

Baseball's greats – at rest

BY MARK MORALES
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THREE WORN out and yellowed baseballs, along with a tiny, tattered American flag, stand at the foot of the Green-Wood Cemetery, at the grave-site of one of baseball's most influential figures.

Henry Chadwick – the so-called “Father of Baseball” – is buried in the Sunset Park cemetery, along with other heavy-hitters in the sport's history.

“Brooklyn was the real hotbed of baseball in the early 1840s,” said Jeff Richman, cemetery historian.

“There's a number of people here that deserve to be in the Hall of Fame, but he's the only one of our residents who is,” said Richman.

About 200 of baseball's most prominent figures are buried at the cemetery – none bigger than Chadwick. He created many of the rules and phrases still used today. His contributions to the game earned him the famous moniker given to him by Teddy Roosevelt, which is etched into his monument.

As pitchers and catchers report for spring training each year, baseball fans start lining up to get their glimpse of baseball history, Richman said. Scattered across the 478-acre site are personalities who helped put baseball on the map in the



Green-Wood Cemetery historian Jeff Richman holds baseballs left by visitors at the The Chadwick Monument for Henry Chadwick, known as the “Father of Baseball.” Photo by Mark Bonifacio

19th and early 20th centuries.

He takes guests on guided tours through the cemetery to visit the gravesites of the most influential figures, such as Charles Ebbets, the former owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, James Creighton, the game's first superstar, and Chadwick.

The tall monument on Chadwick's grave stood with bronze plaques adorned

on either side featuring interlocking baseball bats – a catcher's mask on one side and a bronzed mitt on the other. The plot itself is surrounded by granite stones carved out to resemble bases and a large globe on top with stitching carved in to make it look like a baseball.

“It's beautifully done,” said Richman.

“You get a tremendous sense of where

baseball has come from, and you don't have that with basketball and football.”

Baseball buffs who took the pilgrimage to Green-Wood Cemetery said they were blown away by the history.

“You get a sense that this guy ate, slept and breathed baseball,” said Joseph Purcell, 61, of Chadwick's monument.

“This guy was really memorialized so that future generations could know he was the father of baseball.”

Alan Talfer, 50, also took the tour and said the gravesites were part of the country's fabric.

“It's like seeing where Washington, Lincoln and Kennedy are buried,” said Talfer.

“That's probably as close as you're ever going to get to reliving that time in history – outside of Cooperstown.”

Robert Harrison, 64, still remembers how he felt 12 years ago when he came face to face with the graves of baseball legends.

“It was very impressive,” said Harrison.

“It throws you back in time and it's meaningful to anyone who knows anything about baseball.”

Richman is now gearing up to take hardcore baseball fans on another season's worth of trips through baseball's history.

“It's like you can smell the hot dogs around here,” he said.

mmorales@nydailynews.com