

RICKWOOD FIELD
1137 Second Avenue West
Birmingham
Jefferson County
Alabama

HABS NO. AL-897

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ALA
37-BIRM,
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RICKWOOD FIELD

HABS NO. AL-897

Location: 1137 Second Avenue West, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. Situated in the West End, an area marked by a mix of industrial and residential properties, Rickwood Field sits at the corner of 2nd Ave. West and 12th Street West. The grandstand stretches east along 2nd Ave West and south along 12th Street West before curving back in toward the lot and slightly into the outfield. The outfield is ringed by a concrete wall that curves along the lot line from left field to a point just before the right field grandstands where old wooden bleachers used to lie. In right field the ballpark borders on the Seaboard Coast railroad line, beyond which lie Valley Creek and Lomb Avenue, a major east-west thoroughfare. To the north of Rickwood is Third Avenue West (U.S. Highway 11), another major east-west artery that at one time served as the route of the Ensley/Bessemer streetcar lines leading out to Rickwood from the city center and the western, industrial communities. The field is on a level plain and is one of the few sites in the area that does not experience flooding after heavy rains.

UTM Coordinates: A - 16.513490. 3706890
 B - 16.513500. 3706740
 C - 16.513295. 3706640
 D - 16.513295. 3706890

Present Owner: City of Birmingham, Alabama. The field is used and maintained by the Birmingham Board of Education. The headquarters of the Board's Athletic Department is housed here in the offices above the entryway.

Present Use: The field is used for high school, Police Athletic League, and over-40 adult baseball and softball games.

Significance: Erected in 1910, the original concrete and steel grandstand at Rickwood Field is the oldest baseball grandstand on the same site in the United States.¹ The grandstand forms the core of an

¹ Michael Benson, Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Reference to Grounds, Yards, and Stadiums, 1845-Present. McFarland, 1989. Bill Shannon, The Ballparks. 1975. Philip Lowry, Green Cathedralers. SABR, 1986. Benson appears to be as

historic ballpark which includes a 1928 Mission-style entryway and other subsequent additions. Modeled after Pittsburgh's Forbes Field, Rickwood is one of the few grandstands which remain as a testament to the now classic early twentieth-century style of ballpark construction. The stadium was built by local industrialist A.H. "Rick" Woodward, III for his Birmingham Barons baseball club, and was also home to the Birmingham Black Barons, and the Oakland A's farm teams. As a center for leisure-time activity, the field was an important social and cultural institution in this southern industrial city from the 1910s through the 1970s.

Playing in the Southern Association and later the Southern League, Birmingham's Minor League franchises won nine pennants during their tenure at Rickwood Field. Each era produced its own memorable games and favorite players for the community at large. Rickwood Field holds a place in the heart for the baseball buff and casual fan alike.

In 1920 the Birmingham Black Barons began playing in the Negro Leagues and Rickwood rapidly became the jewel of southern Black baseball. The field served as a central gathering place for Birmingham's Black community as they watched stars like Mules Suttles, Satchel Paige, and Willie Mays

comprehensive as the title suggests. But an additional source is the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), a 6000 member organization of baseball enthusiasts, researchers, and card collectors. I passed word about the validity of Rickwood's claim through the Ballparks Committee of this group, chaired by Robert Bluthardt, San Angelo, Texas. He published my inquiry in the society's newsletter and distributed a one page leaflet I prepared on the subject at their annual meeting in San Diego. In the eight weeks following those events I received one list of possible challengers to Rickwood, but in each case the claim did not hold. My own list of possible challengers also did not hold. The grandstand at St. Cloud Commons in Huntington, WV was also constructed in 1910 but has been moved on three separate occasions. Until a challenger steps forth with plans and evidence the claim for Rickwood should stand.

The original plans for Rickwood are on microfilm at the Building Inspections Office, Birmingham City Hall, 2nd Floor. They are filed by address.

fine tune the skills that would launch them into stardom. The Black Barons reached the Negro League World Series three times in the 1940s and continued playing at Rickwood--alternating field time with the (white) Barons-- until 1963.

Like all social institutions in Birmingham prior to 1964 Rickwood remained racially segregated in the stands and on the field. The Barons continued to attract large crowds before folding their club in the face of integration prior to the 1962 season. Integrated professional baseball resumed at Rickwood in 1964 and continued off and on through 1987 when the Birmingham Barons moved to a suburban location.

In the 1920s facilities at Rickwood were enlarged with major additions to the grandstand and the construction of a new entryway, as well as the erection of a drop-in scoreboard in left field (no longer extant). Light towers were added in 1936, and in the 1940s new fences were built in the outfield reducing Rickwood's mammoth dimensions and allowing more homeruns. Though no longer home to professional baseball, Rickwood is used by the public schools and recreational leagues for baseball games. Efforts are underway to restore Rickwood to its former grandeur and develop museum facilities on site.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: Ground breaking for the field began Spring 1910 and construction was completed on August 18, 1910.

2. Architects and Engineers: Plans and engineering of the original structure were done by the Southeastern Engineering Company of Birmingham, Alabama. Additional bleachers and box seats were added in 1924 by Denham, VanKeuren & Denham, local architects, while the completion of the present grandstand and the construction of the entryway was done by Paul Wright & Co., local engineers in 1928.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, users, :

1910 - land acquired by Woodward and the Birmingham Baseball Association from Alabama Central Railroad Company [?]

1938 - To Ed Norton, local business man

1940 - To Cincinnati Reds organization (only non-native owners)

1944 - To G.J. Jebeles, local business man

1949 - To Al DeMent, Al Belcher, and Rufus Lackey, local business men

1958 - Belcher retains majority control

1966 - To City of Birmingham, Alabama. leased in succession to Albert Belcher, Charlie Finley, Art Clarkson, and the Board of Education.

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: Southeastern Engineering Company of Birmingham, a local subsidiary of the General Fireproofing Company that came into town (from Pittsburgh?) for the construction of Rickwood and left soon after.

5. Original Plans and Construction: The original plans show a covered grandstand extending from the first base dugout to the third base dugout. The grandstand is symmetrical; to each side, extending down the right and left field lines, are uncovered concrete bleachers on a steel structural system.² In the area underneath the far ends of the grandstand are two clubhouses with showers and an office, one for the home and one for the visiting teams. The clubhouses are connected to the dugout by an underground tunnel and a short inclined stair leading to the field. Though there is no evidence in the original drawings of an entryway for the grandstand, a photograph in the 1920s and the Sanborn Insurance Maps reveal a roughly 20' X 25' rectilinear frame structure in front of the entrance to

² Some of the steel columns on the original portion of the grandstand are marked "Tennessee USA" suggesting that the steel used for construction may have been produced at the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (TCI), which set up operations in Birmingham in 1899.

Rickwood. It is uncertain when this structure was erected and in the available plans from the 1928 addition of a formal entryway there is no mention of such a structure being torn down.

6. Alterations and Additions:

July 1914 - Electric fans installed in the grandstand.

May 1921 - After a tornado causes damage to Rickwood 100 men hastily reconstruct the wooden fence running along the outfield boundary.

1924 - Paul Wright & Company, Engineers, Birmingham, Alabama, cover the concrete bleacher section along the first base line, add new box seats along the first base line and erect steel bleachers down the left field line.

1927 - Denham, VanKeuren, & Denham, Architects, Birmingham, Alabama, cover the concrete bleachers and add new boxes down the third base line.

1928 - Paul Wright & Company erect the remaining portion of the grandstand running down the right field line and curving back in toward the outfield, slightly past the foul pole, as well as the wooden bleachers in right field used for seating Black patrons. They also designed and constructed the arcade with offices and connecting breezeway at the entrance of the stadium. In addition, they constructed a concrete wall to replace the wooden fence in the outfield. Finally, they installed the drop-in scoreboard in its original location up against the left-center field concrete wall.

1936 - Truscon Steel Company of Youngstown, Ohio erected eight light towers, five on the roof and three free standing in the outfield.

1941 - Wooden fence erected in outfield to cut down on mammoth dimensions of the playing field.

1948 - Architect not known. A new ladies rest room was added, additional parking spaces were created, and the wooden fence in the outfield moved closer toward homeplate. The drop-in scoreboard was also moved to a new location more toward center field and on a different angle roughly 50' closer in from the concrete wall.

1950 - The Dugout Restaurant built to the extreme right of the arcade running south along the first base line. Additional box seats were added in the front five rows between the first and third base dugouts necessitating the demolition and relocation of the two dugouts further down the first and third base lines to the opposite side of the entry tunnels leading to the field.

[Sometime in the 1960s old scoreboard was taken down replaced by a new one which was subsequently replaced in 1981; Also the original press box was replaced with the two rectangular structures currently on the roof of the grandstand]

1964 - 1000 wooden chairs originally located at the Polo Grounds in New York are bought by General Manager Glynn West and installed at Rickwood Field.

1979-80 - The wooden seats from the Polo Grounds are removed, plastic seats are installed in the box area and metal chairs under the covered grandstand.

1981 - New electronic scoreboard installed.

B. Historical Context

BASEBALL AND THE "MODERN ERA"

On the afternoon of 18 August 1910 Birmingham entered the 'modern era' of baseball history with the opening of Rickwood Field in the city's West End. By three o'clock the city was deserted, shop owners had closed for the day, and only the industrial plants remained open, as "everybody who had a drop of sporting blood in his veins" found themselves at the new ballpark. Festivities began at 3:15 with bands playing, fans hollering, dignitaries cutting ribbons, and Birmingham industrialist and baseball mogul A.H. "Rick" Woodward tossing out the first pitch in high theatrical fashion at four o'clock. The crowd numbered over 11,000 with the newly-built grandstand packed to the hilt and thousands roped in along the foul lines and on into the outfield, forming a circle around the playing field. The game itself turned out to be a tussle, Birmingham defeated rival Montgomery 3-2, and a new era of Birmingham sports history emerged.³

³ Birmingham News, Birmingham Age-Herald. 14-19 August 1910.

The opening of the park had been anticipated for almost a year. Word of a new stadium for Birmingham began spreading in late 1909 when rumors surfaced that iron baron A.H. (Rick) Woodward, III planned to purchase the Birmingham ball club. Approval of the sale to Woodward came that winter. On March 5, 1910 Woodward, R.H. Baugh, president of the club, and manager Carlton Molesworth held a press conference announcing plans for the construction of a reinforced concrete grandstand to be completed by mid-summer. Apparently Woodward traveled with an architect to several northern ballparks in search of the ideal design upon which to model Rickwood, settling on Forbes Field in Pittsburgh. Rickwood was designed and constructed by the Southeastern Engineering Company, the southern representative of the General Fireproofing Company who built Forbes Field.⁴ Woodward apparently admired the size and philosophy behind Forbes Field with its expansive outfield--forcing hitters to earn their homeruns--its large foul territory, and the absence of advertising on the walls. The original grandstand, which ran from dugout to dugout, seated 3,000 people--500 in box seats and 2,500 in wood-back chairs behind them. In addition, uncovered concrete bleachers (later covered to form most of the present grandstand) along each foul line seated another 2,000 people. Any overflow crowd would be roped in along the wooden outfield in temporary bleachers or standing by the wall 400-500 feet from home plate.⁵

Apparently the location of the park was still uncertain at the time of the initial press conference. Size and accessibility surely played crucial roles in the selection process. The chosen lot, while outside the city center, was connected to downtown via a twelve-minute ride on the double-track South Ensley and North Bessemer streetcar lines. Unlike other ballparks of the era, Rickwood did not face the constraints of a tightly defined urban environment in designing the field. A wide open 13.5 acre lot at the time of construction, the neighborhood was sparsely populated, dotted with residential dwellings and open spaces.⁶ The field itself is bordered by a railroad line--at that time the Alabama Terminal Railroad--beyond which

⁴ Birmingham Age-Herald 6,20,22 March 1910. See note 2 on possibility of local steel being used in construction.

⁵ See photograph, figure --, O.V. Hunt Collection, 7.25, Birmingham Public Library (hereafter BPL)

⁶ See Figure --,

runs the Valley Creek. According to 1908 maps from the tax assessor's office the land belonged to the railroad company before being sold to Woodward.

At the time of Rickwood's erection in 1910 baseball had been played in the United States for over half a century in organized professional leagues as well as at the amateur level among workingmen's clubs and industrial teams. Professional baseball in Birmingham began as early as 1885 with a fledgling Southern League operation that folded under the financial constraints of the depression of 1893-97. But in 1896 a new park was built in the West End at the old slag pile, (so named because of an Alice Furnaces slag heap that piled up beyond the right field wall from which young people climbed to watch the games and have rock fights). That league quickly faltered and plans to convert the park to a bicycle track were undertaken. In 1901, under improved financial conditions, a new Southern Association formed and the Barons were resurrected. The Barons continued playing at the "slag pile" into the 1910 season.

In simple terms, Rickwood Field answered the call of strict economic necessity; the 'old' park at the slag pile was too small, dirty, cramped, unattractive, poorly accessible, and highly flammable due to its wood-frame construction. Rickwood Field solved many of those problems in grand fashion and became a symbol of civic boosterism for the urban gentry. Touted by local writers as the finest structure in the South and in all the minor leagues the field carried an imperial and impersonal presence, a grand style, that secured Birmingham's place as part of a surging urban and industrial America.⁷

In recent years architects and baseball buffs who lament the "progress" of post-World War II stadium design gleefully harken back to the days of the old, now "classic" parks like Rickwood with their human scale and more intimate view of the game.⁸ While it is true that the view from Rickwood is closer to the action than at the Metrodome in Minneapolis, the grandstands of the early twentieth century were decidedly less intimate and less personal relative to their own predecessors. Prior to the enclosure movement in

⁷ Editorials at the time of erection and reporters throughout the 20th century, especially around major Rickwood anniversaries, have always referred to it as "the finest plant in the South."

⁸ Including a recent article in the July 1993 Historic Preservation.

baseball, games were played in the open fields and parks still found amidst the widening urban sprawl. Some fans sat in wooden bleachers bunched around home plate, but many simply stood several rows deep, roped in along the lines of the playing field and across the outfield grass or dirt. The bleachers at Birmingham's old slag pile seated perhaps 700 people but overflow crowds of up to 2500 fans filled in along the base lines and on into the outfield. In the early days, as baseball made the transition to a commodified spectator sport, fans had a more intimate relationship to the players and the field. They were, literally, "on top" of the action. In contrast, the grandstand at Rickwood and the once uncovered bleachers along the first base line were almost 80' away from the base line, imposing a certain amount of detachment from the game. In part a response to safety concerns, this detachment also attempted to create a sense of order and discipline for the fans in the stands. What Rickwood did offer from its original construction through its later additions was more safety, comfort, and convenience than what had come before, while retaining the intimacy of social relations within the stands themselves.

In those early seasons at Rickwood an opening day frenzy continually overtook Birmingham. Often City officials declared a half holiday and businesses shut down as the newspapers implored fans to head out to Rickwood for the ceremonies.⁹ Fans who had little or no interest in the game (including Woodward's own father) could be found at Rickwood on opening day just to share the experience. The fans took great pride in capturing the Southern Associations's attendance trophy, and in beating out the hated rivals in Atlanta.

By the 1920s baseball at the major and minor league levels had reached peak popularity and while the Barons struggled with poor teams during many of those years, the club continued to return steady profits to Woodward and the stockholders.¹⁰ The 1924 season proved particularly poor and the "gang of wolves," as Woodward called the rabble in the bleachers, put pressure on club president W.D. Smith to produce a winning ball club. It was the first season since

⁹ Any newspaper in the days leading up to the opening day from 1910 to 1930. A good example is the BAH April 1921.

¹⁰ "Annual Reports on Examination of Accounts", Woodward Papers, Box 12, Folder on 'Birmingham Baseball Association', Main Library, University of Alabama, W.S. Hoole Special Collections, Tuscaloosa.

Woodward built the field that Carlton Molesworth was not manager, having moved on to a bigger job in Columbus, Ohio. Woodward, who admittedly knew little about the mechanics of running a ball club, was also a committed sportsman who clung to the ideals of his boyhood fantasy, not wishing to taint his hobbies with the confused ethic of his industrial life. In a letter to a friend he made it clear that "...I have been in baseball largely from the standpoint of a good, clean sport and the pleasure that we could get out of it. We have never considered it necessary to lose any money [as many owners did and still do], but our aim has been rather to give the public a good, square run, and break even, if we could."¹¹

In that spirit Woodward and club officials made preparations to upgrade Rickwood at a reported cost of nearly \$200,000. The proposed improvements would bring Rickwood in line with ballparks in other parts of the minor leagues also responding to both the rising popularity of baseball and expanding an urban population. (In 1925, despite finishing in 7th place Barons season attendance topped 182,000.) In 1924, the right field grandstand was extended out over what had been the open-air bleachers, box seats added, and steel bleachers installed down the left field line. In 1927 additional box seats were added along the third base line and the concrete bleachers on that side were covered. The following year Paul Wright & Company, local engineers, added a new entryway and office space and a breezeway connecting it to the original grandstand, new grandstands down the right field line on into the corner, and a new scoreboard in left field (replacing the original that sat in right field). Black patrons who had sat in the concrete bleachers and stood along the outfield lines were moved to the very corner of the new right field grandstand extending into fair territory along with new open-air wooden bleachers adjacent to the grandstand. New parking spaces were carved out of the lots adjacent to the field and the streets paved for easier access to the field.¹²

¹¹ Woodward to Mr. Jack Corbett of Richwood, OH, 27 June 1924. Woodward Papers, Box 12, Main Library, University of Alabama, W.S. Hoole Special Collections, Tuscaloosa.

¹² All alterations and additions to the field have been painstakingly culled out from portions of plans obtained from Birmingham City Hall, Buildings and Inspections Division. Also newspaper accounts in BAH, BPH, BN as well as aerial photographs in the figures section.

Apparently the repair work on the field carried over into the team's field performance as the Barons went on to win the Southern League pennant in 1928, 1929, and 1931. The 1928 pennant winners went on to the Dixie Series and apparently embarrassed themselves after having too good a time celebrating their victories. The following season, when the Barons repeated as league champions, the team made a "no drinking" pact prior to the Dixie Series. But the most exciting series came in 1931, beginning with the memorable September 16 face off between Houston's rising star, 19-year-old Dizzy Dean, and Birmingham's aging veteran 42-year-old, Ray Caldwell. Over 20,000 fans witnessed what was perhaps the greatest pitchers duel ever at Rickwood Field, when Caldwell held off the upstart Dean and defeated him on a run scoring double by Billy Bancroft that won the game 1-0. The game carried its legendary status in the collective memory of Birmingham on into the next generation and perhaps always will be a landmark in the city's cultural history.

The 1931 pennant proved to be the last the Barons would win for another twenty-seven years. The depression hit all of baseball intensely, the Barons being no exception. In the Negro Leagues the Black Barons were forced to close up shop for six years. Despite the pennant drought the Barons continued to make news and draw fans to Rickwood. In July 1932 controversy brewed over the move to hold a referendum on Sunday baseball in Birmingham. A late arriving issue in Birmingham, the opponents of repeal were a vocal minority represented by approximately sixty Protestant ministers who felt an election was unnecessary since the ordinance fell under state law and therefore was outside the city's jurisdiction. But with the forces of business, labor, and fans behind it, the dinosaur law was removed from the books.¹³

In 1934, after having been out of baseball for three years due to illness, Rick Woodward returned to his duties with the Barons. As part of a promotional package during the hard times, Woodward began publishing his memoirs of "Baronial" history in weekly columns for the Birmingham News. Woodward reminisced about such things as the days when he would put on a Barons uniform and workout with the club, or the time in 1916 when he slugged umpire "Bulldog" Williams during an altercation after the game. On the occasion of publishing these memoirs on the 5th of July 1934, he sponsored a free day of baseball at Rickwood to

¹³ BAH, BN 25,28 June 1932, 2,8,9,11 July 1932.

which 15,000 fans turned out, despite a downpour, to watch the Barons lose to their rival Atlanta Crackers.¹⁴

As the Barons continued their slide during the 1930s, the team sought new ways of bolstering attendance. At 8:15 PM on May 21, 1936 Rickwood became one of the earliest parks to host night baseball. The Barons drew 43,000 fans for the first five night games, an average that practically filled the grandstand despite hard financial times. Sunday games and night baseball were two distinct adaptations of a game that increasingly entered the commercial age. Where baseball had once been a relatively fixed investment venture in which owners tried to reach a marginal utility of fan attendance in order to break even, the game had become a business in its own right, dominated by marketing strategies, radio, concessions, advertising, gimmicks, commercialism, and eventually television. The game, and the Barons, adjusted to a new era in baseball management. While politicians, real estate speculators, businessmen, and railway companies always had held a vested interest in the development of baseball culture in America, the pressures now became stronger and more timely.

BASEBALL AND INDUSTRIALISM

That baseball became more business-like following World War II is not to deny its distinctive role in the business culture of the early part of the century. Woodward and men like him surely loved baseball for the sport of it, but the game, especially in professional form, held a distinctive place in the reweaving of the social fabric during the transition to corporate capitalism. The game, the men who played it, and the fields it was played on were used to prescribe racial, social, and class barriers and reinforce then acceptable patterns of behavior in the social order.¹⁵

¹⁴ Series began in June 1934. Reprinted in Zipp Newman and Frank McGowan, House of Barons Cather Bros., Birmingham, 1950; Also there is a special pull-out section of the Birmingham News(BN) 6 July 1934.

¹⁵ For an insightful discussion of baseball, team sports, and the relationship to industrialism and national life see Warren Goldenstein, Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball. Cornell UP, 1989; Peter Levine, A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport. Oxford UP, 1985; Allen Guttman, From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports. Columbia UP, 1978; Stephen Riess, Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era. Greenwood

By the first decade of the twentieth century baseball's popularity had grown rapidly. What once had been considered a gentleman's game had grown in popularity among the working class only to take on pariah status in the business world. Many expressed concern about the supposed moral degradation and lewdness associated with the game. Eighteen grown men gathered around a bat, a ball, tobacco and liquor surely could not add up to a healthful environment. Woodward--a third generation iron manufacturer in the Woodward Iron Company--had a taste of this himself in his younger days, while watching the mining and manufacturing leagues in Birmingham (and later as a player while attending the DuBose Academy and at Sewanee College [The University of the South]). He recalled that when it looked like a visiting club was on the brink of victory, fisticuffs were a near certainty. But if the home team won, then it was craps and beer for everyone at the local tavern.¹⁶ Like many boys growing up in the heart of industrial America, Woodward took a fancy to baseball and locomotives. Unlike other children though who quickly aborted their fantasy lives in the face of a life of labor, however, Woodward could and did live out his boyhood dreams by becoming a locomotive engineer and by buying his very own baseball club.

Farsighted industrialists recognized that the game naturally lent itself to all the burgeoning principles of Taylorism and scientific management while at the same time retaining an element of leisure and fun that gave the game its near universal appeal. Baseball became a proper leisurely diversion for the working class. These industrialists-turned-baseball-club investors also recognized the growing popularity of the game and the potential profits to be earned by commodification. While the direct evidence is uneven (at best) it is probable that businessmen like Rick Woodward who were the financiers behind major ballpark construction in the early twentieth century began to see the benefits in a game that in many ways replicated and reinforced the work patterns, ethic, and desired characteristics of a productive business environment. The game encouraged and necessitated teamwork, precision, orderly functioning, quick judgment, a strict division of labor, fair mindedness, and respect for authority (at least bosses, if not umpires): all the desired characteristics of

Press, 1980; Hart Catelon and Robert Hollands Eds., Leisure Sport and Working-Class Culture.

¹⁶ Woodward baseball memoirs reprinted in Newman and McGowan, House of Barons.

an efficient and productive laborer. The nature of baseball as a game and a task could have a two-fold effect on the fan; by deifying athletes fans would internalize the behavior patterns of their favorite players, while the trip to the ballpark itself became an effective means of relieving stresses that might otherwise "discharge themselves in a dangerous way."¹⁷

If the game itself was not as rousing as today's football, it carried a steady pace of action. Since many more games were played, the ballpark became a central social gathering place for all Birmingham residents--though not necessarily between the classes. The arrangement and comfort of seating broke down distinctly along class lines. The 500 box seats at Rickwood, filled with comfortable wooden opera-style chairs¹⁸, hugged the field from dugout to dugout, with an aisle to separate them from the grandstand seating behind. The original drawings indicate that the area underneath the grandstand--what is now a concession area--carried the label "privilege man." Fitted with a crown molding (the only interior space like it) this space presumably served as a club area for Birmingham's elite to mingle in the shade before taking in the game from the comfort of their box seats. The grandstand presumably held the merchants, clerks, skilled labor, and lower level business people, while the open-air bleachers seated the working class. Originally, the far section of the bleachers down the left field line seated black patrons. A 1914 photograph¹⁹ reveals that during games with overflow crowds fans sat in temporary wooden bleachers laid out along the wooden outfield wall, while black patrons stood along the left field foul line.

Recognize the advantages of secure leisure time activities, businessman also realized that the structure of the social space surrounding the field needed clearing up. In the mix of Birmingham's population growth, the expansion of leisure time culture, and people's declining buying power, baseball competed with amusement parks, vaudeville, moving pictures, and circuses in an effort to meet the public's increased desire for inexpensive comfort. Careful attention had to be paid toward establishing who controlled this public space

¹⁷ H. Addington Bruce, "Baseball and the National Life", Outlook 17 May 1913, 104-107.

¹⁸ See photograph, Figure 7, O.V. Hunt Collection, 1.83, BPL.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

and how people would be managed inside the ballpark. Whereas at one time fans crowded along the lines of the field and freely interacted with players, coaches, and umpires, the new grandstand created a buffer zone between spectator and player. The steel magnate and the puddler might share the same experience but would not have to sit along side one another while doing so. Contrary to popular belief, the ballpark did not represent democracy in action; rather, it gave the middle-class and upper-middle class a chance to cut themselves loose and enjoy the informal, physically intimate structure of a working class game within the confines of genteel experience. For some a trip to the ballpark meant "going slumming" while for others it meant a chance to watch good sport.

Finally, one cannot overlook the showmanship of a man who would name a field after himself, as in Rick Wood(ward). As much as Rickwood Field became a symbol of civic pride to the community at large, it also secured Woodward's place in the community as a businessman, entrepreneur, and civic activist. Combining business interests with the idea of play, Woodward could legitimate his own standing and that of the business culture in an era of muckrakers, labor strife, robber barons, and monopoly capital. The game developed in an era that saw the emergence of corporate liberalism, the attempt to co-opt the state's (meaning municipal government's) social agenda into an order that protected corporate interests and preserved what they viewed as the common good while at the same time keeping workers immobilized.²⁰

BASEBALL IN POST-WORLD WAR II BIRMINGHAM

Having sustained the team through some horrendous playing years, not to mention the depression, Woodward was losing money and falling into debt. By late 1937 it became apparent that he would have to sell the club. In February 1938, after twenty-nine years in baseball and founder of the

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of the emerging shifts in the business culture of the United States in the early century see Gabriel Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism: An Interpretation of American History, 1900-1918. Free Press, 1963; James Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918. Beacon Press, 1968; Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1930, Hill and Wang, 1967; and Martin J. Sklar, The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics. Cambridge UP, 1988. Also see Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York. Temple UP, 1986.

field carrying his name, Woodward ended his relationship with the Barons and professional baseball. Ed Norton, a local businessman with varied interests purchased the club for \$175,000, holding it for less than two years before selling to the Cincinnati Reds organization in August 1939.²¹

In 1944 local businessman G.J. Jebeles purchased the Barons and Rickwood Field from the Reds. A Greek immigrant who saw his first American baseball game as a teenager at the old slag pile in 1905, Jebeles had been a small business venturer throughout his life. Among other things, he owned the Reliance Hotel for eighteen years before retiring and settling down with the Barons. Jebeles brought General Manager Eddie Glennon to the club. A man for the era, Glennon was an organization man who brought Birmingham baseball into the next phase of the "modern era".²² In the 1950s minor league baseball attendance suffered from competition from televised major league baseball, and the increased pressure to cop the advertising dollar. Television also provided a new, easily accessible form of inexpensive entertainment that moved fans from box seats, hot dogs, and the Barons to "La-Z-Boys," TV dinners, and Milton Berle. At the same time questions reappeared about baseball's long-held exemption from anti-trust laws and the seeming monopolistic control owners had on the sport.

Responding to these new concerns and realizing the importance of the homerun to the national game, Glennon reconfigured Rickwood to suit a more offense minded style of play. Though Johnny Dobbs, manager of the pennant winning Barons during the late 1920s, had experimented with moving in the fences, they were not permanently shifted until the Reds owned the club in the early 1940s. This new fence placement cut over 55' down the left field line and 110' to center field, making the new distances 350' down the line and 405' to center with right field remaining a manageable 335'. In 1948 Glennon moved the left field line in to 345' and reoriented the scoreboard closer to home plate for a better viewing angle. Where the board had been 421' away at each corner it was now 358' and 381' on left and right corners respectively.

Prior to this time, Rickwood had been, if not a pitcher's

²¹ Birmingham Post (BP) 7 February 1938; 11 August 1939 on sale to Reds.

²² Newman and McGowan, House of Barons

field per se, a ballpark where the homerun did not dominate the game. Though the records are spotty and incomplete, it seems that Dutch Bernsen the homerun record at Rickwood prior to the fence shift, with twenty-two hits in 1921.²³ But Bernsen was a left-hander who hit most of his shots over the right field wall. The Barons' Yam Yaryan, and the Black Barons' Mules Suttles were among the most prolific sluggers from the right side of the plate, but neither put up massive numbers in the homerun count. But the 400+ feet down the left field line and over 500' to center, while daunting, was not outside the norm for ballparks of the era.²⁴ Before the enclosure movement in baseball the outfield, theoretically, extended infinitely into the wilderness. Fans who gathered to watch the action formed a circle in the outfield at some random distance from homeplate. At Rickwood the fence dimensions may have been influenced by custom, by those of Forbes Field, or perhaps the wall simply followed along the lot line. In either case the fences made for a different kind of game than the one played later at Rickwood and across the nation.²⁵

In the early days of the open field, triples and inside-the-park homeruns hit into "the groove" in left-center field were not uncommon and provided the major excitement for fans and players alike. They undoubtedly were, and still are to many fans, the most thrilling hits in a game. When major leaguers came through Rickwood during the exhibition season they gunned for the fence in left and though many reached it during batting practice few did during ball games. By most accounts, not until 1941 when Hank Sauer hit one over the old drop-in scoreboard did a ball leave the park in left field during a game.²⁶ Following Glennon's further reduction in fence distance, Rickwood fell in line with most

²³ Newman and McGowan, House of Barons

²⁴ Philip Lowry, Green Cathedralers. SABR, 1986; Bill Shannon, The Ballparks. 1975; Michael Benson, Ballparks of North America.

²⁵ On early fields see Warren Goldenstein, Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball. Cornell UP, 1989; and Peter Levine, A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport. Oxford UP, 1985.

²⁶ Sauer hit one over the scoreboard in its old location and therefore into the field behind the ballpark. In later years sluggers like Walt Dropo, Lou Limmer, Dave Duncan, and Reggie Jackson hit homers over the scoreboard in its later location and bounced balls off the concrete wall at the back of the park.

other professional ballparks of the period. The left field line remained challenging at 345' but the power alleys were brought in over 70', thereby making homeruns out of what had been doubles, triples and long flyouts. The fence-moving was but one of the many attractions used to draw fans back to the park. By the 1950s fans well versed in televised games began to expect more from the team than just a ballgame. Consequently Eddie Glennon found himself doing things he never thought possible. The ballpark increasingly took on a circus atmosphere with promotional gimmicks and giveaways becoming standard fare at Rickwood and across the minor leagues.²⁷

In the wake of the two-year hiatus on baseball in Birmingham, Glennon moved on to the general manager's position in Denver. Owner Albert Belcher began thinking about tearing down or selling Rickwood; by the end of 1965 negotiations between Belcher, the city of Birmingham and Jefferson County for the purchase of the field had reopened. Birmingham still contemplated using 1960 bond money for its purchase, but opinion remained divided inside City Hall, and Belcher's asking price of \$450,000 was considered too high. After lengthy negotiations and continued motions by Belcher that he would liquidate the field, the City bought Rickwood on April 22, 1966 for \$362,000.²⁸

Professional baseball remained absent from Rickwood for the 1966 season, but in 1967 the city lured Charlie Finley back to Birmingham, bringing a Double-A affiliate for his A's ballclub to town. From 1967 through 1970 the Birmingham A's thrived and Rickwood became home to the bonus babies of Birmingham²⁹, the rising stars of Major League baseball.

²⁷ A conversation with Glynn West, former General Manager of the Birmingham A's and long time Rickwood official was very useful to this discussion.

²⁸ Questions still linger as to whether this was an overly inflated price for the ballpark. One assessment of the fair market value on the field in 1963 was put at \$185,000. A copy of this letter was sent to Ben Chapman, Park Board Chair, who strongly backed the eventual deal that cost \$362,000. A copy of that letter can be found in the Board of Equalization file on Rickwood in the BPL, Archives and Manuscripts Division. Filed by parcel ID number.

²⁹ The 'bonus babies' were Finley's young crop of recent draft choices who were rated as some of the top high school and college talent in the country and were signed by the Athletics with cash bonuses, a standard practice in signing rookie contracts.

Many of the players who formed the nucleus of Oakland's three consecutive World Series championships in the early 1970s passed through Rickwood on their way up to the big leagues. Future stars included Vida Blue, Reggie Jackson, Gene Tennace, and Joe Rudi. For older fans at Rickwood, Vida Blue with his hummer fastball and weak curve surely recalled images of a lanky right-hander who made news in 1927-- Satchel Paige.

Minor League baseball entered a new era after the 1960s and, though it survived the onslaught of televised baseball, in its revised form winning ballgames became the least of team owners' concerns. Places like Birmingham served primarily as developmental centers for major league prospects. Minor league teams, including the Barons, had always carried affiliations with major league clubs as far back as the days at the "slag pile", but by the late 1960s the corporate culture of baseball had superseded the 'play' element of the game.³⁰ Once the bonus babies moved on, the A's fortunes plummeted. From 1971 to 1974 the A's finished in the cellar each season. Total attendance for 1974 was around 20,000; for 1975 about 30,000. On September 5, 1975, though uncertain at that time, professional baseball at Rickwood once again ignominiously came to an end as 705 fans watched the A's pull out a dramatic ninth inning come-from-behind 4-3 victory. Columnist Wayne Martin, writing for the Birmingham News in July 1973 reflected on the demise of baseball at Rickwood Field: "The major emotion is disbelief that in this city once so baseball crazy, so few people now even care." The big crowds at Rickwood were reserved for rock concerts and circuses (and even the rock concerts were later banned for violating noise ordinances). The further corporatization of baseball, the ability to drive to Atlanta for major league baseball, and the rising popularity of football and basketball among young people all combined to work against baseball at Rickwood.

In the late 1970s Rickwood continued as the site of local college and high school baseball and football games. In 1978 "professional" baseball made a brief return to Rickwood in the form of the Freedom League, a four-team division composed primarily of recent college players who did not stay in the major/minor league circuit. The Alabama club carried the Barons moniker but after three days of undefeated play before 2,400 fans the club and the league

³⁰ Charlie Finley, quoted in BN 5 July 1973: "the least of my worries is whether or not Birmingham wins. The team is here to develop players for Oakland."

folded and Rickwood became idle once again.³¹ In 1979-80, plastic seats replaced the deteriorating wooden chairs acquired from the old Polo Grounds in New York and installed at Rickwood in 1964. The lighting system was upgraded once more as speculation mounted that a minor league franchise would soon set up in Birmingham. In 1981 Art Clarkson brought professional baseball back to Rickwood when he started a franchise in the expanded Southern League.

Minor league baseball in the 1980s faced many of the same questions and challenges the major leagues had encountered in the 1960s. The game had moved into an age of increased commercialization, luxury boxes, diamondvision scoreboards, and an explosion of assorted American kitsch. The old, now classic ballparks like Rickwood appeared to have outlived their 'utility'. Cloaked behind talk about poor plumbing, leaky roofs, and poor parking facilities, Clarkson and others used the code words that, in the face of direct evidence, obviously implied their fear that fans would not travel to watch baseball in a Black neighborhood.³² The simple fact became, no matter how good the attendance, or how successful the ballclub, professional baseball was going to leave the West End, quite possibly forever.

RICKWOOD AND RACE RELATIONS

In the wake of the paradoxical combination of euphoria and hysteria that followed the post-war recession, life on the homefront returned to a seeming sense of normalcy. Living under the fear and uncertainty of the emerging Cold War, Americans much like the Romans cried out "Give us games!" In 1948 the Barons drew a Southern League record 445,926 in attendance while finishing third in the league standings.³³

³¹ BN 3 July 1978, the opening; 16 July, the closing.

³² Sam Heys, "Diamonds Aren't Forever", Atlanta Journal-Constitution 2 August 1987; William Schmidt, New York Times 16 August 1987.

³³ This figure averages out to well over 6000 fans per game at Rickwood. Capacity of the park began in 1910 roughly 6000 and grew to over 10,000 with additions in the 1920s. Overflow crowds were jammed in along the foul lines either in circus seating or standing room only, while in the early years and then later after the fences were pulled in temporary wooden bleachers were erected running along the outfield wall from left to center field. In 1931 Rickwood crammed 20,000+ fans, the largest crowd ever. The overall figure for 1948 exceeds the total population of Birmingham, an

The Black Barons, deep in their heyday, won the Negro American League pennant from the Kansas City Monarchs in an exciting seven game series, as the fans continued to occupy their segregated seats. Thousands of Black people fought in World War II with the 'Double V' slogan on their minds; soon the paradox of fighting fascism and racism abroad while maintaining segregation at home became too heavy a burden for America to carry. Nevertheless, across the United States, and particularly in Birmingham, the era of Jim Crow, which codified segregation by race, persisted.

Jackie Robinson reintegrated major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Heralded across America, the breaking of the "color line" in baseball marked some of the first stirrings of the modern freedom struggle. As a corollary to this event the Negro League's popularity waned and teams began recruiting white players to fill roster spots. In July 1950, Chicago American Giants owner Dr. J.B. Martin signed two white players, Louis Chirban and Louis Clarize, both products of local Crane Technical High School.³⁴ The following month on Sunday, August 6 the Chicago American Giants left their downtown hotel, boarded their bus and came to Rickwood in uniform ready to play a doubleheader with the Black Barons. The players entrance gate, normally open, was closed and two uniformed police officers stood waiting at the entryway. Louis Chirban, scheduled to start the first game of the doubleheader, manager Ted Radcliffe (a former Black Baron), and the rest of the team were stopped at the gate by officer John Purdy. They were informed that Chirban, Frank Dyll, and Stanley Miraka could not play at Rickwood against the Black Barons as it was a violation of City Ordinance 597. Furthermore, if they did not get out of uniform they would be arrested and thrown in jail. The game was delayed forty minutes and after some discussion Chirban and the others returned to their hotel, changed clothes and returned to Rickwood where they watched the games from seats in the white reserved section along the third base line.³⁵ The fans knew what had happened. In an interview a few days later by the Birmingham World, one player put it in simple terms,

uncommon and remarkable figure in baseball attendance history. A good major league club in 1948 would have been able to draw around 1.5 million. Birmingham was a Double-A club.

³⁴ Birmingham World(BW) 4 July 1950.

³⁵ BW 8 August 1950. BPH and BN ran one two paragraph blurbs on the story.

"Eventually racial barriers in athletics will be broken down."³⁶

The following month--presumably in response to this incident and the fact that technically the existing laws did not cover segregation in private parks--Birmingham Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor amended section 597 of the City Ordinance to include the prohibition of Blacks and whites from playing sports, cards, dice, dominoes, checkers, or similar games together in any park or playground.³⁷ But the issue would not go away. In 1953, with the Barons on the brink of making the Dixie Series where they would face the champion of the desegregated Texas League, moderates on the City Commission announced their intent to amend the ordinance. Mayor James Morgan acknowledged that section 597 was unconstitutional, and citing integrated play in numerous Southern cities in his motion, attempted to repeal the law. But in February 1954, attorney Hugh Lock, Sr., a crusty old dixiecrat segregationist, challenged the Commission ruling and called for a city-wide referendum on the issue. A ballot date was set for June 1, 1954, just two weeks before the vote the Supreme Court handed down its landmark Brown v. Bd. of Education (1954) decision rescinding the doctrine of "separate but equal". By June 1 the vote effectively became a referendum on the court ruling and went down to a resounding 3-1 margin of defeat (19,640 - 6,685).³⁸ In response, Birmingham voters aligned their city laws to enforce segregation, and the moderates were subsequently voted out of office. The issue would not resurface till Autumn 1958.

Questions about the integration of the Southern Association dogged the league throughout the 1950s. In 1955 the New Orleans Pelicans started the exhibition season with five Black players on their roster but a week later, under pressure from the league, cut them from the team. Three years later, the Barons recaptured the Southern Association pennant for the first time in thirty-one years. As they awaited an opponent to emerge from the Texas League for the upcoming Dixie Series, City Ordinance 597 crept back into

³⁶ BW 15 August 1950.

³⁷ General Code of the City of Birmingham. Amended 19 September 1950 cited in Glenn T. Eskew, "But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle." Unpublished PhD Diss., University of Georgia, Athens, 1993.

³⁸ Eskew, "But for Birmingham" and BN 17 September 1953.

the picture. Both the Corpus Christi and Austin ballclubs, finalists in the Texas League championship, had Black players on their squads. Barons General Manager Eddie Glennon unequivocally stated that "we will not buck any city law and we will definitely play the Dixie Series here." Corpus Christi agreed to substitute white players for Black players in any games played at Rickwood. For some reason, perhaps pressure from League president George Trautman, the Austin club refused to make a similar deal. In a display characteristic of Birmingham's intransigence over race relations, Glennon went so far as to suggest Austin could substitute any player they desired to fill their rosters, "major leaguers, triple-A, anybody" and furthermore the Barons would pay half their salaries so long as the Black players did not don their uniforms while at Rickwood. The point became moot when Corpus Christi won the Texas League title in seven games. On September 26, 1958, Corpus Christi brought their club to Rickwood Field. Starting third baseman Bo Bossard, infielder Carl Dorsey, and one other reserve player remained at home in Corpus Christi.³⁹

The Barons could not escape the issue of integration, nor could the Southern Association or the City of Birmingham. Issues surrounding race relations coupled with dramatic changes in professional baseball, including the influence of television and monopolistic practices by major league owners, spelled doom for the Southern Association and the Birmingham Barons. By 1961 total attendance for the year bottomed out at 112,217, an average of fewer than 3000 fans per game. In late November the Barons announced they would not play integrated baseball and Rickwood shut down for the next two years.⁴⁰ Albert Belcher, principal owner of the Barons and Rickwood, sought assurances from the fans that if baseball returned they would have to "accept the way it will have to be"; if not, Belcher would be forced to either sell the team or dismantle Rickwood Field. Though unsurprising that team owners could not be swayed by the social imperative behind integration, the economic argument did not sink in quickly. Black people boycotted Southern Association games with "Stay at Home" campaigns in all cities, including Birmingham, as the Barons, in the words of Birmingham World sports editor Marcel Hopson, "danced to the Jim Crow serenade."

³⁹ BN 2 September, Barons clinch the pennant; 19 September Glennon on not bucking any law; 23 September Glennon on substitutions; 26 September Corpus Christi plays at Rickwood.

⁴⁰ BN 29 November 1961.

As the 1961 season closed and the Barons withdrew from the Southern Association, concern about the fate of Rickwood Field mounted. In October 1961 Federal Judge H.H. Grooms declared the City Ordinance prohibiting integrated play unconstitutional. Despite that fact, Barons owner Belcher pulled the club out of the league and took a two year hiatus. Some proposed that a \$350,000 city bond issue intended for the construction of new high school football facilities be transferred to the purchase and use of Rickwood. Following two seasons of suspended play and the tumultuous occurrences on the civil rights front in Birmingham during 1963, baseball returned to Rickwood for opening day 1964. From that point forward, baseball would be played "the way it had to be;" the Barons took the field in a new Southern League and under a new affiliation-- Kansas City Athletic's colorful and controversial owner, Charlie Finley.⁴¹

The 1964 Barons carried twenty-two players, four of whom the local press identified as "Negroes": pitcher Stan Jones, infielders Santiago Rosario and Berto Campaneris, and outfielder Luis Rodriguez. In reality, only Jones was an African American from nearby Bessemer, the other three were of hispanic origin; Campaneris was from Cuba, Rosario from Puerto Rico, and Rodriguez out of Venezuela. Hispanics and Native American Indians had been marginally admitted into white professional baseball since the early twentieth century. The opening day crowd topped 6,000. Eighteen years after Robinson reintegrated professional baseball, local sports columnist Benny Marshall carried Birmingham's chip on his shoulder as he chided the national media for ignoring Birmingham when it finally did the right thing.⁴² The Barons' integrated teams did well, ending the season in a tight pennant race. Due in large part to African American fan support, attendance was good. But in 1965 they finished dead last and drew poorly at the gate all season long.

In 1967 the Oakland A's captured the Southern League pennant with several Black stars on the team, most notably future Hall-of-Famer Reggie Jackson. Professional baseball in Birmingham regained its popularity though never matching the attendance and excitement of the heydays of the 1920s and 1940s. A few years later fastballer and rising star Vida Blue arrived in Birmingham. Working with veteran catcher Elmo Plaskett and rising star Gene Tennace, the 20-year-old

⁴¹ BN 12 April 1964.

⁴² BN 17 April 1964.

Blue threw fast and hard, worked on his control, and found easy work of the hitters at the double-A level. Only 374 fans turned out for Blue's debut, but he soon gained popularity as he compiled a 10-3 record and struck out 112 batters by the summer break. A product of Mansfield, Louisiana, Blue reflected his ambivalence about playing in Birmingham: "It was back to the boardinghouse routine. Birmingham is Alabama, and Alabama is the South and Vida Blue is black and southern towns aren't black men's towns... this was a strange town to me, and I didn't know it, I felt out of place here. It was alright. There were no incidents. I was pitching good, but I wasn't being put up for mayor."⁴³ Blue left Birmingham by mid-season and less than two years later became a starter on the Oakland A's team, approaching twenty wins by the all-star break. Vida Blue then received the attention he deserved, gracing the cover of Time magazine at the age of twenty-two.

RICKWOOD AND THE NEGRO LEAGUES

Black people had been involved in amateur organized baseball from the time of the Civil War. The game gained popularity during the War as Blacks joined in on contests played by Union Army troops on the outskirts of their encampments. Participation in organized leagues was scattered among professional clubs in the North (the major leagues), integrated minor league and semi-pro clubs, and college teams such as those at Oberlin College and the University of Michigan. In the South, Blacks played largely on industrial teams sponsored by the coal mines and iron works in which they worked, and also on independent teams like C.I. Foster's Birmingham Giants club that operated from 1904 to 1912.⁴⁴

In 1920, legendary player and manager Rube Foster, who had fielded the highly successful Chicago American Giants independent team organized the Negro National League (NNL). By organizing into their own leagues Black teams avoided being at the mercy of white promoters and booking agents and could take more control over their scheduling and finances. No longer forced into competition with one another for exhibition matches and barnstorming schedules, clubs in the

⁴³ Bill Libby and Vida Blue, Vida: His Own Story. Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1972.

⁴⁴ For an excellent overview of the early Black baseball see Phil Dixon and Patrick Hannigan, The Negro Baseball Leagues: A Photographic History. Amereon House, 1992.

league could work in the interests of collective success.⁴⁵ In the same year Foster organized the NNL, a group of Birmingham players organized a local all-star team and entered the Southern Negro League, Black baseball's equivalent to the minor leagues. The Black Barons opened their season at Rickwood Field and though there was some question as to whether they would return in 1921, they did, playing at Rickwood until the league folded in 1963.

Birmingham immediately became the hot spot of Southern Black baseball. Norman "Turkey" Stearnes, a renowned slugger from the 1920s and 1930s played with the Montgomery, Alabama Gray Sox in 1921 and commented years later, "We'd draw 10-15,000. Memphis was a good baseball town, but Birmingham was the best in the South."⁴⁶ The Black Barons continued in the Southern Negro Leagues for four seasons before elevating to Foster's Negro National League in 1924. While the team faltered for its first two years and took a hiatus for 1926, they returned to the NNL in 1927 and garnered national attention, capturing the second-half division title on the strength of star players like Harry Solomon, Sam Streeter, and a young pitching phenomenon named Leroy "Satchel" Paige.

Many of the young stars were found in the industrial and mining teams, especially the strong clubs at ACIPCO and the Stockham Valve and Fitting Company, which served as the "co-mothers" of the Black Barons. The Black Barons had ample opportunity to scout these teams as they provided ready opponents during the exhibition season. Unfortunately for the Black Barons, star players were hard to hold on to as Northern teams offered more money and a more attractive lifestyle.

The 1920s have been dubbed a golden age of major league baseball and perhaps the same could be said of the Black major leagues. Though many records from the period are gone and memories have faded, baseball historians and enthusiasts concur that some of the all-time greats of the Negro Leagues were in their heyday during the twenties. It was also the era of the Harlem Renaissance and Black baseball became a powerful symbol of social, cultural, and in many ways

⁴⁵ Dixon and Hannigan, The Negro Leagues; Donn Rogosin, Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues. Atheneum, 1983; Robert Peterson, Only the Ball Was White Prentice Hall, 1970.

⁴⁶ John Holway, Black Diamonds: Life in the Negro Leagues From the Men Who Lived It. Meckler, 1989.

political achievement and resistance. In many cities the local team might have been one of the largest Black-owned enterprises. These were large-scale operations that, despite the appearance of disarray, were tightly run organizations. Exhibition, regular season, and barnstorming schedules were planned well in advance of the upcoming season and often evolved into a regular circuit of games for each club. Being a ballplayer was perhaps one of the most lucrative occupations in the Black community, hence the competition to keep a roster spot proved challenging. The players, whether they liked it or not, became important ambassadors of the community, often held to the standards and expectations of a Black elite that sought to mimic white notions of respectability.

As author Donn Rogosin aptly writes, "There is more reason to pay attention to the Negro Leagues than merely to correct the injustice of an inherently unjust era."⁴⁷ The Negro Leagues had a style of their own and Black players did not consume their time beating their heads against the wall over being banned from the "major leagues". As far as they were concerned they were in the major leagues. But the style of play in the two leagues differed. Unlike their white counterparts, Black managers did not emphasize the long ball as much as they did speed. Rube Foster, originator of the hit-and-run bunt, continued to influence play for twenty years, emphasizing that games were won on pitching and defense. On offense managers emphasized bunting, stealing, the hit-an-run, and the excitement of snagging an extra base on long shots to the outfield. Rickwood Field was well suited to precisely this style of play and the Black Barons surely tried to use the field to their advantage.

By playing on the same field it became easier to make comparisons between Black and white players and inevitably we can be sure they were made. Cross-over patronage was not uncommon at another teams' games. To debate who were the best players and who would have beaten who could run one in circles for years since they never played with or against one another. In fact, all baseball records before the 1950s are suspect since they were not set in an inclusive and unified league. It is futile to attempt to figure it out now. The one fact we can establish with certainty is that prior to 1967 Rickwood never fielded the best team that Birmingham had to offer.

⁴⁷ Rogosin, Invisible Men

Availability of Rickwood for the Black Barons was based on off days or away games for the Barons. Consequently, the Black Barons, like most Negro League teams, had fewer home appearances. While seating for Blacks at Barons games was restricted to the wooden bleachers and a portion of the grandstand in right field, for Black Barons games Blacks sat in the grandstands and whites sat in reserved seats along the third base line. But since segregation was a white institution and Rickwood was such a large setting, the racial lines at Black Barons games were more fluid and open than at Barons games.⁴⁸

The growth of the Black Barons, and of the Negro Leagues in general, probably benefitted from the migration streams of the 1920s. Urban centers like Birmingham became way stations in the multi-stage process of migration of formerly rural southern blacks to points in the Midwest. As the Black population grew, presumably fan support and player strength improved and the league prospered. In the North, white team owners recognized the strength and success of the Negro League teams and began playing exhibitions, all-star games, and barnstorming tours with Black teams in the remaining warm days following the World Series. In the South, or at least in Birmingham, presumably this did not happen.

When the Depression hit the Negro Leagues struggled alongside everyone else. Having fallen under hard times, many National Negro League teams, particularly those on the East coast, turned increasingly to local numbers men and racketeers for financial support. Teams in the south and midwest found it difficult to compete against these forces and lost many top players in the process. Gus Greenlee, head of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, lured Sam Streeter and Jimmie Crutchfield away from the Black Barons. The Kansas City Monarchs, perhaps the most popular club on the circuit, barnstormed across North America during the early 1930s while other teams like the Black Barons, feeling the budget constraints, joined smaller regional leagues and barnstormed locally. In 1937 Abe Saperstein, owner and promoter of the Harlem Globetrotters, revitalized the Black Barons and

⁴⁸ Many people recall the reversal of seating at Rickwood during legal segregation yet it does not appear that that reversal was "equal" as many believe. I can not dispute that some whites may have sat in the far bleachers for Black Barons games but I have yet to hear any evidence to that effect. I have heard from many people that whites sat along the third base line as Louis Chirban did when he was not permitted to play against the Black Barons.

joined the newly formed Negro American League (NAL) comprised of clubs in the South and the Midwest, most notably the highly successful and popular Kansas City Monarchs. His skillful promotion ushered in a new era in Black baseball.

The 1940s represented another high period in Negro League baseball as the Black Barons won the NAL pennant in 1943, 1944, and 1948.⁴⁹ On each occasion they lost the Negro World Series to the Homestead Grays, a powerful rival from the industrialized area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Negro World Series never attracted the kind of attention the annual major league East-West All-Star game at Comiskey Park garnered (a crowd of 30-35,000 was considered a poor turnout); consequently, the Negro World Series games were barnstormed across the country. Game six of the 1943 series was played at Rickwood and with Blues legend W.C. Handy in attendance the Black Barons' John Markham won a pitcher's duel, 1-0. However they fell to the Grays in game seven played at Montgomery several days later, with a score of 8-4.

In addition to the regularly scheduled games the two teams barnstormed their way from Washington D.C. to New Orleans playing exhibition games all along the way. Since only one official game was scheduled at Rickwood they even played a Thursday afternoon exhibition game at Rickwood. The series was fraught with irregularities as teams used ineligible players (the Black Barons picked up Chicago catcher Ted Radcliffe along the way). Practices such as this generally left people in Birmingham dissatisfied. But the following season the Black Barons won both halves of the season title and the series opened at Rickwood Field before a crowd of 12,449. But the Black Barons were without the services of Johnny Britton, "Pepper" Bassett, and Leandy Young, all of whom had been in a car wreck a week earlier. The Barons quickly fell down 2-0 in games and by game three it became obvious the team could not win. Only 6,300 fans showed up at Rickwood to watch the team suffer a 9-0 one hit shutout.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The team was now under its most stable ownership- Tom Hayes, mortuary and insurance man from Memphis. His papers are located at the Memphis Public Library and presumably are a rich source for photographs. Knowledge of these came late in the project.

⁵⁰ World Series accounts in Peterson, Only the Ball Was White and the BW

The 1948 club won the first-half division crown and faced the Kansas City Monarchs, perennial fan favorite, in the NAL Championship Series. The series went to seven games with the most dramatic victory coming on Willie Mays' two out bases loaded, infield single in the bottom of the ninth that scored the winning run of game seven.⁵¹ That team was loaded with talent including player/manager Lorenzo "Piper" Davis, pitchers William Greason, William Powell and Joe Bankhead, catcher Lloyd "Pepper" Bassett, veteran outfielder Ed Steele, and Artie Wilson, mentor and friend to rising star Willie Mays.

Mays, a local from Fairfield Industrial High School joined the Black Barons out of high school and roamed center field till the 1950 season when he was purchased by the New York Giants for \$15,000. It is no coincidence that Mays played with the Barons in 1948 and 1949, the two years they won the championship of the Negro American League. Black Barons owner Tom Hayes later gave \$6,000 of that sum to Mays who, of course, went on to an illustrious Hall of Fame career and is classed by many as the greatest baseball player of all time.⁵²

The reintegration of major league baseball began in 1947 when the Brooklyn Dodgers acquired Jackie Robinson. For many Black owners, players, and fans the integration that ensued did not represent the vision many held when the Negro Leagues were first formed. The hope had been that Black-owned, Black-majority franchises would be able to enter the major leagues and compete on an equal level. White owners who were recalcitrant about admitting Robinson to the league were unlikely to permit Black teams to enter the league. But exactly who fought for desegregation and who stood in the way remains a murky issue.⁵³ Some writers and fans in the late 1940s charged Black owners with being in collusion with white owners to keep baseball segregated. Black owners sought to preserve their terrain, fearful that, following integration, raiding parties would descend upon their teams, leaving behind the tattered remains of what had been top

⁵¹ Excellent photograph of team celebrating in the clubhouse after the game in Dixon and Hannigan, The Negro Baseball League

⁵² Willie Mays with Charles Einstein, Born to Play. G.P. Putnam, 1955; Willie Mays with Lou Sahadi, Say Hey: The Autobiography of Willie Mays. Simon and Schuster, 1988.

⁵³ Rogosin, Invisible Men and Peterson, Only the Ball Was White for an interesting discussion of these factors.

level baseball action. On one side stood considerations about the future of black baseball and black ownership of franchises, while on the other was the ability of individual Black players to earn a higher wage and reach their full potential. These were not necessarily conflicting forces but, based upon the recalcitrance of white owners toward desegregation, Black-owned membership in the major leagues seemed an impossibility. Of course in the end the owners' fears came true and the Negro Leagues slowly disappeared. In effect baseball had desegregated but not integrated. Today few if any franchises attract Black fans to the ballpark in the multitudes once so common in the Negro Leagues, and baseball franchises still await the first Black owner.

The breaking of the "color line" in 1948 spelled doom for most of the Negro League teams. However, unlike Northern teams that had to compete with the major leagues for fan support, in Birmingham Black and white fans had no alternatives. The Black Barons continued to play at Rickwood until the Negro League folded in 1963. They served as a bargain-priced talent pool for major league owners who wanted to "season" young Black players before bringing them to the big leagues.

By 1951 the Black Barons began feeling the effects of desegregation as stars like native sons Willie Mays, Artie Wilson, and "Piper" Davis all made their way into the major leagues. The NAL dwindled to six teams and the Black Barons opened the season facing New Orleans before 3,554 fans. Attendance waned during the season though nearly 5,000 fans still turned out for the always attractive Indy Clowns visit to Rickwood. But the Black Barons would never again pack the park as they did during their heydays in the 1920s and 1940s. In late October Roy Campanella's all-stars came to town to face the NAL all-stars on "Willie Mays Night" at Rickwood. Shortly after the end of the season Tom Hayes put the team up for sale after twelve years of ownership. In the 1950s the team moved through a series of owners, some white with Black frontmen, as they continued play in the hodgepodge league and circuit. Piper Davis became involved once again with the Black Barons following the end of his playing career. In 1958 the team won the NAL championship on a thirty-four game schedule. By 1963 the NAL ceased operations and the Birmingham Black Barons dissolved after over forty years of professional baseball.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The 1950 season provided a novel event in Rickwood's storied past. In the spring Rickwood played host to its presumed-to-be-first gender integrated baseball game. Toni Stone (the playing name of Marcenia Lyle,--a second year player for the New Orleans Creoles of the Southern Negro League) came into town for a game with the Birmingham Eagles. Though touted as a marketing ploy (some 5000+ turned out at Rickwood for her appearance) Stone was reported to be a solid .300 hitter with good speed, and an excellent glove. Stone made three appearances at Rickwood that season and may be the only woman to have played at Rickwood with a professional baseball team.⁵⁴

Rickwood also was home to many football games over the years. Until 1927 many Alabama-Auburn games were played here, and in the 1940s the field became the site of the New Year's Day Vulcan Bowl matchup for the championship of Black college football. In addition Rickwood also hosted periodic horse shows, concerts, and wrestling matches.

CONCLUSION

Rickwood is above all a baseball field, now the oldest remaining grandstand on its original site in the United States.⁵⁵ It has a grandstand specifically oriented for baseball and undoubtedly the seventy-plus years of professional ball played there is for what it shall best be remembered. The essence of Rickwood Field lies foremost in those memories. For generations of people in Birmingham Rickwood Field became a central gathering place for fans of all stripes. In few other settings could people gather in the thousands and forget the day's troubles while relaxing and watching grown men play a boy's game. For the regular fan, the people around him became a micro-community of largely anonymous peers with whom he could unravel from the day's toil. For the casual fan it was a chance to share in this experience. One could write reams about the peculiar nature of baseball and its relationship to American life and Americana, but what Rickwood Field represents more than anything else is that inexplicable feeling of tenderness one gets at the sheer mention of the name, and it is in that affection and in those memories that Rickwood will long hold its place in history.

⁵⁴ BW 20 June 1950.

⁵⁵ see Note 1.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

1. Architectural Character

A. General Statement: Rickwood Field includes a single tier concrete and steel grandstand constructed in 1910 during the early century shift to modern stadium construction techniques. Following the pattern of many major league parks constructed at that time, including Shibe Park in Philadelphia and Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, Rickwood was one of the first minor league clubs to utilize the new materials and methods. Unlike the wooden bleachers constructed in the earlier era, the modern reinforced concrete and structural steel ballparks were fireproof from top to bottom and provided greater material comforts for an ever growing community of baseball fans at the turn of the century. Unlike its counterparts, Rickwood was not confined by an urban landscape that forced peculiar angles and irregular shapes upon the design. But like most fields of the era, the dimensions were quite large and the field was asymmetrical--470' to left, over 500' to center, with only a manageable 335' in right field. Though Rickwood does not have the ivy walls of Wrigley Field or the green monster at Fenway Park, fans were still thrilled by the prospect of watching a player hit a triple or "homer" into the "groove" in deep left-center field.

Though baseball grandstands are largely perceived as grand structures that enshrine the national pastime, Rickwood Field carries a human scale that creates a sense of coziness and comfort among people in the stands. Whether in the box seats or the stands, Rickwood presents a casual space that allows, though it does not demand, a certain level of social interaction. Yet in relation to the field itself the stands become more detached. A majority of the seats are oriented toward the infield area where most of the playing action occurs, but these seats are separated by a large foul territory that creates a distinct buffer zone between the fans in the stands and the player and umpire on the field. The backstop behind homeplate and the field seats behind that fence, favored by the ardent fans of pitching technique, are an unusually long 82' from home plate, and originally stood at 90'.

The formal entryway, added to the field in 1928, displays an influence of the Mission style quite fashionable in the South during the 1920s. It has a

prominent one-story arcade with a symmetrical facade and a pent roof with Spanish clay tile. A tile banding extends around the parapet, keeping in line with the Mission theme.

2. Condition of Fabric: The current condition of Rickwood Field is fair. Since being leased to the Birmingham Board of Education efforts have been made to fix and maintain the steel structural system, wiring, and plumbing. Rusting in several of the steel supports continues as water seeps through holes and gaps in the concrete. Though these are serious concerns a concerted effort at maintenance should allow Rickwood to remain functional well into the future. Plans to rehabilitate Rickwood have already begun under the direction of the Friends of Rickwood, a non-profit, Birmingham-area chamber of commerce group of citizens, appointed by the school board. The installation of a new roof for Rickwood will commence in the Fall, and major fund raising for the rehabilitation is underway.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The ballpark is an irregular shape resembling a U-shape design. The individual dimensions are as follows:

Left Field Wing- 250' X 71'
Home Plate Section (including the entryway)-
50' X 90'
Right Field Wing- 460' X 75'
End Wing Right Field- 70' X 63'
Covered Breezeway- 70' X 45'
Angular Porch- 40' across front with 20' wing on
each side. 18' wide. 9' porch out in front.
Dugout- 90' X 32'
Press Boxes- 32' X 8'

2. Foundations: The foundations are of concrete.

3. Walls: The walls of the stadium itself are concrete block. The outside wall of the seating sections are enclosed with horizontal boarding and fixed wooden louvers(only on the 1924 and 1928 additions). Horizontal lap siding has been added approximately 4' high and open from there up.

4. Structural system, framing: The seating area is covered with structural steel composed of steel H

columns, a large steel truss extending underneath the ridge and gable steel trusses extending front to back supported by steel columns. On top of the gable trusses are 3 2X purlin members that extend from truss to truss. Between the trusses are metal tie rods. The roof is made up of two inch tongue-and-groove wooden deck covered with asphalt rolled roofing.

The stands are a concrete frame structure with concrete risers covered by a steel frame. They are covered by a gabled roof structure with asphalt roll roofing. The steel columns supporting the structure sit on steel piers projecting from the ground approximately 1'. In several places steel structural members have been added to provide additional support to the concrete members. On the 1924 and 1928 portions of the grandstand there are pre-cast concrete risers that butt right up against the older concrete bleachers. Each side of the grandstand has steel channel risers with pre-cast concrete treads for the seating areas. The seating overhangs the supporting structure approximately 5' and is braced with steel members projecting out at an angle from concrete and steel members underneath.

5. Porches: The arcaded entryway to the stadium is located at the northwest entrance to the stadium facing the corner of Second Avenue West and 12th Street West. This is a one-story arcaded porch with three sides and incorporating seven bays. It is composed of clay tile walls with a stucco finish and has a built-up flat roof system with parapet walls covered with sheet metal flashing. There are five major entryways or gates with segmented arch openings. The center section has a second floor with offices. Over the two end bays is a gable roof flanked on each side by an engaged pilaster with rounded tops at the parapet each with a decorative plaster face. There is a large plaster shield in the center at the top. Tile edging extends from the gable roof upward running along the parapet returning to the gable roof on the opposite side. Across the width of this area is the inscription "RICKWOOD FIELD". Each opening of the arcade has a pilaster composite curve molding on each end. On the extreme right side of the arcade is a doorway that leads upstairs and to the left of that is an opening now filled with glass block. The ticket booths lie just inside each opening with casement windows facing out onto the street. Each opening has an iron gate across it.

6. Breezeway: The area between the arcade and the grandstand creates a breezeway covered with a steel structural system with two clipped gable roofs composed of wooden decking and asphalt shingles. There is a concrete floor. The gable ends are sided with horizontal wooden drop siding and a wooden fascia. Traveling through the arcade into the breezeway, one must pass through a gate system that was modified at some time and consists of iron pipe railing with iron mesh panels bolted to them.

Curiously, though designed and constructed at the same time, the entryway and breezeway do not run parallel to one another. The original grandstand, obviously oriented to the layout of the field, was based upon the direction of the sun's rays in the late summer afternoon. The adjoining streets were paved and a curb put in at the same time that the arcade and breezeway were constructed. The breezeway parallels the grandstand while the arcade does not. The arcade, with a concrete floor, is oriented directly toward the newly formed corner, forming a miniature plaza for early arriving fans to gather before the ballpark opens.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There is a doorway on extreme right side of arcade, leading upstairs to the offices and press box.

b. Windows and shutters: The structure has numerous types of windows throughout. The offices above the entryway have nine-light metal sash windows with metal bars on the exterior. The ticket booths below have casement windows facing the front and ticket windows facing northeast with an iron grill across and a single wooden panel with shutter on the inside. The windows on the Dugout Restaurant (now the Conference Room) have louvers below and a transom above. The rest rooms have steel sash glass which has been replaced with plywood boarding.

8. Roof: There is a gable roof covered with roll asphalt roofing. A continuous gutter on each edge of the roof connects to metal downspouts that extend to the ground along the edge of the columns. Currently, an 8' high chain link fence stretches along the outer edge of the roof except on the far ends of each side where there is a low chain link fence approximately 16"

high. A low mesh fence runs along the inner edge of the roof.

9. Press boxes: There are two wood-frame press boxes with narrow board siding and a shed roof with roll asphalt roofing and a wooden fascia. The box on the right has a solid slab wooden surround door with six double raised panels. Each has sliding aluminum frame windows with wooden surrounds and a small wooden platform in each box.

10. Light Towers: Five towers rise from the roof and three free-standing towers from beyond the outfield fence. Four of the five on the roof light the infield while the four others light the outfield. The towers on the roof are 75' to the ground, while the free standing towers are 73' high. All are supported by a cantilevering, statically indeterminate, steel-frame structural system. Since erection in 1936 the lights themselves have undergone many changes in an effort to provide maximum illumination without the dark lines that often troubled outfielders in the early days.

11. Decorative features: At the end of the original grandstand on the first base side is a water fountain with a polygonal metal base pedestal, presumably an original 1910 feature. It has a step-on activator and a chrome octagonal water receptacle. A second fountain was located on the third base side and is believed to be in storage at the field.

Several large speaker horns are mounted on the trusses as well as several porcelain enamel industrial light fixtures running along the stadium. Portions of the ceiling fan fixtures, installed in 1914, still exist in the trusses.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The original grandstand was laid out on an area that presumably had been used for ball playing back into the nineteenth century. Home plate is placed in the northwest corner of the site and the back edge faces in the same direction. The grandstand curves around the back of home plate and angles out at forty-five degrees along the first and third base lines. On the third base side the stands cut back in towards home plate and end just beyond third base where they were at one time followed by a steel bleacher section that continued on down the line to the left

field foul pole. The first base stands extend out along the foul line into right field and curve back toward the outfield around the right field foul pole. Adjacent to these stood the wooden bleachers used by Black patrons.

The open end of the diamond is enclosed by a concrete wall extending from what was the outer edge of the steel bleachers to the edge of the wooden bleachers in right field. This fence, constructed in 1928, is rounded while the original wooden fence was squared forming a right angle directly in dead center field. The original fence dimensions were enormous. The fence dimensions were changed four times presumably with a plywood fence much like the one now on the field with the shortest dimensions Rickwood has ever had, suited for the high school teams that play there. Surrounding the site from one end of the concrete fence to the other is a chain link fence with numerous pedestrian and vehicular gates.

The field itself is a diamond. The infield area is a smaller diamond within the larger field bounded by the four bases running counter-clockwise from first to home. The running and primary fielding area is a red clay surface while the rest of the field is bermuda grass. On each side of the field are the dugouts, two-thirds recessed into the ground, supported by two round steel columns and having an open end view of the field.

Constructed before any of the adjoining streets were paved the original grandstand is offset from the main thoroughfare by 36' on the right side and 24' on the left. The path of the late afternoon rays of the sun played a primary role in the layout of the field. Orienting home plate toward the northwest insured that the late afternoon summer sun would cast shadows on the grandstands and most of the infield playing area. Thus on the later grandstand additions wooden louvers were attached at the back of the grandstand seating along the right field line.

The grandstand rises up from field level with several rows of box seats that are then separated from the covered seating areas by a cross aisle extending around the entire grandstand. There are two tunnels leading directly onto the field past the dugouts. The seating is separated from the field by a low concrete block wall behind home plate and then by a low chain link

fence in front of the box seats.

2. Stairways: From the arcade there is a stairway leading to the second story offices. Ten steps lead to a landing followed by a right angle turn and eight steps to the second floor. A wooden rail is attached to the wall.

A wooden stairway leads from the back of the grandstand to the roof. In addition there are steel stairs in the wooden treads extending from the grandstand to the roof of the breezeway.

3. Flooring: The interior of the offices and restrooms are ceramic tile with those in the office carpeted with a vinyl base. Interior areas of the concourse and stadium are concrete. In the press box are narrow board wooden floors (some with carpet). The dugouts have wooden floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The offices have plaster gypsum board walls with tile wainscoting and a suspended acoustical ceiling. Two of the five offices have random width knotty-pine panelling. Plastered walls are found in the ticket offices. The concourse and parts of the restrooms have concrete block walls. The ceiling in the ladies restroom are plaster and square fiber board panel. Four metal wall louvers are also found in the ladies room. The press box walls are wooden panel and the ceiling is an exposed structure. The dugout walls and ceiling are concrete.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Doors in the office are solid slab wood with metal veneer. One metal door leads to the roof of the arcade. The ticket booth doors are wooden surround with three panels below and a four-light glass panel in the upper part. Doors to the restroom stalls are wooden panel. The press box entrances are solid slab wooden surrounds with metal thresholds. One door on the right side press box is double raised with six panels.

b. Windows: The offices have nine-light windows with the lower three lights fixed and a six-light hopper vent above. The ticket booths have casement windows while the concession stand in the breezeway has a pair of three-light casement

windows. The restrooms have steel sash glass now covered by plywood boarding. Some window openings are filled with glass blocks. The press boxes have sliding aluminum frame windows with wooden surrounds.

6. Decorative features: The concession area directly facing the entryway and gate area has crown molding surrounding the concrete block wall. On the original plans this was labeled the "privilege man" area and presumably was a smoking and social gathering spot for the box seat holders, team officials, and other members of the urban gentry who might have been in attendance.

On the walls in the breezeway are two large signboards. One displayed the current standings in the Southern League during the 1980s and the other showed the lineups of the home and visiting clubs for that days game. The lineup from the last professional game is still on this board though it has faded considerably.

7. Mechanical equipment: The remodeled offices have central heat and air. The plumbing and electrical facilities have been modified several times over the years and are modern systems. Interior areas have modern fluorescent lighting.

D. Site.

1. Historic landscape design: The field lies on a level 13.5 acre plain bordering the West End section of Birmingham. On the east side lies an industrial plant and on the south side runs a railroad track belonging to the Seaboard Coast Line, beyond which lies the Valley Creek. To the north and west are modest residential dwellings. The neighborhood immediately to the west of Rickwood's entrance is called Rising Station. Running south from 2nd Court to Lomb Avenue and west from 12th Street West to 15th Street West, it has been a longstanding Black neighborhood in Birmingham from as early, if not earlier, than the construction of Rickwood Field. To the north and south of Rising Station lie traditionally white neighborhoods of working-class bungalow and cottage style homes. Following the exodus of the 1970s, these have become predominantly Black neighborhoods as well. The Barons' departure from Rickwood in 1987 was due in part to the perception of this area as a "bad neighborhood."

As early as 1910 the area was characterized by a mix of residential and industrial occupants. The surrounding area grew in size and population along with the rest of the city during the boom period of the 1920s. Many of the Black residents in Rising Station worked in the neighboring industrial plants, most notably at Tennessee Coal & Iron Company, located just west of Rickwood Field.

Barons and Black Barons games were always eventful as thousands of people streamed on foot into the neighborhood from the West End and Bush Hill, and by streetcar from downtown, Bessemer, Fairfield, Ensley and other points. Rickwood provided patronage for the local community as many young people found their first employment working the concessions at the field. Outside the ballpark vendors sold popsicles, ice cream, and other assorted goodies while fans gathered before the game to grab a soda or some barbecue at the Lily White Cafeteria directly across the street from the entrance. At night games the floodlights from the towers illuminated the surrounding neighborhoods, creating a picnic atmosphere for fans and neighbors alike.

In the post-World War II era the neighborhood began a process of change which saw the professionals and relatively well off from the area move out to newer housing developments. In the 1970s this process accelerated and an area that had been roughly 50/50 in its racial mix rapidly turned to an all Black neighborhood. Though still decidedly working-class the area saw an increase in the number of retirees and unemployed.

Photographs from the earlier era reveal many more trees around the grandstand, and originally the fan peering into the outfield could see lush greenery out beyond the center field wall. The trees themselves were seating for young boys who climbed up to watch the games for free. There were also some large shade trees in front of the original entrance to Rickwood. The trees fell victim to storms and functional needs and so now the site is devoid of any greenery.

Located between the old concrete wall and the current back field fence are practice mounds for the pitchers.

2. Outbuildings: Beyond the right-center field plywood wall and inside of the concrete wall lies a wood frame

utility shed with a corrugated metal roof.

In right field there is a small size football scoreboard. In left-center field there is a rectangular baseball scoreboard. Both are electronic.

In center field a flagpole stands between the plywood and concrete fences.

Down the left field line in the space where the steel bleachers were located is a practice batting shed. It is a rectangular structure with corrugated metal sides and roof, approximately 90' X 46'.

To the right side of the arcade/entryway running along the first base side of the grandstands is a building that housed the Dugout Restaurant. Built in 1950 the Dugout is a wooden structure built on a concrete foundation with a built-up flat roof system. The exterior walls are board and batten wooden siding. The windows are boarded with plywood and they have fixed wooden louvers underneath. The south end of the building, formerly a screened-in beer garden is filled with concrete block. The street side entrance is boarded up while the east side entrance now has a metal door leading to the newly constructed conference room. Windows on the east side have wooden louvers below and a transom above.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Eskew, Glenn T. "But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, Athens, 1993.

Useful discussion of the social context of the West End and surrounding areas during the fifties and sixties. Pointed to account of city commission attempting to rescind the city ordinance banning integrated play.

Woodward Papers, Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Boxes 12-19, 22, 27.

This is an unprocessed collection. Boxes 12-19 run chronologically and within each box are files

marked "Birmingham Baseball Association" and "Southern Association" for the years 1913 - 1938. Files for 1909-1913, around the time of construction are not in the box. The correspondence is mostly business related including annual income reports, letters to league president John Martin, and miscellaneous business related material. Boxes 22 and 27 contain envelopes of newspaper clippings largely related to the Barons. All in all a collection worth looking at but minimally helpful.

Plans & Maps:

Building Plans and Inspections Division, Original Plans for Rickwood Field, and 1924, 1927, and 1928 Additions (partial), and 1936 Light Towers. City Hall, Birmingham, 2nd Floor. Filed by address.

Jefferson County Tax Assessments, Property Maps 1910
-Present. Tax Assessor's Office, Mapping Department, Basement, Jefferson County Courthouse.

Does not show buildings but does allow an overview of the lot designs and changes throughout the century. For these maps, all tax records, plans, and permits it is very useful to have the following: Parcel ID # - 29-4-1-16-11, Tax ID # - 25-5001.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1911, vol.3, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts.

Photographs:

General Catalogue and O.V. Hunt Collection of the Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts.

Board of Equalization, Photographs labeled 3-59545 from the File on Rickwood Field, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Manuscripts Division.

Aerial Photographs, Engineering Division, City Hall, Birmingham.

Aerial Photograph, ca.1925, Anonymous source.

Photograph of Scoreboard, courtesy Walter Garrett, Park Board, City of Birmingham.

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*PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Parks Service, Department of the Interior, as part of a long-range program to document historically significant architecture, engineering, and industrial works in the United States. The Rickwood Field recording project was co-sponsored during the Summer of 1993 by HABS under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of HABS/HAER and by the Birmingham Historical Society, Marjorie L. White, Director, and Phillip A. Morris, President. The field work, measured drawings, historical reports, and photographs were prepared under the direction of Eric N. Delony, Chief of HAER, and Craig N. Strong, HAER architect; Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS, and Joseph Balachowski, HABS architect; and Catherine Lavoie, HABS historian. The recording team consisted of Professor John P. White, Texas Tech University, architect and overall supervisor, Thomas W. Williams, Auburn University, individual team supervisor, and architectural technicians John Bacus, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, Barbara Schmidt, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and W. Greg Simon, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The historical report was prepared by Hemant S. Damle, University of Cincinnati. Large-format photography was done by Jet Lowe.

Figure 1. Photograph shows the old drop-in scoreboard in its second location, closer to home plate and more toward center field ca. 1950s. To the left of the scoreboard is the extra seating area known as "Glennon Gardens". (Courtesy of Walter Garrett, Park and Rec. Board, City of Birmingham)

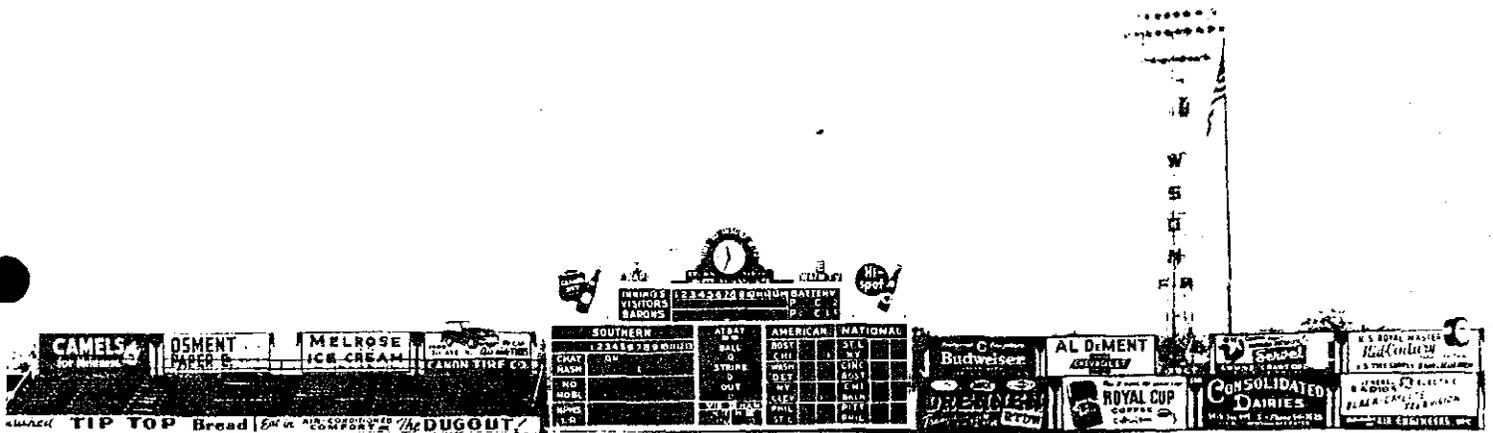


Figure 2. Photograph of front entryway to Rickwood Field. No date. Original press box is on the roof. Spanish clay tile still on the pent roof.

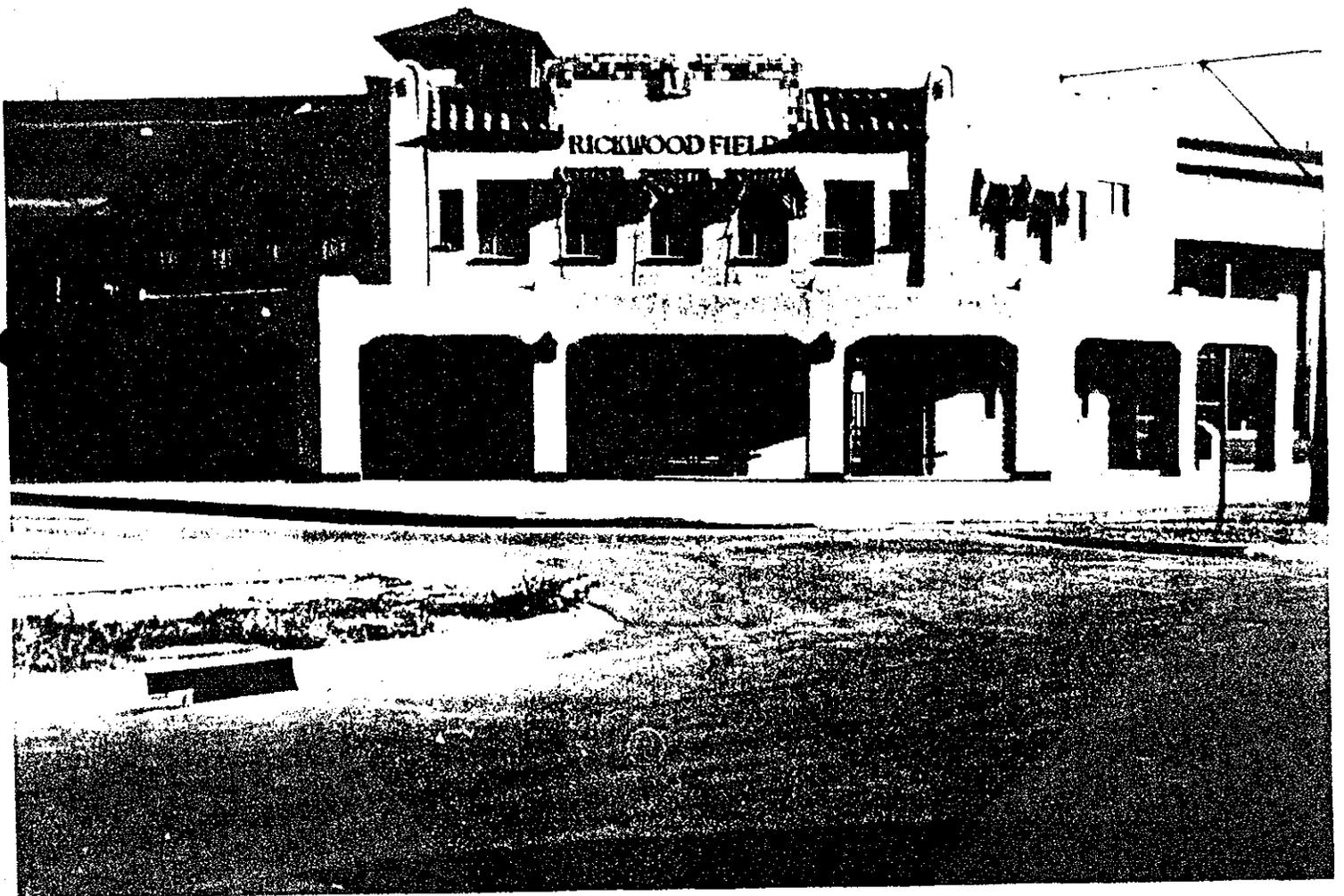


Figure 3. Aerial view of Rickwood ca. 1925. Shows the 1924 addition of covered grandstand along the first base line and the addition of steel bleachers in the far section along the left field line, while the concrete bleachers by third base remain uncovered. Also note that at the main entrance to the grandstand is a rectilinear entryway replaced in 1928 with present structure. Note that most of the greenery has been cut down by this time. The squared wooden fence enclosing the outfield was put up in 1921 following a tornado that tore down the original. This wood fence was replaced with a curved concrete wall in 1928. (Courtesy an anonymous source)

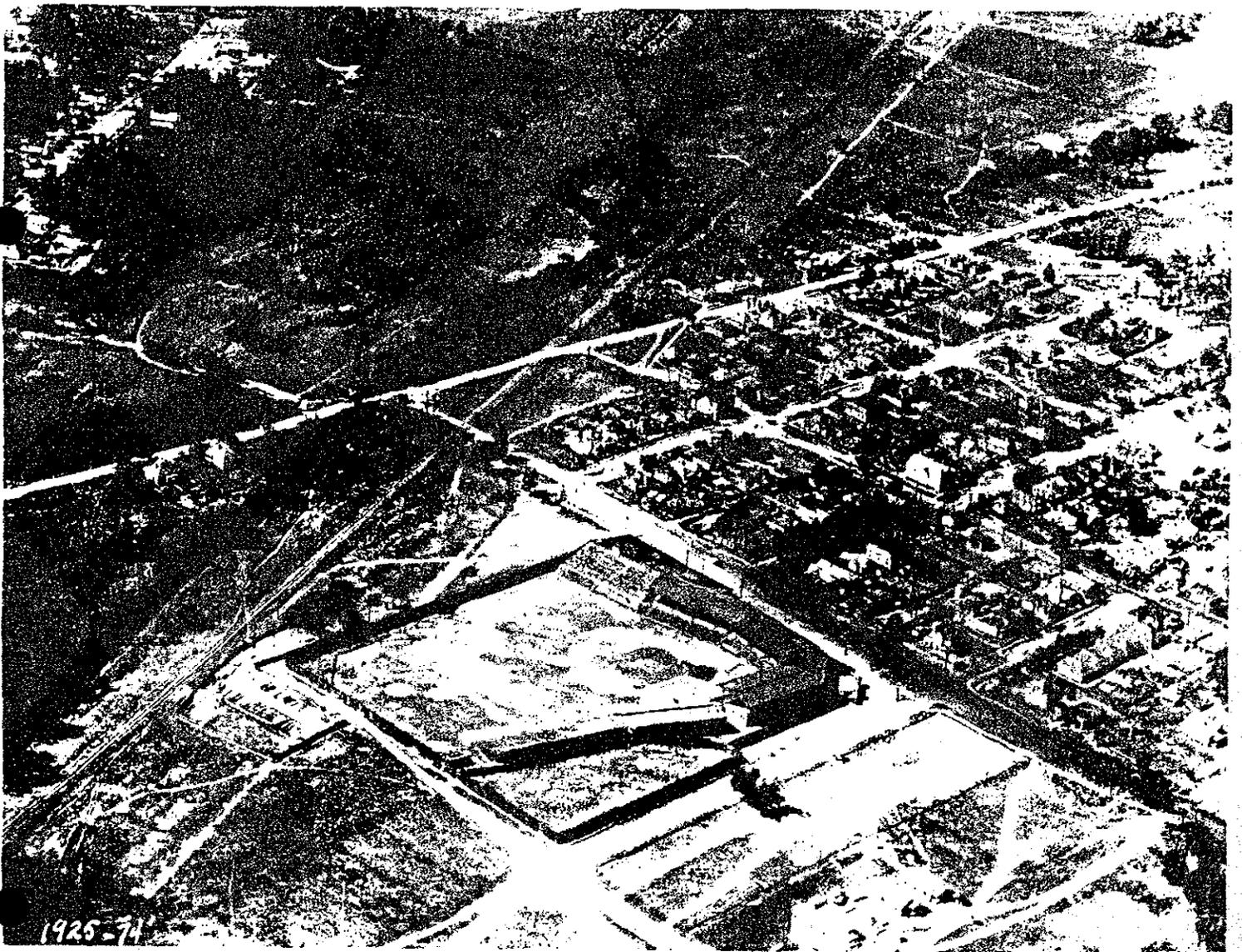


Figure 4. The Dugout Restaurant, 1950. Built in spring 1950 the far end of the restaurant was a screened in porch area that served as a beer garden. (Board of Equalization File, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Special Collections)

Photo Taken 10-3-1950



3-59545

Figure 5. Caretakers house. Located on the grounds of Rickwood Field outside the grandstand along the right field line. No known date of construction or destruction. Believed to have been taken down ca.1960s. Walker family were long time caretakers. (Board of Equalization File, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Special Collections).

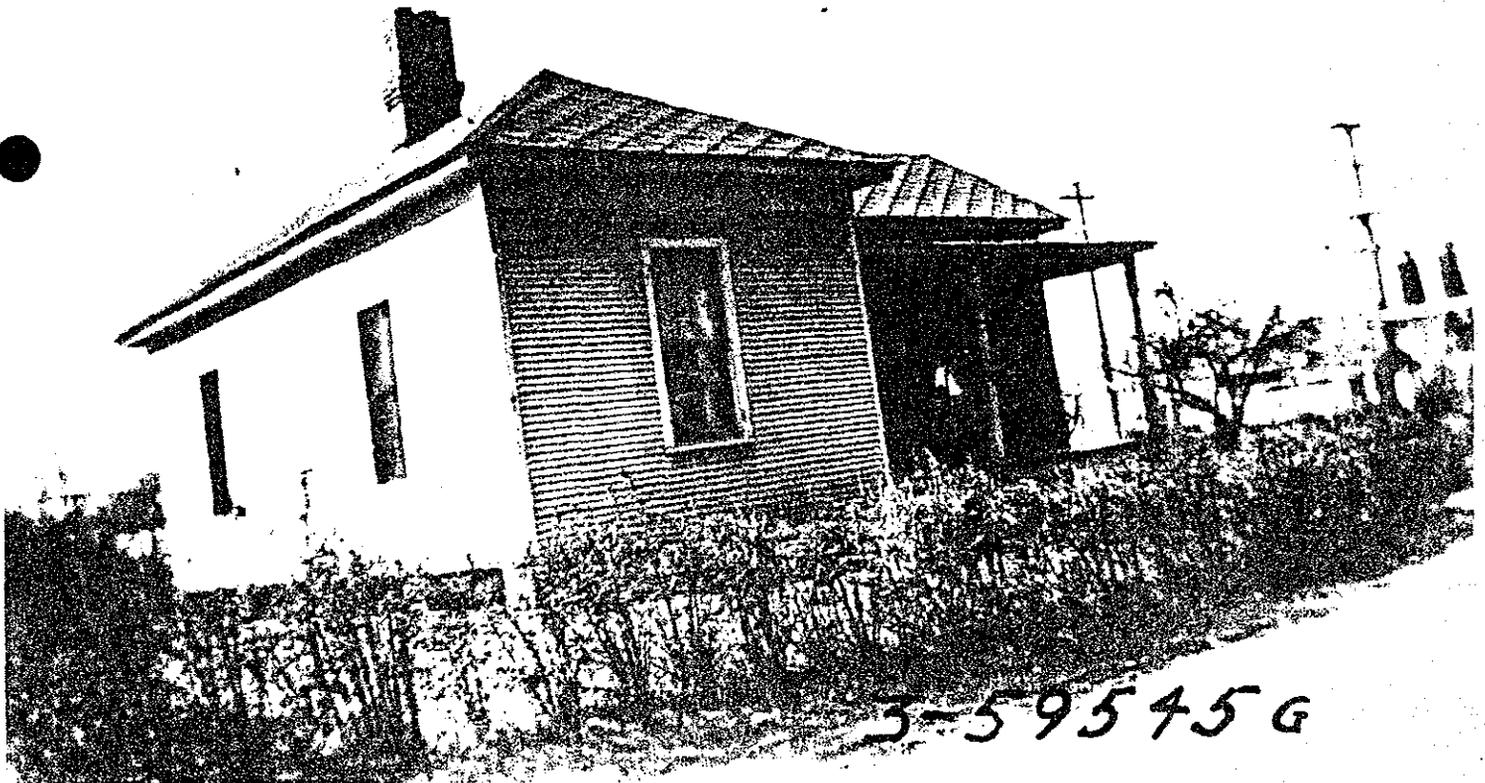


Figure 6. Rickwood after the tornado of April 1921. The original wooden fence is toppled over in foreground. The wooden risers from left field bleacher section are piled to the side. The third and first base uncovered concrete bleachers remain standing as does the grandstand. In the distance one can note the original location of the first base dugout at the end of the original grandstand, accessed by a tunnel leading directly to the clubhouse. (O.V.Hunt Collection, 12.75, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Manuscripts Division).

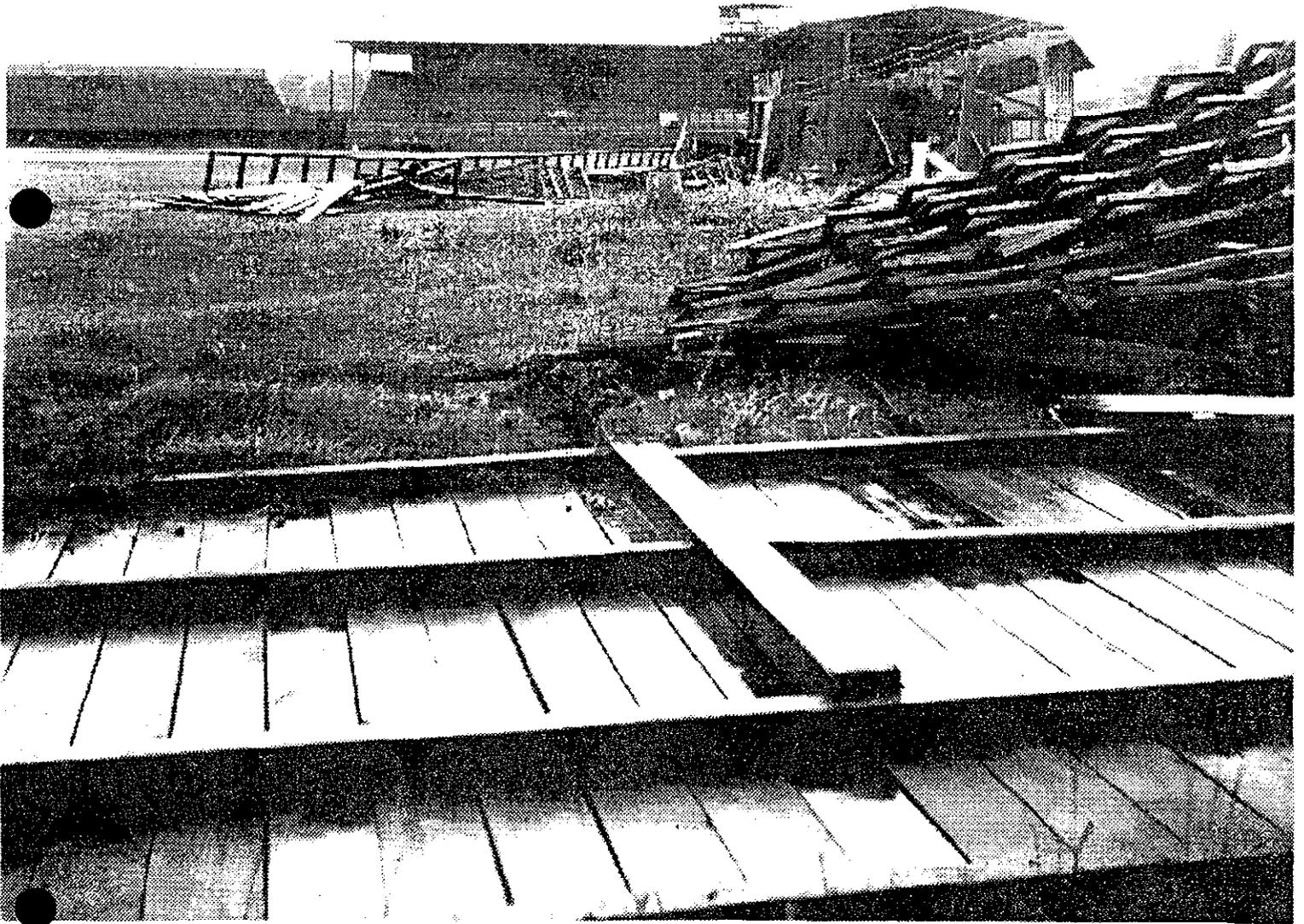


Figure 7. Birmingham Barons, 1914. First man on left is Carlton Molesworth, long time manager of the Barons. Third man from left is owner Rick Woodward. In the background is the third base side of the original grandstand. Note the opera chairs in the box seats. (O.V. Hunt Collection, 1.83, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Manuscripts Division).

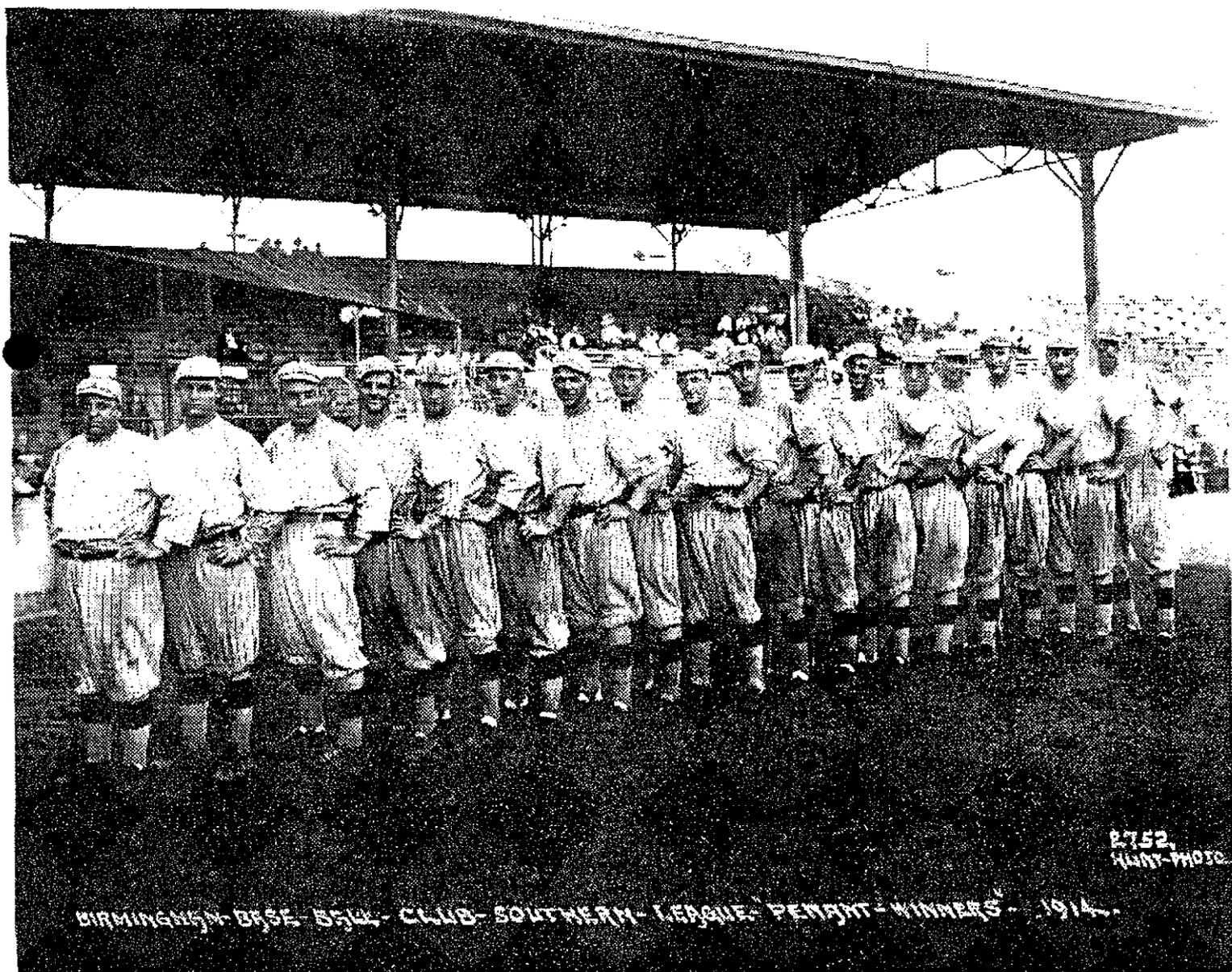


Figure 8. Opening Day at Rickwood, 1914. Overflow crowd is seated in temporary wooden bleachers along the outfield wall. Black fans are roped in along the left field line. This view gives a sense of the mammoth dimensions to left and left-center field and also the spacious foul territory along the third base line. Note the fans sitting on top of the wooden fence in left and center fields. Also the abundance of trees and greenery beyond the outfield wall. (O.V. Hunt Collection, 7.25, Birmingham Public Library, Archives and Manuscripts Collection).

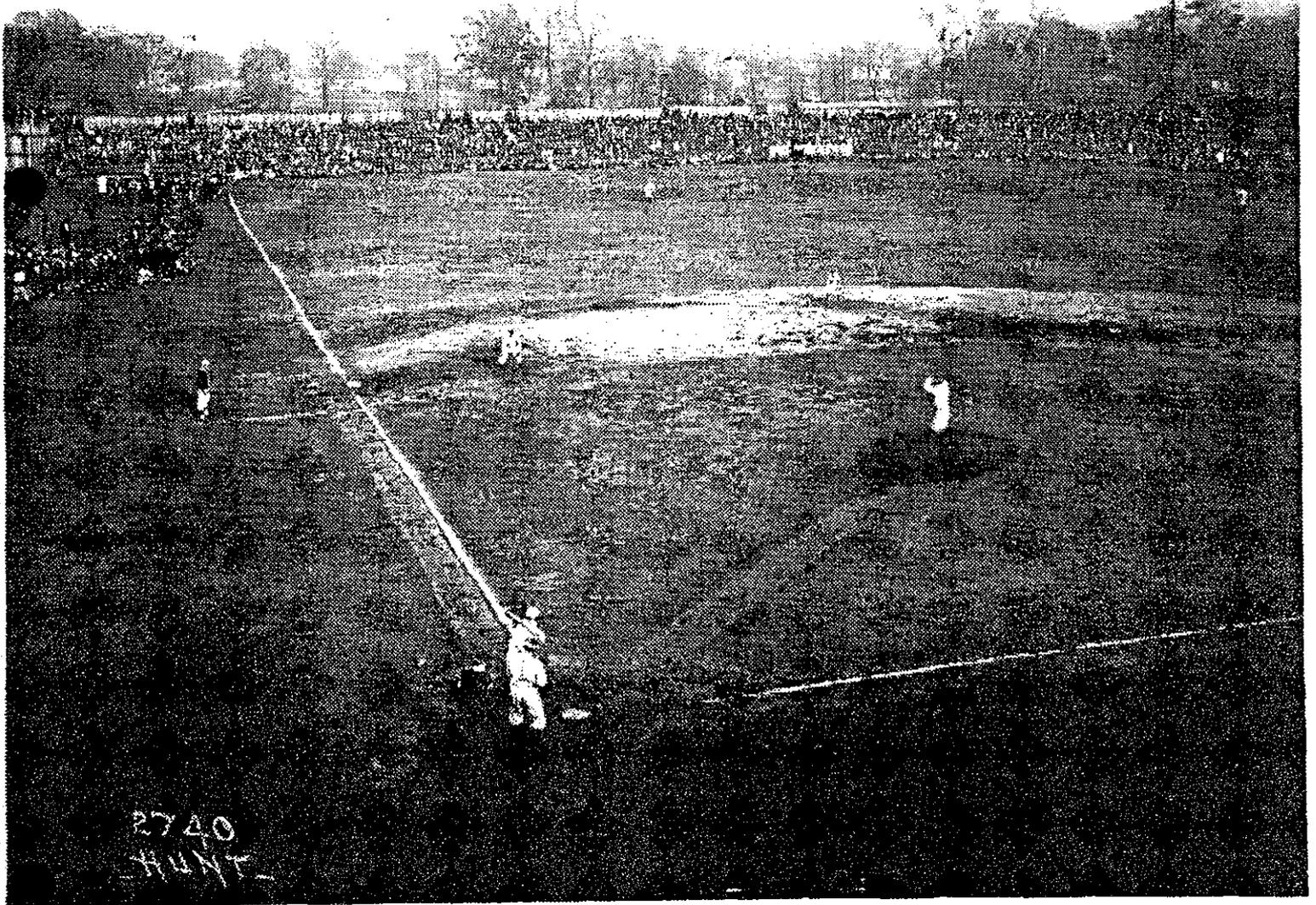


Figure 9. View from third base grandstand looking northeast. Road became 2nd Ave. West. Houses in background no longer standing. In the distance is the streetcar line running along Third Ave. West. (O.V. Hunt Collection, 10.37, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts).



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HUNT

OVER

Figure 10. Property Map, ca.1908 showing an empty lot at future location of Rickwood Field, corner of Florence and Bush Boulevard. Label on lot is "Ala. Terminal R R Co. 08". (Tax Assessors Office, Mapping Department, Jefferson County Courthouse, Sec# 4-18-3).

