

Tale of the Class of 1914 Student Body President From the Archives

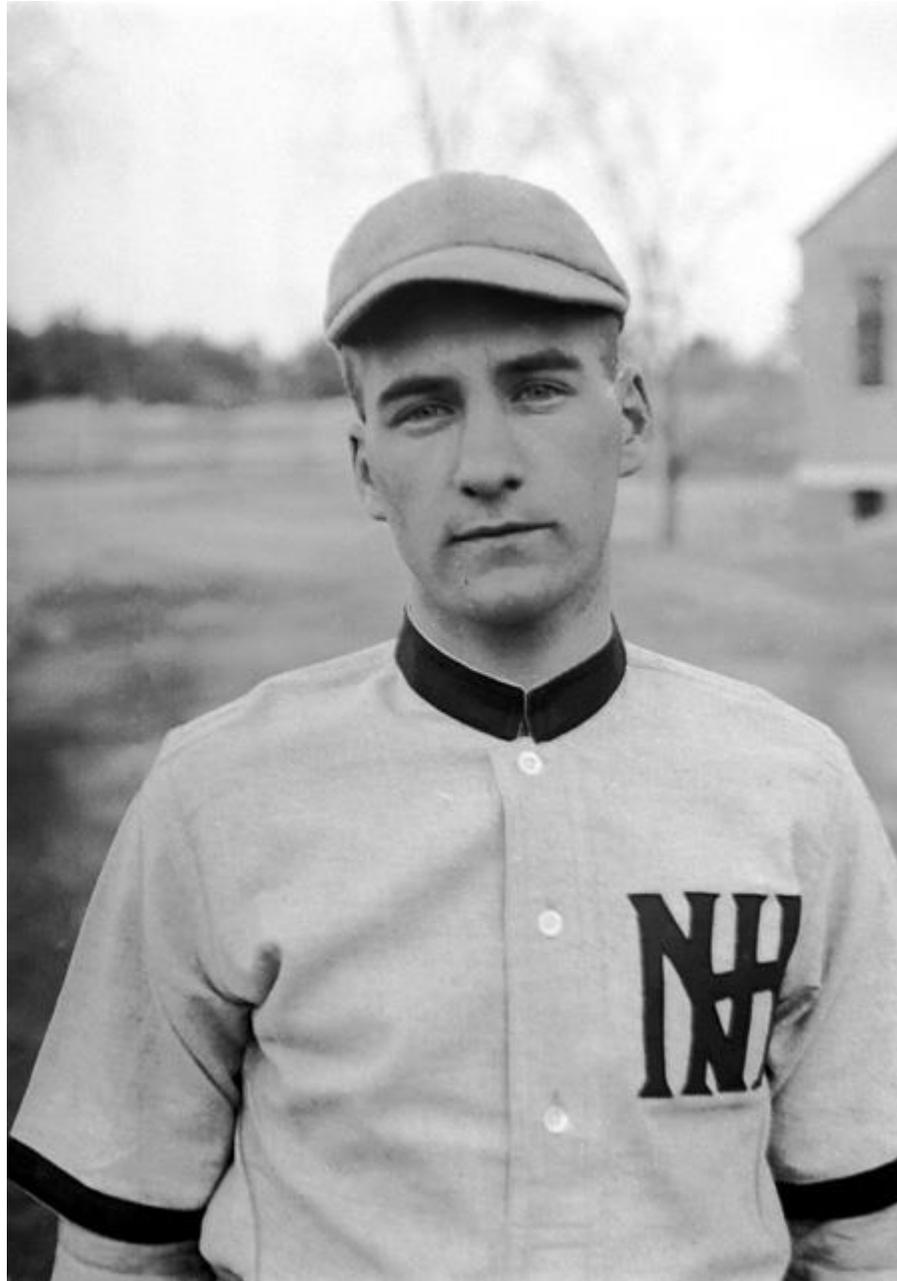
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BRACKETT FIELD WAS NAMED AFTER WILLIAM H. L. BRACKETT, CLASS OF 1914 -- STUDENT, ATHLETE, PATRIOT.

On a spring day in 1912, UNH President William Gibbs was working in his office in Thompson Hall when the bells began to ring, alerting the town to a fire. As he headed up the stairs to the tower to find out what was happening, he met William Brackett running down and immediately became suspicious. Brackett was one of the most popular students at the college, for both his personality and his athletic abilities. He was also president of the Class of 1914, and



WILLIAM H. L. BRACKETT, CLASS OF 1914 -- STUDENT, ATHLETE, PATRIOT.

Gibbs rightly presumed that the “fire” was part of an elaborate ruse to distract the freshmen while the sophomores boarded the train that would take them to Boston for their annual class banquet. (To win this traditional interclass competition, one class had to prevent 10 percent of its opponents from getting to the banquet--by kidnapping and other tactics.)

When Brackett reported to Gibbs’ office the next day, he was suspended for the remainder of the year for ringing a false alarm. The sophomores objected, saying the punishment was too severe since Brackett had acted as an agent for the class and not as an individual. They voted to stop attending classes until Brackett's suspension was

adjusted to what they considered to be a fairer punishment. The freshman class and then the junior class voted to follow the lead of the sophomores. The strike dragged on for more than a week before some of the trustees intervened. After the trustees consulted with President Gibbs and the class representatives, Brackett's punishment was reduced to suspension for two weeks and probation for the rest of the college year. The students returned to classes and the strike was over.

The Class of 1914 never voted for another president, and Brackett held the office for three years. He was also president of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, but it was as an athlete that he achieved his greatest stature: he played football and baseball for four years, captaining both teams, and basketball for one year. He was so good at shortstop that he attracted the attention of big-league scouts and received several offers. Upon graduation, he went into teaching and coaching until the United States entered World War I. He joined the Medical Reserve Corps in 1917 and drove an ambulance overseas for thirteen months before he received a bad dosage of mustard gas and was sent home. He never fully recovered, and on June 3, 1921, he died of complications attributed to the gas.

When the sad news reached campus, the alumni immediately proposed that the newly relocated baseball diamond be named for Bill Brackett. The baseball diamond was refurbished in 1936 during construction of the Lewis Fields athletic complex and by vote of the Board of Trustees was officially dedicated as Brackett Field on June 6, 1936, "In memory of"

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Written by Mylinda Woodward '97, Archives Assistant, LSS, University Archives. Photos courtesy of University Archives.

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