game 10-5 after scoring four times in the first inning and ending the Series with a 16-hit assault.

Mrs. Follett said Livingston County Judge Stevens R. Baker was "a big Weaver fan" who attended some of the games during the 1919 Series. "When he came home, he said Buck played a flawless game. He batted .340, didn't make an error and made unbelievable plays. He even did some stunts on the field," she said.

But the others, with the exception of ace hitter Shoeless Joe Jackson, bounced between skillful and inept plays during the eight games. Trying to justify their brush with gamblers, the players complained about Comiskey, saying he didn't pay them enough to live on. Bitterness grew among some of the players who

didn't keep him from hitting the only home run in the Series and leading both teams with a .375 batting average.

Jackson did admit getting \$5,000 of the money changing hands during the fix, but he also said he reported the money to Comiskey.

Weaver and Jackson were South Side idols and young boys braved soiling their knicker pants to climb telegraph poles so they could get a closer glimpse of them out on the field.

*I've cried many tears for Buck Weaver and if there's one thing I could do in my lifetime, it would be to clear his name. — Marge Follett*

One of the most poignant legends during the famous trial was the one telling of the young boy hugging at the sleeve of Jackson as he was leaving the courtroom. The youngster was pleading, "Say it ain't so, Joe." But it was so. And Weaver and Jackson stood trial with the others for the blunder. However, all eight players were acquitted of charges after the material evidence mysteriously disappeared from the state's attorney's office.

Still, the eight were exiled from organized baseball for life by Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, a newly appointed baseball commissioner.

Weaver "never mentioned the Series again," according to Miss Scanlon. But for 35 years after until his death in 1956, he spent all his savings trying to fight the case and clear his name.

**HIS NIECES AND NEPHEWS** would still like to clear the name of their Uncle Buck. "I've cried many tears for Buck Weaver and if there's one thing I could do in my lifetime it would be to clear his name," said Mrs. Follett.

"But it would take a man of money to get the job done," Cook added.

Those who saw Weaver play during the Series know he played "to the best of his ability," said Mrs. Follett. And in a column written Nov. 1, 1953, Gene Kessler quoted Weaver as saying "I fielded 1,000 and hit .340 in the 1919 Series. In one game when we had only three hits, I got two of them. With any kind of breaks I'd have won that game for us, too."

*"It's never been easy earning a living, but I have been able to live with my conscience."*

— Buck Weaver

die in the history of baseball.

Allegedly, the seven others contributed to the fix by either making poor plays off and on during the games or by taking

turned the White Sox empire into a field of pawns.

Although Weaver knew that some of his teammates were playing for stakes, he couldn't

# Family wants Weaver back in lineup

By CAROL MARTINO  
Leader Staff Reporter

Home runs, stolen bases and fielding gems were replaced by fountain cokes, hotstick and adhesive bandages when third-man Buck Weaver was forced to leave Chicago White Sox.

Though he loved his customers at a South Side Chicago drugstore and tended to their needs, his talkative nature changed to reticence as his striped uniform and spikes were packed away to gather dust.

It has been nearly 70 years since the "Black Sox" scandal shocked the nation and wiped away the baseball careers of Weaver and seven other players.

But tears are still being spilled over the injustice done to Weaver, who many believe was the innocent one of the bunch. Although he spent the remainder of his life trying to clear his name, Weaver died in 1956 with the black blemish still scratched against his bat.

Today, his family continues the crusade to clear the name of George "Buck" Weaver into baseball's Hall of Fame.

His nieces, Marge Follett, Pontiac, and Bette Scanlon, Chicago, talk with fond memories of their Uncle Buck, who was sentenced to life without baseball and never paroled. They believe his only crime was not squealing on his teammates, and anybody familiar with the tragic story will probably agree.

**WEAVER WAS ONE** of the eight White Sox players who allegedly plotted with gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds.

Although the men were acquitted by a jury on the charges of "defrauding the public," they were banned from baseball for life by Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball commissioner.

Weaver admitted knowing about the conspiracy but denied being part of it. He took no money during the fix and made unflawed

plays in every game. Yet he was lumped with the others and denied a separate trial, according to historical reports.

"He was so loyal to his teammates and would never say anything against them," said Mrs. Follett. She unfolded an old newspaper story that quoted Weaver as saying, "I hate a squealer." In the article, written by reporter James L. Kilgallen, Weaver went on to say, "I know in my own heart I never helped throw a game. If my conscience wasn't clear in this respect, I would never think of taking a ball in my hands again."

But he did think about it and the thought never left his mind, according to the nieces. They fight tears as they unraveled the sad story of their uncle, a man who had an undying love of baseball but was struck out in the peak of his career after some of his teammates fell into the hands of the nation's leading gamblers.

Mrs. Follett remembers her uncle as "a quiet, good-natured man who never complained." While growing up, she spent her summers in Chicago visiting her grandparents, Jim and Rose Cook, who lived with her Uncle Buck and Aunt Helen.

She and Miss Scanlon became close during those summers and have maintained that friendship over the years, often talking about ways they could clear their uncle's name.

Miss Scanlon also remembers her uncle as "a quiet man," but said that part of his personality was quite a contrast to the outgoing nature he wore like a glove during his baseball days.

"He really grieved about not being able to play baseball," said Miss Scanlon. She rarely saw him laugh, "but I do remember him chuckling once and can still see his shoulders shaking," she said.

**HER FATHER DIED** in 1931, during the Depression, when the family lost everything. Miss Scanlon, her mother and sister Patricia

moved in with the Weavers and their grandparents. "He (Buck) was like a father to us," she said.

Miss Scanlon apologizes for the burst of memories that surface in her eyes.

"He was a very generous person. If he had anything, he'd share it. That's the way he raised me and my sister. On Saturday mornings he would take us to the store and buy us a sack of penny candy that was supposed to last us all week. Then he'd say, 'now go and share this with your friends.'"

One of her most vivid memories of her uncle was his "gentleness" and how an abundance of it spilled into a love of animals. Even the most vicious dog of the neighborhood would whimper for affection when he walked by.

Mrs. Follett said she came from a very poor family and her wardrobe did not include a lot of fancy clothes. But during summer visits in Chicago, her aunt and uncle always graced her in ruffled organdy dresses, patent leather shoes and white anklets.

And she remembers the splendor of "a red rose sitting in the middle of a white tablecloth and all the silverware placed the right way" during the frequent family dinners.

She is rich with the memories of those elegant dinners when "everyone dressed in their Sunday best" and her Uncle Buck sat at the head of the table sharing bits of wisdom.

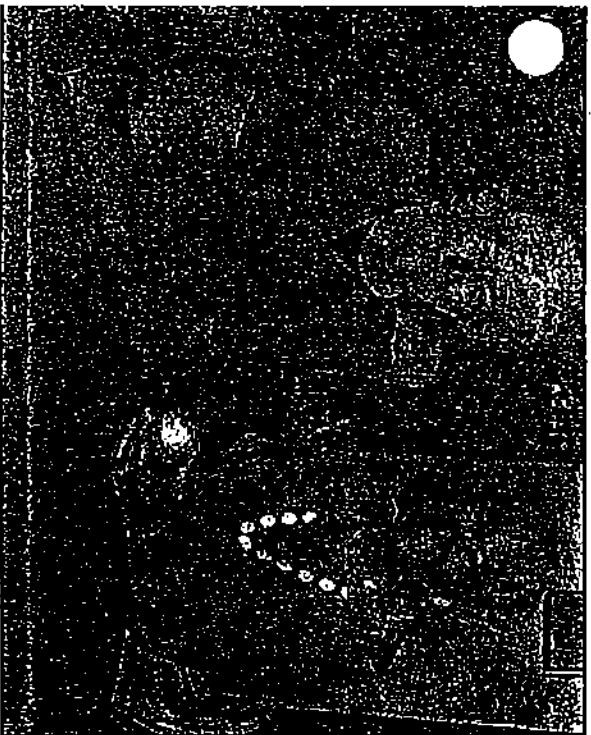
The dinners also stand out in Miss Scanlon's memories. She calls to mind a particular conversation and the advice her uncle gave her that she has carried through life.

"One day at dinner I was pondering something and asked 'What would my friends think of me if...,' and Uncle Buck said 'Don't ever worry about what anyone thinks of you as long as you know what you're doing.'"

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them. He used to tease me, 'You caten just like a girl' and one day I huffed away, reminding him 'I am a girl.'"



Buck Weaver's nieces, Marge Follett Pondac, at left, and Bette Scanlon, Chicago, are pictured with a stainless steel bat presented to their uncle after his outstanding performance during exhibition games in 1913. The ball was autographed by several baseball greats. -- (Leader photo by C. Martin)

**DURING THE 1950s**, she remembers her aunt and uncle watching the White Sox play on TV. But there was no conversation between them during the games. She said her Uncle Dick watched in silence, smoking his little Italian cigars.

After her uncle died, Miss Scanlon found an official American League baseball in one of his drawers. The ball was wrapped in a tan silk handkerchief with the initials "G.W." embossed on it. "The ball was probably from an exhibition game because it had the signatures of several of the greats on it," she said.

Many of those players attended Weaver's funeral and reminisced about the ace third baseman who made Ty Cobb hesitate about laying down a bunt.

One wintry morning in 1956, shortly after receiving his first Social Security check, Weaver was on his way to get his income tax figured. He suffered a fatal heart attack.

Buck Weaver was 65 when he died. He had lived 35 of those years trying to be reinstated to the game he loved. He died with the dream of someday playing in the majors still clinging to his heart. He never did.