



Rogers Hornsby — one of baseball's greatest players — is buried in a **secluded family cemetery** in Bluebonnet territory

THE RESTING PLACE OF

The Rajah

By Aaron Schnautz

One of Texas' best-kept baseball secrets rests beyond an unremarkable metal gate off a farm-to-market road in eastern Travis County. Behind the gate, posted as private with signs to deter vandals or trespassers, a narrow gravel path twists half a mile downhill toward the Colorado River and a time long forgotten.

Mesquite trees and cacti block the view on each side. Visitors who have been granted permission to visit the land will walk past a 1936 Texas Centennial marker commemorating the first house built in Travis County before the path opens to a field that is home to one of the oldest cemeteries in Texas.

There, in this unnoticed location, is the final resting place of Rogers Hornsby, one of the greatest baseball players of all time.

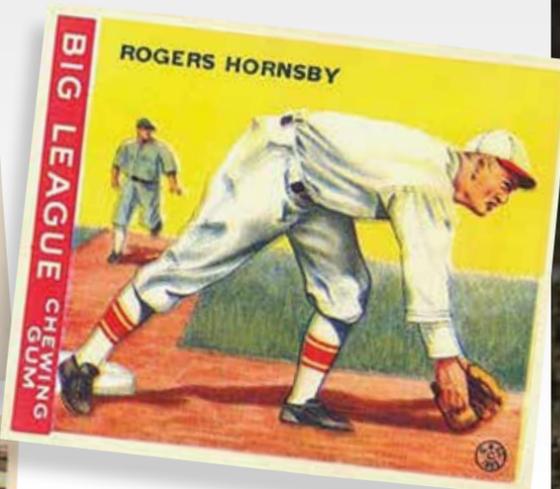
The 27th inductee of the National Baseball Hall of Fame was born in 1896 in the small community of Winters, 40 miles south of Abilene. He was the youngest of six children. "The Rajah" signed with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1915 and would amass 2,930 hits, including 301 home runs, during his illustrious 23-year career. His .424 batting average during the 1924 season is a record that still stands today. And at .366, Ty Cobb is the only player to better Hornsby's .358 career average.

"Not many people know his grave is there," said Hugh Hornsby, the son of Hornsby's first cousin.

Hornsby Cemetery is just a small part of the Colorado River's horseshoe-shaped Hornsby Bend, named for the family patriarch, Reuben Hornsby. As a surveyor for Stephen F. Austin, he spotted land along a northern bend in the



Baseball's legendary second baseman: Above right, a news photo of Rogers Hornsby at bat in 1922 — by then, he was a star, leading the league multiple times in batting average, hits, doubles and runs batted in. Three Hornsby baseball cards of value today are, at left, a 1917 card from the rare Collins-McCarthy Candy Co. series; below, a 1933 card of Hornsby with the Chicago Cubs; below left, a card from Hornsby's time with the St. Louis Cardinals.



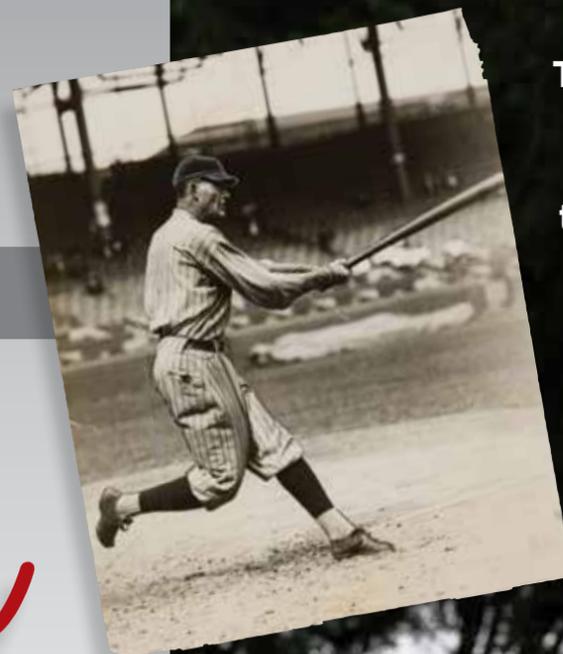
river and relocated his family. In 1832, he established the first permanent white settlement in what would later become Travis County.

The cemetery became necessary four years later when two Texas Rangers, John Williams and Howell Haggett, died guarding the Hornsby property from Comanche fighters. They were the first of 467 internments at Hornsby Cemetery, which includes 13 other Texas Rangers and veterans of wars from the War of 1812 to Vietnam. More than 360 of those buried in the graveyard are descendants of the Hornsby family.

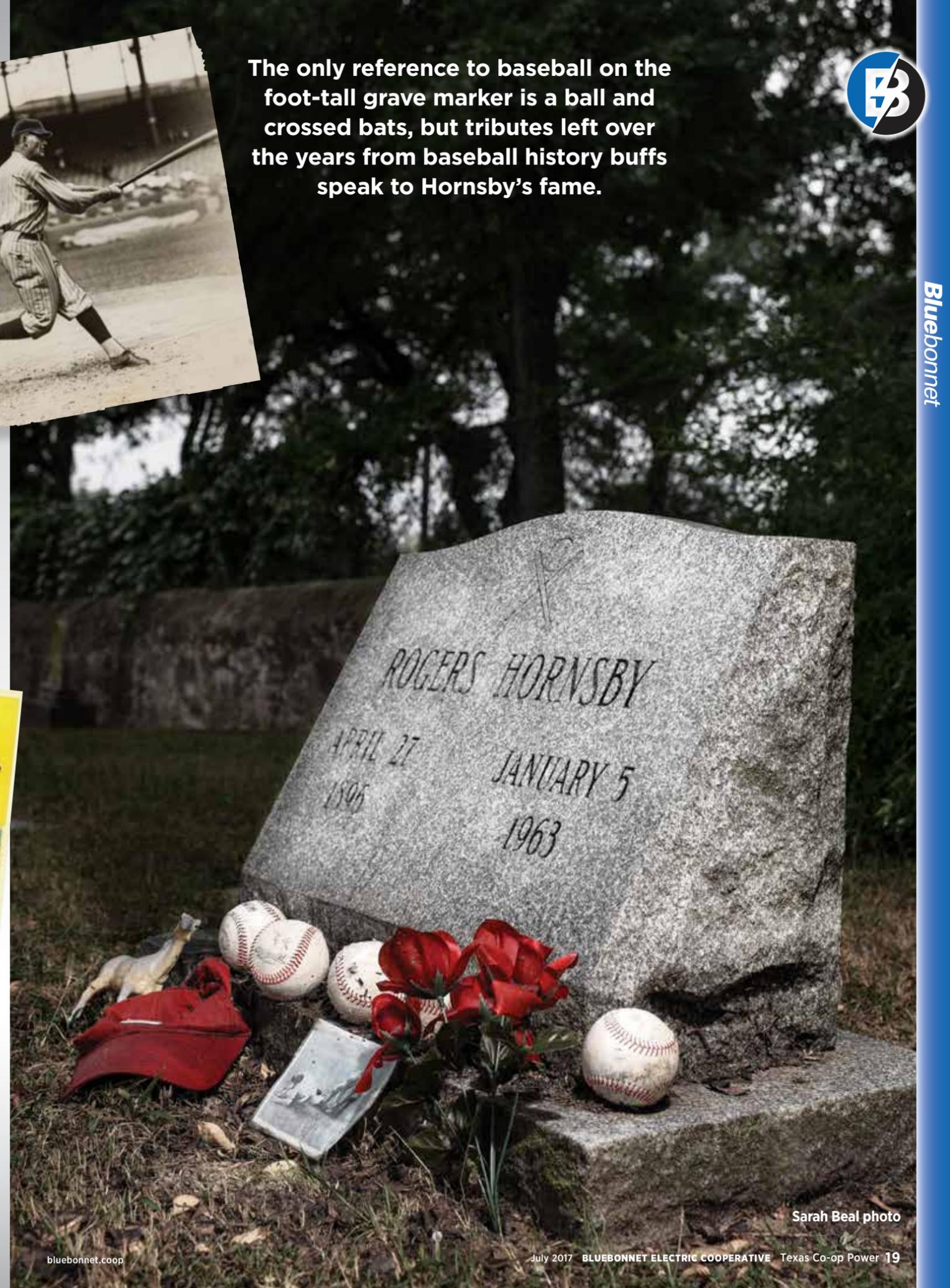
The biggest attraction, though, is the star baseball player, Reuben's great-grandson.

Rogers Hornsby suffered a fatal heart attack in Chicago on Jan. 5, 1963, after complications from

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The only reference to baseball on the foot-tall grave marker is a ball and crossed bats, but tributes left over the years from baseball history buffs speak to Hornsby's fame.



Sarah Beal photo

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cataract surgery. He was 66. He was buried in the Hornsby family cemetery five days later, on a cloudy and unusually warm winter day. Family, friends and colleagues from his nearly 50 years in baseball — including time as a manager and coach — poured in from across the country to mourn the loss of the Hall of Famer.

“The cemetery was packed,” Hugh Hornsby said. “It was the most people I had ever seen at a Hornsby funeral.”

Rogers was laid to rest near his family: Aaron Edwards Hornsby, his father who died 20 months after Rogers was born; William Wallace and Emory Bud Hornsby, his older brothers who didn’t live long enough to see him become the National League MVP; and Mary Dallas Rogers Hornsby, his mother and namesake who died three days before the start of the 1926 World Series — the only championship Rogers Hornsby won.

Rogers Hornsby took baseball seriously. He avoided alcohol and tobacco. He slept as much as 12 hours a day and drank whole milk with every meal. He even refused to read books or go to the movies for fear of straining his eyesight. Boston Red Sox legend Ted Williams, who knew a thing or two about hitting, called him the greatest hitter for average and power in the history of baseball.

But his headstone says little about this legendary second baseman. There is no mention of his two MVP awards or the seven batting titles he won. And there is nothing about his two Triple Crowns, the title given to a player who led the league in batting average, home runs and runs batted in during a single season. Visitors will see no mention of his World Series victory. The unpretentious foot-tall grave marker simply lists his name and dates of birth and death. The lone indication that baseball meant anything to Rogers Hornsby is the ball and crossed bats engraved above his name — and the tributes visitors have left over the decades.

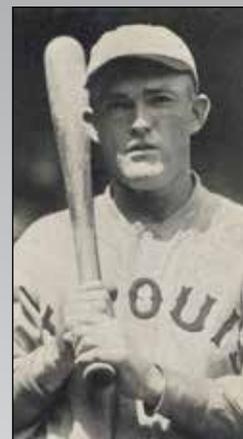
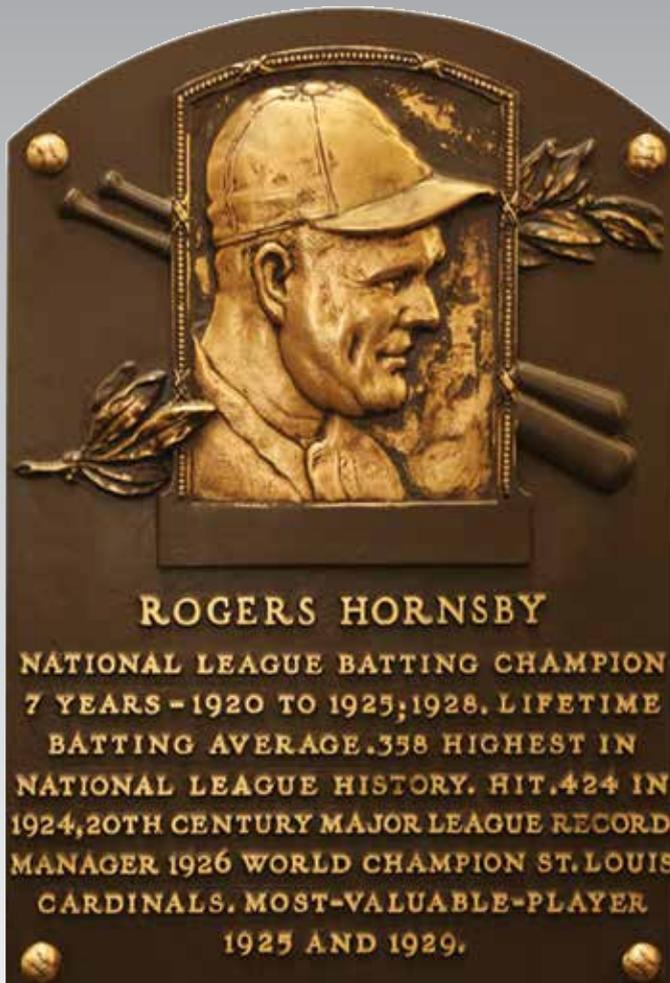
“Ever since the funeral, there have been baseballs on that tombstone,” said Ronny Platt, a great-great-grandson of Reuben Hornsby and president of the Hornsby Cemetery Board of Governors for the past eight years.

Rogers Hornsby’s grave is a baseball pilgrimage destination (but one that can only be seen with permission from the family.) A recent trip to the cemetery found a handful of gifts left on his headstone: several worn baseballs, the oldest of which had turned gray and was coming apart at the seams; a faded laminated photo of Hornsby tagging Babe Ruth for the final out of the ’26 Series; and a small replica horse, possibly representing his reported fondness for gambling on ponies.

There are no written messages, no names or dates to record who visited when. There’s no guestbook to sign, no tour guide. There is just nearly two centuries of history to sift through before finding the most decorated headstone in the cemetery.

“Nobody knows how long things get left there,” Hugh Hornsby said. “Usually if something disappears, something else replaces it pretty quickly.”

Rogers Hornsby’s headstone is by no means the largest or flashiest in the cemetery. It lacks



Sarah Beal photo

Above left, Hornsby’s plaque at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. He was named to the hall in 1942. Top right, Hornsby in 1921, his second year at second base with the St. Louis Cardinals. Above, Hornsby joined the New York Mets in 1962 as a scout and third-base coach, finishing his career there. He died in 1963 of a heart attack. At left, a visitor’s photo of Hornsby tagging out Babe Ruth in the 1926 World Series. It was the only time a World Series ended with a runner caught stealing a base.

any of the historical markers that interest Karen Thompson, the president of Save Texas Cemeteries, a nonprofit group dedicated to rescuing cemeteries from destruction. She occasionally sends researchers to Hornsby Cemetery to study the plaques and medallions adorning the gravesites. Although her focus is typically on the headstones representing the Daughters and Sons of the Republic of Texas, Thompson makes an observation each time she passes by the greatest right-handed hitter in baseball history.

“I don’t know how many folks visit Rogers’ grave,” she said. “But enough that a fairly new baseball always seems to be there.” ■

Story courtesy Reporting Texas, University of Texas School of Journalism.

To obtain permission to visit the Hornsby Cemetery, contact Hugh Hornsby by email at hornsbybend@peoplepc.com or by mail at 8021 North Ranch Road 620, Nolana Flats, #524, Austin, Texas, 78726. To help Hornsby family members maintain the cemetery, you can contribute to the Hornsby Cemetery Foundation by contacting C. Ronnie Platt by email at rplatt16110@gmail.com or by mail at 16110 Chateau Ave., Austin, Texas 78734.