

## **Wesley Branch Rickey---A Lucasville Legend**

Wesley Branch Rickey was born on December 20, 1881, in Scioto County, to the modest farming family of Jacob Franklin “Frank” Rickey and Emily Brown Rickey. Branch had an older brother, Orla, born in 1875, and a younger brother, Frank, born in 1888. As Branch’s first name would indicate it was a pious Methodist household.

Lucasville had an outstanding twelve–grade high school with bustling halls, and three large classrooms. Because the family believed Branch was unusually intelligent and the little one room school at Duck Run had given all the education it could to Branch, the family moved to Lucasville so he could continue his studies. Only his father remained at home working the farm.

The family rented two floors of Squire Crain’s home which sat across Main Street from Chandler Moulton’s home. Superintendent, James Finney, took Branch under his wing tutoring him privately helping Branch overcome his impediment of stuttering. Finney encouraged him to take exams to become a teacher. The money from teaching allowed him to pursue further studies.

Frank Appel, superintendent in Wheelersburg, encouraged Branch to cram for entrance exams to Ohio Wesleyan College. He tutored Branch for six weeks. And both Finney and Appel went to see Branch’s father and persuaded him to let Branch go to Ohio Wesleyan. Later, Branch said, “I wanted to go to college more than anything else in the world, and I didn’t care how I got there.”

He began coaching at Ohio Wesleyan and played semi pro baseball in the summers. In 1904 after graduation, he played professional ball. He was a difficult player for coaches to handle because he wouldn’t play on Sundays. In all he played major league baseball for four seasons.

On June 1, 1906, he married his sweetheart, Jane Moulton in the living room of her parents, Chandler and Mary Moulton. It was said that Chandler gave his permission when Branch agreed to give up baseball and go to Law School. When he arrived in Lucasville for the wedding, he was greeted by a brass band welcoming home the “conquering hero”.

He did indeed go to law school teaching beginning law course while taking higher level courses himself. After a brief career in law, he signed as a scout/general manager for the St. Louis Browns. In 1917 he became president of the St. Louis Cardinals.

In 1918 he joined the Army Chemical Corps. He was commissioned a major. As the war ended, he was back in Lucasville with the family for Christmas.

In his work with the Cardinals, he invented many innovations, one was the farm system to find the great players. He also invented the sand pit to train players to slide; a set of strings to help pitchers find the strike zone, batting tees to help hitters; batting helmets, and chalk talks. He was with the Cardinals for over 20 years.

In 1937, he brought the Cardinals to town to play the Portsmouth Red Birds in an exhibition game at Riverside Park. While home he visited his old Lucasville gang including J. H. Finney, E. C. Hood, C. D. Walden, Robert Morgan, Clyde Brant, James Cain, Joseph Morgan, Bud Yeager, Arthur Moulton, John Moulton, Frank Moulton, Frank Brisker, Lewis McKinley, J. H. Rockwell, Hayes Shultz, Edgar G. Miller, and Carey Fresbeur. (*The Portsmouth Times*)

Over time his reputation as a shrewd executive and motivational speaker grew. In 1942, he made the move to the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1945, he, Walter O'Malley, and John Smith acquired over 50% of the Dodgers. After WWII, he developed the idea of a spring training complex, but it was his decision to seek talent in black players that placed him as a "sainted agent of progress". This idea came from his religious beliefs; his desire to draw fans and win; and his ability to see baseball in the context of the American society. His first choice was Jackie Robinson. His decision was validated, and the two began a life-long friendship.

In 1965, he finished the book *The American Diamond: A Documentary of the Game of Baseball*, which was the closest thing to an autobiography that he would write. He died while speaking at a meeting held to induct him into the Missouri Baseball Hall of Fame on December 9, 1965. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1967. The category was "Executive". He and Jane are buried in Rush Township Burial Park.

Branch is famous for his quotes. Go online and enter Branch Rickey quotes. You will enjoy reading them and get a measure of the man. We leave you with one of them:

***"It is not the honor you take with you,  
But the heritage you leave behind."***