

William Henry Sinclair, a transplanted Northerner and radical Republican who replaced Ira H. Evans as speaker during the reconstructionist 12th Legislature, was instrumental in bringing professional baseball to Texas. Union soldiers occupying Galveston in 1865 popularized that game among residents, and the interest later spread throughout the state. Sinclair, who was discharged from the Union Army in 1866, developed a fondness for the port city through his travels and moved there shortly after the Civil War. About 20 years later, after a team from Austin defeated the New York Giants and prompted baseball enthusiasts in this state to establish the Texas League, Sinclair became president of a group of stockholders that helped to organize the Galveston franchise. In April 1888, the Galveston team played its first game, losing on the road to Houston, 4 to 1. During that inaugural Texas League season, Sinclair and his associates introduced to Galveston two modern baseball accoutrements: the promotion of a Ladies' Day to increase attendance; and the use of an outfield tally board, supported by telegraph communication, to keep fans abreast of games being played elsewhere in the league.

Born in Jonestown, Michigan, on October 31, 1838, Sinclair originally enlisted in the infantry in 1862 as a mere fife player. By war's end, however, he had risen to the rank of brevet colonel. Sinclair participated in several important Civil War engagements, including the sieges of New Madrid and Corinth and the battles of Murfreesboro and Chickamauga. Interestingly, at Murfreesboro, he was on the opposite side of the fray from Matthew F. Locke and George R. Reeves, the 12th and 25th speakers, respectively, of the Texas House of Representatives.

Sinclair served a single term as state representative and did not seek reelection. The house chose him as its speaker on May 10, 1871, after Ira H. Evans was ousted from that office due to a factional quarrel. The 12th Legislature, in which the two men served, passed a series of measures, known collectively as the "Obnoxious Acts," that were anathema to most unreconstructed Texans. Of more lasting significance, however, the same legislature provided for compulsory education, established the state's first genuine free public school system, and chartered the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (Texas A&M University). That legislature also ratified the federal constitutional amendment abolishing slavery.

Sinclair was a prominent citizen of postwar Galveston. He was district clerk of Galveston County, later held a position as collector of internal revenue, and during President Benjamin Harrison's administration was appointed Galveston's postmaster. An energetic entrepreneur, Sinclair, in addition to molding a baseball team, established a local ice manufacturing firm, organized a city railway company, and founded an electric light utility. He also supervised construction of the Electric Pavilion, a Galveston beach house that was the first building in Texas to have electric lights, and built the Beach Hotel, an early resort of elaborate architecture that catered to the city's growing recreational trade. Sinclair died January 11, 1897, in Rochester, New York, while on a promotional business trip.