

Just twelve metropolitan areas in the United States had major league baseball teams before the Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee in 1952. They became the first major league franchise to move in fifty years and that opened the possibility that other major league teams would relocate. Kansas City Star sports Editor Ernest Mehl and other Kansas City baseball fans wanted to obtain one of those teams for Kansas City. The Milwaukee Brewers and Kansas City Blues had been rivals in the AAA American Association since the early 1900s. The cities were similar in size.

The next franchise that became available was the St Louis Browns in 1953. Kansas City made an effort to obtain the team but Baltimore had a considerable advantage because it had a suitable major league stadium and a group of people ready to purchase the franchise so the Browns moved to Baltimore.

By the spring of 1954 most baseball experts felt the Philadelphia Athletics needed to relocate. The A's had been one of baseball most successful franchises under the leadership of legendary Connie Mack in the first three decades of the century but had fallen on hard times since the Great Depression. The team struggled in the box office and lacked money to sign prospects to rebuild the team through their minor league system. Other American League teams complained about their slim share of gate receipts in Philadelphia were not enough to cover the traveling expenses.

Ernest Mehl knew Kansas City needed an owner to purchase the team and build a suitable place for the team to play. He contacted Chicago business tycoon Arnold Johnson. Johnson purchased Yankee Stadium and the minor league stadium in Kansas City from the New York Yankees in December, 1953. He told Mehl he was not interested in purchasing the A's and moving them to Kansas City but he agreed to sell the stadium for what it cost him (\$650,000) if Kansas City obtained a major league team.

The A's situation in Philadelphia deteriorated throughout the 1954 season and by the mid-July Johnson changed his mind and wanted to buy the team. Kansas City did not have a major league stadium but the city passed a bond issue to purchase Blues Stadium from Johnson and expand it to 30,000 seats in August. Construction would not begin until Kansas City obtained a major league team but Johnson assured American League owners the stadium would be completed before the start of the 1955 season.

Representatives from Dallas, Minneapolis-St Paul, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Houston also wanted to buy the franchise. A "Save the A's" campaign was organized in Philadelphia that fell short. There was a proposal to keep the A's in Philadelphia for one more season and then move the team to Los Angeles. The odds seemed stacked against him but Johnson refused to give up.

It took four meetings of the American League owners to approve the sale to Johnson and approve moving the team in Kansas City. The owners approved the transaction after the second meeting but after the meeting Roy Mack told the other owners that he was selling to a Philadelphia syndicate. Johnson threatened to file a damage suit against some of the people in the Philadelphia syndicate. "In view of the almost two million dollars in advanced ticket sales in Kansas City, my damages should be substantial," he stated. The league held another meeting and rejected the Philadelphia group's bid.

Johnson flew to Philadelphia and went to Connie Mack's home. Johnson wrote a check to Mack for \$604,000. The Macks sent a letter of American League President Will Harridge and informed him they made a deal to sell all of the stock to Johnson. The American League approved the sale on November 8, 1954.

Workers transformed the 17,774 seat single-deck Blue Stadium into the 30,611-seat double-deck Municipal Stadium in just 90-days. Many called in a construction miracle. The fairly-new scoreboard at Braves Field in Boston was purchased and installed in the stadium. The scoreboard had not been used since the Braves moved to Milwaukee.

Johnson hired the Kansas City Blues' general manager Parke Carroll as the A's new general manager. During Johnson's five seasons of ownership the A's and the Yankees made an unusual number of trades prompting baseball fans to call Kansas City a Yankee farm club. Although it was generally perceived that these trades favored the Yankees and helped them to maintain their domination in the American League an analysis using win shares shows the trades were fairly even.

Johnson selected former Cleveland manager and star shortstop Lou Boudreau to manage the team. The A's roster was virtually the same as the Philadelphia team that finished in last place in 1954 but the A's surprised the rest of the eight-team league and finished sixth with a 63-91 record.

The A's debuted before a packed house of 32,844 in Kansas City and defeated the Detroit Tigers 6-2. Left-hander Alex Kellner was the starter but the victory went to another southpaw Ewell Blackwell. After losing the second game the A's went on the road and were swept by Chicago and Detroit. When they returned to Kansas City the White Sox clobbered the A's 29-6.

Art Ditmar had a 12-12 record and Keller finished 11-8. Vic Power, a fancy-fielding first baseman who played with the Blues hit .319. Veteran outfielder Enos Slaughter batted .322 and Harry Simpson ended with a .301 average. Only the Yankees and Milwaukee Braves outdrew Kansas City, which drew 1,393,054 fans to the 77-home game schedules.

Boudreau returned to manage the 1956 squad. The team made few roster changes and finished in the cellar with a 52-102 record. Power batted .309 and outfielder Lou Skizas .316. Keller was the only winning pitcher with a 7-4 mark.

The A's made big trades with the Tigers and Yankees prior to the 1957 season to improve its pitching and defense. The team started slowly and Harry Craft replaced Boudreau as manager for the last third of the season. The A's finished in seventh place with a 59-94 record. Catcher Hal Smith (.302) was the leading hitter while veterans Virgil Trucks and Tom Morgan were the only pitching with winning records, both at 9-7.

Under Craft's leadership and the hitting of Bob Cerv the 1958 Athletics made a bid to finish in first division. The A's purchased his contract from the Yankees prior to the 1957 season. He was batting .344 on May 17th and led the American League with 11 home runs and 30 runs batted in when he broke his jaw in a collision at home plate with catcher Red Wilson in the seventh inning of a night game against Detroit. He refused to quit and played with his jaw wired shut, drinking only liquids for food, until June 16th. He finished the season with a .305 average with 38 home runs and 104 runs batted in.

Roger Maris, obtained in a trade with Cleveland, added 19 home runs. The A's stayed in contention most of the season, but tumbled from the first division late in August after they traded 42-year-old relief pitcher Murry Dickson to the Yankees. Dickson had a 9-5 record for the A's who finished the season in seventh place with a 73-81 record.

The fans had high hopes when the 1959 season began. With Cerv hitting 20 home runs and batting .285 and Maris hitting 16 home runs and batting .273 Craft led the A's to another seventh place finish with a 66-88 mark. Bud Daley finished the season with a 16-13 record. Maris was traded to the Yankees after the season, causing fans to accuse the A's of obtaining Maris just to trade him to the Yankees later.

Bob Elliott was hired to replace Harry Craft as manager for the 1960 season. Arnold Johnson's death during spring training created uncertainty for the future of the A's in Kansas City. Despite drawing more than one million fans in each of the previous five seasons there were rumors that team might be purchased by out-of-town interests and moved from Kansas City. This uncertainty seemed to affect the team as the A's finished in the cellar with a 58-96 record even though Bud Daley won 16 games for the second consecutive season. He finished with a 16-16 record. Elliott was fired after the season and was replaced by Joe Gordon.

Ernest Mehl organized a local group to buy the team but they were out-bid by Charles O. Finley. He began making changes as soon as he purchased the team. He replaced general manager Parke Carroll with Frank Lane. Lane was nicknamed "Trader Lane" because he made frequent trades as general manager of the Cardinals, White Sox and Indians.

Finley also made changes at Municipal Stadium. "This park needs some color," Finley said. He had all the seats painted yellow or turquoise, added a "Fan-A-Gram" on the scoreboard, installed a small tube in the center of home plate that blew air to dust the plate, and added Harvey, a mechanical white rabbit that rose from the ground behind the plate with baseballs for the umpire. These improvements duplicated changes Bill Veeck made to increase attendance in Chicago when he purchased the White Sox two years earlier.

The A's finished in 9th place in the expanded 10-team American League with a 61-100 record in Finley's first season. Hank Bauer replaced Joe Gordon as manager and Pat Friday replaced Frank Lane as general manager during the season. Norm Siebern led the club with a .296 average, 18 home runs and 98 runs batted in. Shortstop Dick Howser was named Rookie of the Year. The 23-year old set a team record with 37 stolen bases.

Lew Krausse, an eighteen-year-old pitcher signed for a record \$125,000 bonus. He made his professional debut on June 16th and thrilled a Kansas City crowd of 25,869 when he threw a 3-hit shut-out and defeated the Los Angeles Angels 4-0.

Ernest Mehl published a report that Finley wanted to move the A's to Dallas after the 1961 season. Finley reportedly examined the Cotton Bowl as a site for home games. He denied it saying, "I'm here to build a team for Kansas City and keep it for my family."

Bauer returned as manager in 1962 and the A's improved to finish the season with a 72-90 record. Siebern repeated as team leader with a .308 batting mark, 25 home runs and 117 runs batted in. Second Baseman Jerry Lumpe and rookie outfielder Manny Jimenez batted .301. Dave Wickersham (11-4) John Wyatt (10-7) and Orlando Pena (6-4) all had winning records.

Ed Lopat replaced Bauer as manager in 1963, the year the A's introduced their colorful green and gold uniforms to replace the tradition white home and grey road uniforms. The A's, led by shortstop Wayne Causey who finished the season with a .280 average, was in the first division for the first two months of the season, but finished the season in 8th place with a 73-89 record. Dave Wickersham and Orlando Pena led the team with twelve victories.

Finley became upset early in the 1963 season when the city rented Municipal Stadium to the Chiefs for \$1 a year as an incentive to move the team to Kansas City. He refused to renew the A's lease at the stadium when it expired at the end of the season unless he received similar benefits. He contacted officials in Atlanta and Oakland and said he wanted move the team at the end of the season. American League owners indicated they would not approve the move and told Finley he needed to renew his lease in Kansas City. When negotiations reached a stalemate he signed a two-year lease for the A's to play in Louisville, but when the American League voted 9-1 against the move he signed a four-year lease in Kansas City.

Lopat returned to manage the 1964 team. Finley was convinced the A's needed more power. He traded for sluggers Jim Gentile and Rocky Colavito and shortened the dimensions at Municipal Stadium. He installed a "Pennant Porch" to duplicate the right field dimensions at Yankee Stadium. When major league officials ordered him to remove it he replaced it with a "One-Half Pennant Porch." Despite the added power (Colavito batted .274 with 34 home runs and 102 runs batted in and Gentile batted .251 with 28 home runs and 71 runs batted in), the A's tumbled to the cellar with a 57-105 record and Mel McGaha replaced Lopat as manager before the

season ended.

As the team struggled on the field Finley gave lofty bonus contracts to sign high-school and college athletes to build the team for the future. In addition to Krause (\$125,000 bonus) he signed Jim "Catfish" Hunter and John "Blue Moon" Odom in 1964, giving each player \$75,000. Hunter might have demanded more, but a hunting accident had filled his right foot with 45 shotgun pellets. Finley promised Hunter he would receive the entire bonus, even if his foot did not respond to treatment and he was unable to pitch. Finley paid \$662,000 to sign 80 players in 1964, the most spent by one team in a single season.

Baseball initiated the free-agent draft in 1965. The A's had the first draft choice and selected Rick Monday. Monday signed for a \$100,000 bonus. Other players selected and signed by the A's in the 1965 draft were Sal Bando, Gene Tenace and Rollie Fingers. The A's selected Reggie Jackson as the number one pick (and second pick overall) in the 1966 draft and Vida Blue in the second round on the 1967 draft. These players became All-Star players for the A's after the team moved to Oakland.

Mel McGaha returned to manage the team in 1965. Eighteen-year-old Catfish Hunter broke into the majors on May 13th in relief of Diego Segui and pitched two hitless, shutout innings. Three days later Finley fired McGaha and replaced him with Haywood Sullivan. Even though the A's were in last place for most of the 1965 season and finished the season with a 59-103 mark the A's minor league system was beginning to produce major league players. Hunter finished with an 8-8 record and a 4.26 ERA. Dick Green became the A's second baseman the previous year and Bert Campaneris became shortstop in 1965. Campaneris hit .270 and became the first major league player to play all nine positions in one game.

Finley introduced Charlie O the mule as the team's new mascot in 1965. He took the mule to the team's hotels on road trips in an air-conditional trailer with piped-in music. Finley signed 59-year-old Satchel Paige to boost attendance at the end of the season. He had a nurse and a rocking chair for Paige, who pitched in one game and worked three-innings against Boston, yielding one hit and one run.

The A's young talent began to mature under new manager Al Dark in 1966. He led the team to a seventh place finish with a 74-86 mark, only six games out of first division. Rookie right-hander Jim Nash won his first seven starts after coming up from the Southern League (AA) in July. He finished with a 12-1 record, a 2.06 ERA, and the Rookie of the Year award. First baseman Danny Cater led the team in hitting with a .292 average, Lew Krause had a 14-9 record and a 2.99 ERA, and closer Jack Aker had an 8-4 record with 32 saves and a 1.99 ERA.

This gave the A's had high hopes for the 1967 season. The starting pitching staff averaged 21.8 years of age with Hunter, Chuck Dobson, Krause, Odom and Nash, but the team did not fulfill its expectations and finished the season in last place with a 62-99 record.

The season effectively ended on August 3rd after the team returned to Kansas City from Boston on TWA flight 85. An informant told Finley that players were drunk on the flight. When the A's were in Anaheim one week later Finley called Krause and informed him that he was being fined \$500 for "raising hell on the plane" and was suspended. Finley issued a statement apologizing for the incident and barring liquor on all future A's flights.

The players were upset because it insinuated that all twenty-five players had a drunken brawl on the plane. They asked player representative Jack Aker to call Finley and request the statement be kept from the press until they could discuss the situation with him but he already released the story to the AP and UPI and it was printed in the early editions of the next day's sports pages. The players met in various hotel rooms and decided to draft a statement to publicly reply to Finley. Aker sat in the bullpen before the next game on Saturday afternoon and made a

rough draft on a small piece of paper. Before releasing it to the public they showed it to Dark. He agreed with the players' stand but warned them about releasing it to the public.

Finley flew to Washington, where the A's were to start a series with the Senators and fired Dark for backing the players. Two hours later he rehired Dark. When the players refused to retract the statement, Finley fired Dark again, accusing him of losing control of the players, and hired Luke Appling as manager.

"It's tough to leave these kids," said Dark. "This club could win the pennant as early as 1971." Dark was right, but unfortunately for Kansas City by that time the team moved to Oakland.

Ken Harrelson, first baseman and team's leading hitter with a .305 average was angry when Dark was fired. He was quoted as calling Finley "a menace to baseball." Finley "fired" Harrelson and made him a free agent instead of trying to trade him. Harrelson signed with Boston for a \$112,000 bonus and helped the Red Sox reach the World Series against St. Louis.

The demoralized A's stumbled to a 10-30 record for the remainder of the season under Appling, but had a final hurrah when they swept a doubleheader against Chicago in the final week of the season and ended the Sox pennant hopes. Dobson stunned the Sox 5-2 on a three-hitter, blanking them until the ninth. The Hunter pitched a three-hit, 3-0 shutoff. Boston went on to win the pennant and Chicago finished fourth. Hunter finished the season with four shutouts, a scoreless-inning streak of 26, and finished the season with a 12-17 record and a 2.81 ERA.

Finley searched for a new home for the club during the 1967 season with an emphasis on Seattle, Milwaukee and Oakland. Following the season Finley asked for permission to move the team to Oakland. Following the league's approval Stuart Symington, the powerful United States Senator from Missouri said: "Oakland's the luckiest city since Hiroshima."

The A's never had a winning season in their 13 years in Kansas City.

