

After 117 years, family finds great-grandfather’s baseball card

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BEND — A search that lasted 117 years ended last month when a Bend family found an extremely rare baseball card of their great-grandfather, who played Major League Baseball at the turn of the century.

Over four generations, the Douglass family looked for the 1903 card of William “Klondike” Douglass, a catcher for the Philadelphia Phillies. The card features a portrait of Douglass with his arms crossed while wearing his white Phillies uniform.

It is a clear, vintage photo that connected family members to their past.

“It was a very emotional feeling getting that card in my hand,” said Douglass’ great-grandson, Donnie Emerson, of Bend. “It didn’t leave my side for several days.”

Emerson, 43, the boys soccer coach at Mountain View High School, grew up looking for the card.

He visited memorabilia shops and wrote letters to collectors. He discovered there were only about 100 to 200 copies of the card originally produced and only six are known to still exist.

The card is part of a larger



EO Media Group Photo/Ryan Brennecke

Bend resident Donnie Emerson holds a rare 1903 baseball card of William “Klondike” Douglass that he has been searching for for more than 30 years. Emerson purchased the card last month from a man in Glide.

collection of cards made by the Breisch-Williams candy and tobacco company. Each card is valued between \$800 and \$30,000, depending on the player and the condition of the card.

The search felt impossible at times, Emerson said. But to his surprise last month, one of the cards was posted on eBay from a private seller in Glide, in Douglas County. The seller was willing to part with the card for \$500, a bargain

considering the sentimental value.

Klondike Douglass knew he was featured in a baseball card, but was never able to see it, Emerson said.

Klondike’s four sons, including Emerson’s grandfather, Robert Douglass, also tried finding it but never could. No one in the family even saw a picture of the card until an image surfaced on the internet about 10 years ago, Emerson said. “For 117 years we have

been tracking this down,” Emerson said. “Without the internet, it would have never happened.”

Emerson is amazed any of the cards lasted this long. “They handed those out at baseball games with caramels or tobacco,” Emerson said. “For a kid or even an adult to be able to put it in their pocket, save it and have it last for 100 years is just insane.”

Emerson began his search at age 10, when he

started to get an interest in sports and collecting cards. A few years ago, Emerson was outbid at an auction when someone bought one of the remaining Klondike cards for \$4,500. The buyer was trying to complete the collection, which would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars but nearly an impossible task. The only complete collection of the Breisch-Williams cards is kept in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

Those who have part of the collection are often unwilling to sell their Klondike card, Emerson said.

Emerson is grateful to the seller in Glide and wants to find out how the man came to own the card. He wants to let him know how important it is to his family.

“I always wanted to find it when my grandfather was alive,” Emerson said. “I always felt like it was important that our family had one.”

Emerson’s uncle, Mike Douglass, of McMinnville, helped with the search over the years. Douglass said the family was able to find old photos of Klondike, but never the card. He credits Emerson for never giving up.

“Donnie was the one that

knew how to search better than anyone,” Douglass said. “If anyone was going to find it, it was going to be him.”

Douglass said the card ties a piece of the family history together. He remembers growing up and hearing stories about Klondike, who played first base and catcher for the St. Louis Browns and the Philadelphia Phillies from 1896 to 1904.

Klondike eventually retired and moved his family from their home in Missouri to Bend in the late 1920s. He raised a family on Columbia Street until his death in 1953 at 81.

His professional baseball days were not glamorous, Douglass said.

They were not paid nearly as much as today. And if an umpire was unable to travel to a game, Klondike and other players would have to do the job for a game.

“They played because they loved the game,” Douglass said.

Douglass never had a chance to meet his grandfather, Klondike. But seeing old photos, especially the baseball card, gives him a good idea of who he was.

“That is part of finding the baseball card,” Douglass said. “You get to know him in a way you didn’t get to before.”

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