



PELICAN BRIEFS

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The Sale of the New Orleans Pelicans

August – September 1937

Charles Somers of Cleveland had been the principal owner of the New Orleans Pelicans since 1913 until his death in 1934. When A.J. Heinemann committed suicide in January 1930, Somers was forced to take a day-to-day role in operating the club, something he had always delegated to others. Almost immediately after Heinemann's death, the inquiries regarding the sale of the club began.

This turn of events was complicated by the fact that while Heinemann was President of the New Orleans Pelicans, he was a minority owner of the team, but a majority owner of the land and stadium where the Pelicans played. During 1930 and 1931, as Heinemann's estate was settled – after heated protests from some of Heinemann's relatives – Somers brought ownership of the land and stadium under the same umbrella that owned the franchise: the New Orleans Baseball & Amusement Company.

With Somers' death in 1934, discussions began in earnest with multiple interested parties. In early 1937 discussions began between Somers' estate and a group of New Orleans businessmen about purchasing the franchise.

On August 11, 1937 the New Orleans Baseball & Amusement Company was sold to a syndicate of local businessmen led by Colonel Seymour Weiss, A.B. Freeman (president of the Coca-Cola distributor), A.B. Patterson (president of New Orleans Public Service), Horace Williams (a contractor), and others including Governor Leche. The selling price was reported to be \$203,000 for the franchise.

The land and stadium was purchased separately for \$115,000 by Mayor Robert Maestri, who would agree to make \$150,000 in improvements to the facility over the next two years and would further agree to \$12,000 per year in rent.

The total package was \$418,000 or \$795 per share for the franchise, equipment, uniforms, stadium, and land. However, a group of minority shareholders was not pleased with the terms of the transaction and sued to block the sale.

Represented by the law firm of Monroe & Lehman, the dissident shareholders included 150 shares of the 400 total outstanding shares in the enterprise. Among the disgruntled shareholders were Morris Simon (10 shares), William Wiegand (8 shares), Bob Wiegand (7 shares), Boris Burke (5 shares), Fred Eldridge (5 shares), Adelaide Comfort (4 shares), Charles Schwandt (2 shares), and Charles "Pie" Dufour (1 share).

The sale was eventually completed as originally structured on September 21, 1937.