

# THE AFTERLIFE OF A BASEBALL STADIUM

## BRAVES FIELD AND THE CREATION OF BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S WEST CAMPUS

DAVID G. LEWIS

# SITE HISTORY

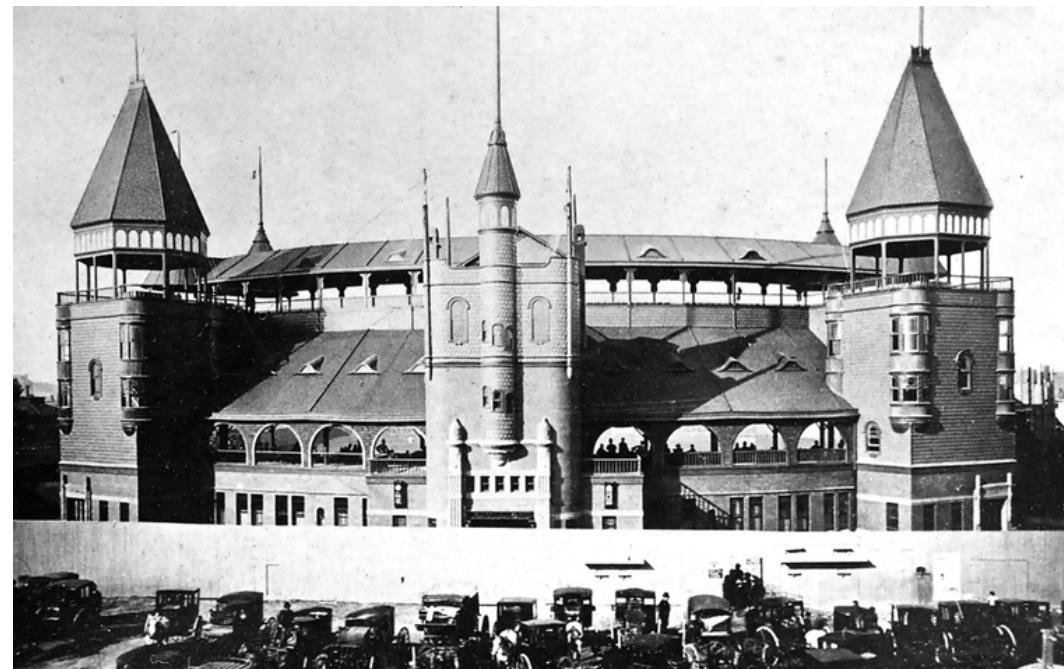
1890s-1914

Site of the Allston Golf Club



1871-1914

Boston National League Team plays at the South End Grounds



March 20, 1915

Construction of Braves Field Begins



**August 18th, 1915: Braves Field officially opens to a crowd of 46,000**

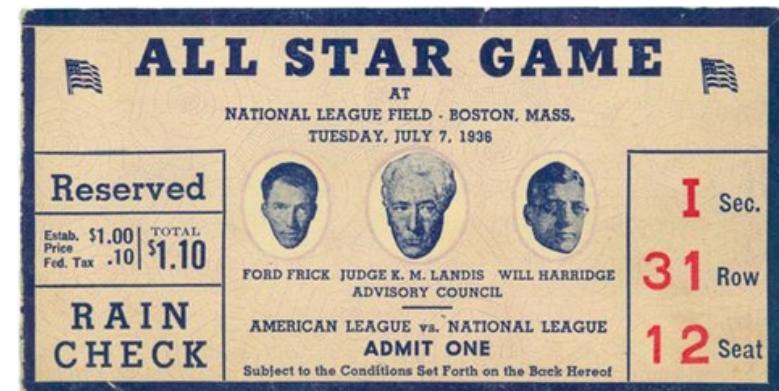
# BRAVES FIELD HISTORY

May 1, 1920  
Longest game in AL/NL history, a 26 inning tie played at Braves Field

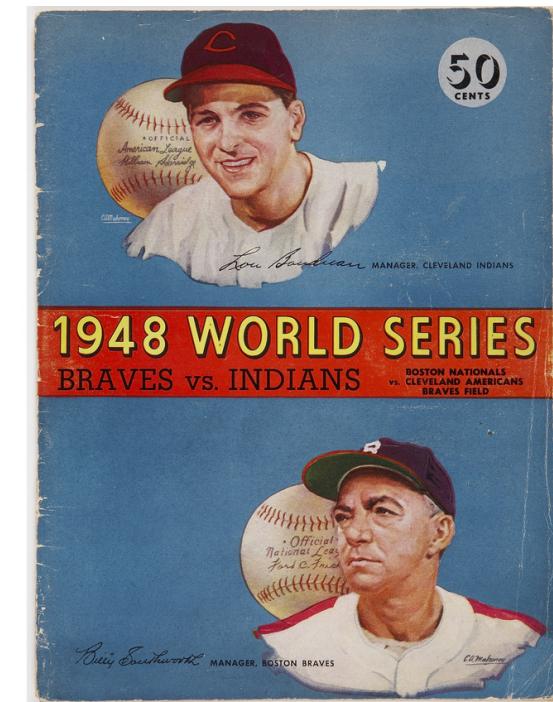


April-May 1935  
Babe Ruth plays the final games of his career as a member of the Boston Braves

July 7, 1936  
Braves Field hosts the MLB All Star Game, featuring 21 future Hall of Famers



October 1948  
Boston Braves face Cleveland Indians in World Series, 3 games played at Braves Field



March 1953: Boston Braves announce move to Milwaukee

# BU & BRAVES FIELD



Fall 1920

Boston University begins playing football games at Braves Field, first establishing a connection with the site



1952

Boston University purchases 855 Commonwealth Ave, their first property west of the BU bridge, in the vicinity of Braves Field.



Summer 1953

State of Massachusetts takes BU's Nickerson field in Weston, MA via eminent domain, to construct Rt. 128.



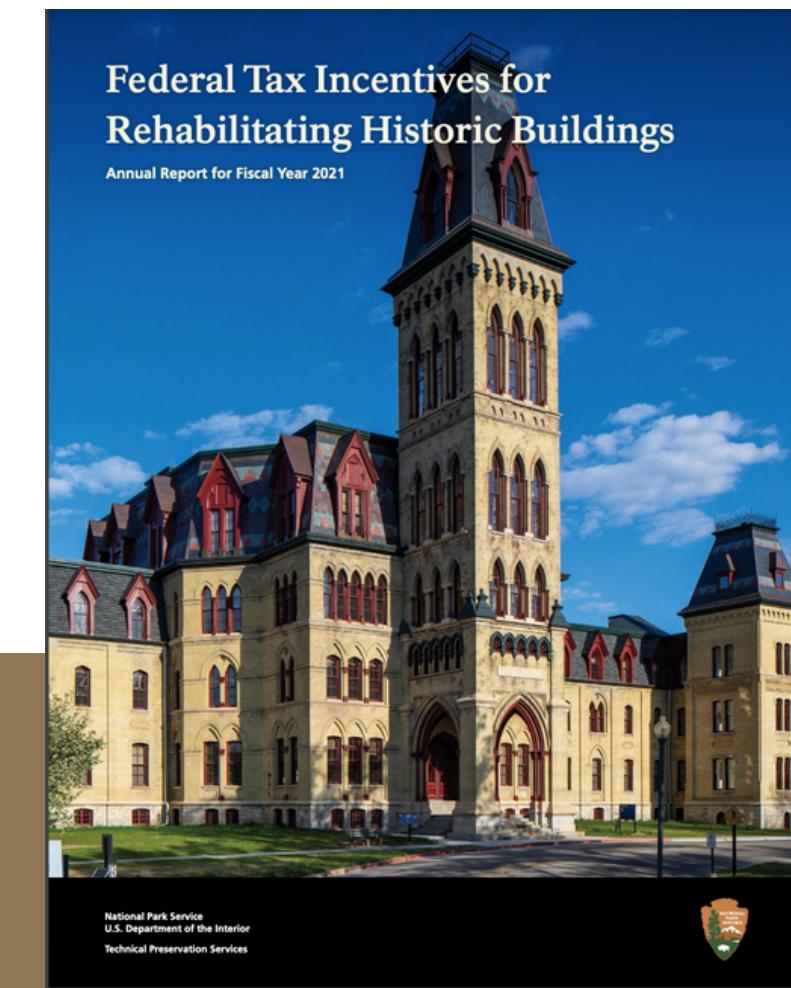
1955

Boston University begins demolition of grandstand, pavillion and outfield bleachers to create space for dorms and football facilities

July 30th, 1953: Boston University completes purchase of Braves Field

# WHAT IS ADAPTIVE REUSE?

- Adaptive ReUse is the process of rehabilitating a historic structure for a new use
- Serves to preserve the existing structure and maintain the historic character of its surroundings, while offering a more relevant or necessary use
- A cost effective mode of development, saving on materials, labor and demolition costs. New expenses can qualify for historic tax credits at both the state and federal levels

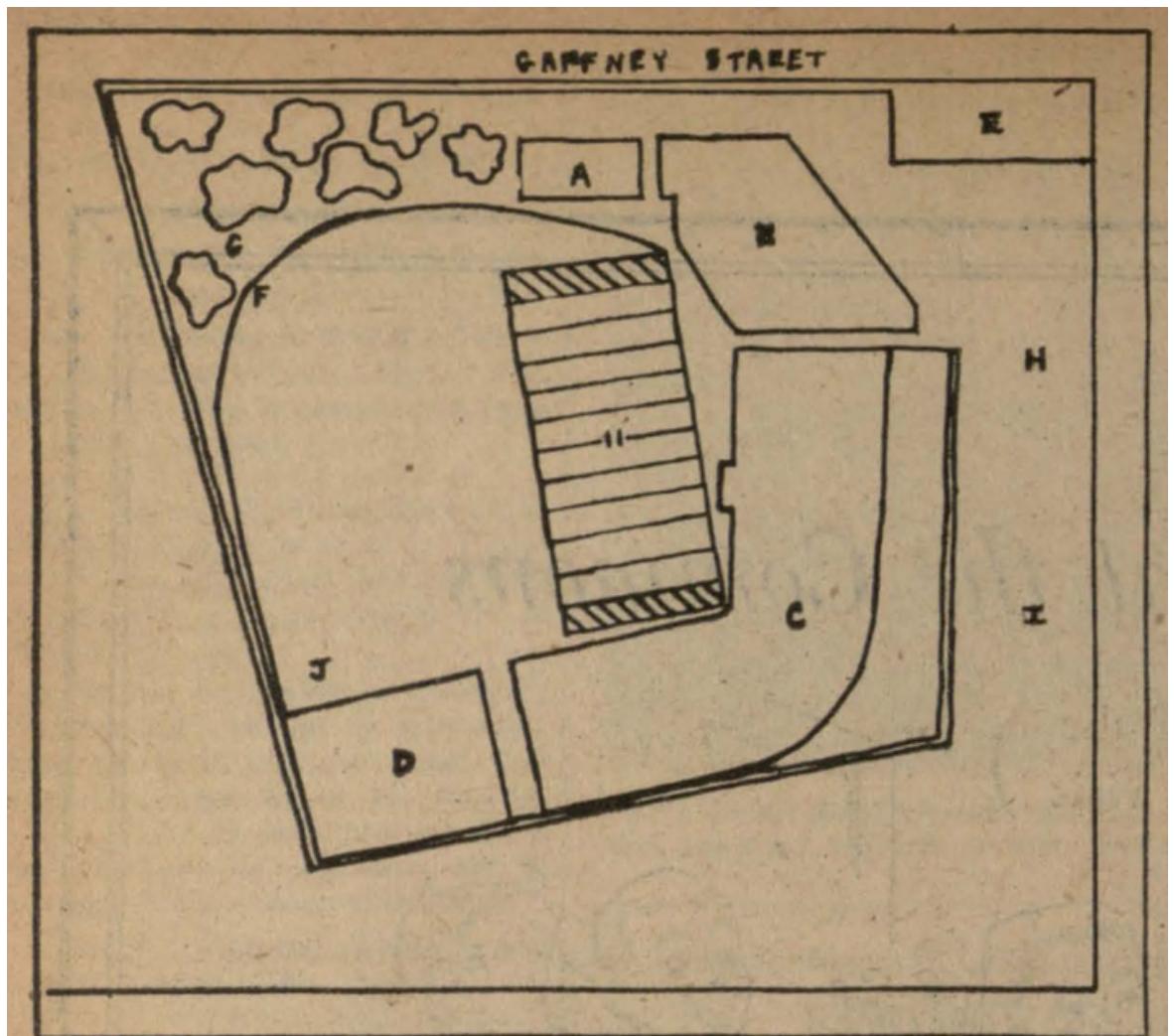


# PLANS FOR REUSE

Boston University had ambitious plans for the ReUse of the Braves Field site.

- Shortly after the University acquired the field in 1953, an article ran in the school newspaper laying out ideas for the property. BU immediately saw the site as the central location for athletic facilities, planning to host its football, baseball, track, swimming, and tennis teams on the grounds. For a time, they considered constructing a classroom building on the site
- The school knew right away that tearing down the grandstands would be a necessity for their plans
- A statement from then-president Harold C. Case envisioned the Field's role as a multi-use stie, hoping that commencement, physical education, and other events could take place there.
- During the early 2000's planning of the Student Village, there was consideration in incorporating the site of the field (more so than came to fruition)

**"Opportunities Unlimited for New Braves Field"**



**Key to chart:** A — Right field jury box; to be torn down. B — Right field pavilion; student section which will seat up to 50 yd. line. C — Reserved grandstand and boxes. D — Left field pavilion; to be torn down. Possible site for field house. E — Entrance and athletic offices. F — Outfield wall; to be torn down. G — Possible site for tennis courts. H — Volleyball courts. I — Badminton court. J — Track to encompass entire field.

(Boston University News, 1953)

## 25 Classrooms for Braves Field

B. U. Also to Build Offices  
on Park, Keep Baseball Site

By EARL BANNER

Braves Field soon will be the most unique college campus in the United States.

The grandstands that once echoed to the roar from 40,000 wild-eyed World Series fans will be converted to contain at least 25 classrooms and dozens of smaller offices to accommodate Boston University's student body of 26,000.

The baseball diamond will be maintained and improved. But in addition to baseball and football, Braves Field will be the site for a heavy intercollegiate and intramural athletic program embracing track, lacrosse, soccer and perhaps even hockey.

But the university's prime consideration in purchasing the vacant baseball stadium was the need for more classroom space

rather than additional athletic facilities, Dr. Harold C. Case, president of Boston University, told the Globe today.

The university's School of Education physical program, R. O. T. C. facilities, athletic and school service programs will be quartered at Braves Field this Fall. Other schools in the university may also use some of the 25 new classrooms that will be constructed under the grandstand, he said.

Boston University with a student body of more than 26,000 at the present time is extremely hard pressed for classroom space, Pres. Case said. School of Education classes are now being held in the School of Theology building, he cited.

**BRAVES FIELD** Page 2

(Boston Globe, 1953)

Unlimited opportunity and a centralized athletic set-up best describe the potential and purpose of the University's newly acquired property, Braves Field, and its 463,000 square feet of land, two blocks from the main campus.

At present, the field and its surroundings have facilities for football and baseball. When present plans are realized, the property will also house track, basketball; swimming, fencing, wrestling, and tennis.

### Seating Capacity of 39,181

According to Vic Stout, assistant athletic director, what the University actually acquired in the July 30 transaction was the stadium with a present football seating capacity of 39,181, portable stands seating 14,000, light towers, two scoreboards, batting cages, the protective screen in back of home plate, offices, and locker and storage rooms.

Long range plans for making the property fit the needs and desires of the University are now being formulated, according to Aldo T. "Buff" Donelli, athletic director. The old will make way for the new when the left and right open pavilions will be torn down, as well as the dugouts, lower concrete box seats, and outfield wall. The evergreen trees enclosing the outfield will be removed.

The University architects are now concerned with finding sufficient area within the property to construct

proposed additions and complete the changes, according to Donelli.

### Big Plans in the Making

Some of these proposed additions and changes include tennis courts in back of the present outfield wall which will be removed, a track circling the field, and a field house which will house a swimming pool, basketball court, and gymnasium for both male and female students.

The entire University athletic staff too has "gone up the river" to new headquarters. Their offices and the ticket booth are housed above the entrance gates.

According to Donelli and Stout, the new athletic living quarters are advantageous for many reasons. The team's practices were formerly held at Nickerson field, Weston, 11 miles from school. The new field is within walking distance. In order to transport the players to drills at the Weston field, it was necessary to use a bus.

Because of the time consumed traveling to Weston, practices rarely began before 5:30 in the afternoon and continued well past

See Braves Field Page 4

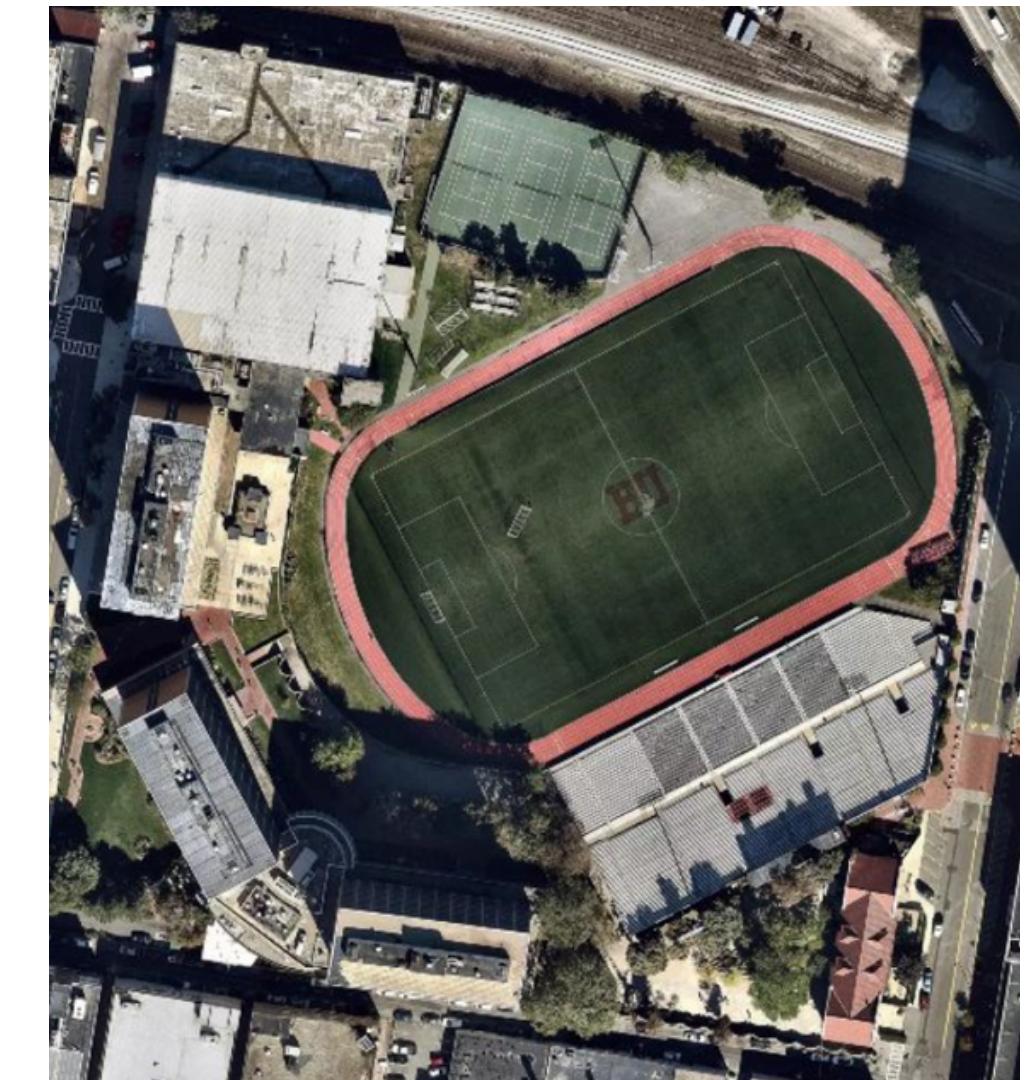
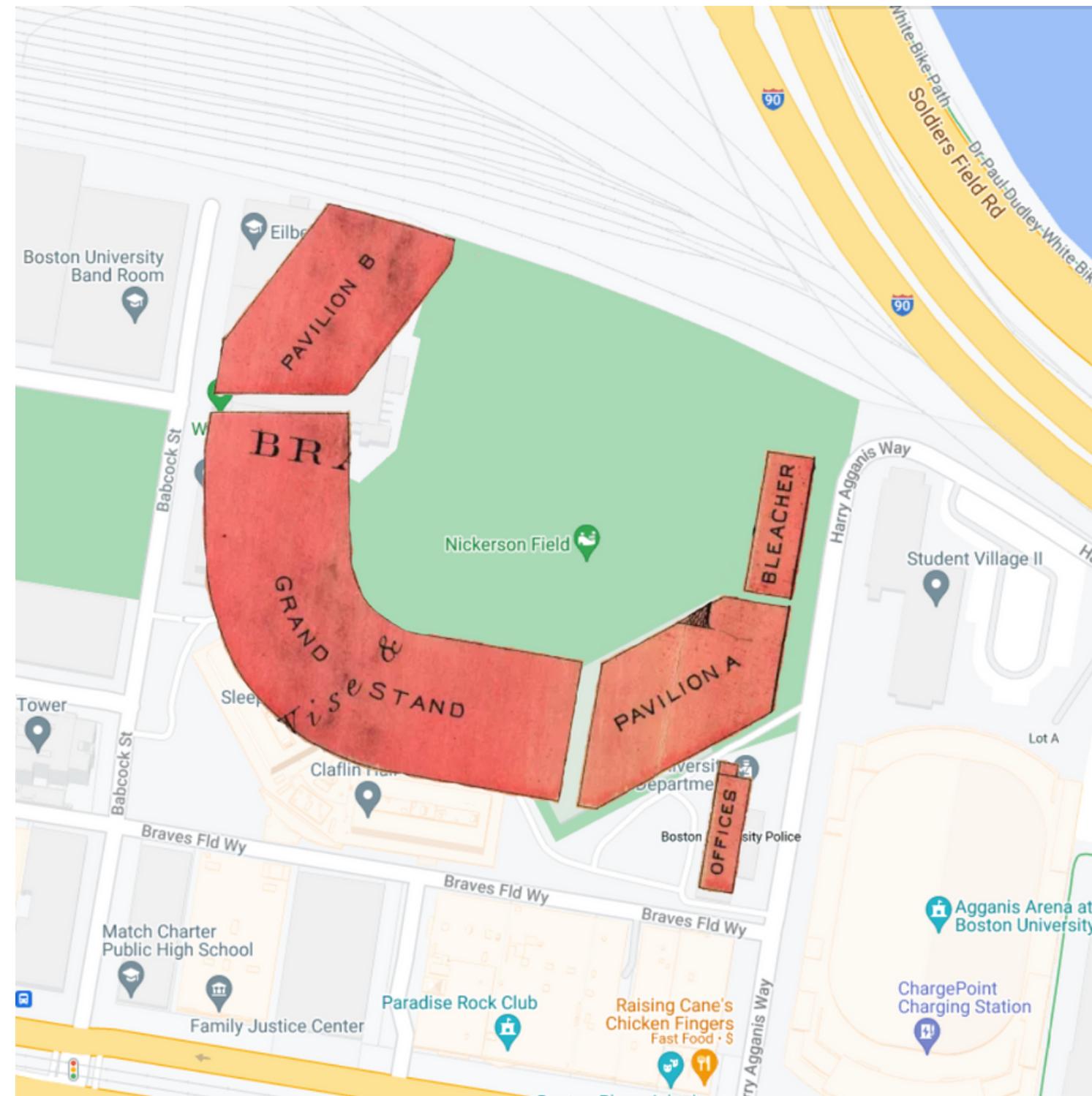
(Boston University News, 1953)

# PROCESS OF REUSE

Boston University began shifting the Braves Field site into their own almost immediately, first dismantling some stadium elements and transforming the surface into a football field.

- In 1960, the school invested \$300,000 into new lighting, sod, and seating for the stadium
- In 1963-1964, Sleeper, Claflin, and Rich Hall dormitories were constructed, the first major dorm buildings built by the school
- In 1972, Case Athletic Center opened, housing the majority of BU athletic facilities.
- Simple construction in 1978 filled in the lower portion of the clubhouse building to allow for additional space for the Boston University Police Department and childcare services.
- Right Field grandstand was preserved and only necessary maintenance has been conducted

**"A junk shop of approaches to solve for a very dense campus." - Paul Rinaldi**



(David Lewis, 2021, using Google Maps & Bromley Fire Map)

(Aerial Photos sourced from Boston Planning and Development Authority's Boston Atlas tool)

# PRINCIPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE

While not an Adaptive ReUse project in our traditional understanding of the term, the adaption of Nickerson Field nonetheless followed some of the guidance and principles that are standards of ReUse.

- This project fits, not perfectly, but within the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The property retains its historic use (athletic fields), historic features are repaired not replaced when maintenance is needed, and new construction was done in a way that does not attempt to replicate the historical fabric
- Continuing to use the space for athletic facilities is an example of a compatible use as defined by the Burra Charter. Furthermore, changes in use have changed the cultural significance of the place, which is deemed acceptable under the Charter.
- The majority of the historic structures have been removed, and modifications to the site lack reversibility. These would be considered unacceptable under the Burra Charter.
- Aligns with idea that there are many ways to achieve density, from Principles of ReUrbanism
- "Layers" of history as discussed in "Preserve: A Conversation"

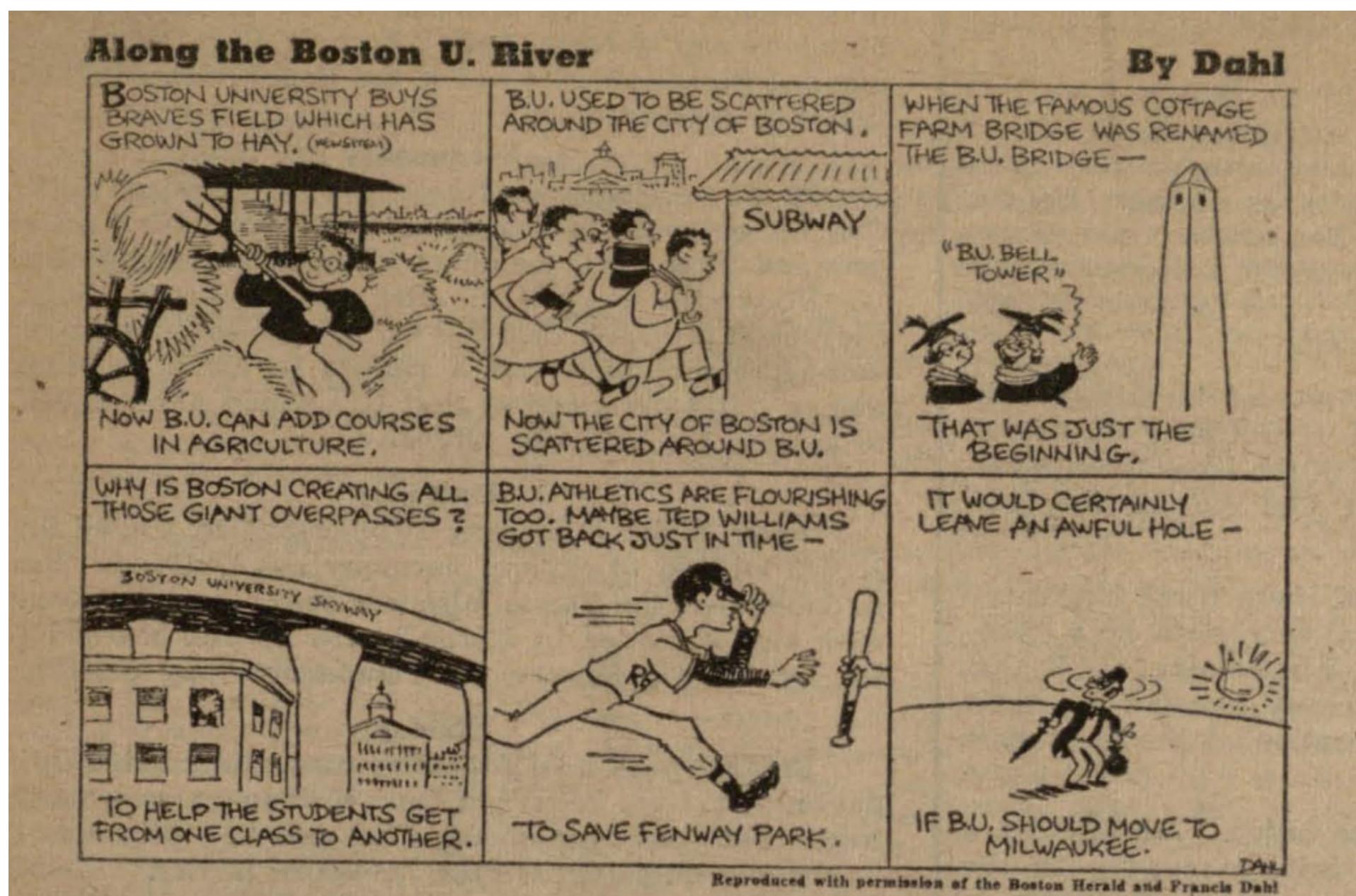
**"Do as much as necessary but as little as possible."**

# EFFECTS ON THE CAMPUS

The purchase of Braves Field and its transition into Nickerson Field served to ground Boston University within the city of Boston and along Commonwealth Avenue

- 2nd land acquisition west of the BU Bridge, after what is now CFA
- 10 of Boston University's current 110 acres came from this purchase
- Soon after purchasing Braves Field, the University began planning to move Sargent College from Cambridge to the Charles River Campus
- The University immediately began holding non-athletic events at the Field, as they still do today. In September of 1953, Braves Field hosted Freshman Convocation and a Dance for new students.
- Athletic events were held on campus instead of miles away, boosting attendance and school spirit
- BU has bucked the trend of urban sprawl and remained in the city of Boston

**"Braves Field is a new source of pride... [the field] stirs our imagination and upgrades our confidence." - Harold C. Case**



(Francis Dahl, Boston Herald, 1953)

## Sargent Move Spurred By Wigwam Purchase

No definite plans have been made for Sargent in connection with newly-acquired Braves field, but the added athletic facilities near the main campus give added impetus to the transfer of the Cambridge school to the main campus, according to Dean George K. Mackenzie.

"Braves field offers marvelous auxiliary service to our college," said Dean Mackenzie. "It gives us opportunity to conduct various types of field work in season."

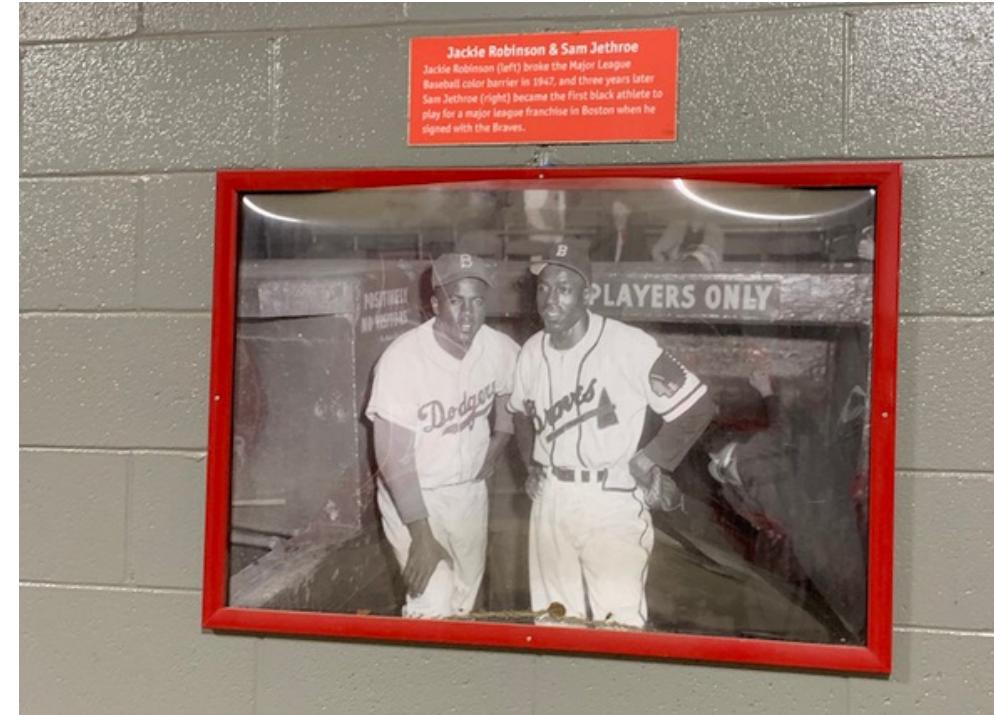
Rumors concerning the erection of a Sargent hall or a gymnasium are unfounded, according to Dean Mackenzie. Unofficial sources had reported that Sargent's athletic facilities would be transferred to Braves field in the near future.

"Our eventual aim is to move Sargent to the campus, and the addition of Braves field will undoubtedly tend to speed the process," said Dean Mackenzie.

Plans for the use of Braves field are now in the hands of a committee on physical education service and intramurals. Chairman is John Toner, director of physical education service and intramurals. Other members are vice-president J. Wendell Yeo, Dean Elsbeth Melville, Dean Marta R. Smith, S of N Dean Mackenzie, Dr. Leslie Irwin, Ed. school Athletic Director Aldo T. Donelli, Prof. Barbara E. Hall, Sargent, Prof. Wesley N. Tiffany, CGE and Carla Paaske, PAL.

# COMMEMORATING SITE HISTORY

- In the concourse of the remaining grandstand, photographs are hung alongside informative placards, depicting Boston Braves and Boston University history
- A plaque has been hung on the exterior of the grandstand to honor the 100th year of Braves/Nickerson Field
- Thanks to an initiative started by the Boston Braves Historical Association, the alley between the field and the shops on Commonwealth Avenue (which was formerly the trolley loop for Braves Field) has been renamed Braves Field Way. Prior to being Renamed Harry Agganis Way in 1995, the street between Nickerson Field and Agganis Arena was named Gaffney Street, after Braves Owner James Gaffney
- A plaque erected in the courtyard between the BUPD headquarters and the grandstand explains the significance of the site
- In 2022, Boston University placed a marker at the site of Braves Field home plate



(David Lewis, 2021)

With the [@Braves](#) in town, it's a perfect time to unveil  
a special landmark on our new turf at Nickerson.

Home plate has returned to its original location where  
many [@MLB](#) legends came up to bat when the facility  
was known as Braves Field.



(Boston University/Twitter, 2022)



(David Lewis, 2021)



(Jesse Costa, WBUR, 2015)



(murphman61, Flickr, 2018)

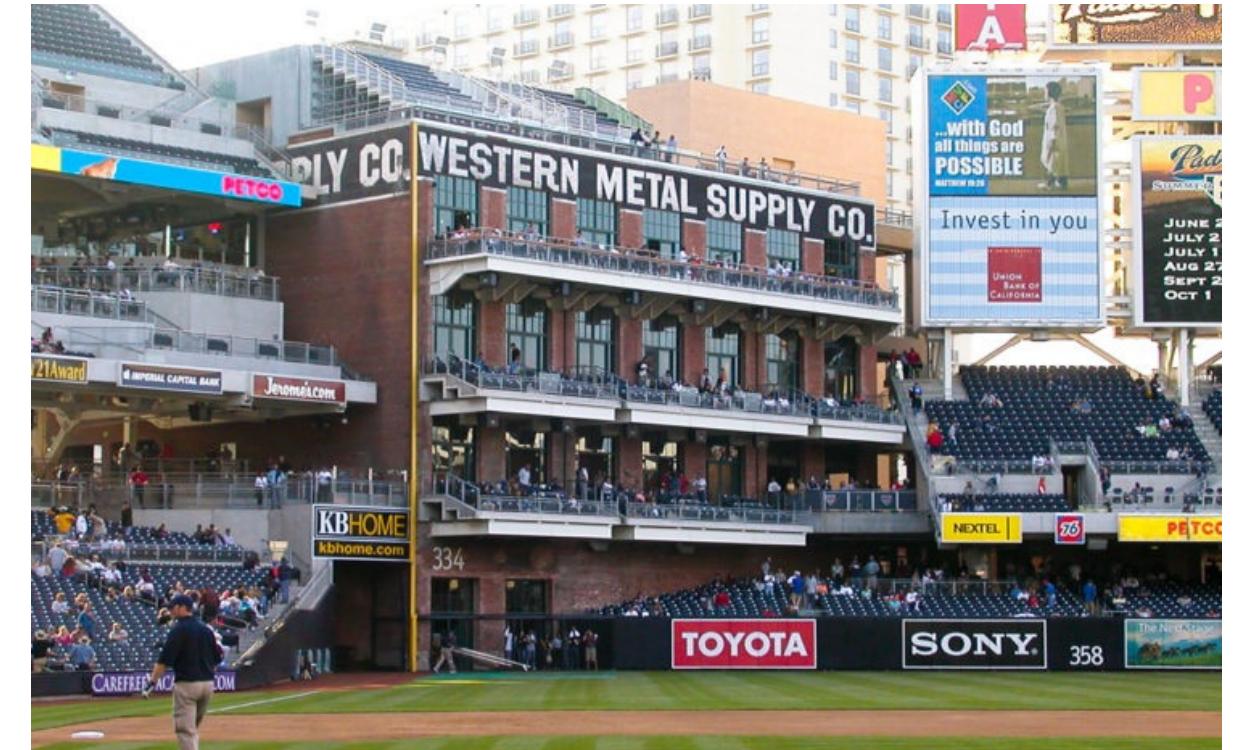
# OTHER EXAMPLES OF BALLPARK REUSE



Bush Stadium, Indianapolis



Rendering of Bush Stadium Reuse



Petco Park, San Diego



Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore

# QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

How could the process of reuse been approached differently, and potentially done better? Would it have been possible to reach the same ends without sacrificing as much of the historic structure?

Would reusing this, or a similar site, even be considered today when space is at such a premium?

Can/will ballpark architects continue to incorporate adaptive reuse into the design of new stadiums?

Is adaptive reuse a realistic option for modern major league ballparks? Especially those larger in scale and surrounded by parking lots?

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the primary research for this project was conducted via interviews with experts on the subject. Special thanks to Bob Brady and Ralph Evans from the Boston Braves Historical Association, author and librarian Bob LeMoine, and Paul Rinaldi of the Boston University Campus Planning and Operations office.

Additional thanks all those involved with the Society for American Baseball Research [SABR], especially those who contributed to the book *Braves Field: Memorable Moments at Boston's Lost Diamond* and those who planned and set up the SABR 50 Convention

Finally, thank you to Professor Jan Haenraets, my classmates in AM 501, and all the students and professors affiliated with Boston University's Preservation Studies program.

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- Photographs courtesy of Digital Commonwealth, Boston Planning & Development Authority, the author, and other sources as noted.
- Author Interviews, as noted.