

# St. Paul Saints' City of Baseball Museum brings local lore to life



A St. Paul Saints jacket from the 1940s worn by Ray Blades, who played 10 years for the St. Louis Cardinals before managing the Saints from 1944-46, is seen on display at CHS Field in St. Paul on May 9, 2019. Collector Taylor Simons acquired the jacket from a Minnesotan whose father was the Saints' assistant trainer and ran concessions at Lexington Park. (John Shipley /Pioneer Press)

By [JOHN SHIPLEY](mailto:jshipley@pioneerpress.com) | [jshipley@pioneerpress.com](mailto:jshipley@pioneerpress.com) | Pioneer Press

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When Taylor Simons started collecting baseball memorabilia, his palette was limited.

"All I knew was the Twins," he said.

That changed when the boy from Blaine started meeting Minnesota baseball enthusiasts who would wax poetic about the Minneapolis Millers and St. Paul Saints.

Who?

"I did some research and really started to understand the rich baseball history of this state," Simons said.



Minnesota baseball memorabilia collector Taylor Simons said this Minneapolis Millers

uniform worn by Carl Yastrzemski “may be my greatest find.” It’s part of the new City of Baseball Museum on display May 9, 2019, at the St. Paul Saints’ CHS Field in St. Paul. After research, Simons was able to confirm the uniform was Yastrzemski’s, and he later had it confirmed, and autographed, by the Hall of Fame outfielder himself. (John Shipley / Pioneer Press)

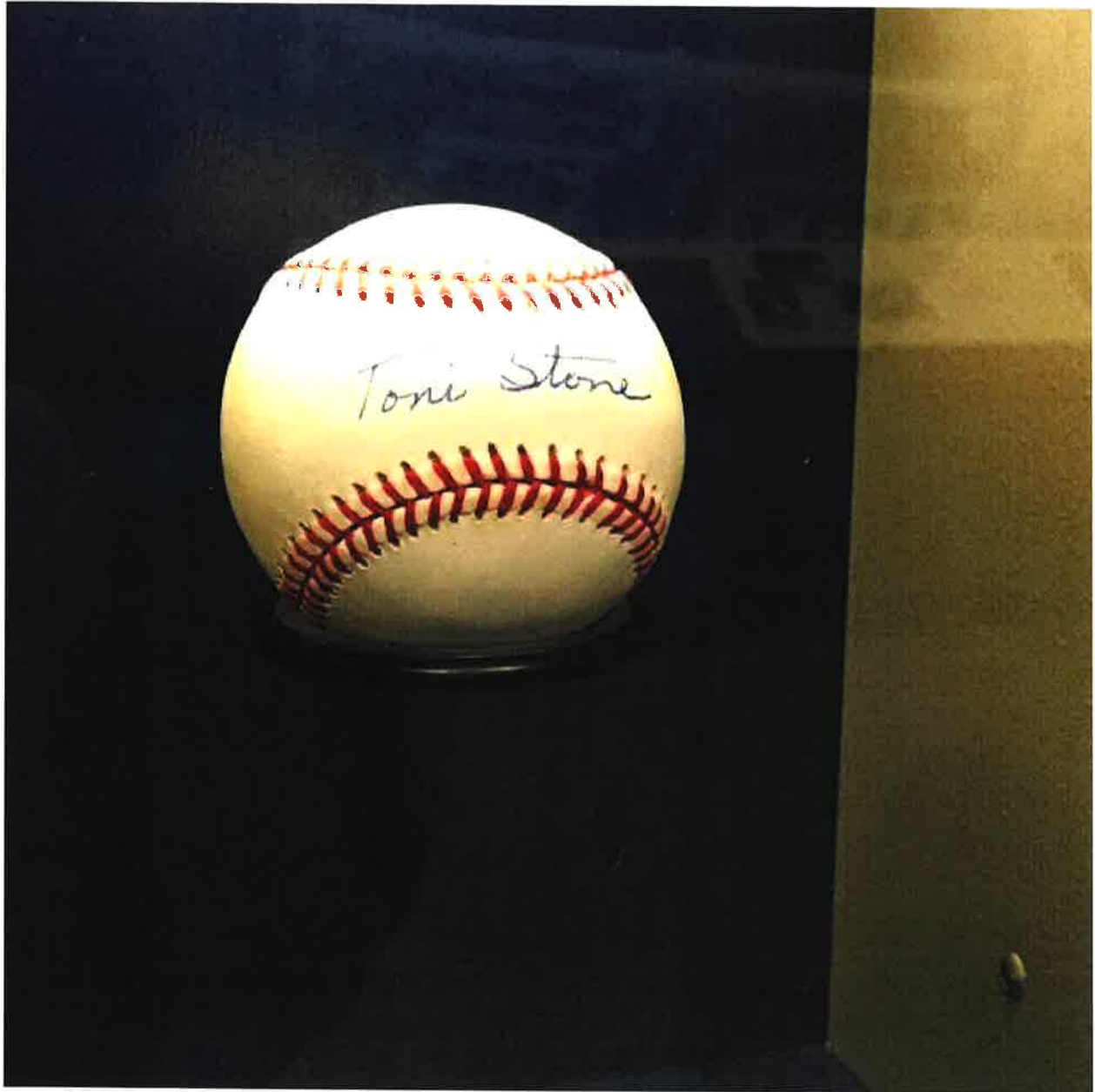
Beyond Kirby Puckett and Harmon Killebrew, he discovered, was a treasure trove of Hall of Fame players and African American pioneers, heated local rivalries and some of the best minor league baseball the country had to offer. Simons was hooked and dove head first into trying to find as much Millers and Saints memorabilia as he could.

He found quite a bit, and now some of it is on display at the Baseball City Museum at CHS Field, a passion project for Saints owner Marv Goldklang and his son, Mike, who took the helm of the \$2 million project that will officially open during the Saints’ season opener May 16.

For Simons, 32, it’s a “dream come true.”

“A lot of feels going through me right now,” he said Thursday as local media took the first tour through the roughly 2,000 square-foot museum built on a formerly open concourse at the Saints stadium.

The current exhibit is St. Paul heavy but ultimately tells the story of baseball in Minnesota — from the sandlots to the majors. There is a uniform worn by Carl Yastrzemski during his days with the Millers, a bat used by Saints catcher Roy Campanella and a baseball autographed by Toni Stone, who grew up in Minneapolis and St. Paul and is widely considered the first woman to play professional baseball.



This baseball was autographed by Toni Stone, who grew up in Minneapolis and St. Paul and is widely considered the first female professional baseball player. From 1945-54, she played for San Francisco, Indianapolis and Kansas City of the Negro Leagues. The ball is part of an exhibit dedicated to Stone, and other African-American pioneers, seen May 9, 2019, at the City of Baseball Museum at CHS Field in St. Paul. (John Shipley /Pioneer Press)

“We’ve always been the toy box, ‘Fun is Good,’ and all that,” Saints vice president Derek Sharrar said. “This was a chance to really dig into our past. That’s always been there for us, but this is our chance to really show it.”

The museum is free to the public during stadium hours and to fans who attend games. The exhibit was designed by Amanda Wambach of Split Rock Studios in St. Paul.

Much of the current exhibition is on loan from Simons, who first approached the Saints about a museum before the team moved into CHS Field in Lowertown. But when the stadium went up in 2015, things got rolling with a series of phone calls from local residents offering Saints artifacts.

“There was a woman who called and said, ‘I have team photos ranging from the late ‘50s to the early 1900s, do you want them? You’ve got a new park, do you have a place to put them?’ ” Sharrar said. “She literally pulled up in front of the ticket office, said, ‘I’m out here.’ We went out, picked up the boxes and she drove off.

“Things like that happening were what kind of pushed us in the direction in digging a little deeper into the history and interacting with guys like Taylor and learning.”

One of the best items on display is a St. Paul Saints jacket from the mid-1940s that Simons believes was worn by Ray Blades, who played 10 years for the St. Louis Cardinals before

Simons acquired it after being put in contact with the grandson of the Saints’ former assistant trainer and concessionaire at Lexington Park. The jacket had been passed through the family for decades.

“He kept it in the family the whole time,” Simons said. “To make its journey here 70 years later is very, very cool.”

The museum will get a second grand opening when the American Association All-Star Game is held at CHS Field July 22-23.