

SHH ... EXHIBITION BASEBALL

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Crack go the Red Sox bats. Roar goes the crowd. "Ahhh" go the whispers at Fenway Park's display by the Boston Public Library of about 20 prints that date back to the early innings of baseball, when Boston had the Braves, the Red Sox had Ruth, and everyone had a fedora.

Conversation drops to a murmur when visitors reach the back corner of the alcove of Fenway's right-field concourse, where a slender Babe Ruth gazes wistfully away from the camera. The adjacent print is a 1920 newspaper cartoon depicting then-owner Harry Frazee chopping down Ruth, who is drawn as a literal pillar of the team.

"This is the way my father used to see it," says a white-haired visitor of a photo showing fans sneaking over the wall at the Huntington Avenue Grounds during the 1903 World Series. Another old-time fan recalls skipping school to see Ted Williams play in 1939. "I remember it like it was yesterday," he says.

The exhibit opened Aug. 19 and will run every home game until the end of the season. Sources of the collection include Michael "Nuf Ced" McGreevey, head of the former Red Sox fan club the Royal Rooters, who donated the photographs that lined his lower Roxbury saloon, Third Base, before prohibition shut it down. The family of Leslie Jones, photographer for the old Boston Herald Traveler, donated his collection of more than 40,000 negatives.

The exhibit opens around 5:30 p.m. to catch the pre-game amblers and closes at 8. About 200 people show up each day, many imparting Red Sox lore to their children.

"Did you know that Babe Ruth's granddaughter is a Red Sox fan?" a visitor asks a friend on a recent afternoon, breaking the silence.