



Ring Lardner gets yet another honor – Chicago Literary HOF membership

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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Ring Lardner was far more than the cynical character, portrayed by “Eight Men Out” director John Sayles, serenading the 1919 Black Sox in a railroad car with “I’m Forever Blowing Ballgames,” a parody on the day’s popular “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles” melody.

“A lot of people now, if they know him at all, think of Lardner as a baseball writer,” said Don Evans, executive director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. “But he had a diverse body of work. Lardner was a very important and influential short-story writer. Ernest Hemingway and a lot of great writers thought of him very highly as a literary figure. He was a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and a leading-edge humorist.

The second author of the *Chicago Tribune’s* lead “In the Wake of the News” sports column that continues to this day under David Haugh, Lardner corralled platoons of well-deserved honors in his relatively short life. But the hits keep on coming. Eighty-four years after his death in 1933, he will be inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame on May 4, at the Newberry Library’s Ruggles Hall, 90 W. Walton St. in Chicago’s Gold Coast neighborhood.

The Chicago Baseball Museum is one of the event’s sponsors along with the Literary Hall of Fame, Newberry Library, The Guild Literary Complex, Chicago Writers Association, Society for American Baseball Research -- Emil Rothe Chicago Chapter and Bardball.

A reception with drinks, snacks and desserts will kick off the festivities at 5 p.m. as well as viewing of the highlights of the Ring Lardner Papers. Newberry Library officials will pull together some of the more relevant and interesting pieces of that collections.

The induction ceremony will run from 6 to 7:15 p.m. Ron Rapoport, former *Chicago Sun-Times* sports columnist and editor of the newly released *The Lost Journalism of*



Ring Lardner in familiar pose with straw skimmer, cigarette and manual typewriter to bang out another column.

Ring Lardner, will give the keynote address. James Lardner (*The Nation*) will accept the statue on his grandfather's behalf. Susan Lardner and David Lardner, two other grandchildren, and great grandson David Lardner also will be on hand.

Other speakers will include ESPN writer Christina Kahrl, former *Tribune* sportswriter Fred Mitchell, Cubs tour guide Brian Bernardoni, author Don De Grazia and Baseball editor James Finn Garner.

"We'll do a pretty good job exploring Lardner," Evans said.

Just as he did chronicling life in the early 20th century, Lardner is enjoying good timing. The Literary Hall of Fame has typically inducted six writers in each of the years since the first ceremony in 2010. The likes of Mike Royko, Ben Hecht, Carl Sandburg and Gwendolyn Brooks were in the first class.

However, Evans and Co. have changed the format to give each of the 2017 inductees more credit via their own, separate ceremony. Fellow inductees Roger Ebert and Eugene Field certainly merit a dedicated event due to their lifetime achievements.

"You can't have a 10-hour ceremony," Evans said. "Before, each writer had 15 minutes. Now, we'll be able to honor each of the inductees for the better part of 90 minutes."

Growing up in an affluent family in Niles, Mich., three hours from Chicago in his day, Ring Lardner thought of himself primarily as a sports writer, though many of his generation's best writers considered him one of the finest short story writers.

Hemingway, writing for his Oak Park High School newspaper, even used the pen name "Ring Lardner, Jr." in several parodies of Lardner's style, which employed the slang of common characters.

Lardner went to Chicago's Armour Institute to study engineering, but failed every class except rhetoric. Lardner returned to Chicago in 1907 to work on several newspapers, and started to earn a reputation as one of the smartest, funniest and most insightful baseball writers of his day. He returned to the *Chicago Tribune* in 1913 to write the syndicated "In the Wake of the News," which expanded his repertoire beyond sports. He wrote the column seven days a week – a total of more than 1,600 columns -- until 1919.

Black Sox shook Lardner

The Black Sox Scandal shook Lardner to his core. He had been close to White Sox players and officials. Although he did not write about the scandal as it transpired, he reportedly never viewed baseball in the same positive light.

In "Eight Men Out," Lardner is portrayed as inseparable from *Chicago Tribune* writer Hugh Fullerton, played by Studs Terkel. The two are shown to be suspicious of the Sox's actions early on in the 1919 World Series. But the actual details of the scandal did



Don Evans of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame is promoting separate ceremonies for each inductee.

not formally leak out in the media of the day until an attempt to fix a Cubs-Phillies game late in the 1920 season was exposed. The attention of a Cook County grand jury quickly shifted to the long-rumored World Series fix.

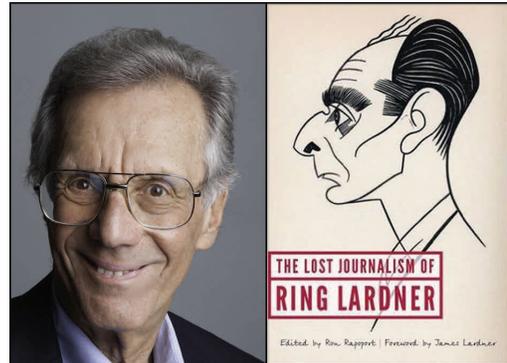
During this time, Lardner began selling baseball stories to *The Saturday Evening Post*, and those stories were eventually collected into his first major work, an epistolary novel called *You Know Me, Al*, which centered around the travails of minor league pitcher Jack Keefe.

Though Lardner is known for his baseball stories, only about a third of his 130 short stories were written on the subject. He also explored subjects such as marriage and the theater, and wrote a series of plays, the most successful being *June Moon*, a musical comedy for which he also wrote songs.

His comic sketches appeared in Ziegfeld Follies, including one in which Will Rogers played a veteran pitcher. His best known collections include *Treat 'Em Rough*, *The Big Town*, *How to Write Short Stories*, *Haircut* and *Roundup*. His biographer, Donald Elder, called Lardner the “most ferocious satirist since Swift.” In 1990, his name was engraved on the frieze of the Illinois State Library alongside other great Illinois literary figures.

Rapoport will also be the honored guest at a special Cliff Dwellers luncheon on May 4. A buffet lunch will be served at noon, and around 1 p.m. Rapoport will deliver a talk about Ring Lardner’s legendary literary and journalistic career. Volumes Bookcafé will be on hand to sell his new book, which the University of Nebraska Press is releasing later this month.

Rapoport will sign copies of the book at the conclusion of his talk. The price for the luncheon and program is \$30. Reservations are required, and can be made by emailing reservations@cliff-chicago.org, or calling 312/922-8080.



Ron Rapoport, who knows a thing or two about sports columns, compiled a book (right) on Ring Lardner.