

FRED CLARKE

*A Biography of the Baseball
Hall of Fame Player-Manager*

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Preface

As many readers know, offense in the Deadball Era was largely about strategy and guile. Home runs came only infrequently, so teams relied on the bunt, the hit and run and the steal to push baserunners home one at a time. Managers who were able to perfect this “small ball” style had great success. Those who did not usually became unemployed.

Around 1920, not long after Babe Ruth made his way from Boston to New York, the home run became the new strategy in baseball. Fans became less interested in steals and bunts, wanting instead to see prodigious blasts by the likes of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Rogers Hornsby and Hack Wilson. As time went by, rooters screamed for more and longer hits.

The bunt and steal are used in baseball today, and some managers adhere to small-ball policies when they need to manufacture runs. But the power game is still ascendant. Furthermore, new baseball ideas such as specialty pitching and platoons have replaced the player-manager and the Baltimore Chop. Starting pitchers are no longer expected to complete the game, and players who in the 1910s might have come out of the lineup only when injured are today given the occasional day off.

While baseball has changed dramatically during the past century, there are many facets of the national pastime that remain the same. Ballplayers still play for the love of the game as they did in 1900. They also play to win. Throughout history, the goal of most owners, managers and players has been to win a championship. For more than a century, players have gathered year after year with one purpose in mind: Play your best, defeat the competition and win the World Series.

A fiery competitor whose positive attitude rubbed off on everyone around him, Fred Clarke established himself as baseball’s greatest left fielder while in Louisville during the rough-and-tumble decade of the nineties. He also

received his managerial on-the-job training while playing in the Falls City. When Clarke moved on to Pittsburgh in 1900, he continued to build upon his resume as a great player, and he quickly proved that his managerial ability was equally deserving of praise. From 1900 to 1915, there was no manager in baseball who had greater success.

Clarke's achievements as both a player and manager were rooted in his desire to be the best through hard work, determination and dedication. He played a hard-nosed brand of baseball that alienated him from many opposing players throughout his career. Between the lines, he was willing to scratch and claw in order to win a baseball game. Away from the game, he was said to be a gentleman and devoted family man.

Clarke was more than just a baseball player. He was an inventor, entrepreneur, rancher and farmer. His love for life on the farm was in fact every bit as strong as his desire to play baseball. On more than one occasion, Clarke almost walked away from the game he loved so that he could nurture the Kansas farm and be with his family. Clarke had two callings which he answered in life. At times, it was difficult to give each its proper attention. In spite of this, Fred Clarke remained loyal to both.

During his time as manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Fred Clarke won four National League pennants and one world championship. He finished in second place five times, third place three times and fourth place two times. At a time when baseball success meant finishing in the first division, Clarke's Pirates did so every year but his final two. Pittsburgh owner Barney Dreyfuss expected such results, and Fred Clarke was able to deliver throughout their time together in Pittsburgh.

The Fred Clarke-Barney Dreyfuss partnership began in 1894. Dreyfuss was responsible for bringing Clarke to Louisville after the Colonel's treasurer scouted the outfielder during a minor league game in Memphis. Through the years, the relationship between Clarke and Dreyfuss grew as each moved up the ranks within the Louisville organization. In 1897, Fred Clarke was named to manage the Louisville Colonels. After the 1898 season, Barney Dreyfuss ascended to the presidency of the Louisville squad.

Both men were part of the Louisville transfer to Pittsburgh after the 1899 season. Fred Clarke became manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates when Barney Dreyfuss became the primary owner of the Smoky City squad. During their time together in Pittsburgh, Clarke and Dreyfuss had overwhelming success as the Pittsburgh Pirates quickly became a National League powerhouse. Fred Clarke was the ultimate warrior and field general, and Barney Dreyfuss was a shrewd mogul who supplied the fuel that kept the Pittsburgh machine running. Each did whatever was necessary to win.

Clarke and Dreyfuss were friends both on and off the field. At times, the

two men had their differences. These differences of opinion never shook the strong bond which developed during their years together. Clarke and Dreyfuss were cut from the same cloth, driven men who demanded much of themselves and others.

The Pittsburgh Pirates are a big part of the Fred Clarke story, the majority of Clarke's baseball success having come in the Smoky City. Players like Honus Wagner and Ed Konetchy shaped Clarke's legacy in both a positive and negative way. Wagner's great play contributed to the success of Clarke's Pirate clubs during the glory years; Konetchy's disruptive behavior as a Federal League agent while still on the Pirates payroll in 1914 contributed to Clarke's first second-division finish in 15 years as Pittsburgh's manager. Events such as the war with the American League in 1901 and 1902 tested the young player-manager as he built a team which had few peers in baseball during the first decade of the twentieth century. If owner Dreyfuss had mapped out a blueprint of success for the Pirates, Clarke executed it masterfully.

My decision to write a biography covering the life of Fred Clarke was based on a desire to learn more about the man who brought glory to the Pittsburgh Pirates franchise during the twentieth century's first decade. Clarke was one of baseball's most popular and most quoted managers during that time. His willingness to talk with baseball writers during his career afforded me the opportunity to gather volumes of information during the research phase of this project. Articles and Fred Clarke interviews from both *The Sporting News* and *Sporting Life* were great research tools which made it possible for me to write this biography.

This work contains three elements that interact with each other. The first and most important of these is the story of Fred Clarke's life. The second is Clarke's relationship with owner Barney Dreyfuss during their time together in Louisville and Pittsburgh. The last element involves Clarke's Pittsburgh Pirates teams and specifically the interaction between him and his players. Throughout this book, I show how these elements remained intertwined each season during Fred Clarke's tenure as manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

History is kept alive through stories passed down by each generation. Unfortunately, as time has passed, some of the heroes from baseball's early days have been mostly forgotten. Fred Clarke first appeared on a National League diamond in 1894. Even in Pittsburgh, Clarke is sometimes a forgotten man as people talk about Clemente, Stargell, Mazerowski, Kiner and the Waner brothers while discussing Pirates baseball history. Fred Clifford Clarke's story is one that needs to be told in respect to both baseball and Pittsburgh history.

Chapter 1

A Fall Day in Winterset

After the Civil War, a new wave of settlers began pouring into the grand Midwest hoping to carve out an existence for themselves. Many of these people were European immigrants who came across the ocean looking for a better life in the land of opportunity. Whether it was a man from Germany hoping to enhance his station in life or a farmer in Illinois seizing the chance to improve his existence, the heartland of the United States was a popular destination for those chasing the American Dream. Places like Illinois were perfect for those who aspired to aid in the building of an industrial America. Iowa was a beautiful contrast for people who wished to remain close to the land while at the same time contributing to the great agricultural success of this country.

Iowa's population nearly doubled after the Civil War to about 1.2 million people. Many of these new residents were immigrants who had come from Germany, Sweden and Denmark. The Iowa legislature encouraged immigration and even published a ninety-six page brochure in 1869 titled *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants*. Great efforts were made to attract foreigners from all lands as the pamphlet was published in English, German, Dutch, Swedish and Danish.¹ Native sons stood side by side with their European counterparts as Iowa forged ahead during the late nineteenth century.

One of these native sons was a blacksmith named William Clarke who moved his family from West Point, Illinois, to a farm in Winterset, Iowa, during the late 1860s. Clarke was a Maryland native who settled in Illinois after his marriage to Lucy Cutler in 1852. When the Clarkes moved to Winterset, their family consisted of eight children. Anna, Edgar, William Jr., Mattie, Grace and Lucy were born while the family resided in Illinois. Prior to the Civil War, Hattie and Charley were born in Iowa.² Obviously, the Clarkes were not strangers to the beauty of Iowa. West Point was basically a stone's

throw to the east of Iowa, so it was quite possible that William Clarke and his family had matriculated west for some reason during those years.

Winterset was a small city about 28 miles southwest of Des Moines. Designated as the county seat for Madison County, Winterset was founded in 1849.³ By the time Clarke moved his family there twenty years later, the town had grown in size and stature. The Madison County Courthouse was completed in 1868 and some of the covered bridges which were the trademark of the county had been erected.⁴ William Clarke worked hard as a blacksmith, and also farmed the land in an effort to provide a good life for his family.

In 1872, Winterset graduated from being somewhat of an outpost town to the status of viable city thanks to the railroad's arrival. The first train rolled into Winterset from Des Moines on February 28. The caravan, made up exclusively of construction cars, arrived at the Winterset station around 3 o'clock. Falling snow failed to put a damper on the proceedings as local citizens gathered to witness the gala event. A brass band was on hand for the celebration. Contractors and railroad men were honored at a huge banquet that evening inside the St. Nicholas Hotel.⁵

Passenger trains did not appear in Winterset until late spring. On May 13, 1872, the first passenger train arrived in the local station with the intention of taking riders to nearby Des Moines.⁶ Not only did this event connect Winterset with surrounding communities, it also opened up new possibilities that would allow the town to grow in size and strength. As historian Herman Mueller described it, "The engine bell rang and for the first time the conductor called out 'passengers for Des Moines all aboard,' and Winterset was no longer an inland town, dependent upon wagons for communication with the outer world. During the summer of 1872, immediately following this event, seventy-three buildings were erected in Winterset, at a cost of over ninety thousand dollars, and within seven years next following it more than doubled its population."⁷

Another indication that Winterset was becoming prosperous was the birth of many newspapers throughout the area. In 1872 the *Winterset News* was born when Jacob Morgan, formerly a foreman with the *Winterset Madisonian*, bought the plant of the *Winterset Sun* from its owners.⁸ Morgan changed the name and shifted the political content away from the pro-Republican material that the *Sun* printed. The first content was cranked out in a small rear upper room of the building where the plant was located.⁹

As the town of Winterset continued to grow throughout 1872, so too did the family of William and Lucy Clarke. On October 3, 1872, the Clarkes welcomed their ninth child into the world when Lucy gave birth to a baby boy on the family's farm. William and Lucy decided to name the newest member of the Clarke family Fred Clifford Clarke. With the birth of Fred in 1872,

the Clarke family legacy now spanned 18 years, from 1854 when oldest sibling Anna Clarke was born.

As the Clarke family grew in the autumn of 1872, a game that developed in the eastern part of the country was beginning to captivate youths in the Midwest. Baseball's popularity in America's heartland continued to grow as more people migrated westward. Young men like Adrian Anson of Iowa, Jimmy Galvin of Missouri, Charley Comiskey of Illinois, Sam Thompson of Indiana, and Abner Dalrymple of Wisconsin were cutting their teeth playing baseball as newborn Fred Clifford Clarke entered the world. Other Midwest youngsters such as James Holmes, Billy Sunday, Jake Beckley, Jack O'Connor, Perry Werden, Lave Cross, Charles Nichols, Frank Bowerman and Herman Long may not have embraced the game quite yet, but they would eventually be drawn to baseball's allure.

Baseball's popularity in the Midwest did not matter much to William Clarke. He had the basic day-to-day concerns of life to worry about as he provided for his wife and nine children, causing pleasurable recreation many times to be disregarded in favor of sweat and hard work. The Clarke children were responsible for doing their fair share of chores on the family farm. If any of the boys found time to get away and play baseball, it was done more for fun and exercise rather than preparation for this game to someday become a chosen profession.

William Clarke also had little concern for distant parts of the country which did not impact his everyday life. He no doubt cared very little that an eastern city in Pennsylvania was beginning to make a name for itself as an industrial power after the Civil War. By 1872, Pittsburgh had already begun charting the course that would allow the city to become America's king of the steel industry.

During the summer of 1872, a few months before Fred Clifford Clarke was born, the Isabella and Lucy blast furnaces became operational in Pittsburgh.¹⁰ The Isabella, located in Etna, battled it out with the Lucy furnace across the river to see how many tons of pig iron each could produce. By the end of 1872, both furnaces were producing up to 500 tons per week.¹¹ In January of that same year, Mark Twain gave a lecture to a packed house at Library Hall about his experiences roughing it in the Nevada wilderness.¹² Two entrepreneurs named Henry John Heinz and L. Clarence Noble also moved their business to Pittsburgh in 1872. Heinz and Noble were food purveyors with a product line that included horseradish, pickles, celery sauce and vinegar.¹³

All of these events in Pittsburgh were of no consequence to William Clarke in Iowa unless he happened to purchase some of the Heinz-Noble products from time to time. In a way, these proceedings did relate to the newest member of the Clarke family. In 1872, nobody could have foreseen

that Fred Clarke, who was only a baby at the time, eventually would become a baseball player whose destiny was to be fulfilled in Pennsylvania's Steel Town. Pittsburgh may have been insignificant to William Clarke, but it was the place where Fred Clifford Clarke ultimately achieved his greatest success as one of baseball's supreme player-managers.

Chapter 2

Two Passions Are Born

When Fred Clarke was two years old, his father William uprooted the family from Winterset and joined a covered wagon caravan that was making its way to southern Kansas.¹ Although the trip was not as perilous compared to a wagon convoy rolling through hostile Indian territory along the Oregon Trail, this venture wasn't quite like taking a Sunday buggy ride through Central Park in New York City either. The journey was long and arduous. Outlaws, angry Indians and a variety of unsavory characters still posed a threat to any wagon caravan moving through the prairie state.

The destination of the wagon caravan was a place called Cowley County, located in southern Kansas near the Oklahoma border. Lush bottomland was supposedly prevalent throughout the county.² William Clarke was intrigued with the prospect of making a better life for his family in a region which had so much untapped potential. Cowley County was named after Matthew Cowley, a first lieutenant from the Ninth Kansas Cavalry who was killed during the Civil War at Little Rock, Arkansas, in August 1864.³ Kansas historian William G. Cutler explained how Cowley came into existence:

It was carved out of Hunter County by the Legislature of 1867, which defined it as running thirty-three miles north from a point on the south line of the State, 103 miles west of the State line, and extending thirty-four and a half miles west. At this time, the county was comprised in the "thirty mile strip" or Diminished Osage Reserve, and the three mile strip on the south line which had been reserved as a pathway for the Cherokees on their hunting trips to their more western possessions. The great Osage trail ran east and west across the county, entering at the Flint hills on the east, crossing the Grouse about two miles above Dexter, the Walnut at Winfield, and the Arkansas at the mouth of the Ninnescah. The villages of the tribe were at the latter crossing and on Timber Creek, a short distance above Winfield.⁴

Such a strenuous journey across the plains was bound to toughen every participant in some manner. Even a small child like Freddie learned resilience, perseverance and hardiness in spite of his young age. The youngest member of the Clarke family certainly was not afforded the comforts and amenities that a two year old came to expect while residing in a permanent residence. A wagon caravan trip through semi-hostile territory molded and shaped a young child every bit as much as it did an older counterpart.

The trip ended for the Clarke family at a piece of farmland in Cowley, close to the city of Winfield. Here William Clarke decided to establish new roots for his wife and children. The Clarkes arrival in Winfield coincided with the departure of many settlers from that area who abandoned their claims to land after some tough times in 1874 and 1875. Drought issues were followed by an invasion of grasshoppers, which blighted the land and destroyed crops in the summer of 1874. Concerns arose for the 1875 growing season after the destructive swarm deposited eggs throughout Cowley and moved on to nearby fertile land.⁵

Farmers who feared for their survival cut and ran, feeling that the new horde of grasshoppers would be just as destructive after the eggs hatched. These worries were eventually proved to be invalid when the young hoppers left Cowley without inflicting any damage like their predecessors did in 1874.⁶ If not for the troubled year of 1874 in Winfield, William Clarke may not have been able to acquire the piece of land that his family now called home.

Young Fred Clarke learned at an early age that hard work and dedication reaped immense rewards. Life on the farm was a sunrise to sunset endeavor, with chores consuming the bulk of the calendar week. It was through this type of life that the young boy was able to realize that goals were achieved with sweat and blood. Malingering on the farm was something that wasn't tolerated. Everybody had a job to do, and the family's ability to succeed depended upon each member completing their assigned tasks correctly and in a timely fashion.

Winfield in the 1870s was by no means a hostile area. Osage Indians had threatened and driven out early settlers in 1869. The tribe was eventually pushed aside when their lands were opened for settlement on July 15, 1870, and legitimate claims from settlers were accepted.⁷ The town and young Fred Clarke grew up together as Winfield became more civilized each year. By the time Fred was of the age to attend school in the county's learning institutions, Cowley County's population had doubled to over 21,000 people by 1879.⁸

The U.S. Census taken in 1880 showed that William Clarke's real estate value totaled \$2,000 and that he had additional personal wealth equaling \$400.⁹ The national population information regarding the Clarke family was entered into the record on June 21, which included the births of Mabel in

1875 and Joshua in 1879.¹⁰ Some of the older Clarke children had moved on and were making a life for themselves. As tough times hit the Cowley area in 1880, it was William, his mother Sarah, Lucy and eight Clarke children contributing daily to the family's wealth and prosperity.

The summer of 1880 in Winfield was disastrous for farmers as another drought hit the area that was harsher than the one experienced by Cowley dwellers in 1874.¹¹ Farms big and small were affected as all people in the area suffered because of the crippled growing season. Whether it was the drought or some other unknown reason, William Clarke packed up his family in late 1880 or early 1881 and moved them back to Iowa. This time the Clarks settled near the thriving metropolis of Des Moines.¹² Fred Clarke's father once again wore the dual moniker of blacksmith and farmer as the family took up residence in a fourth different city over the last 15 years.

During the family's days in Kansas, young Freddie grew to love the land around Winfield and its surrounding area in Cowley County. At times, the youngster did grow tired of the everyday tedium that went along with working on a farm. This was only natural for a child who had other interests. In spite of this boredom at times, Fred Clarke had formed a bond with the land in that area. After the family moved back to Des Moines, the youngster's burning desire to return to that place remained unquenched. Tiring of life in Des Moines, Fred hitched a train and ran away from home.¹³ Many years later, a Udall, Kansas, newspaper chronicled the young lad's adventure:

When a mere lad of 11 summers he grew tired of the monotony of farm life and, leaving his home in Iowa, started out to see the world. Everything went well until he reached Udall, where he was "ditched" by a heartless brakeman. His available cash assets at that time amounted to only 10 cents, which he judiciously invested in cheese and crackers. While waiting for another train Fred was sizing up the country hereabouts, and he resolved then and there to possess himself of a home in this immediate vicinity.¹⁴

Upon returning to Des Moines after his journey, he soon found a second thing that he was passionate about other than the prairies of Kansas. While working as a newsboy for Ed Barrow, a circulation manager for the *Des Moines Register*, Clarke was introduced to the game of baseball.¹⁵ Most of the kids who had paper routes under Barrow were rambunctious lads who needed a positive way to channel all of their energy. Fred himself was one of the more pugnacious kids in the group. While waiting for papers in an alley one day, Clarke got into a fight with one of the other boys. He accidentally knocked out a window by pushing his antagonist through it. In order to teach Clarke a very important life lesson, Barrow made him pay every penny of the 35 cents required to replace the window.¹⁶ The future baseball magnate introduced

his seventeen paper route boys to baseball in an effort to keep them out of trouble. Barrow named the team the Stars and placed them in the local Des Moines City League.¹⁷ Clarke played the outfield and quickly showed great ability on the diamond with his blazing speed and relentless hustling.

Finding time to play baseball was difficult at times considering the fact that Clarke had school, chores at home and various jobs to contend with. Besides having a newspaper route, Clarke also worked as a bellboy at the Savery Hotel, did odd jobs at the Foster Opera House and drove a delivery wagon for grocer C.C. Loomis.¹⁸ While working for Loomis, he would sometimes stop the wagon, tie up his horses and participate in an inning or two of a game taking place on a sandlot park at Sixteenth and Woodland. Clarke was eventually fired for this practice.¹⁹

Baseball equipment was another issue that confronted Clarke in his quest to perform on the diamond. The young man certainly could not ask his father for money to buy items such as a glove or shoes. He had to scrounge around hoping to persuade other players in the area to donate equipment that was no longer being used. On occasion, Clarke could be seen hanging around the clubhouse of the Western League's Des Moines team.²⁰ His mission was two-fold: He wanted to get a glimpse up close of professional players, and also hoped that someone would be willing to give him equipment that was no longer being used. A player from that team named Richard "Dad" Phelan did Clarke a good turn during the summer of 1888.²¹ As Phelan told the story:

It was back in '88 when I first ran across Clarke. I was with the Des Moines club that year and we won the Western League pennant. Clarke was only a kid and was playing with an amateur team called the "Stars." We had an off day and Clarke had just been chased from the clubhouse by several old players when I met him.

"What is the matter, little fellow," I asked.

"Oh nothing," replied Clarke. "I only wanted to see if I could get a pair of old baseball shoes from some of the players. But instead, they chased me off the grounds."

I took a kindly feeling to the boy and brought him back to the park and gave him a pair of shoes.²²

With new shoes in tow and the drive to become the best player that he could churning inside of him, Clarke once again decided to run away from home. Clarke had added the positions of catcher and shortstop to his repertoire on the Des Moines Stars team.²³ He was also performing quite capably for the Des Moines Mascots as well. When the opportunity arose to join an independent team in Carroll, Iowa, Clarke seized upon it. Comparisons to the prodigal son were not unwarranted even though Clarke wasn't about to ask for his share of the family fortune before he left:

My parents were opposed to my playing ball. I had learned my trade, that of a lather, and father and mother, and incidentally several aunts and uncles, thought I should devote more time to my calling. But I liked to play ball, and in this respect was just like every other kid. One day I received an offer from an independent club in a town in Iowa. They had an important game scheduled and were very anxious to have me take part in it. I knew it would do no good to ask for parental consent, so one night I went to my room, packed all my belongings in an old telescope bag, sneaked out the back way and started for the town where the club desiring my services was located. When I got there and we played the first game, in which they thought I did well at short, they made me an offer of \$40 a month to remain. The team only played three games a week — Friday, Saturday and Sunday — and I was given employment at my trade for \$3 a day; things were coming pretty easy for me. I drove nails into laths five days a week, getting off every Friday, and drew my little \$10 per week for playing ball. I remained for two months, and when I started back for my own fireside I was rich — had \$114 in my pocket.... Once inside the house I ran to mother and before saying a word, or before she could say anything, I handed her the \$114. She looked at the money, and I guess she thought I had been a pretty good boy to save so much in two months, for she did not scold me. Instead I was accorded a real motherly welcome.”²⁴

There definitely was no use in trying to stop Clarke from realizing his dream of becoming a professional baseball player. When the time came for young Clarke to pursue his ambition, William Clarke begrudgingly gave his consent. Clarke’s father gave his son sound advice which the youngster heeded throughout his career.²⁵

Clarke was able to embark on his career in professional baseball because of an advertisement he placed in the want column of *The Sporting News*. A club in Hastings, Nebraska, that was looking for players answered his ad in 1892 and offered the youngster \$40 a month in salary.²⁶ Clarke jumped at the chance, packed his gear, and made the trek to Nebraska. He received Ed Barrow’s seal of approval as one of his first “finds” debuted in baseball’s professional realm. “Fred Clarke played one of the outfield positions and from the start displayed a real knack for hitting the ball,” said Barrow. “My brother, George, caught for the Stars. I managed, and also tried to pitch, and played first base. Around 1892, Fred and George Barrow decided they were good enough for a try at pro ball, and landed in the old Nebraska State League. Fred made it, but my brother soon returned home and obtained what he thought would prove a steadier job.”²⁷

Clarke showed strong ability with the bat as he hit .302 during his brief time with the Hastings team. His play in the outfield was a bit suspect at times, though, leading the youngster to doubt his ability as a ball player. Clarke had made a smooth transition as a hitter, but he found that what

worked for him in the field as a Star or Mascot in Des Moines was not good enough to get the job done at the true professional level. The young player was concerned that this shortcoming could halt his baseball career before it had even started. "They put me in the outfield," stated Clarke, "and I was lucky to catch half of the drives hit to me. Looking back, I still wonder how a manager, even in a league way down in the sticks, could have put up with such a terrible outfielder. An old-timer told me I could improve by practice, so I went out to the field at 8 o'clock in the morning and practiced until game time in the afternoon. After a while, I got so I could catch fly balls pretty well."²⁸

Clarke's hard work and practice paid off as he honed his fielding skills every day. By summer, Clarke was a highly capable flycatcher who knew the nuances of the position so well that the youngster now made plays that he had been unable to execute at the beginning of the season. Unfortunately, the Nebraska State League folded in July and Clarke's baseball career in Hastings came to an abrupt end.²⁹ Because the season's sudden and unexpected end left him in a monetary bind, Clarke needed to ask a favor in order to get home. "The league blew up in July," Fred commented, "and when it did I had overdrawn my small salary by \$7. The manager told me if I would give him my personal note for \$15, he would give me a ticket home. After he got my signature on the note, he told me I could go to the hot place. Was I sore!"³⁰

In spite of the shortened season, Clarke had done a good job during his first year of professional baseball. Buoyed by this positive experience in 1892 and the belief in his own mind that he could make it as a baseball player, Clarke signed a contract to play for the Western Association's St. Joseph, Missouri, team in 1893. Joining him on the Saints was fellow Des Moines resident James "Ducky" Holmes.³¹ When the season began, Clarke found himself batting leadoff and playing left field for the Saints. His play was so impressive that it was not long before he received an offer to hook up with Montgomery of the Southern League.³² Clarke jumped at the opportunity to climb another notch on baseball's ladder. Future New York Giant pitcher Joe "Iron Man" McGinnity was already making a splash for Montgomery when Clarke was signed. Manager John McCloskey offered Fred \$100 in advance money when the former Saint reached Alabama. This brought great joy to Clarke. He remembered the sting of his financial status the previous summer in Hastings. As a precaution, Clarke put some of this newfound wealth in an account at a local Montgomery bank.³³

Manager McCloskey altered Clarke's responsibilities once the youngster joined the Colts. McCloskey decided to place him in the fourth spot of the batting order. Clarke didn't disappoint as he batted .292 in 32 games. The outfielder was still finding his way as a left fielder in the outer garden's confines.

Even though Clarke was a young man with a slender build, he had a cannon for an arm and showed better accuracy with his throws each game. He did commit five errors for the Colts, but he also threw out seven runners from left field that season.

Just as Clarke was finding his groove on the diamond, bad luck struck once again. This time it was a health epidemic in the city of Montgomery, which caused a league which he was playing in to disband for the second consecutive season.³⁴ To make matters worse, Clarke's prudent move of putting money in the bank when he arrived in Montgomery backfired:

When I landed in Montgomery, I received \$100 in advance on arrival, and put \$50 in the bank to be sure I would have a ticket home. While we were playing in New Orleans, yellow fever broke out in Montgomery. We started back, but were forced off the train in Mobile. Armed men were preventing anyone from going into Montgomery. We stayed in Mobile, and played there for ten days. When we finally were able to take a train for Montgomery, the train was not allowed to go into the station. However, a bus met us ten miles out of town. We got back on a Monday, only to find that the league had folded because of the yellow fever scare; and the bank in which I had deposited my \$50 home money had closed the preceding Saturday.³⁵

Clarke's luck took a turn for the better when St. Joseph's sent him train tickets with instructions to rejoin the Saints. He remained with the Western Association team until the season's close.³⁶ After the season, Clarke made a decision that almost altered the course of his life. Disgusted with the economic setbacks that were prevalent during his first two years as a professional baseball player, Clarke turned to something else he loved in an effort to achieve stability in his life.

On September 16, 1893, the Cherokee land strip in Oklahoma was opened for people who wished to file land claims in that area. Clarke was among the first group of people who arrived in Oklahoma to make the run by horseback, hoping to acquire a beautiful section of land in the untapped Oklahoma territory. Clarke's luck in this venture worked out no better than his misfortunes the past two years in baseball. Fred's mount was not fast enough and the youngster was beaten to the prime Cherokee real estate by other riders.³⁷ Clarke may have fared better if the horse's speed was comparable to that which Fred possessed in his nimble legs.

Had Clarke secured a claim during the run, it could have meant that he was through as a baseball player for the time being, since it would have been necessary for Clarke to remain in Oklahoma to establish the validity of his claim. Since the Iowa native had failed in this particular business enterprise, he could now turn his attention back to securing a spot on the baseball diamond in 1894.

The roller coaster of fate presented a positive ascension for Clarke in 1894 when the Southern League reorganized. John McCloskey, named to manage the Savannah Modocs, hadn't forgotten Clarke's stellar play during their time together in Montgomery. McCloskey asked Clarke to join him in Georgia.³⁸ Clarke picked up where he left off the previous season. He batted .311 in 54 games and continued to show off his rifle arm in left field. Clarke gunned down 14 reckless runners, an average of about one every four games.

Once again, the Southern League began to run into financial difficulties as the season reached midsummer. If things continued to go bad for the league, Clarke was looking at the prospect of having a third consecutive season cut short for reasons beyond his control. Savannah was in such dire financial straits that McCloskey didn't have the necessary money for train fare home after a series in Memphis.³⁹ It was here that fate finally favored Clarke.

While the Modocs were stranded in Memphis, the treasurer of Louisville's National League team was attending to business in the Tennessee city. Barney Dreyfuss was the Louisville ballclub's treasurer, who also scouted players. There was one player with Savannah who had made a favorable impression on Barney when he took in a few games between Memphis and Savannah.

At some point during his stay in Memphis, Dreyfuss had a discussion with the downtrodden McCloskey, who told Dreyfuss that the current road trip had been a disaster and the team was hemorrhaging red ink. When he explained to the Louisville treasurer that the Savannah team was without financial means to return home, Dreyfuss offered a solution that he believed was advantageous to both parties. "I'll try to help you Mac," said the sympathetic Dreyfuss. "You have a young outfielder named Clarke, who looks like he might develop into a good ball player. Now I'll pay the fare for your entire ball team from here to Savannah, if you are willing to turn this boy over to me."⁴⁰

McCloskey quickly agreed to this deal, and Dreyfuss bought Savannah's railroad tickets for about \$200.⁴¹ Clarke and pitcher Harrison Peppers headed to Louisville while the remainder of the Modocs returned home to Georgia. Clarke was guaranteed to receive a \$100 bonus if he reported to Louisville within five days.⁴² Dreyfuss was quite ecstatic that he was able to acquire Clarke only days after he had entered the outfielder's name into his little scouting dope book. Barney Dreyfuss later explained why he was so captivated by Clarke's play:

A young, thin, rawboned little fellow was playing left field for Savannah; going after everything in sight and hitting the Memphis pitcher, Wadsworth, out of the lot, but unfortunately for his team he seemed to be the only man who tried to and did play ball, the rest of the nine acting as if the ghost had not "walked" for some weeks. Suddenly the catcher of the Savannah team

became ill. No one else being on hand to do the windpad work the young left fielder came in and volunteered to do the backstop work, and he did it well, though three times he threw the ball into center field endeavoring to catch base runners, for the simple reason that infielders were too tired to cover the bag.⁴³

Clarke's hard work and perseverance had paid off, as his hustling and win-at-all-costs attitude left an immediate impression on Dreyfuss, whose Louisville squad was one of the National League's bottom feeders. The addition of dedicated players such as Clarke was bound to improve the listless team. Amazingly, he had made it to the big leagues without playing a full season for any minor league team. Clarke officially became a member of the Louisville Colonels on June 28, 1894. How far Clarke was ultimately destined to progress as a major league player would be answered in relatively quick fashion.