

From the Cotton Field to the Playing Field: the Solomon Northrup and Harry Northrup Story.

by Larry Lester

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Recently, Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o, playing the abused slave Patsey, was selected as the "World's Most Beautiful" woman by *People* magazine. Her role, along with Chiwetel Ejiofor, in the movie "12 Years A Slave" has brought tremendous attention to Solomon Northrup, a citizen of New York, who was kidnapped in 1841 and later rescued in 1853, from a cotton plantation near the Red River in Louisiana. Solomon, aka Platt Hamilton or Plat, was a farmer, a noted violinist, hack driver, skilled carpenter, and, of course, later an author. Solomon's journey of cruelty and subjugation in this critical acclaimed film, did not end when reunited with his family.

In time, Solomon became a free agent again, as he had prophesized "I will not fall into despair! I will keep myself hardy until freedom is opportune!" But his grandson would never be fully liberated to pursue his diamond dreams. Let's examine Solomon's grandson's baseball journey and discover his legacy.

John Henry "Harry" or "Zip" Northrup (also spelled Northup or Northrop), was born in Auburn, New York. In an email to Wayne Stivers from Zip's granddaughter Irene, ". . . when his father [Alonzo] was mustered out of the 26th Regiment of the New York Colored Troops in 1865, he married Caroline Victoria Robinson and eventually moved to Weedsport, New York, settling here because of the work that the Erie Canal offered. Alonzo had been wounded (bayoneted) in the Battle of Bloody Bridge at Johns Island, South Carolina. From what I can gather in reading on this topic, the battle was spearheaded on July 7, 1864 by the 26th Regiment and became a "horror of horrors" as the 26th laid siege on the Confederate soldiers. On the final day, the Confederates had reinforcements come that turned the tide into their favor."

Eighteen years later, on July 27, 1882, Alonzo and Caroline brought Zip into the world. As a young man Zip played for the talented semi-pro Watsons of Weedsport, New York. Later, the *Syracuse Journal* (July 30, 1902) reported that Zip "GOES TO CUBAN GIANTS" stating, "It has been announced that Harry Northrup, the crack colored twirler of the Watsons, has been signed by the Cuban Giants and will leave at once to join the team at Clifton Springs. Northrup has pitched 16 games, of which he has won 14. The two games lost were at Union Springs and Lyons, the latter game being a victory for Lyons by the score of 1 to 0."



1901 Weedsport Watsons

Standing, left to right: Sheldon Bibbens, Harry Stickles, Vern Bibbens, Ray Bentley, George Hudson, Frank Bibbens, and Fred O'Neil

Sitting, left to right: Ed Flynn, James Kanaley, Bill Coyle, ? Clossey (mascot), Zip Northrup, & Byron Kanaley with dog.

After playing for perhaps the top independent black team of the period, Zip Northrup returned to Weedsport in 1907 and played for several teams over the next few years. He organized and coached various levels of competition, including some integrated teams. One press account revealed that his all-colored Auburn Royal Giants defeated the thinly talented Cuban Giants in 1924. Perhaps Zip's last on-field appearance came at age 43, with the Savannahs as their second baseman. The *Skaneateles (NY) Free Press* on August 7, 1925, reported Northrup, batting clean-up, went 0-for-4, but scored a run, in a 5-2 lost to the Skaneateles Men's Club.

Local historian Lazelle R. Hopkins in his 1933 book *Facts Regarding Weedsport New York* provided further confirmation of Northrup's impactful career, "A whole chapter and more could be devoted to that picturesque player, Harry Northrup, who played on the team [Watsons], except when he was away from Weedsport, for over a period of 10 years. During this time he never lost more than three games in any one season."

The tabulated score:

Men's Club	AB	R	H	O	A					
McDonald, lf	5	1	3	2	0					
E. Hornington, 1b	4	1	2	1	0					
Stewart, 2b	4	1	2	0	0					
H. Hornington, 3b	3	0	1	2	1					
Symula, ss	3	0	0	0	3					
Clark, cf	4	1	1	1	0					
Arthur, rf	2	0	0	1	0					
Stearns, c	3	0	1	1	0					
Kyan, p	4	1	0	0	7					
Totals	32	5	10	17	13					
Savannah	AB	R	H	O	A					
W. Jones, 1b	5	0	1	1	1					
N. Jones, cf	5	0	0	3	0					
Gettings, ss	4	1	2	0	0					
Northrup, 2b	4	1	0	1	0					
Wright, rf	4	0	0	1	0					
Culkins, 1b	4	0	3	1	1					
Cushing, lf	4	0	0	3	0					
Wool, c	4	0	1	1	0					
Parsons, p	4	0	0	1	5					
Totals	38	2	7	24	11					
Score by innings:										
Men's Club	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Savannah	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Skaneateles (NY) Free Press
on August 7, 1925 - Men's Club versus
the Savannahs

Upon Zip's death in 1944, in Auburn, several tributes were written. Researcher Bill Mullins discovered that E. G. Treat, a former New York state assemblyman who had known Harry Northrup as a child and had given him his first baseball job (as a team mascot), wrote a long tribute to him that was printed in the *Cayuga Chief* (and reprinted in the *Auburn Citizen-Advertiser*, November 4, 1944).

As a ballplayer, Treat wrote in part, "Northrup (frequently known as 'Zip') just naturally had everything—speed, a true eye, baseball spirit, an indomitable will to win, and a fine arm. He developed into a pitcher of unusual ability. His reputation constantly mounted as the Cuban Giants, the finest colored baseball team of all time, engaged him as a pitcher. In that capacity he starred throughout the entire country and almost every baseball enthusiast knew of him and admired his work. In after years he continued for some time with the Watsons. His enthusiasm and his baseball experience were great assets to the team. He and Barney McManus [another local player] were the best coaches I have ever seen anywhere and I have through the years seen nearly all the great teams and the great players."

Treat concluded, "Zip's father Alonso inherited many of [Solomon's] refined qualities. [Alonso] had a large family (three sons - Zip, Alonzo S., Frank Calvin; seven daughters - Stella M., Anna M., Rosa G., Mertie E., Caroline C., Florence and Lottie), all peaceable and law-abiding."

Genealogy source: <http://www.geni.com/people/Alonzo-Northrup/6000000025331055679>

In the article, Treat also penned a poetic tribute to Alonzo's son Harry, which read:

You'll seldom know
A fellow
Finer than Harry.
He'd carry
His half of the load
The length of the road
With a smile and a quip
That's the nature of Zip.

Though dark his skin
He's white within
Deep red his blood.
Every inch he stood
A ballplayer,
A stayer.

If on the green
We could place a team
Of eight players more
Like Zip Northrup,

John Henry Zip Northrup's baseball chronology:

1889-1902 - Weedsport Watsons
1902-1906 - Cuban Giants
1907 - Meridian
1910 - Independent teams
1911 - Auburn Norwoods
1913, 1920 - Auburn Royal Giants
1914 - Genoa
1915-1919 - Dunn+McCarty, Dugans, Duganites
1917 - International Harvester
1920 - Auburn Colored Giants
1924 Columbians
1928 - Wanderers
1932 - North Cayuga County
1936 - All-Auburn
1941-1942 - Port Byron

What a score
We'd roll up.

With bat and run
He was never done
'Till the game was won.
O'er flowing with fun
Always a gentleman!
Hip -- hurrah -- hip
Rah, rah, rah for Zip!

More personal observations about Zip are revealed in another *Cayuga Chief* (May 19, 1949, Weedsport, NY) article stating, "When, in writing about the Watsons someone once asked Harry 'Zip' Northrup why he wore different colored socks. He replied that didn't want to be mistaken for any of the other players. There was a chap who could play call and unlike others at the game, he scarcely would say anything - just played ball. I once asked him why he kept so quiet when almost everyone else was yelling like mad. He replied, 'I have found out that I can't use my brain and my mouth at the same time.' Good, eh?" Well this writer doubts, per several printed accounts and photographs, the humbled warrior would not have been mistakenly identified with the other Watsons, as Zip was the only man with a tan on the team.

Later on December 22, 1955, Don Brandt wrote in his "*Sports*" column for the *Cayuga Chief* that, "Weedsport undoubtedly would have produced another Major Leaguer had Jackie Robinson made his debut about 50 years earlier. As it was Harry Northrup known to all as 'Zip,' put in three seasons as a pitcher for the Cuban Giants. It is told that the reason why Zip didn't stay longer was that the Giants ruined his arm by pitching him without enough rest. Northrup was a real ballplayer, though, for he could hit and play other positions, which he did when he wasn't pitching."

In an email from Tony Kissel, renowned expert on the many versions of the early-day Cuban Giants, he had discovered Harry Northrup in 1996. Kissel recently shared, "I lost the trail of Harry 'Zip' Northrup while searching for his Cuban Giants days. This year [2014] I found another Zip Northrup who played for the Homer Braves semi-pro team of 1949. My hunch was right! Raymond H. (Mickey) 'Zip' Northrup from Port Byron, NY, was Harry's son and Solomon's great grandson. Raymond was a pitcher and also played third base."

Kissel continued, "Raymond or Mickey joined the Homer Braves semi-pro team for the 1949 season and played in 46 games mainly as the third baseman. His batting average was a solid .285 for the year. The Homer Braves compiled a 49-20 W/L record while winning the championship in the Southern Tier League. Northrup would also play for the Braves in 1950 and 1954."

This Northrup legacy trail was made possible by the tremendous amount of grass roots investigation by researchers Gary Ashwill, Bill Mullins, Tony Kissel, Wayne Stivers, David Fiske,

and Jean Baker, historian at the Old Brutus Historical Society (Weedsport), along with Zip Northrup's granddaughter, the energetic 71-year old Irene Northrup-Zahos, who bragged, "My grandfather had an undying love for the game of baseball and would play it at every chance he got as a player, coach, manager and organizer. He was affiliated in one way or another throughout his life, and up to two years before he died."

Irene's grandfather, Harry "Zip" Northrup was born July 27, 1882 in Auburn, New York. He died on July 11, 1944 in Auburn and is buried in the Pine Hill Cemetery in Throop, New York. Harry's great-grandfather Mintus (1772 - 1829) is buried in Baker Cemetery, a small and well hidden cemetery, that sits just off Main Street in what used to be called Sandy Hill in Hudson Falls, Washington County, New York. As for Solomon Northrup (1808 - unknown?), Zip's grandfather, the death date and place of death are not known. Researchers believe that he may have died between 1863-1870. To date, no record of his passing have been found.

In some closing thoughts from the book "*Twelve Years A Slave*" Solomon's expressed, "Chastened and subdued in spirit by the sufferings I have borne, and thankful to that good Being through whose mercy I have been restored to happiness and liberty, I hope henceforward to lead an upright though lowly life, and rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps."

Currently, the "Find A Grave" website reveals more unresolved ancestry puzzles for both Mintus <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=64507913&ref=wvr> and Solomon <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=119270646> . Check out the threads!



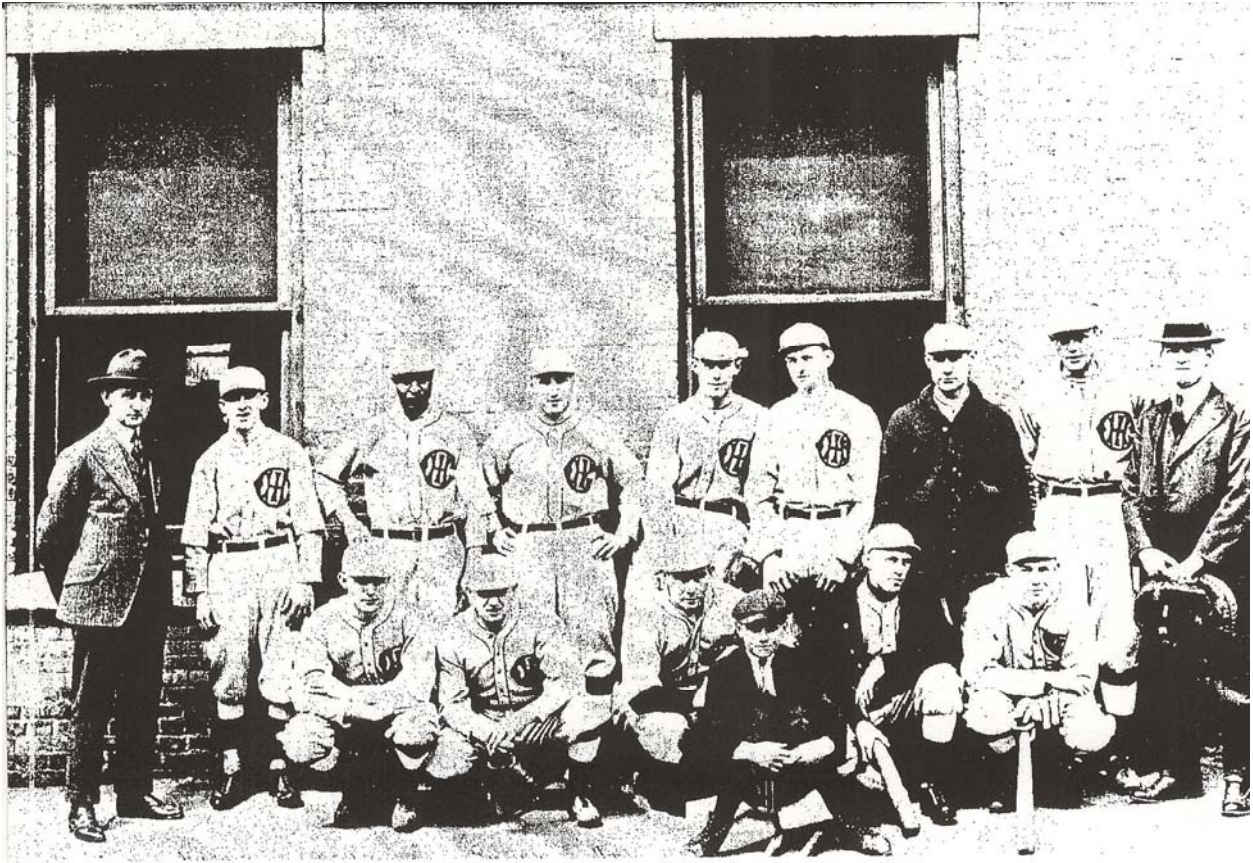
SOLOMON IN HIS PLANTATION SUIT.

Solomon Northrup

Family members led by Irene Northrup-Zahos plan to install a two-sided 24"W x 4" x 48"H grey granite headstone to memorialize Mintus and Solomon Northrup. The headstone is to be placed at the resting site of Mintus Northrup replacing the vandalized pre-existing 1829 stone. For those who care to give, funds are welcome at Old Fort House Museum, c/o Fort Edward Historical Association, P.O. Box 106, Fort Edward, NY 12828, 518-747-9600, <http://www.oldforthousemuseum.com> .

Plans are also underway for the 16th annual "Solomon Northrup Day of Celebration and Freedom" on July 19, 2014, at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. July.

Like the undefined beauty of Lupita Nyong'o, the beauty and excitement of discovering new players and their historical significance in the National Pastime is breathtaking. Let's take the time to break the chains of mental bondage and reach out to discover more about American history and the beauty of learning.



1917 International Harvesters, Auburn, New York

Standing, left to right: manager, Eddie Blumerick, Leon Ringwood, **Zip Northrup**, Barney Smith, Pete Hubbard, Chuck Warter, Footsie Steigerwald, Freight Monroe, and manager Pop Carr.

Kneeling, left to right: Frankie Davis, Polly Mitchell, Roy Noyer, Johnnie Ryan (bat boy), ? Baler and Clarence Hoey.