



Cash-strapped White Sox Built Foundation One Brick at a Time

*By Dr. David Fletcher
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Pat Brickhouse was there in December, 1975, when Bill Veeck called her late husband and summed up his plight in three words. "I am short," he said in reference to the bottom line. This was after the American League had rejected Veeck's first offer to buy the cash-shy White Sox from owner John Allyn, whose team appeared to be bound for Seattle at the time

The Brickhouses met with Veeck at the Executive House hotel, where they discussed strategy to raise an additional \$1.2-million dollars in one week to meet a league-imposed Dec. 10 deadline. It was there that longtime broadcaster Jack Brickhouse assumed a lead role in the eventual deal that allowed Veeck to purchase the White Sox for a second time and prevent their move to the Pacific Northwest.

"It was Jack Brickhouse, rather surprisingly, who lent the final helping hand . . .," wrote Veeck in the March 15, 1976 Sports Illustrated article *Baseball Couldn't Shut Him Out*, which was left out of the book *Veeck as in Wreck* years earlier.



Broadcaster Jack Brickhouse helped broker the deal that kept the White Sox on the South Side.

Called "an unrepentant Cub fan" by Veeck in the SI story, Brickhouse came through for the White Sox, for whom he broadcast games from 1940-1943 on WGN Radio and 1948 through 1967 on WGN-TV. In 1968, the team moved its games from WGN-TV to WFLD, a fledgling UHF station. The move left Brickhouse with an emotional scar, as he was limited to duties as a Cubs announcer in the final 13 years of his career.

Brickhouse had rightly predicted that the deal would haunt owner Arthur Allyn, who sold his share of the franchise to his brother John one year later. "The big mistake was not realizing what they needed most of all was exposure, not money," Brickhouse wrote in *Thanks for Listening*, his 1996 autobiography.

John Allyn, who had rejected the WGN contract extension that Brickhouse had engineered with White Sox general manager Ed Short for the grainy, ghostly images of the new WFLD and Field Enterprises. Allyn didn't want the team to share time and space

with the crosstown Cubs, and in the new deal, more of its games would be televised than ever before.

The problem was, the station relied on new technology and equipment that were largely untested. Reception in the Chicago area was limited if there was any at all.

But as Brickhouse wrote in *Thanks for Listening*, he was not “going to let the franchise, whose original owner founded the American League, leave town.”

Brickhouse relished being the voice of both Chicago teams, and his 1983 Hall of Fame induction speech confirmed as much. “My dream of dreams is that I imagine the Cubs and Sox playing with the Seventh Game of the World Series going into extra innings,” he said. “Then it is finally suspended on account of darkness.

“It has been my privilege to broadcast both the exploits of the Cubs and Sox. I have experienced the joy and heartache of both clubs.”

With the help of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, a die-hard White Sox fan who would pass away one year later, Brickhouse convinced Patrick O’Malley, a confidant of the mayor, and Howard Miller, the chairman of the Canteen Corporation that had concession contracts at several ballparks, to invest \$250,000 in the project. Now Veeck had the finances that were required to get one shot under the arc lights.

Pat Brickhouse revealed for the first time that Veeck had wanted her husband to be part of the new ownership team. Because Jack was serving on the Cubs board of directors at the time, however, he could not serve in the same capacity elsewhere.

After Veeck’s death in 1986, Major League Baseball historian Jerome Holtzman wrote that his greatest baseball legacy was that he kept the franchise in Chicago, an achievement in which Brickhouse played no small role.

Brickhouse and Veeck had first known each other when Veeck owned the Milwaukee Brewers of the American Association in the early 1940s. As author Paul Dickson mentioned in his recent biography *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, they even saw each in Marine boot camp in California in 1943 before Veeck would suffer an injury to his right leg in World War II.

In Holtzman's book collection and personal papers, which the Chicago Baseball Museum acquired in 2007, Veeck is a popular subject.

After Veeck was posthumously inducted into the Hall of Fame, Holtzman wrote a retrospective of his impact on Chicago baseball. Andy McKenna, who ran both the Cubs and the White Sox in his career, told Holtzman, “On July 31, 1975, I went out to Easton (Md., where Veeck had retired to the life of a country squire) and had dinner with Bill. That’s when it was clear to me that the White Sox would be moved to Seattle. John Allyn would be forced to sell the team to Seattle interests. I was hopeful that Allyn would entertain purchase from a local group. Then in August (1975) Bill came back home and set up an office at the Executive House and began what turned out to be a lengthy process of as-

sembling investors.”

Holtzman also interviewed Rudy Shafer, Veeck’s long-term business partner dating back to their days in Milwaukee. “One thing Bill doesn’t get credit for saving the White Sox for Chicago,” he reported. “The Sox were almost gone and the AL owners made it very difficult of for him.”

Also not to be overlooked is the role of Veeck’s nephew Fred Krehbiel in the successful attempt to keep the charter franchise in place.

In 1959-61, Krehbiel worked for his uncle Bill as an office boy at Comiskey Park. He also came upon Harry Grabiner’s diary of the events surrounding the 1919 Black Sox scandal and the 1920 grand jury investigation that led to the creation of the first major league commissioner’s office, discoveries that were made in the bowels of Comiskey Park. It was his maternal grandfather, longtime Cubs president William Louis Veeck, the father of Bill Veeck, who pressed for judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis to become the first commissioner.

In 1965, Krehbiel joined the Molex family business, for which he is the co-chairman with his older brother John. When asked about his role in saving the White Sox in July, 2011, he said he almost got in trouble because “I did not tell my dad about it.”

In late September, 1975, Allyn needed \$500,000 to cover payroll and other operational expenses. This prompted him to accept Veeck’s offer of \$10 million for the White Sox after McKenna had urged him to act swiftly in order to keep the franchise in Chicago. Veeck called Krehbiel to form a partnership with Ruben Rosen, a Philadelphia lighting businessman, and Rosen’s attorney David Cohen, who were planning to buy the Baltimore Orioles with Veeck before the grave White Sox situation arose. This connection led to a \$500,000 loan and convinced Drovers Bank to cover Allyn’s payroll checks before they bounced.

Unbeknownst to his father, Krehbiel went to the Continental Bank in Chicago and pledged \$500,000 in stock towards the purchase of the team. Krehbiel admitted that, even though John had a close relationship to Veeck as his brother-in-law, his response would have been “Are you crazy?” if he had been aware of the generous commitment.

Before Jack Brickhouse came through for Veeck and secured \$250,000 from Pat O’Malley and the Canteen Corporation, Krehbiel contacted his Uncle Bill and said the family was prepared to up the ante. “Fred called to tell me his family was ready, able, and willing to double their original contribution. Fred was already in for \$100,000 and he had also signed his name for \$800,000 to keep the White Sox going. The difference between his signature and mine was that with him it was collectable,” Veeck said in the Sports Illustrated account.

Decades later, the White Sox remain at 35th and Shields. Brickhouse. Veeck and a few other persistent individuals would have it no other way.