



LAUREL STARS
1948



WHEN THE STARS CAME OUT

*Black ballplayers
from segregation's twilight
recall hometown team*

BY DAVID DRIVER

Daniel Carter Jr. was just 15 years old when he joined the Laurel Stars.

At the time — 1953 — he was the youngest player on the team, and in his first game the Laurel manager asked him if he could get a hit against the opposing pitcher.

"Yes, I can," Carter told the manager.

"Then grab a bat," the Laurel skipper replied. Carter came up to bat with the bases loaded, and hit a home run on the first pitch.

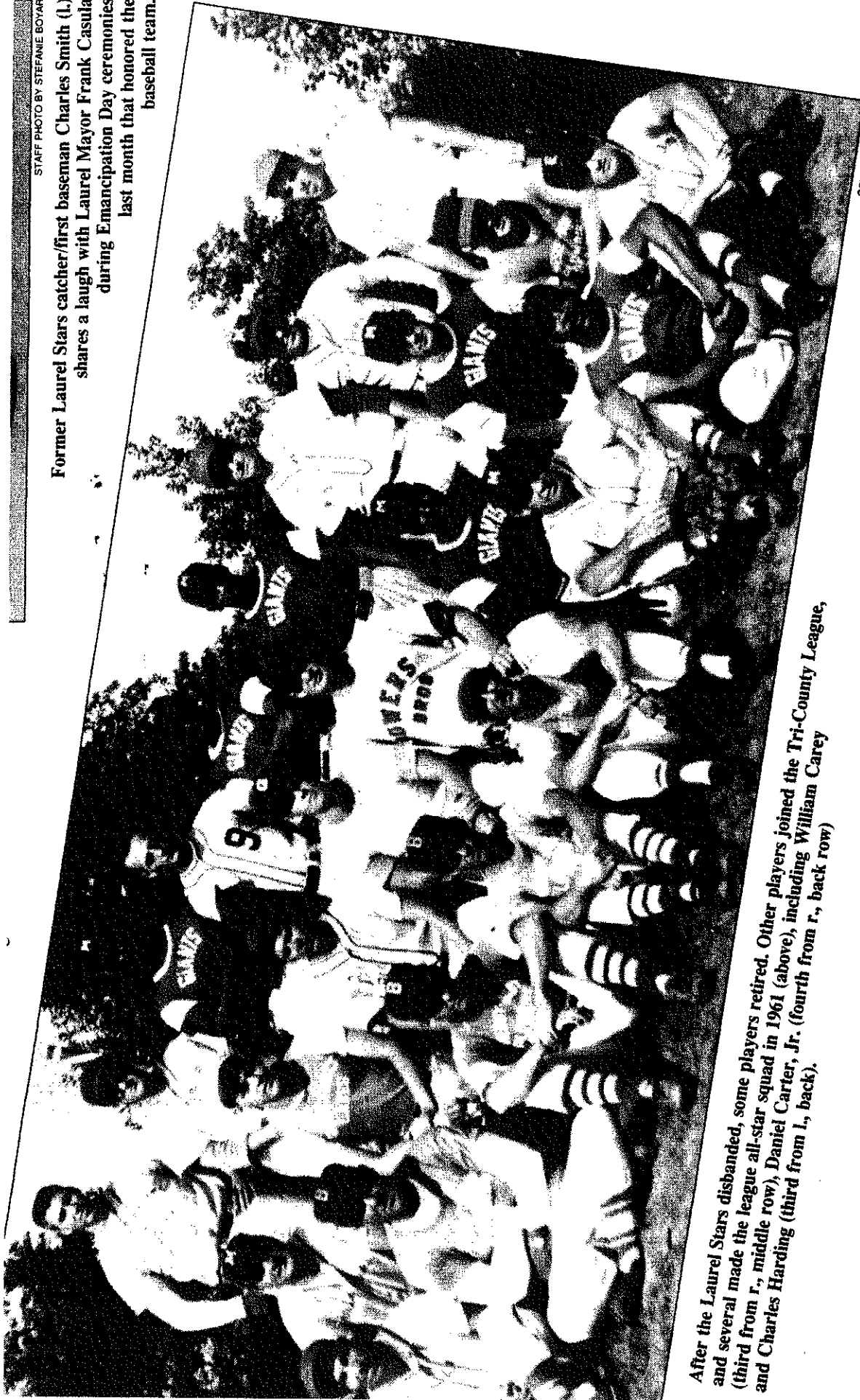
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STAFF PHOTO BY STEFANIE BOYAR

Former Laurel Stars outfielder Phillip Reese, 61, had another day in the sun in the early 1960s, when he played in the minor leagues with the Cleveland Indians.

STAFF PHOTO BY STEFANIE BOYAR

Former Laurel Stars catcher/first baseman Charles Smith (l.) shares a laugh with Laurel Mayor Frank Casula during Emancipation Day ceremonies last month that honored the baseball team.



COURTESY PHOTO

After the Laurel Stars disbanded, some players retired. Other players joined the Tri-County League, and several made the league all-star squad in 1961 (above), including William Carey (third from r., middle row), Daniel Carter, Jr. (fourth from r., back row) and Charles Harding (third from l., back).

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HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

The Laurel Stars would play teams from surrounding Maryland towns and sometimes travel to Virginia, Pennsylvania and Delaware. "Almost all the small towns had a baseball team," says former pitcher Cornelius Carter (no relation to Daniel), wearing a Baltimore Orioles' hat at the recent Emancipation Day ceremonies.

Carter remembers playing at the minor league stadium in York, Pa., against another all-black team.

Since the Stars did not make their living in baseball, and most had full-time jobs and families to tend to during the week, they held most of their games on Saturdays and Sundays.

According to "The Ramblings of a Baseball Story Never Told," the result of recent interviews with the players done by William Aleshire of Bowie, the Stars' home diamond was surrounded by oak trees between present-day Seventh and Eighth streets and bounded by Gorman and Talbot avenues.

"Left field would cut through the present-day site of the Stanley Memorial Library, second base was on Seventh Street and the first-base line would cut through Seventh Street," writes Aleshire, whose wife, Clara, works at the Laurel library as the head of the children's section.

Carey says that left field was on a slope, and that a big tree was in center field. The infield was all dirt, with a grass outfield.

"All you had to do was drag (the infield) and it was ready to play," says Carey, wearing a New York Black Yankees' hat. "All of us (players) would take care of the field."

Carey, since 1958, has owned a building that sits near where the field once stood. He says that when the Stars played at home during his playing days it cost only about \$1 for fans to attend.

Members of the Stars say about 200 or 300 fans would come to games during the summer, and the crowd would swell to around 1,000 for the annual Emancipation Day game against other all-African-American local teams.

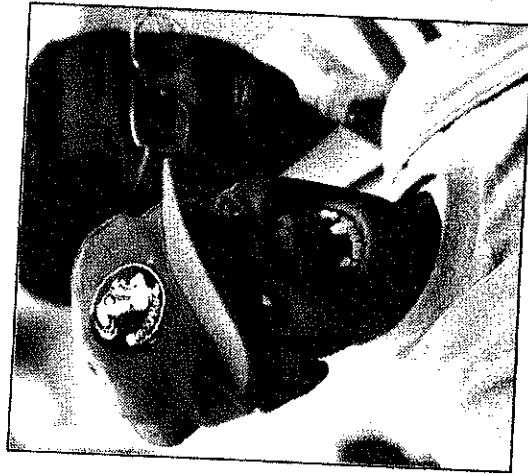
Speaking to the audience about the Stars and other, more notable baseball pioneers, the sixth-grader said, "We thank them because they have given other children a chance to play. We thank Jackie Robinson for breaking the color barrier. We now have a chance to play professional baseball."

Marcus, when he made his short speech, was standing just a fly ball away from where the Stars played decades ago.

Meanwhile, the men to whom the boy addressed his gratitude, now in their 60s and 70s, must have thought back to their own youth.

Because on Emancipation Day, celebrated here for years on the first Saturday of September, was when the Stars drew their largest crowd every season.

In those days, a boy such as Marcus might have sat in the crowd dreaming of the day he could play for the Stars.



STAFF PHOTO BY STEFANIE BOYAR

During his days with the Stars, Lawrence Thompson, 63, was known as 'Bugs.' He played nearly every position.

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While a few of the local players were of professional caliber — one played in the minors for the Cleveland Indians — it was not the promise of money or fame that motivated the Stars.

"It was a community team (that drew players) from a 10-mile radius," former player and manager Carlton Moore, 71, said during ceremonies Sept. 6 at Emancipation Park that honored the team. "We all played together as a team."

Moore, a team organizer, has noted how much he learned about the game while playing against other strong squads.

Charles Smith, 71, a Laurel native who was a catcher/first baseman for the Stars from 1942 to 1960, recalls "the comradeship with other guys you met" while playing.

"My best memory? We had a good team, I know that," says former pitcher Joseph Watkins, 75, who played with the Stars from 1942 to 1951.

The Stars finished well above .500 nearly every season.

William Carey, 68, who played with the Stars from 1948 to 1960, said that when the Laurel team played at home "it was a real community event. You loved the game. You just played (for what) you could get out of it."

The Laurel Stars played their home games near the site where Emancipation Park and the Stanley Memorial Library now stand.

RECEIVING THEIR DUE

During Emancipation Day ceremonies this year, youth baseball standout Marcus Noel hit a home run without stepping into the batter's box.

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Games on Sunday would be church let out.

The Laurel Stars, according to research, lost their home field where it was built through Laurel.

The Stars then moved their Simpsonville in Howard County Harriet Tubman High School. The owner of the land began to warn) houses on the site, moved again to the home of Giants, an all-black team which was off Route 1 south of Laurel.

By the end of that season many Stars retired, or joined other of which had integrated. Some joined the Tri-State League, which lasted mid-1970s.

MAKING THEIR

While none of the Stars played major leagues, some did distinguish themselves in higher levels of play.

Carey played baseball in the early 1950s. One of his teammates was Don Newcombe, a pitcher and first blacks in the major leagues. Carey also played against Famer Willie Mays in a tournament in Virginia.

Phillip Reese, 61, probably the closest of any Laurel Star to major leagues. He played with the Stars in 1959-60, and was scouted by a farm club of the Cleveland Indians.

Reese went to spring training in Arizona with the Indians in 1960. Among the standouts for Cleveland that year was pitcher Jim "Mud" Howser, who later managed the Royals to the World Series.

While in spring training, Reese saw such players as Mays, and the Alou brothers, Jesus, Ma and the latter of whom is now the Montreal Expos.

COVER STORY

Members of the Laurel Stars baseball team gather for a team photo, circa 1946, at the home field of the Stars, which was located near the present site of the Stanley Memorial Library.

COURTESY PHOTO



Games on Sunday would be played after church let out.

The Laurel Stars, according to Aleshire's research, lost their home field when Route 198 was built through Laurel.

The Stars then moved their home field to Simpsonville in Howard County in 1960, near Harriet Tubman High School. Soon after that the owner of the land began to build (without warning) houses on the site, and the Stars moved again to the home of the Muirkirk Giants, an all-black team whose home field was off Route 1 south of Laurel.

By the end of that season many of the Laurel Stars retired, or joined other teams, many of which had integrated. Some joined teams in the Tri-State League, which lasted until the mid-1970s.

HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

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"Almost all the small towns had a baseball team," says former pitcher Cornelius Carter (no relation to Daniel), wearing a Baltimore Orioles' hat at the recent Emancipation Day ceremonies.

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"I'll never forget that," says Carter.

Carter says that by the time he circled the bases, his teammates had placed dollar bills on home plate. Carter walked past the money and to the team's bench, where he was told the money was for him.

"For me? Good gosh," recalls Laurel resident Carter, who went back and collected what he estimates was about \$15 from his debut with the Stars more than four decades ago.

Carter, 58, played with the Stars, an all-African-American team, until 1960, and also played with the Baltimore Elite Giants of the professional Negro League in 1959. He also played with the Murrkirk Giants and the Glenarden Braves, but it was with the Stars that Carter began his baseball career.

The Stars, an amateur team that played here from the 1920s to the early 1960s, performed during an era when opportunities to perform in the white minor and major leagues were at first non-existent and later limited.

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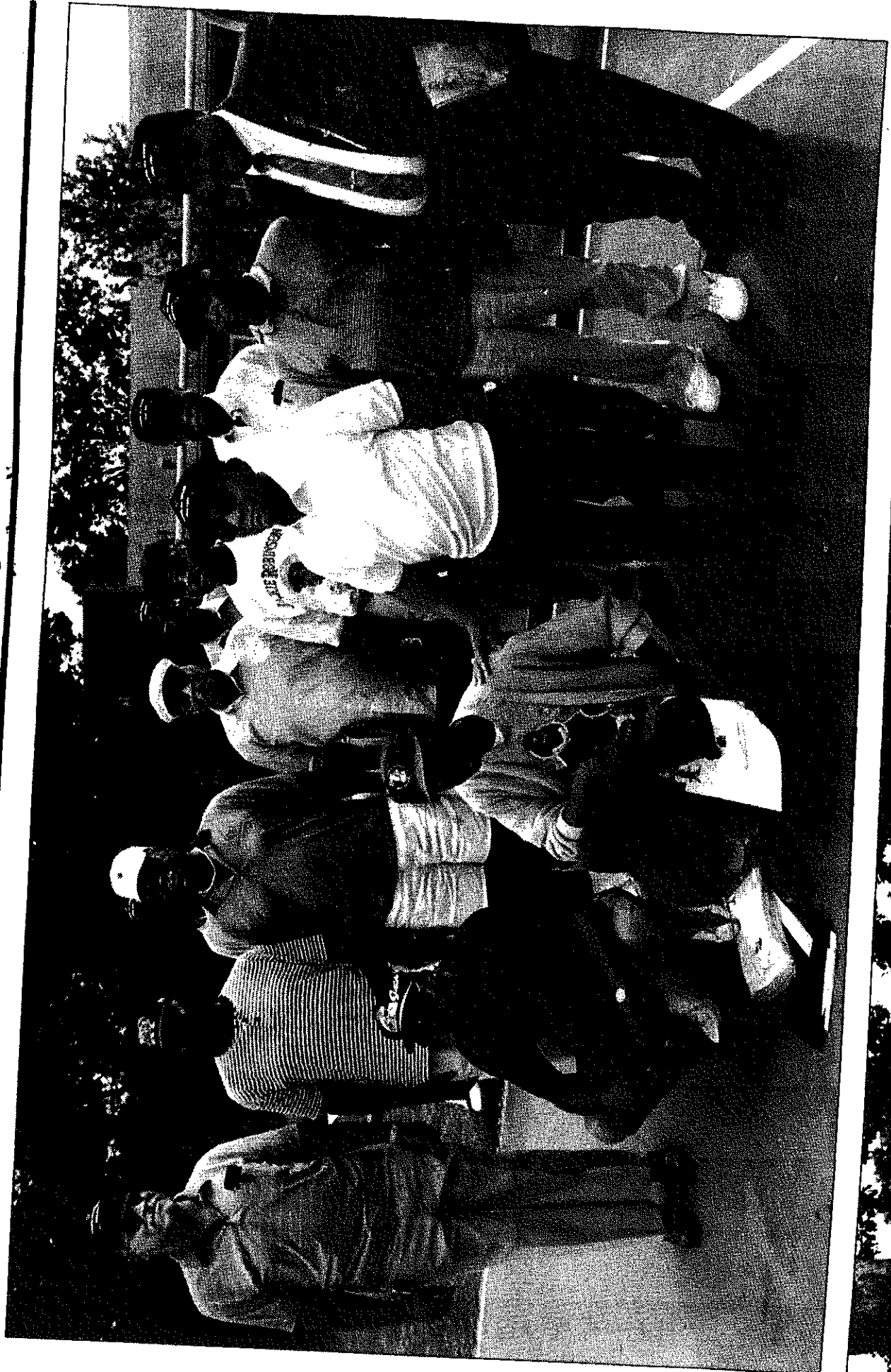


STAFF PHOTOS BY STEFANIE BOYAR

All but one living member of the Laurel Stars (top), an all-African American team that played here from the 1920s to the 1960s, was on hand last month when the team was honored during Emancipation Day ceremonies. Also present was William Aleshire (r.), who along with former Stars' player and Carlton Moore (next to Aleshire) helped track down the players for interviews. One of the former Stars is William Carey (above), 68, who played with the team from 1948 to 1960. Carey, since the 1950s, has owned a building near where the Stars once played.

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COVER STORY



WHEN THE

Reese played a year in the minors and got a bonus of \$2,300 from the Indians in 1963 before he returned home. But the Laurel resident, who like many of the Stars attended elementary and high school here, has no regrets from his brush with the big time. "It was great," says Reese.

Many of the Stars came in contact with the major leagues when they once played a team from Fort Meade that featured outfielder Jim Lemon, who played several years in the majors and was also a manager.

Even during an era of segregation, legal or otherwise, the Stars would sometimes play all-white teams, such as one from Fort Meade and another from Savage.

"The baseball team in Laurel never had any racial incidents that I can remember," says Cornelius Carter.

The team would travel to away games in several cars owned by players, and occasionally they would take a bus through an independent actor.

Most of their games were played during the moon, though some road games were played at night. The Stars' uniforms were made of wool, and Cornelius Carter can remember pitching on some very hot days.

While some may be turned off by the game today, not Watkins. "I love it," he says.

"But I don't like the Orioles. My team is Seattle." But some can only dream of what might have happened if they had come along a generation later.

"The only thing I regret is I never had a chance to make that money," Carter, the former Stars pitcher, says with a grin.

A STORY NOW TOLD

The story of the Stars may have gone untold without William Aleshire, who with Moore's help located 17 living former Stars.

All of them, except one, were on hand last month when they were recognized at Emancipation Park and in the parade that followed. The only former living player not present was James Carroll, a Bowie resident who was born in Laurel in 1913 and played for the Stars from 1928 to 1934.

Other members present were: Milton Mack, Carlton Moore, Robert Lee Moore, Charles Smith, Vernon Smith, Joseph Watkins, Cornelius Carter, George Gibson, William Carey, Howard Reese, Lawrence Thompson, Harold Awkard, Thomas Miller, Daniel Carter, Jr., Charles Harding and Phillip Reese.

"It has been a great pleasure that someone came forward to recognize us," Smith said after the ceremony.

"This is the first time we have ever been recognized as a team," said Carey.

Nearly six decades after the Stars began, the players finally got their day in the sun, and young players like Marcus Noel have had a glimpse of their long shadows.



STAFF PHOTO BY STEFANIE BOTAR

Former Laurel Stars catcher/first baseman Charles Smith (l.) shares a laugh with Laurel Mayor Frank Casula during Emancipation Day ceremonies last month that honored the baseball team.

