

2017

## Home Team

Robert F. Garratt

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>

---

Garratt, Robert F., "Home Team" (2017). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 386.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/386>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# HOME TEAM

[Buy the Book](#)



# HOME TEAM

The Turbulent History of the  
San Francisco Giants

ROBERT F. GARRATT

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN & LONDON

[Buy the Book](#)

© 2017 by Robert F. Garratt  
All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the United States of America



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Garratt, Robert F., author.

Title: Home team: the turbulent history of the San Francisco Giants / Robert F. Garratt.

Description: Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016031549 | ISBN 9780803286832 (cloth: alk. paper) | ISBN 9781496201232 (epub) | ISBN 9781496201249 (mobi) | ISBN 9781496201256 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: San Francisco Giants (Baseball team)—History. | Baseball—California—San Francisco—History. | New York Giants (Baseball team)—History. | Baseball—New York (State)—New York—History.

Classification: LCC GV875.S34 G27 2017 | DDC 796.357/640979461—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016031549>

Set in Minion by John Kloppng.

[Buy the Book](#)

For my grandchildren:

Leighton Mae, Hudson, and Aidan;

Madeline and Sofia;

Elliott and Olivia.

Touch all the bases  
and be safe at home!



# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations | ix

Preface | xi

## PART I. HORACE

1. Sunset in New York | 3
2. Dawning in the West | 11
3. Reinvention | 29
4. Scandalstick | 43
5. Perennial Bridesmaids | 61
6. A Perfect Storm | 73

## PART II. BOB

7. “Bobby Thomson Lives!” | 91
8. Learning Curve | 107
9. The Humm Babies: “You Gotta Like These Kids!” | 121
10. Vox Populi | 137

## PART III. PETER

11. “It’s Déjà Vu All Over Again” | 153
  12. The Improbable Dream | 173
- Epilogue: “The Home Team” | 191

Acknowledgments | 195

Author’s Note | 199

Notes | 201

Bibliography | 225

Index | 229



## ILLUSTRATIONS

*Following page 106*

1. Stoneham, O'Malley, and Congressman Emanuel Cellar
2. Crowd welcoming the Giants to San Francisco
3. Seals Stadium
4. Major League Baseball's first game on the West Coast
5. Builder Charles Harney welcomes Horace Stoneham to Candlestick Park.
6. Parking facility at Candlestick in 1960
7. Vice President Richard Nixon at the opening of Candlestick Park
8. The Giants were pioneers in recruiting and developing Latino players.
9. Juan Marichal with Alvin Dark and Stoneham
10. Willie Mays fights the wind on the basepath
11. A notorious moment in the Giants-Dodgers rivalry
12. Willie McCovey, Willie Mays, Orlando Cepeda, Juan Marichal, and Gaylord Perry
13. New owners Bob Lurie and Bud Herseth
14. Lurie hired Al Rosen and Roger Craig in September of 1985.
15. Roger Craig and the Humm Baby brand of baseball
16. Roger Craig and Al Rosen
17. The great tightrope walker Karl Wallenda traversing Candlestick Park
18. Crazy Crab, the legendary anti-mascot

19. The Loma Prieta earthquake caused massive destruction in the Bay Area
20. The Baker-Bonds era ushered in a new chapter in Giants baseball
21. Bonds and Jeff Kent were a devastating one-two punch in the batting order
22. The 1996 campaign for the new stadium
23. Giants officials were attentive to the progress of construction on the new ballpark
24. Peter Magowan and Larry Baer hold up headlines from the 1992 *San Francisco Examiner*
- 25–26. The proximity of the new ballpark to downtown and the San Francisco Bay
27. The Giants' opening game at PacBell Stadium, April 11, 2000

#### GRAPHS

1. Bay Area Baseball Attendance, 1960–1975 | 75
2. Total Wins: National League Western Division, 1986–1992 | 136

## PREFACE

The Giants' move from New York to San Francisco has been long overshadowed by an emphasis on the Dodgers and their colorful owner, Walter O'Malley, who masterminded his team's move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles the same year that the Giants came west. This book widens the focus on West Coast baseball to treat the story of the Giants' move in its own right, rather than as a footnote to the Dodgers' story. It also looks at the development of the Giants as a San Francisco team, forging its own history.

The Giants coming to San Francisco involved more than a change in location and an assumption of a new name; it also involved the cultivation of another identity, an important theme in their California story. For all the joy at the beginning of the move, this transition for the Giants was far from easy. Once they settled into their new home and the initial enthusiasm of the relocation had worn off, difficulties arose. After early successes with near misses at league pennants and a World Series championship, there were troubled times, both on the field and at the box office, when attendance slumped so badly that the team almost left town, not once but twice. These periods of ups and downs over the years were indicative of a team struggling with its connection to the city. The story concludes happily, however. The ball club's fortunes improved dramatically with a move to a new baseball park at the turn of the century; the Giants grew into a stable franchise and became an integral part of the city's cultural life.

This version of the Giants' story develops in the form of a biography, not of a human subject but of a team, following a traditional biographical pattern with emphases on the phases of a life: begin-

nings, with early growing pains; then adolescent-like problems; then adulthood, with certain mid-life crises; and, finally, ending with maturity, an established and comfortable identity. The focus is chiefly on owners, managing partners, team administrators and officials, city politicians, journalists, and individuals behind the scenes, in the background of the game itself, who played an important role, not only in bringing the team from New York to California but also in keeping the team in San Francisco when it appeared that certain conditions might drive the ball club away. These people were part of the business of baseball in the city, running the ball club, coordinating events related to baseball and, especially, dealing with the important and difficult issues about where the team will play and in cultivating the team's relations with the community.

Most of the contemporary writing on the Giants concentrates on their time in AT&T Park, where they won world championships in 2010, 2012, and 2014 and have drawn fans at an extraordinary rate. According to national journals such as *Forbes* and business websites such as bizjournals.com, the Giants rank in the top five Major League Baseball franchises for profitability, team worth, success on the field, and overall stability. A good example of that stability can be seen in the smooth succession of recent corporate management. When Peter Magowan retired in 2008, Bill Neukom became chief managing partner; and then in 2012, when Neukom left, Larry Baer became the chief executive of the franchise. During this period of change, the ball club has remained not just efficient and secure but also phenomenally successful.

While all of the attention given to the recent success is both relevant and appropriate to the story of the Giants in San Francisco, it is not the primary focus here. This story goes back to the beginning of the move west, to feature both the Giants' early years in a new city and their gradual development there over four or five decades, in both rough times and smooth, the years that serve as the bedrock for the ball club's recent achievements and triumphs, both on the balance sheet and the field of play.

# I

## HORACE

*In late October of 1954, Horace Stoneham, longtime owner of the New York Giants, was on top of the baseball world and, more important to Stoneham at least, his team was finally the toast of the town, eclipsing both the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Yankees. The Giants had just swept the mighty Cleveland Indians to win the World Series. The Indians, winners of 111 games that year, were heavy favorites, bolstered by a formidable pitching staff with twenty-game winners Early Wynn and Bob Lemon and a great offense anchored by American League batting champion Bobby Avila and power hitters Larry Doby and Al Rosen. But the Giants felt the magic and shocked the baseball world. The Series turned on Willie Mays's famous over-the-shoulder catch in game one, and the Giants never looked back. Defense, speed, timely hitting, and an uncanny knack for substitution in manager Leo Durocher's use of pinch hitter Dusty Rhodes were all too much for Cleveland.*

*The future seemed bright indeed, and thoughts of returning the Giants to their pre-World War II eminence in the National League danced in Stoneham's head. He had a young superstar in Mays, a solid if not outstanding pitching staff, a brilliant and feisty manager in Durocher, and, more critical for Stoneham, an enthusiastic fan base. The Giants drew 1,155,067 for home games during the 1954 season, more than they had in five years. With such a result and so much promise, Stoneham was poised for a great run. Happy days seemed here again.*

*The baseball gods are fickle and cruel, however. The Giants' perch*

*atop the heights of New York's sporting world would be momentary, and their reign as world champions brief, lasting only one season. They would not enjoy such glory for another fifty-six years, and in a likeness and at a location that could not have been even remotely imagined by mid-1950s New Yorkers.*

ONE

## Sunset in New York

By the summer of 1955, Horace Stoneham began to sense the dire circumstances of playing baseball in the Polo Grounds. A true Manhattanite with genuine affection for the city and the urban life it offered, he had been willfully blind to the growing number of empty seats in his ballpark in the hopes that the Giants might catch fire and climb back into the National League pennant race. Stoneham's connection to New York was not just as a lifelong resident but also through baseball. Born in New Jersey, he moved with his parents to Manhattan as a young boy and except for a few years in boarding schools such as Hun and Pawling and a six-month stint working out west as a twenty-year-old, he spent his entire life in the city. His father, Charles A. Stoneham, bought the Giants in 1919. Soon thereafter young Horace began lifelong employment with the ball club, beginning in 1924 with ticket sales, gradually moving to field operations, travel arrangements, and eventually working his way into the front office in the early 1930s. He learned the operations of player personnel, salaries, and trades from his father, from John McGraw, a fellow owner and manager of the ball club, and from Bill Terry, who would succeed McGraw as team manager in 1932. When Charles Stoneham died suddenly in January 1936, Horace, now almost thirty-three years of age, became the youngest baseball owner in National League history. Given his family connection, Horace always felt that his ball club was an integral part of New York history. This assumption made the present circumstances of so many empty seats in the ancient Polo Grounds particularly troubling in a deeply personal sense.

Against that foreboding, Stoneham applied a strong sentimental

feeling for New York, hoping that the previous year's championship season might signal the beginning of a shift for his club, in both on-field success and increased interest among fans. His thinking was not unreasonable or far-fetched. The Giants' 1955 roster was nearly identical to that of his World Series winners. With a team led by Leo Durocher and Willie Mays, lightning might indeed strike twice; the Giants could win another pennant. Baseball is a game of streaks and rushes; the 1951 team overcame an apparently all-but-insurmountable Dodgers lead to win the pennant dramatically.

But Stoneham waited in vain; the momentum of the Giants' championship season did not carry over and 1955 remained a big disappointment both on the field and in the stands. Part of the Giants' fate was due to fortune and the shifting ways of baseball history. It turned out that 1955 was Brooklyn's year. The Dodgers ran away with the pennant. The Giants would finish a distant third in the National League, eighteen and a half games behind their archrivals, despite a winning record of 80-74. It was their plight that year to contend with what many called the greatest Dodgers club of all time, whose players finally gelled to bring down the formidable Yankees in the World Series and produce Brooklyn's only championship.

But Stoneham sensed something far more ominous that season in the Giants' third-place finish and dwindling gate receipts. He began to realize that his location, the aging Polo Grounds, was a great liability, dimming opportunities for his beloved club in New York City. Giants attendance for the 1955 season would total 824,000, down considerably from the 1,155,067 of the previous year's championship season. Although Stoneham could seek some solace in baseball's overall numbers—the mid-1950s attendance throughout baseball was down almost 40 percent from an all-time postwar high in 1948—he could not deny the blunt fact that his New York Giants suffered the greatest slide among National League clubs despite playing in its largest market. In 1955 only the small-market teams of Pittsburgh and Cincinnati drew fewer fans.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, Stoneham could no longer ignore the fact that his attendance problems went beyond his team's wins and losses. He under-

stood that where the Giants played had as much to do with the club's present circumstances as how they played. It dawned on him that despite its tradition and history, the Polo Grounds, both as a facility and a location, was past its prime. A dilapidated stadium situated in what many considered a deteriorating neighborhood, the Polo Grounds would require major renovations to bring it up to the standards of the day. One of the oldest parks in baseball, it predated even Ebbets Field and was showing its age in seating, fan facilities, façade, and pedestrian traffic, especially the egress, when after a game the crowd would pour onto the playing field to exit through the center field gates.<sup>2</sup> Repairs and remodeling would be costly if Stoneham wanted to improve fan comfort, and these expenses would cut into his already dwindling bottom line. The stadium's famous horseshoe design, part of its charm, posed financial difficulties for Stoneham as well, severely restricting the number of premium box seats he could offer. Many of the so-called "infield" box seats were far away from home plate and the baselines, putting fans at a distance from infield action.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the general admission seats were wrapped around the outfield. Those fans that sat above the bullpens in left and right fields were 450 feet away, and those in the center field bleachers were 460-plus feet from home plate.<sup>4</sup>

Repairs and renovation of the ballpark, however necessary, were only part of Stoneham's stadium woes. Even more troubling was the changing nature of the neighborhood surrounding the park. In the late 1940s, a number of housing projects were planned for Harlem, the first of which was Colonial Park, which opened in 1950 opposite the Polo Grounds. By the mid-1950s the perception among middle-class white fans that the area around the park was becoming dangerous made a trip to the ballpark seem like a risky affair. Stoneham believed fans might feel safer if they could drive to the ballpark. Though he spent the majority of his life in Manhattan, with its extensive and reliable transportation system, including its famous subways, Stoneham sensed that future American life would be shaped and determined by the automobile. He watched postwar automobile production and sales boom, in large part to meet the needs of young families leav-

ing the cities for the suburbs with their promise of affordable housing, convenient shopping centers, and new schools.

The movement that came to be designated “white flight,” characterized by the largely white middle classes leaving their ethnically mixed urban neighbors, was most pronounced in northeastern cities such as Cleveland, Philadelphia, Detroit, and especially New York, where there was a great shift from the city’s boroughs to Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut.<sup>5</sup> Knowing that these young families would come into the city with their cars for shopping and entertainment, Stoneham fretted more over the Polo Grounds’ lack of parking than he did about the ballpark’s aging facilities.<sup>6</sup> It was becoming clear to him that regardless of the quality of the team he put on the field, attendance would continue to dwindle unless fans had a convenient way to come to the ballpark in their cars. Nowhere in the environs of the Polo Grounds was there space to develop parking.

The shift in postwar baseball attendance was also affected by a burgeoning television industry, whose meteoric growth in the 1950s would change American culture. More and more Americans were buying television sets and staying home for their entertainment, sending shock waves through giant industries such as American cinema, Broadway theater, opera companies, symphony orchestras, radio, and professional sports. Naturally, baseball owners like Stoneham, Walter O’Malley of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Dan Topping and Del Webb of the New York Yankees were terrified by what they imagined might be the consequences of the success of this new medium, and they scrambled to adjust. Like Stoneham, O’Malley was aware of his own problems in Ebbets Field, another aging ballpark, and was hypersensitive to attendance figures. Stoneham and Topping huddled to see about limiting the televising of home games. They also approached O’Malley about the problem.<sup>7</sup> The three clubs had been televising a selection of home games from the early 1950s, but they were unclear about the practice’s effect on home attendance. Indeed, the jury was out even in the commissioner’s office on whether television increased or hindered interest in seeing live baseball.<sup>8</sup> Though he held a fear about the place of television in the game, Stoneham certainly prof-

ited short-term from the Giants games that were broadcast; television revenue allowed him to post a profit even with sagging home attendance.<sup>9</sup> But Stoneham and O'Malley knew that television deals would only buy them a little time while they sorted out their respective stadium woes.

At the end of the 1955 season, with all of these concerns troubling his daily operations of the team, Stoneham began to weigh his options on the future of Giants baseball in New York. One idea surfaced as a reversal of history and gave him some hope that he might remain in the city. Recalling that the Giants were landlords to the Yankees in the early years of his father's ownership, he pondered playing his home games at Yankee Stadium in the role of tenant. In his characteristic style of diffidence, reticence and, some would say, cunning, he approached Yankees owners Del Webb and Dan Topping indirectly, first through some offhanded remarks at an owners meeting in winter of 1955. He floated a vague idea of tenancy and told Topping that he would get back to him in the near future. Stoneham never followed up on his suggestion, however, and the two owners never met face to face to discuss the possibility. The primary contact between the Giants and the Yankees was conducted through a third party, the New York sportswriters, essentially orchestrated by Stoneham, who, through hints and intimations during interviews, set in motion the Giants' tenancy idea as a solution to his problems with the Polo Grounds. The rumors about the Giants playing in Yankee Stadium persisted for three years. Eventually the sportswriters bristled at their own role in the stadium wars. At one of the rare Giants owner's press conferences, one writer asked bluntly whether Stoneham would simply pick up the phone and call Topping or Webb directly.<sup>10</sup>

Stoneham also had another card up his sleeve in the form of an idea for a new ballpark to be built and shared by both the Giants and the Yankees. The idea was more of a pipe dream, doomed from the start since it required public financing that the city could not provide and cooperation from the Yankees, who were happy in their

present location. In his characteristic taciturn manner, Stoneham would be vague about details, hinting about the project in nebulous remarks.<sup>11</sup> During the late spring and summer of 1956, he also entertained what was surely the most far-fetched and elaborate scheme for a ballpark, even one intended for the Giants.<sup>12</sup> The notion, put forth by Manhattan city politician Hulan Jack, was to build a one-hundred-thousand-capacity stadium to rise above the New York Central's West Side railway location that would also provide parking for about twenty thousand cars. Jack argued that he had planners and investors to advance the project and thereby keep the Giants in Manhattan. Stoneham is on record as showing interest, meeting with Jack and his committee but expressing his characteristic caution.<sup>13</sup> As the costs estimates for the project continued to rise, the city's enthusiasm fell and the railway company remained distant; plans for the so-called "stadium on stilts" faded away.<sup>14</sup>

These suggestions about Stoneham's solutions to the Giants' ballpark woes were always devoid of particulars and served as diversionary tactics, allowing him to play a waiting game and consider his alternatives and a course of action. Stoneham gave no public indication of real concern, and certainly none of panic; it was business as usual for the New York Giants. He simply behaved publicly as he always had done, generous to a fault, providing hospitality for sportswriters and standing rounds at Toots Shor's famous Manhattan saloon, which catered to New York sports celebrities, bantering hopefully about his ball club. He could be as enigmatic as the best of them, almost as inscrutable as his friendly rival and fellow owner across the river, Walter O'Malley, whose reputation for fogging a press conference was legendary. With rumors flying about the Giants moving out of the Polo Grounds, and even out of the city, Stoneham would calmly dismiss everything as speculation, saying he had a lease with the Cooogan family and he planned to be in New York for "years to come."<sup>15</sup>

At the same time he insisted that the Giants would stay put in New York and were committed long term to the Polo Grounds, he began entertaining a radical idea, something that just two years before would have been unthinkable. He gave serious consideration to moving the

team out of New York. His first thoughts were to plan simply, minimize complications, keep costs manageable, and hold his cards close to his vest. Stoneham was well aware of the astounding success at the turnstiles of the Milwaukee Braves, leading the National League in attendance every year since their move from Boston when, in their last year there (1952), they drew a miserable 281,279.<sup>16</sup> That the Braves' change of fortune came once they moved to a new city with an excited fan base was not lost on Stoneham. In early 1956, he knew he could not remain much longer in his present location. Minneapolis, home to his Triple-A farm team, the Millers, and a major midwestern city, seemed a very attractive option.<sup>17</sup>

As a Giants franchise, the Minneapolis Millers granted Stoneham rights to the city's territory. With the recently transplanted Braves nearby in Milwaukee, and with St. Louis and Chicago as Midwest neighbors, there would be no travel objections from other National League owners. Minneapolis officials were eager to please Stoneham and approved plans for a new stadium that would offer plenty of parking.<sup>18</sup> Stoneham and Chub Feeney, Stoneham's nephew and second in command of Giants operations, had visited Minneapolis off and on over the past few years to check on the Millers, had built good relations with the city's planning commission, and felt comfortable with the designs for the new ballpark, which could be expanded for Major League crowds. They went so far as to contact a steel company for a reconstruction of the Millers' present park to improve seating capacity, an interim arrangement until the new park would be ready.<sup>19</sup> The move to Minneapolis, welcomed by the locals, with minimal disruption to the league, appeared to provide a soft landing for the Giants' flight from New York.

But as he contemplated his move to the Midwest, Stoneham did so in his customary wary and discreet manner. Making up his mind to move and selecting a date to do so were two very different undertakings for Stoneham. With his lease with the Coogan family for the Polo Grounds securely in hand, he could afford to sit back and let the action come to him. Whenever he was asked about the Giants' future, he responded as the loyal son he was, suggesting that things

might work out somehow and the Giants could be in New York for a long time to come. Even with his awareness of the problems with the Polo Grounds, Stoneham was not quite ready to establish a deadline, nor to go public with any decision. Admitting to O'Malley in a confidential, informal conversation in March 1957 that he had made up his mind to move to Minneapolis, he did not feel an overwhelming urge for any public pronouncement just yet.<sup>20</sup> His waiting game would prove momentous. In the late spring of that year, he would be lobbied by three different parties, each of them urging him to expand his horizons westward another two thousand miles to consider San Francisco and the lucrative California market.