

**FAMOUS BRANDENBURG BASEBALL PLAYERS**

by Pat bristley

There were five big league baseball players connected to our Brandenburg family. One was Earl B. Combs, “The Silver Fox of Kentucky” who descended from Matthias and Hester (Wolgamot) Brandenburg. Three others were Charles “King Kong” Keller, his brother, Hal Keller, and his son Charles Keller Jr. who descended from Matthias and Barbara (Keller) Brandenburg. The final one was Mike Mussina, who descended from Anthony and Pamela (Curtis) Brandenburg. Mike was pitching for the Yankees in the 2006 season.

**EARL B. COMBS**

**Earl B. Combs, ‘The Silver Fox of Kentucky’**

b: May 1899, near Pebworth, Owsley Co., KY (census, 599)

m: **Ruth McCollum**, unknown (sister’s letter, 599)

d: 22 Jul 1976, probably Richmond, Madison Co., KY (599)

**Earl B. Combs was the son of:**

**James Combs**

b: Feb 1860, Owsley Co., KY (census, 599)

m: ca 1886, unknown (birth of 1<sup>st</sup> child)

d: post Jun 1900, unknown (census)

fa: **Andrew Combs (?)** (see below)

mo: **Elizabeth Herndon** (granddaughter’s letter) [Elizabeth was also a Brandenburg descendant]

**Nannie Brandenburg**

b: Jun 1869, Owsley Co., KY (census, 599)

d: post Jun 1900, unknown (census)

fa: **John Harrison Brandenburg** (granddaughter’s letter)

mo: **Margaret Evans** (granddaughter’s letter)

***Letter from Addie (Combs) Brandenburg to W. J. Moore, (see #599):***

3417 Grand Avenue  
Huntington Park, CA  
August 13, 1965

Dear Mr. Moore

I cannot give you the needed information, yet I think I can give you some leads towards it. **I’m Earl Combs’ sister**, and **his wife, Ruth** is the genealogist in our family. You see our mother was a Brandenburg. We never knew or could trace that we were any relation of my husband’s family Brandenburg. Yet I feel sure that we were of the same Brandenburg Gate family in Germany. My grandfather was John H. Brandenburg of Lee County, and later Paint Lick, Madison County, and I fell sure your mother was not from that line of Brandenburgs. My grandfather’s family even spelled their name Brandenburgh, but later, since I can remember, dropped the “h.”...My husband was a grandson of the late Thomas Brandeburg, whose brothers were Patrick, Samuel, Jackson,

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and Jailey (Brandenburg) Herndon, who married a brother of my paternal grandmother Combs....I suggest you see Earl's wife, who will be most happy to share her findings....

Cordially yours,  
Mrs. Addie Combs Brandenburg

**Note:** For the complete letter shown in part above, see the Thomas and Nancy (Thomas) Brandenburg sketch.

### *W. J. Moore Papers* (see #599):

Information that came from John Harrison 'Jack' Brandenburg of Madison County, Kentucky: "The children of the informant, John H. Brandenburgh, and his first wife, Margaret Evens were:

1. Nannie Brandenburgh, married James Combs, and they were the parents of Earl Combs, who has become an illuminating star in baseball playing...."

*Moore Papers* (see #599), part of an unknown New York City newspaper article, "Viewpoint" by E. J. Kahn Jr., 13 September 1976::

The worse thing about traveling abroad is missing the obituaries back home. Thus it was not until a couple of months after the sad event, that I learned, on returning from an overseas junket, **that the greatest center fielder ever to wear the uniform of the New York Yankees was dead**....I am referring, of course, to that paragon of Yankee center fielders, Earl Combs, the Silver Fox from Kentucky.

The news of his death was saddening, but what shocked me most on looking up Combs' death notices was that he was 77. True, his hair had been flecked with gray even when as a boy I watched him with huge and unflagging admiration, but how could he be *that* old? Then I realized that it was 50 years ago that I used to take my leather-bound autograph book up to the old Yankee Stadium, an hour or more before game time, and hang around the edge of the home-team dugout hoping to add a Herb Pennock or a Jumping Joe Dugan to my collection of illustrious signatures....But to me their deeds, however valiant, pale in comparison to my memory of those of the incomparable Combs.

As the lead-off man for the old Murderer's Row, he always seemed to be hitting something like .350, and he always seemed to be on base - like as not moved along to second by Mark Koenig - when Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig came to the plate to drive him around. Defensively, Combs was the cement that held the other jewels of the Yankee outfield together - Bob Meusel to his right, Ruth to his left. Combs abetted and protected them like a sheep dog tending his flock. Any ball hit to right center or left center that Ruth or Meusel gathered in, was caught by them. I often had the impression, largely through courtesy on the part of the courtly Combs: he could have loped over and gobbled up those flies, himself, but he did not wish to appear to be intruding on their assigned territory.

I once had my picture taken shaking hands with Gehrig and I once pressed the flesh with Ruth, but to my own dying day I will regret that I never got closer than my autograph book to Earl Combs. He was not the pushy, glad-handing sort in any case. He

wore No. 1 on his uniform, and he will always be No. 1 in my book....It doesn't matter. Combs retired....I could never work up much excitement over DiMaggio or Mantle. But I like to think, rather, that it was because they simply couldn't measure up to the lofty standards of Earl Combs. I have a hunch that Bob Meusel and Babe Ruth would most certainly agree with me.

### **THE KELLERS**

**Charles “King Kong” Keller** was born in Frederick County, Maryland, in 1916. He played for the Detroit Tigers and for the New York Yankees, when Casey Stengel was the coach. He was in 1170 games, and had an RBI (runs batted in) of 760. In his final year in baseball, he coached the Yankees. He was in quite a few world series.

He got his nick-name “King Kong” because he had dark hair and batted so many home runs. However, he had a bad back, so eventually retired to his horse farm in Frederick County, Maryland.

**Charlie Keller Jr.**, led the Eastern League one year in hitting (349 hits). Like his father, he had a bad back, so had to retire from baseball.

**Hal Keller** was born in 1927 in Frederick County, Maryland. He played for the Washington Senators in 1949-50 and 1952. Later he was in the Senators' management.

### **MIKE MUSSINA**

*Part of an E-mail from Carolyn Seama, descendant of Anthony Brandenburg who died in Warren County, Ohio, of Kinderhook, N. Y., dated 4 May 2006:*

...And you can add one more baseball player to the list of Brandenburg descendants. Mike Mussina, currently a pitcher for the Yankees, is my brother's son. Mike pitched for ten years for the Baltimore Orioles, before joining the Yankees in 2001....

*Part of an E-mail from Joe Roberts, descendant of William Henry Brandenburg I, Jr., and III, from Jacksonville, Florida, dated 4 May 2006:*

That is a delightful chronicle of a relatively lesser-known talent of the Brandenburgs – being baseball stars through several generations.

The only thing that's surprising is that there isn't a William or Matthew or Jake (Jacob) or Hank (Henry) out there at third base, shortstop, second base, and first base.

Nevertheless, the Ancestors are probably cheering from on high, even though they don't quite understand baseball and wonder how grown men can spend time doing this, instead of farming, tanning, milling, or cabinet making....