

# HISTORIC OTTERBEIN

[Return to the Otterbein History Page](#)

## Babe Ruth Lived in the Neighborhood

by David Safier

If you happened to be walking by the corner of Hanover and Hughes in 1904, you may have seen some boys in the street tossing a ball around. If you stopped to watch a minute, you might have noticed one of them had an exceptionally strong arm for a lad so young. And if he picked up a stick or a bat or whatever they used in the South Baltimore streets at the time and took a few swings at the ball, you might have thought, “That is one talented kid.”

That nine year old lad you were watching was George Herman Ruth Jr. A few years later, he would be known to the world as Babe Ruth.

The Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum at 216 Emory Street notes the house he was born in “is now just a long fly ball from Oriole Park at Camden Yards.” When George Jr. was young, George Herman Ruth Sr. ran saloons in a number of locations in South Baltimore, including one at what is now center field of Camden Yards.

In 1903, George Sr. applied for a liquor license at 712 Hanover, a long fly ball from Oriole Park in the other direction from The Babe’s birth home. Baltimore’s 1904 directory has George Sr. living at that address and running a saloon.

## Did Babe Ruth Live at the Hanover Street Address ?

It’s clear that George Sr. lived at 712 Hanover, and that should mean young Babe Ruth lived there as well. He was born in 1895, so he would have been 8 or 9 in 1904, far too young to be living on his own. But the question remains: Did Babe Ruth live at the Hanover address? That’s because, when he was 7, George Jr. was sent to St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys because his parents couldn’t handle him. [Unrelated factoid: Al Jolson lived at the same school a few years earlier.] Ruth stayed at the school until 1914 when he turned 19, when he signed with the Baltimore Orioles, then a minor league team. (He was picked up by the Boston Red Sox a few months later.) So it is possible he never lived at the Hanover address.

We can suppose that George Jr. stayed with his parents on Hanover Street on weekends or holidays.



Photo from 1915-1917: Babe Ruth (Center) with the Boston Red Sox. Library of Congress

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After all, St. Mary's Industrial School was on Wilkens Ave. near Canton Ave., about 3.5 miles from 712 Hanover, so it would have been easy for his parents to pick him up and take him home for a few days now and then. The problem with that supposition is, The Babe didn't get along with his parents, and he rarely talked about his youth, so we can't say with any degree of certainty that The Babe lived, or even slept at the Hanover Street address based on the information we have so far.

## The Answer Is Yes

The 1974 biography, *Babe Ruth: His Life And Legend*, by Kal Wagenheim, holds the answer. When writing about George Jr.'s years at St. Mary's, Wagenheim noted that the school tried sending him back to his parents on a few occasions, but he always returned to the school. The author includes this critical detail:

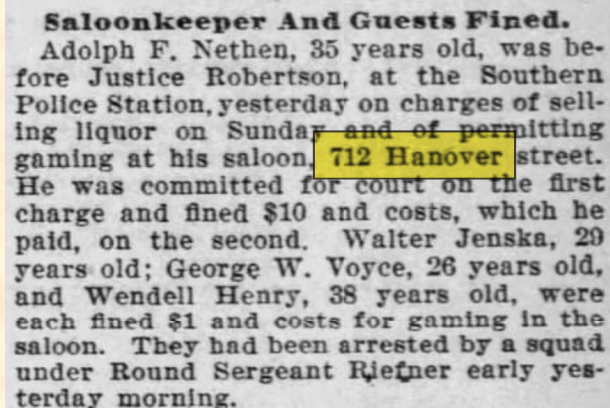
"He came home again just before the Christmas of 1902, when his family moved to Hanover Street, and stayed for more than a year. But back he went at the age of nine and was confined for four more years."

That is as close as you can get to proof positive. The Babe lived in what is now the Otterbein neighborhood, above his parents' saloon at 712 Hanover.

## A Post Script

Here is an added bit of information, which appeared in an article in The Baltimore Sun on November 17, 1902, from just before George Sr. took over the Hanover Street saloon. The previous proprietor, Adolph F. Nethen, was fined for selling liquor on a Sunday and "permitting gaming" at his establishment.

Though we can't say for certain, we can indulge our imaginations and picture Adolph Nethen throwing in his saloon keeper's towel after the November incident, and George Sr. moving in with his family in December.



**Saloonkeeper And Guests Fined.**  
Adolph F. Nethen, 35 years old, was before Justice Robertson, at the Southern Police Station, yesterday on charges of selling liquor on Sunday and of permitting gaming at his saloon, 712 Hanover street. He was committed for court on the first charge and fined \$10 and costs, which he paid, on the second. Walter Jenska, 29 years old; George W. Voyce, 26 years old, and Wendell Henry, 38 years old, were each fined \$1 and costs for gaming in the saloon. They had been arrested by a squad under Round Sergeant Riefner early yesterday morning.