



INTERVIEW WITH: Shyla Chase and Earl Chase Jr.
CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS

BREAKING THE COLOUR BARRIER: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS
A collaboration between the University of Windsor and the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame

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Name of interviewer: Alastair Staffen (A.S)

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A.S: Ok, well, my name is Alastair Staffen, and I am here at the home of Earl Chase Jr., it is July 11th, 2016 and we are just here to talk about the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, and in particular about Earl "Flat" Chase who played in the 1930s. So, I have got a few questions, a list here, and we'll just kind of go through them. If you don't know the answers that's fine, just basic information, whatever you know, whatever you can give. If you do feel pressured into talking if you do feel that way, you can obviously say, well I'd like to skip that question, or can we move on. And if you think of something afterwards we can always go back to the question. So, just pretty standard stuff there. Basically, we will start off with a really simple question...

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A.S: What was the name of the person that you knew who played for the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

E.C: Well, like I say, my dad was Earl "Flat" Chase, of the '34 All-Stars, and more or less we grew up living in the park on the weekends. But Dad, when I come along, I didn't come along until '35, so this all happened, and I guess I didn't start going to the park until I was five or six years old. But that was your entertainment, every weekend, going to the ball park. There wasn't any TV back in those days, so the family went to the ball park. Dad played ball, I'm going to say, when he was six, seven years old. We lived on Wellington Street and then we moved over to live on Foster Street, when I was about five, and then, in the backyard, was Stirling Park. So, that's how we spent our time with the All-Stars.

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A.S: Ok so, we were talking about when you were born, can we talk about when your father was born, where he grew up, stuff like that?

E.C: Well, Dad was born in Buxton in 1910...

S.C: I just looked at it the other day.

E.C: [laughs] ... in 1910 in August something. They say they were young when they, Grandpa moved to Windsor. When they were young, I don't know whether he was four or five years old, when they moved to Windsor. When they moved to Windsor they lived on Mercer Street. Right across the street from the home was Wigle Park. So, he grew up in the park across the street too.

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A.S: Ok, all right. We've got a question here asking if sports were important to him growing up, so obviously we just kind of touched on that. Maybe, can you elaborate on his participation in sports, when he was younger or when he was growing up?

E.C: Just, what I would say, is just by what his sisters and brothers said, more or less. My aunts would say he could play ball. He could hit it, I would say. He was picked up, you know, a team from Detroit just come over, and they would get him to come play with certain teams on weekends, or if they were in some type of, I don't want to say back in them days you call them a tournament, but they would have games in a different city or different town or something like that. He travelled when he was a teenager, according to the aunts, his sisters and stuff like that.

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A.S: Did he play any other sports besides baseball?

E.C: No, no, just baseball. There was no soccer, no hockey, no football or nothing like that. Maybe football, might have been what you call flag football, maybe that, but I never heard anything. I don't say he didn't play soccer, but it was just a kid's game, going to school and playing with school friends, stuff like that. But organised sport, I don't think so.

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A.S: Just before we get into specific questions, can we talk at all about his family, about the family in general. We have touched on it a couple of times already, but were they participating in sport as well? His parents or his siblings, that sort of thing.

E.C: Well, he was the only one who was in sports. Uncle Gale, Uncle Rich, no, they weren't in sports. I guess one of my aunts, she played ball, I guess, in high school and stuff like that, you know school baseball and stuff like that, and Uncle Jim, but they were in a fastball league in Windsor. It would be his brother-in-laws, Uncle Jim and Uncle Louie, they played fastball in Windsor, with Dayus Roofers¹ and stuff like that. I can remember that, but that was softball, fastball and stuff like that, but Dad played hardball, he never played fastball. And... nope like I say, when he come to Chatham he was, what do you call it, picked up, you know they called down to ask him to come play with the All-Stars and stuff like that, that's how he ended up in Chatham, him and... Fergie, Fergie Jenkins, and I think, well, Don Tabron and Don Washington, they come from Windsor and Detroit to play ball with the All-Stars. That would be Dad and that bunch, when they come, like I say, well at this time I wasn't old enough to understand if they were just visiting or something like that, I was just a kid. So yeah, Dad, he was playing ball with teams near Chatham. They won a few OBA Championships, with the Sherman's -- Sherman's was a furniture store -- the Arcades, and I want to say the Pickett Lumber company. He had a couple championship teams, I think '43, '47' and '48' something like that, but I'd have to look at my book back there for the exact dates, stuff like that. But he was known for pitching, he could hit ball, he could hit a ball. He got records in Hamilton, Milton, Sarnia for the longest balls hit out of the park. They still have the records, his records, in six or seven cities around. Like I say, he could play all positions if need be, but between pitching, first base, and second base was usually where he was at. And the other positions were covered by extra team guys, you know, I mean they had guys that could play, well, back in them days everybody could play two, three, four positions, or play all

¹ At one time (possibly c. 1940s) Dayus Roofers had a baseball team in Windsor comprised of mainly black players.

positions and go from there. But the catcher, Don Tabron and that, he came in from Detroit and certain guys that played certain positions. Pretty well everybody had their own positions, but could play another two or three positions if they had to, in case... yeah.

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A.S: Well obviously you just talked about his positions and things, did he have any particular skills, maybe a type of pitch, or anything like that?

E.C: Well, he could pitch, he could throw a ball, and when they won the championship in Penetang in '34; that when he won it, the pitcher he beat in Penetang, he went to Philadelphia... dear can't think of the man's... the pitcher's name, but he was on the Philadelphia ball team, what the hell was that man's name... I have to go back there and look at the book right there... but he beat him, he beat this guy. Penetang was the team....²

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A.S: Well, you're definitely covering the questions quite well. Quite...

S.C: He wasn't even born then! [laughs]

A.S: ... yeah, so yeah you are moving down the list pretty well. So, you are talking about memorable events and stories already, but do you have any more that you would like to tell?

E.C: No, I, like I said, he was more or less... when they played they come out to see him play ball, because everybody on the team could play ball, and like I said there were different little towns around, you had your little towns that you would go to and stuff like that. They would, people would just come out to see the Coloured All-Stars, you know. It was an all-black team, it was more or less entertainment, you know. They just wanted to come out and see a certain team, you know you go ten, fifteen, twenty miles from here, there was no... Everything was all white ball players. Out in Dresden there was a couple of coloured boys out there, the Cooks, Lambkins, but like Wallaceburg or Thamesville, Sarnia, Toronto. Dad, he played in London, he played on the London Majors, I think around the '40s. London asked him to come down and play ball for a season, or two. I'm not sure but it's in the scrapbook. My mother started the scrapbook in '33 or '34 when Dad and they were playing ball. I've got the scrapbook back there and she kept the write

² Referring to Phil Marchildon, the pitcher for Penetanguishene when Chatham Coloured All-Stars won the OBA championship in 1934. Marchildon later played for the Philadelphia Athletics and Boston Red Sox.

ups from the paper and stuff like that, of the team and what was going on.

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A.S: Ok, so that was very good. You were kind of talking about people's reactions, and obviously it was kind of a big deal to have an all coloured team playing. What were people's reactions to it, it could be the black community, or outside of that, how were people kind of....

E.C: Well, like I said, I was a kid when Dad was playing ball, and I am travelling, or you know, family is travelling with him. But, you know, I wouldn't understand it, you know what I'm saying, I'd ... but you know later on in years, when I started, I've been playing ball ever since '48, well I've been playing since '45 when I was eight, nine, ten years when I played in the park or in school leagues, stuff like that. But I know we went to Dresden, and played ball out in Dresden, but that was back in the day and there was discrimination. You heard of Dresden? In your schooling and stuff like that? Well, like I said, me and my brother didn't get served at a restaurant after a ball game, after playing ball out there, but the coach, the manager was Bill Stirling, said, "Get up, let's go back to Chatham, you guys don't need this." He took us all out and went back to Chatham, and had our treat, whatever we went out there for. I guess we had won the game or something like that but other than that, what's the word for it... If you knew there was a problem, you didn't have a problem, you just by-passed it. You went on home, or if Mom, Mother was having a picnic lunch and she was travelling somewhere, out in Strathroy or Sarnia or something like that, you just go along to a park where you would have a picnic out in the park if the family was with you. Now, Dad and the ball team were travelling together in two or three cars, and it was no problem if they went into a place to get a drink or something, they'd get served and stuff. And if you knew there was a problem, you didn't stop. There ain't no sense in giving a man your money if he doesn't want to look after you, you sure as hell don't want to give him your money, that's all there is to it. You go someplace where the man will appreciate your money.

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A.S: Well a very comprehensive answer there as well. Obviously he was part of the 1934 team, did he talk much about winning the championship at all, or do you remember much discussion of that or the build-up or the aftermath?

E.C: Well, no, I more or less heard more from other people, his friends, or people that knew Dad or some place, yeah that's, like I said, I wasn't even around, that was '34 and I wasn't born until '35. Like I say, I guess he was here and people would come to visit, and sitting around talking, going on about the games and stuff, you know, different ball players, well... No, more or less we would just read the scrapbook. They were having

troubles with the umpires in Penetang so they moved the game to Guelph and in Guelph they were losing and the umpire called the game on account of darkness so they had to go and come back the next day but they still turned around and beat them.³ You know, like I said, you got to beat the team, you have to beat the umpires, like I say, sometimes, we didn't have—trouble with fans but it was just... yeah... awkward I guess is the word for it. You know, you've got to wonder why... but I'm just a kid, but you get to ten, twelve, fifteen years old you started guessing a little bit what was going on. [laughs] Isn't that awful, I want to say Mark Tetong? Mark... but that was Penetang, that was the playoffs, but like I say that's all back there in the scrapbook. My mother kept all of it. I was looking at the scrapbook because the pages, they need to be, they have a vinyl cover over trying to protect the pages, you know they are starting to disintegrate and stuff like that. So we what do you call it, vinyl wrapped them and put a sleeve on them.

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A.S: Ok, so we have talked for a fairly long time about his playing and about the championships and his experiences. What about his time after, you know, playing for the 1934 team, or after sports in general?

E.C: Well, like I say, in general, after that they would make up teams. Sherman's was a big department store—he had a team, Sherman. And then there was, oh, dear, Arcade, Pickett's Lumber, you know, businesses more or less would have their own team, manage, play ball in the city, in Chatham or stuff like that. There was always an intermediate league, I don't want to call it a senior league, but an intermediate B or C league and stuff like that. So that's what was entertainment, there was no TV back in those days.

A.S: What about his working life as well, moving away from sports?

E.C: Well, he had a job with the city, he worked for the city. I guess, that's where he went after playing ball in ball season. He got a job working for the city, and that way he could get time off so he could go play ball, stuff like that. He was working with the city until '54. When he passed away, I took his spot. The city hired me and I come in and took his spot, needed a job, so I was there from '54 to '92. I left out of there in '92 and I'm sitting here looking at you in 2016, and still playing ball!

A.S: Good to see you keeping active. Did he encourage sports amongst the family?

³ Referring to the third game in the championship series with Penetanguishene, when officials stopped the game claiming it was too dark to play. The game resumed the next day, with the All-Stars winning 13-7.

E.C: Well, we, what do you call it, the Taylor ACs was another coloured team, us guys, me and my brother, the Coopers, the Hursts and stuff like that. They would call them the Taylor ACs and it was like a community centre and I played with Dad a couple, well I was about 15, 14. I was a pitcher, but I played other positions. Me and Dad played together and my brother, he played with the Taylor ACs for a couple years and after that... yes, like I say, he encouraged the ball playing.

A.S: Did you have any memories that stick out from your time playing with him?

E.C: Just at the ball park, between that...

S.C: Trying to get him to slide into home plate there in Thamesville. [laughs]

E.C: ... oh, that pitcher, yeah. Well like I say, just more or less ball, and we done a lot of that. We worked together. When he wasn't working for the city, he'd be moving stuff. We had a big truck and we always had little jobs to do, we always had little jobs, and we cleaned up for... Well I guess one company was, what was that...? That theatre group. We used to move scenery. Our truck was big enough, long enough that we would stick the scenery into the covered truck, the covered box, stuff like that. We worked together on different things. Between that and going to school... we had a few chores to have a little change in your pocket. We had to work for it.

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A.S: Obviously at the time he was pitching you were young and everything, but how do you think that maybe sports affected his life? In general, the larger impacts of sports, that sort of thing....

E.C: Well, I'm going to say, what I can remember, that he enjoyed playing ball and sports, stuff like that, and the camaraderie with the different ball players. My thing is, they had parties and stuff like that, ball members, team members, stuff like that. But like I say once ball season was over it was more or less work and stuff like that. There were no wages back in those days, it was more or less going out there and having fun. I guess if you got a wage or something it was... a man may... I don't know, I never heard any talk about, what do you call it, pay or anything to play ball. There might have been, but I don't know. I played ball myself, I played ball against teams in tournaments and stuff like that who were getting paid, they were getting paid, I couldn't believe it.

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A.S: Okay, we are going to move on to a couple of questions about sports in the community, and again we have repeatedly touch on it and it is always going to be there, but do you

know if sports were important in the black community when he was alive, can you say anything about it?

E.C: No, like I said, it was just, no.

S.C: Mr. Stirling.

E.C: Well, he was the one who promoted everything, yeah, Mr. Stirling he was the one who got the teams going and the park. He started a league, stuff like that back in '47, '48 and started mixing teams, you know, white ball players, Dad was... there was maybe two or three guys on the white ball teams, that started already in '40, '43 when he went to London, they asked him to come down and play ball there and in Chatham here. They had their own team, the All-Stars. I don't know when they quit playing together, disbanded more or less, but some guys on the team, they were business guys, they ended up having their own businesses and stuff like that. I don't want to say that they folded, but they had work to look after, you know. The Talbots they were in the chicken and the rabbit business and the Hardings, Boomer and them, Boomer, he played all kind of sports. He was at the Post Office, and Len Harding, Andy, he was a policeman. I don't know what Len did but, like I say... Fergie Jenkins⁴, he was a chef, like on the boats and such. I don't really know when they disbanded, but it must have been '39 or '40 because I think Dad was in London in '40, '41, '42. Then they started having local teams, so he played here in Chatham with, like I say, these different ball teams.

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A.S: Did he talk about any of the barriers or difficulties in participating in sport?

E.C: Not really, like I said, not to me, you know what I'm saying? He'd tell me, if you know there was a problem, and now he's not around to look after me or something like that, if you know there is a problem don't go near it, just stay away from it. You know, like I say, go about your business. He would tell me where he was going to play and he would say that this town was okay this town was alright, this town was a problem, to stay away from it. The managers, the coaches, they were always up to date, they would keep you out of problems and stuff like that. In other words, it was just guidance, more or less just to say there is trouble out there, just don't go looking for it. But if it crowded you too much you would have to look after yourself. But if you see it you just stayed away from it so there was no problem. I never had too much trouble with nothing, but I know where I could go and where I couldn't. Like I say, I wouldn't give anybody my money... plain and simple, that's plain and simple. But yeah, if you got crowded, they wouldn't crowd you no more.

⁴ Referring to Ferguson Jenkins Sr.

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A.S: Okay, good. the last couple of questions are just about the impact and the significance of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, and again, I've probably said, this numerous times we have talked about it a little bit, what do you think the actual impact or legacy of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars was?

E.C: Like I say, it was wonderful. The Coloured All-Stars win the Ontario Championship back in the day, with all this discrimination and everything else, and these guys won everything at that time and everything else, it makes you feel proud, and part of it. That your father was in a position to bring home that championship and stuff like that. Like I say, they still talk about it, but I wasn't around when it actually happened.

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A.S: The last question is about family and remembering them. Has any of your family been involved in the public commemoration of the All-Stars, maybe did they attend the Blue Jays game in 2002 or attend the fifty year celebrations in 1984?

E.C: We went to the 2002, in Toronto and my brother, he done a lot of the work for Dad in the Chatham Hall of Fame, he did a lot of work for the record and he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. Between that, and I guess Fergie Jr. You see him once in a while. Well, like I say, his closest—well he was our batboy for the Taylor ACs and stuff like that. I guess it was a nice time, there was different records and stuff like that. It was good for conversation for the older folk back in the day. It gave them something to talk about.

A.S: Well, you have mentioned the scrapbook as well, right, and I think that it is obviously a big part of this commemoration. If you would like to talk more about how it came to be, or the impetus behind it?

E.C: Well, like I say it was my mother, my mother started in I think '34, maybe '35, and had all the Chatham Daily News sports reports and she would, I guess when they won a game... I'll show it to you just to give you an idea what it looks like... [gets up and grabs book] See this is where I first started out. Ernie Banks signed the book, my brother had him sign it, Flat and Pete. This is back in '47, but this all starts back in '34, '35.

E.C: And they had Willie Shaugnosh, he was a pitcher, an Indian from Walpole Island. So this is what I mean, this is where I got a look at it. I was looking at it the other day just to clean it, I want to save the book so I have to protect these, and get some vinyl wrap for the pages.

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A.S: So, obviously your mother put quite a lot of effort into preserving it, so I think that this is the last question I have for you. Do you think that this is a story that people should know, should we get it out here?

E.C: Well, the book doesn't leave the house anymore. [laughs]

A.S: No, just the story in general. The book helps but just the greater story, what we are doing here, the interviews, the events we are having?

E.C: Well, like I say, it's been around, with the commemoration in 2002 they had the history, with the recognition...

S.C: The Blue Jays.

E.C: ... Blue Jays recognition and stuff like that. What more can you add to it. More or less it's to save it, that's what happened back in '34, '35. I don't want to say it was Ontario Championships, Windsor must have had coloured ball teams, in Windsor and Detroit. I don't think anyplace else, maybe Toronto had coloured ball teams I don't know. But I know the '34 in Chatham here, they took everything here in Ontario. When they won the 1934 Championships that was for Ontario. And at Penetanguishene, was Phil Martridon?⁵ was the other pitcher, and he went to, played for Philadelphia...

S.C: Phillies?

E.C: Phillies, yeah, for twelve years. Dad and those guys beat them down here, but like I say, they weren't supposed, they were moving the games around and everything else. But like I said, I get it from... when I read the book a little bit or what my mother might have told me or something like that, or Dad.

0:37:53.5 - 0:38:22.0

A.S: So that's basically all my questions, so for the last little bit if there is anything else you want to talk about, anything that I have missed, anything else that you want to say, generally, closing remarks that sort of thing?

E.C: Like I said, we said everything, more or less saying how everything was played out and everything else. It's just nice that it is being saved, put away in the archives, is that what

⁵ Marchildon

it is? Will this be on the internet?

A.S: Yes, we will probably publish transcriptions of this. I'll go and do the work and type it all out, and you will get to see a copy of this, make changes or, at any time you can say I want it up, I don't want it up. The idea is to spread the story, to let people know what was going on. We are going to have a website and that sort of thing and really try and share the history.

E.C: So it will be a story about the All-Stars, the '34 All-Stars. That'll be I guess preserved for ever I guess, until it gets burnt up or lost....

S.C: Your great grandkids will be able to read it.

E.C: I got kids coming down, like I say grandbabies coming down from Philadelphia, from London so they come down and see Grandpa playing ball, and playing ball we're all out here. So yeah, I think that would be nice. Like I say, what you are asking about, I am trying to remember 65, 70 years ago.

A.S: As I say, what you have given me so far has been very helpful.

E.C: And like I say, I kind of look at the book, the other day I decided to clean it up and stuff like that and look at different things just to kind of put a little memory back in it and different things. Well, like I say, I never had discrimination and stuff like that, when I come out, it was pretty well on the way, quieting down.

S.C: No, it's still going on Earl, don't say it's not around....

E.C: Well, like I say, it's not like it used to be, out, people didn't care. Now people are sneaky, they hide it, they don't come out right to your face. Back when I'm talking about they used to come out and get in your face about it. They don't do that anymore, they just kind of sneak it now; they keep it quiet.

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A.S: Okay if you don't have anything else to say, if you do....

E.C: No, it looks like we've covered everything that you wanted. I can give you an idea what it was but I'm not an orator, I can't sit up and talk and talk.

A.S: That's all right....

S.C: His brother will fill you in where he.... [laughs]

A.S: Okay, alright. Well, as I say, you have been very helpful regardless, orator or not. So, I'd like to thank you for participating, for doing this interview and for inviting me into your home, it was very nice. Thank you for being part of the story and for helping us to share it with everybody.

E.C: Well it's been a pleasure, no problem, it's nice....