

Historical Headlines

Bear Down, Chicago Bears!

“Bear down, Chicago Bears, make every play - clear the way to victory;

Bear down, Chicago Bears, put up a fight with a might so fearlessly.

In the spring of 1920, Decatur industrialist A.E. Staley hired former University of Illinois athlete and U.S. Navy veteran George Halas to play baseball for his factory baseball team and then recruit and coach a football team. On September 17 of that year Halas attended a meeting of football team owners in Canton, Ohio and agreed that the Staley team would participate in the proposed American Professional Football Association, the future NFL.

STARCH WORKERS WIN FROM GREAT CHICAGO ELEVEN IN FAST GAME

Sternaman Boots Two Field Goals From Placement and Staleys Finish on Long End of 6 to 0 Score—Hard Fought Battle.
Decatur Herald, November 26, 1920

In their fourth game of the 1920 season the scarlet-shirted Decatur Staleys traveled to “Cubs Park” on October 24 and defeated the orange and black outfitted **Chicago Tigers** 10-0 on their home field. The Staleys returned there again on Thanksgiving Day and although *“The Tigers outweighed the visitors ... the Decatur machine was speedier and in better physical trim.”* This November 25 Tigers’ 6-0 loss was their last professional league game and marked the end of one of the four* original Illinois APFA teams.



On the following two Sundays the Staleys split games against the Racine [Chicago] Cardinals losing 7-6 at the Cardinal’s home field Normal Park but winning 10-0 on December 5 in front of 11,000 people at Cubs Park while using only 12 players. The Staleys came in second place that year even though four of the team members are now in the NFL Hall of Fame. In 1921, after winning their first two games on Staley Field in Decatur, with the blessing of owner Gene Staley, the team moved to Chicago and played their next 10 games in Cubs Park before being declared the league champions. Before the next season started, the NPFA changed its name to the National Football League and George Halas and Edward “Dutch” Sternaman incorporated the Chicago Bears as equal partners. In 1931 Halas bought out Sternaman before the team again won national championships in 1932 and 1933 wearing their current orange and blue.

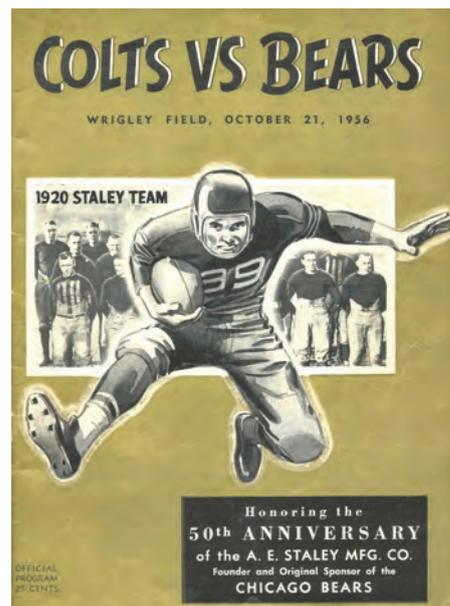
Specializing in the use of the T-formation and forward pass the Bears won national titles in 1940, 1941, 1943 and 1946 and gained the moniker “Monsters of the Midway.” Their drubbing of the Washington football team 73-0 in the 1940 title game is still an NFL record and resulted in Al Hoffman writing the

Bear Down, Chicago Bears fight song before the 1941 season. [It is still played and sung after every Bears’ touchdown and was recorded by the world-famous Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus after the 1986 Bears’ Super Bowl victory.]

We’ll never forget the way you thrilled the nation with your T-formation.

Bear down, Chicago Bears, and let them know why you’re wearing the crown.

Unfortunately the Bears had little success between 1947 and their next national championship in 1963. However, every year beginning in the mid-1930s, owner and head coach George Halas welcomed back all former team members [with the exception of Ed and Joe Sternaman] for a player reunion. In 1956 a national search took place to find all of the members of the original 1920 Staleys team who would be honored during the half time of the October 21



The Bears honored the Staley manufacturing company in 1956 during an NFL game.



Baltimore-Chicago game at Wrigley Field and post-game banquet at the Edgewater Beach Hotel.

After Halas' death in 1983 the Bears won their first and only Super Bowl championship in January 1986 under one-time Bear player and now head coach Mike Ditka.

You're the pride and joy of Illinois, Chicago Bears, bear down.

*Illinois had four APFL/NFL teams – In addition to the **Decatur Staleys/Chicago Bears** - the **Chicago Tigers** only competed in 1920; the green and white **Rock Island Independents** were a franchise from 1920 through 1925 and had a record of 2 wins, 4 ties and 8 losses against the Bears; and the eventually red and white **Racine [Street]**

Jubilant Q-C hails the Bears

Super parties for a Super Bowl win

On October 3, 1920, the Decatur Staleys played their first football game and defeated the "Moline Tractors" 20-0 in front of 2000 spectators on Staley Field. Despite this loss, Quad City fans gathered to cheer on Walter Payton and the Chicago Bears at Super Bowl XX parties in 1986. The Daily Dispatch [Moline] Jan. 27, 1986

Chicago Cardinals had 5 different home fields before departing for St. Louis for the 1960 season. For a history of that franchise see Joe Ziemba's 1999 book *When Football Was Football: The Chicago Cardinals and the Birth of the NFL.* 

For a complete description of the first two years of Bears' football see *Corn hustlers - How Decatur Starchworkers became Chicago Bears* by Mark W. Sorensen. *Illinois Heritage*, Vol. 8, No. 5, Sept/Oct 2005.

Also online at <https://www.lib.niu.edu/2005/ih050910.html>

Biographies of all of the 1920-1921 Staley players can be found online at Decatur's Staley Museum www.staleymuseum.com

Mark W. Sorensen is a frequent contributor to Illinois Heritage and the Official Macon County Historian.

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Lunch and Learn Series



The Architecture of Place and Sound

Tuesday, September 21

David Finnigan, author of *Inside Allerton*, will discuss his research of Allerton Park, the elegant Monticello estate filled with rich history, surprising stories, formal gardens and woodland trails.

Dr. Paula Pugh Romanoux, professional musician and educator, will discuss Andrew Carnegie's Organ Benefactions to Illinois and the World.



In Celebration of Springfield

Wednesday, October 27

Ken Page, preservationist and historian, will discuss Firehouse No. 5—the First Black Firehouse in Springfield, IL, home to the city's Black firefighters in the early 1900s.

Curtis Mann, librarian and city historian, will discuss the History of Nightlife in Springfield.



Arboriculture and Mine Wars

Tuesday, November 9

Guy Sternberg, arborist and author, will discuss *The Oaks and Habitats of Illinois* and the Starhill Forest Arboretum in Petersburg.

Taylor Pensoneau, author and publisher, will discuss the *Mine Wars of Central Illinois*.



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Sept. 21 • Oct. 27 • Nov. 9

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