



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: David Gill, Parks and Recreation Director
DATE: March 23, 2026
SUBJECT: Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire Marker

Recommendation:

Accept this report.

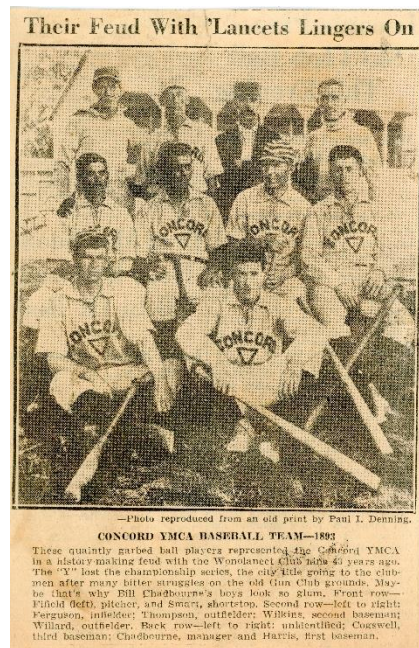
Discussion

William Penn Thompson, born in 1874 in Louisa County, Virginia, became an important yet often overlooked figure in both early baseball history and the local heritage of Concord, New Hampshire. Moving to Concord in the early 1880s, Thompson grew up during a transformative period in American sports and society. Thompson was a Pioneer in Baseball and part of Concord's rich History.

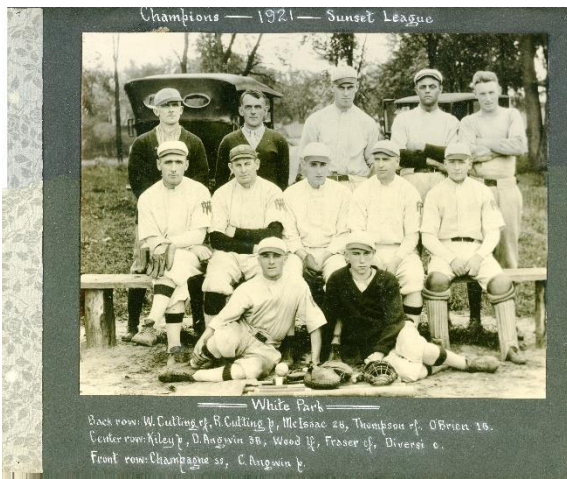
At just 17 years old, Thompson played for the Concord YMCA's 1891 baseball team. This was the era of "barnstorming," when teams traveled from town to town playing exhibition games to attract paying spectators. Games held at former State Fairgrounds and White Park during this time could draw hundreds of fans, highlighting the popularity of baseball in the community.

In his personal life, Thompson's marriage reflected the complex racial dynamics of early 20th-century America. On April 25, 1910, he married Margaret Jane Coughlin, the daughter of Irish immigrants. Their interracial marriage was unusual and controversial for the time. Official records listed Thompson as "colored" and Margaret as white, while census records later described her as "mulatto," a term often applied in such marriages. The couple lived with Thompson's mother, Kate, and others in homes on North Spring Street and North Main Street. Thompson worked as a pool hall attendant, while Margaret managed the household.

Thompson's baseball career spanned a pivotal era when the sport was becoming segregated. In 1911, he played for the Vermont Sulphites in the Twin States League while still residing in Concord. He is believed to have been one of the last African American players to compete on an integrated team in an organized league after the informal agreement that excluded Black players from professional baseball. After segregation took hold, Thompson continued playing with prominent Black teams, including the Cuban Giants—the first all-Black professional baseball team in the United States—and the Philadelphia Colored Giants.

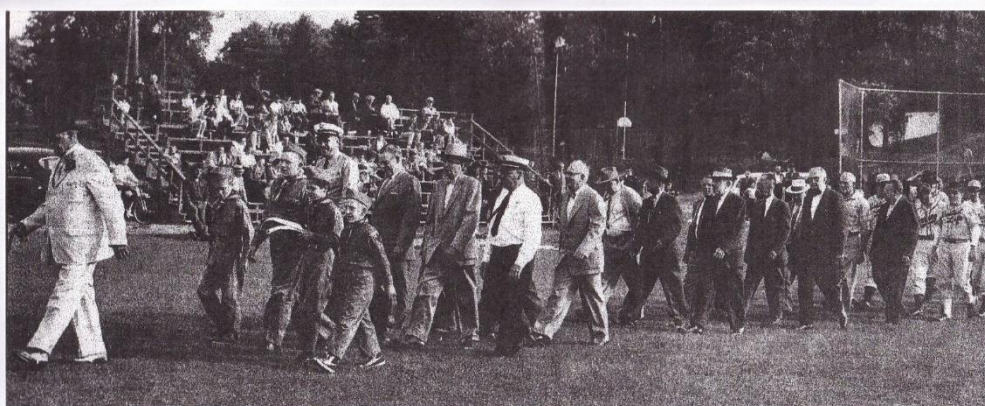


Beyond professional play, Thompson remained deeply involved in baseball locally. He was a catcher and a longtime participant in Concord's Sunset League, one of the oldest recreational baseball leagues in the nation, established in 1909. He played for many years and his contributions were recognized when he was inducted into the Sunset League's 1946 Older Timers Hall of Fame.



WHITE PARK OLD TIMERS OF THE SUNSET LEAGUE'S HALL OF FAME AUGUST, 1948
 Front row, from the left: Ralph DeAngelis, Chester Wheeler, Paul Messier, Dolly Callahan, Larry Maddan, Lou Messier, Charlie Nabor and Bill Slatery
 Back row: Frank Costello, Fred Callins, Fat Simpson, Rich Macey, Sharmmy Angwin, Mike Martel, Roy Fraser, Paul Haskell, Matt Pender, Gordon Lovell, Marshall Lecker, Partho O'Hara, Bob Thompson, I. Lewis, Pat Clark, Vernon Stone, Corbett and Pat Bunker

Outside of baseball, Thompson worked for many years as a janitor for the Concord police department, which at the time was housed in a building that now serves as a restaurant. He also worked during the baseball "off" season at various pool halls around the City. His steady presence in the community reflected a life of quiet dedication both on and off the field.



Thompson often led the annual parade at the start of the Sunset League season, in the White Park parade photo are Boy Scouts, Concord's police chief, fire chief, mayor and other dignitaries and ballplayers.

Thompson spent his last months in a Boston-area nursing home and, according to his obituary in the Concord Monitor, died at Roxbury's Copley Hospital on May 12, 1960. Five days after his death, Thompson at his request was buried at Blossom Hill Cemetery in a section historically designated for Black residents. Although the cemetery is now integrated, this detail reflects the segregation that extended even into burial practices during his lifetime.

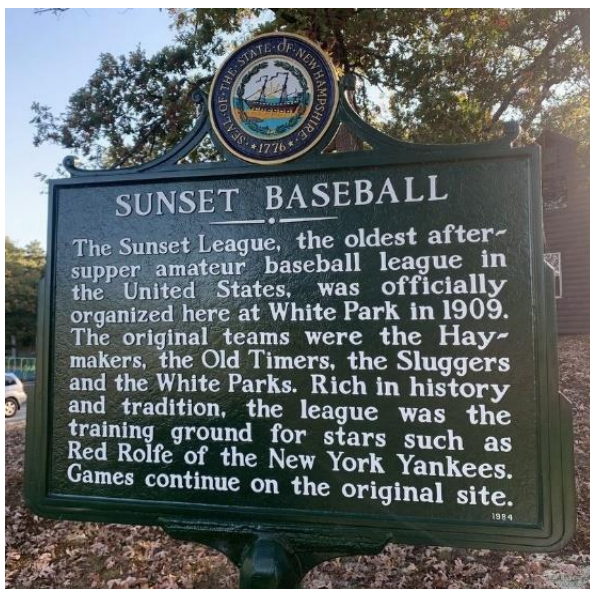
Thompson lived through a period of intense racial inequality in the United States. As late as 1960, New Hampshire's population was overwhelmingly white, and across the country segregation and racial discrimination remained widespread. Despite this context, the City of Concord made a remarkable decision. On February 13, 1961, it named a park in Thompson's honor. This recognition was especially significant given the era's racial climate and the fact that Thompson was a Black man in an interracial marriage. Today, the Thompson Play Lot on North Spring Street remains the only Concord Park named for a person of African American descent.

Recommendation

In Honor of William Penn Thompson's long and storied baseball career it is recommended the City work with the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire to have a marker installed next to the Sunset League Historical Marker at White Park. The cost of the marker will be shared equally between the Black Heritage Trail of NH and the host community. The estimated cost is in the \$4,000 to \$5,000 range and we will fundraise for the local match. Our goal is to raise the funds in the coming weeks so we can have a ceremony prior to a baseball game this summer to dedicate the marker. At their March 19, 2026 meeting the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee agreed with staff's recommendation and voted to recommend City Council approve the installation of a Black Heritage Trail Marker at White Park next to the Sunset League Historical Marker.

William Thompson's life tells a powerful story of perseverance, talent, and quiet impact. As a baseball player, he bridged the gap between integrated and segregated eras of the sport. As a resident of Concord, he contributed to the community for decades and ultimately received recognition that was ahead of its time. His legacy remains an important part of both local and national history.

Thompson's life sits at the intersection of sports history, racial history, and local heritage. He was part of a brief window when baseball was still integrated, lived through the rise of segregation, and remained a respected figure in his community—ultimately recognized in a way that was ahead of its time.



Special thanks to the following people and organizations for their help with the history of William "Bill" Thompson: Steve Destefano and Robert O'Connell from the Sunset League, Concord Monitor, the Concord Room of the Concord Public Library and Althea Barton.