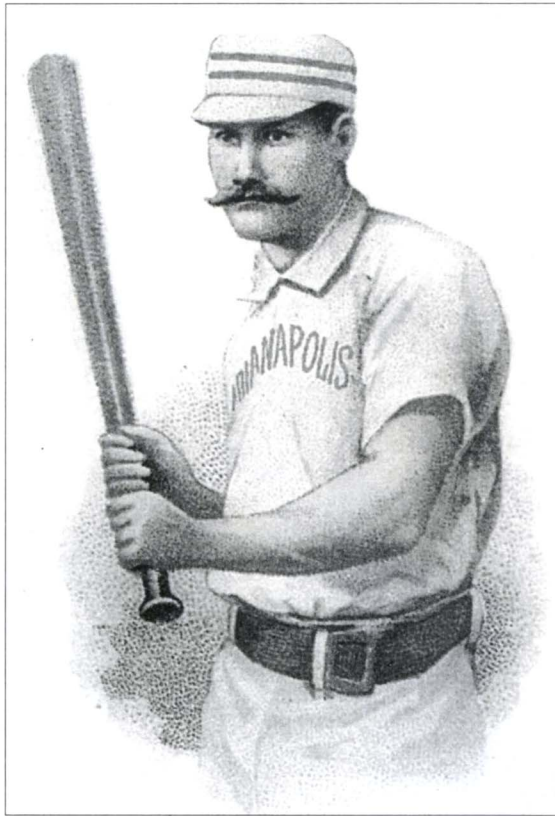


## John Wesley Glasscock - *Sports and Athletics*



Imagine being the first Major League Baseball player to use hand signals to let the catcher know what defense the infield would be employing. Or being the shortstop in the duo which first had the second baseman play halfway between first and second bases instead of close to the bag, with the shortstop covering second base on attempted steals and on double play balls hit to the right side of the infield.

If you're John Wesley Pebbly Jack Glasscock, those are two of the major innovations in America's pastime for which you are credited.

Glasscock was the first West Virginian to play Major League Baseball, starring as a shortstop for several teams during a career that began in 1879 with Cleveland.

A .290 hitter in an era when someone was fortunate to hit .260 because of the dominance of pitching, Glasscock lasted 17 years in the National League from 1879 to 1895. In addition to Cleveland, Glasscock played for NL teams in St. Louis, Indianapolis, New York and Washington. In 1884, he jumped midway through the season from Cleveland to the Cincinnati entry in the ill-fated Union League, which folded after that one season.

Regarded as the King of Shortstops during pro baseball's infancy, Glasscock led the National League in fielding throughout his career, setting records in assists, double plays and putouts, all done without the benefit of a glove. He led the league in hitting in 1890 with the New York Giants.

A century after he played, Jack Glasscock was rated by Sports Illustrated magazine in 1984 as one of the three best shortstops of all time, along with legendary Pittsburgh Pirate Honus Wagner and Hall of Famer Luis Aparicio.

Given the nickname of "Pebble Jack" because of his superstitious habit of tossing stones away from his infield position, Glasscock holds a record that will never be broken. In 1889, he pounded out 205 hits when the pitching mound was only 50 feet from home plate. This record will always

stand because the mound is now 60 feet, 6 inches from home plate.

The year after setting that record, Glasscock again led league hitters with a .336 batting average. When he was released during the 1895 season, he stood eighth in hits (2,040) and 10th in stolen bases (334) even though stolen bases were not kept as an official statistic the first eight years of his career.

After retiring from Washington because of an arm injury during the 1895 season, Glasscock came home to Wheeling and led the local team to the Iron and Oil League title.

Pebble Jack also is credited with starting the professional baseball career of Wheeling's Jesse Burkett, who was a distant cousin of his. Burkett was ready to be released from a Scranton, Pa., team because of his attitude, but Glasscock intervened and told the team's owner he would gladly pay the expenses of Burkett receiving a thorough tryout. Burkett went on to hit better than .400 three times in his playing days, one of only three players to do so, and became the first West Virginia native elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1947. Burkett was inducted into the Wheeling Hall of Fame in 1982.

Glasscock was born in Wheeling on July 22, 1857. He and his wife, Rhoda, who died in 1925, had two sons, one daughter and five grandchildren. Most of his direct descendants live today in Mansfield, Ohio. Glasscock was elected to the Ohio Baseball Hall of Fame in 1998.

After retiring from baseball, Glasscock worked as a contractor and carpenter in Wheeling. He died on Feb. 24, 1947, in the aftermath of a stroke.

A local baseball card collector said a Glasscock card in acceptable condition would be worth about \$250 today while a Glasscock card in pristine condition would be worth at least \$1,000 in today's market.