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Baseball program coming to Cultural Heritage Center June 13

PIERRE, S.D. – The Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, in conjunction with its new exhibit “Play Ball! The National Pastime in South Dakota,” is hosting a program about a baseball player who barnstormed through the Midwest from 1910-1940 with many teams, passing through South Dakota on several occasions.

“400 Wins But Almost Forgotten: John Donaldson’s Baseball Legacy” will be held Saturday, June 13, at 2 p.m. CDT. Donaldson was known as the greatest black left-handed pitcher from the pre-Negro Leagues time period (1887-1920). He played the national game when the “color line” had been drawn in major league and minor league baseball. Donaldson played where he was allowed to play, in semi-professional baseball and on the best African American ball clubs of his era.

There is no fee to attend the program but there will be an admission fee to visit the baseball exhibit and museum galleries.

Presenter Peter Gorton has spent years in historical societies and archives tracking down the record of Donaldson, and he was honored in 2011 by the Society of American Baseball Research-Negro Leagues Committee with the Tweed Webb Lifetime Achievement Award for his efforts. Gorton is a content producer for the international law firm of Faegre, Baker and Daniels based in Minneapolis, Minn. He established “The Donaldson Network” of researchers who assist in his quest to reconstruct in total the life and career of Donaldson, in many ways stolen from him by the existence of the “color line.”

Barnstorming from town to town, payday to payday in the first three decades of the 20th century had its difficulties and indignities verging on danger. If Donaldson had lived in another era, his name would likely be honored across the country, much like Satchel Paige. Donaldson’s accomplishments were almost lost to history, but his career statistics are being meticulously reconstructed in hopes of restoring a legacy stolen from baseball history.

“We are especially excited to bring Peter Gorton to Pierre,” said Jay Smith, museum director, “His story brings light to an era of our state and national history that is almost always overlooked. Gorton’s exposure to Donaldson springs from his love of baseball and growing up in a small town in Minnesota near where Donaldson played many games. Listening to the stories of former players, coaches and others, Gorton set out to discover the proof for the legacy of Donaldson, and he will share that story with us in vivid detail on June 13.”

The baseball exhibit now on display at the Cultural Heritage Center contains graphics from the Donaldson Network.

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About the South Dakota State Historical Society

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Education. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.