



PALACES OF THE FANS
The Newsletter of the SABR Ballparks Committee
December 2019

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: Ballpark Committee members are welcome to provide comments on what you have seen and want to see in the newsletter. Please forward on to Richard articles or links to articles on ballparks for inclusion in future newsletters as well as short research articles. Longer research articles can be accommodated via links on the SABR web site. The next issue is scheduled to come out in June of 2020.

FUTURE SABR BALLPARKS COMMITTEE PROJECTS: If you have ideas for group research or projects, please send them to the co-chairmen, Ron Selter (rselter@att.net) and Kevin Johnson (kjokbaseball@yahoo.com). Members are always encouraged to do a ballpark 'bio' for the SABR BioProject. Some other ideas would be a committee produced ballparks book of some kind, a joint research effort with other committees (Pictorial Committee for example), etc.

QUERY – WEST SIDE GROUNDS PHOTO: A SABR member posed the following research query to me: Have you ever seen a photo of Chicago's West Side Grounds that dates *prior* to 1900? There are numerous photos of the grounds taken after 1900 (such as the one below which was taken at the 1906 World Series), but finding one prior to 1900 is a challenge. If you know of such an image, please contact Richard at smileyr@georgetown.edu



SMOKIE LINKS – CURRENT BALLPARKS

Anaheim – Angels Stadium

The Angels reached a deal with the City of Anaheim to keep baseball in the area through 2050. The city will sell Angels Stadium and the surrounding land to the Angels:

https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/28225505/angels-reach-deal-remain-anaheim-least-2050

<https://www.mlb.com/angels/news/angels-to-remain-in-anaheim-through-2050>

Los Angeles -- Dodger Stadium

The Dodgers announced plans for a \$100 million renovation of Dodger Stadium. A new center field plaza will be built and a series of ramps and bridges will be constructed allowing for easier access throughout the stadium:

https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/27245269/dodgers-renovate-stadium-add-koufax-statue

Miami – Marlins Park

The Marlins announced major renovations to Marlins Park including moving in fences and adding a synthetic field:

<https://www.mlb.com/marlins/news/marlins-unveil-major-changes-for-ballpark>

<https://beyondthebases.mlblogs.com/marlins-park-to-sport-new-look-in-2020-eff2e139af50>

Arlington, TX – Globe Life Field

The Rangers will use the ballpark dimensions in the new Globe to honor former players:

<https://www.espn.com/espn/print?id=28225250>

SMOKIE LINKS – INTERNATIONAL BALLPARKS

London Stadium

In July, the Red Sox and Yankees played a series in London. ESPN's Marly Rivera looked into the construction of the stadium used for the series:

https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/27040215/what-need-know-london-stadium-series

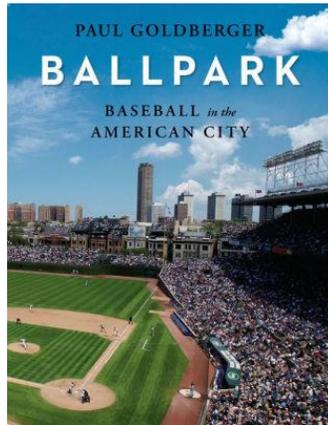
Mexico City

The Padres and Diamondbacks will play two regular season games at the new Alfredo Harp Helú Stadium in Mexico City on April 18-19, 2020:

https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/28268143/d-backs-padres-play-mlb-1st-regular-season-games-mexico-city

Pictures of Alfredo Harp Helú Stadium can be found here: <https://diablos.com.mx/estadio/>

BOOK ON BALLPARKS: Richard Smiley offers his opinions on Pulitzer-prize winning architecture critic Paul Goldberger’s recently published book on ballparks.



Ballpark: Baseball in the American City

by Paul Goldberger

Publisher: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

Pages: 384

When a Pulitzer-prize winning architecture critic writes a book on ballparks, the SABR Ballparks Committee should take notice. When the book serves as a wonderful review of baseball parks throughout the ages, the public should take notice. Such is the case with Paul Goldberger’s delightful chronological essay entitled *Ballpark: Baseball in the American City*. In it, Goldberger explores the origins of ballparks, looks at how they developed over the years, and makes an assessment about where they seem to be headed.

The crowded, dirty, noisy cities that emerged in the midst of the industrial revolution led contemporary thinkers to wonder if there wasn’t a way to incorporate nature back into the city. Initial efforts focused on transforming cemeteries from drab condensed graveyards into expansive fields where citizens could go to picnic and enjoy nature. But the locations of these cemeteries were often located a substantial distance away from the urban center and focus shifted creating something more centrally located and democratic in nature – a public park.

At the time this was happening, baseball was just beginning to rise up in Brooklyn and New York and the concept of building structures devoted fully to the sport was just emerging. As Central Park would not allow organized games of any kind to be played on its fields, baseball teams seeking a place to play had to look elsewhere. Finding any location that they could shoehorn into, teams ended up putting the concept of *rus in urbe* (“an illusion of the countryside within the city”) to great use. Fans would enter a nondescript facility and be transported into a green rural wonderland that seemed to stretch to infinity while still being grounded in an urban setting.

According to Goldberger, the ballparks that have been the most praised and fondly remembered are the ones which were most successful at pulling off this difficult balancing act. The early chapters of the book set up the “*rus in urbe*” concept and explore the initial attempts to incorporate it into Brooklyn’s ballparks. As baseball spread to other areas, ballparks began to take on different forms often reflecting the character and architecture of the new locations. Boston’s second South End Grounds featured a unique Grand Pavilion that John Pastier referred to as “a virtuoso exercise in Victorian carpentry featuring carved columns, a steep and lofty double-

decked grandstand built in a sweeping arc, and a shapely dormered roof surmounted by six spires of various sizes and shapes.” In St. Louis, Chris Von der Ahe incorporated a beer garden into the design of Sportsman’s Park, anticipating the walkways, patios, and party areas that one now finds in modern ballparks. The 1883 redesigned Lake Front Park in Chicago featured the first raised luxury boxes as an added amenity and was marketed as an attraction in its own right.

The primary material used in constructing the ballparks of the 1800’s was wood and that made each of them susceptible to fires. After Philadelphia’s Huntingdon Grounds burned down the Phillies owners opted to replace the ballpark in 1895 with a “fireproof” structure made of brick and steel. The new Huntingdon Grounds (later known as the Baker Bowl) ushered in a new era of ballpark design. In short order at the end of 1900’s first decade, Shibe Park, Forbes Field, and Comiskey Park were built using steel and brick materials. Shortly thereafter a “Golden Age” of ballpark design arose with Goldberger highlighting Crosley Field, Tiger Stadium, Fenway Park, Ebbets Field, and Wrigley Field as the exemplars of the era. His text and photos bring to life with vivid detail the experience of being in each of the parks.

At the back end of this Golden Age came the construction of Yankee Stadium – initially planned to be massive in scale and still ending up as an imposing impressive structure. Cleveland followed suit later in the decade by constructing an enormous stadium downtown called Municipal Stadium that was built with an eye towards attracting other sporting events (such as the 1932 Summer Olympics) to the city. The stadium was way too large for baseball and deemed a failure, but Goldberger does see it seminal for starting the trend of major league ballparks being built with public financing.

After Municipal Stadium was constructed there would not be a major league ballpark built for over twenty years. Reflecting the societal shift away from the inner cities, new ballparks in Milwaukee and Baltimore were built in neighborhoods outside of the urban center while the new park in Minneapolis was built in a suburb. Two legendary ballparks in New York’s urban center, the Polo Grounds and Ebbets Field were abandoned by teams fleeing for the West Coast. Goldberger does an exquisite job reviewing the efforts that were made to keep the Dodgers in Brooklyn. He reviews commissioned proposals for new ballparks (including one put forth by Buckminster Fuller) that contained features which have later appeared in modern ballparks.

Urban unrest in the 1960’s combined with antiquated facilities led to further exodus from the inner cities by numerous teams that were not relocating. In what Goldberger refers to as the “Era of Concrete Doughnuts”, teams moved into mammoth publicly-financed multi-purpose facilities designed to house both baseball and football teams. These stadiums were often surrounded by a “sea of parking” and removed from the urban setting. Even downtown facilities such as Pittsburgh’s Three Rivers Stadium were shut out from the world outside by the completely enclosed design of the structure. Previously, ballparks had let in some aspects of the city outside the park – a view of the skyline, a warehouse, a multi-level residential building, elevated train tracks, ... But the new fortress-like facilities cut that all out. As with Cleveland’s Municipal Stadium, these cookie-cutter structures turned out to be terrible places to watch baseball games as the size necessary to accommodate football games eliminated intimacy and the similar circular shape cut out uniqueness and quirkiness.

This trend in ballpark design more or less continued through the 1980’s although some stadiums (such as Kansas City’s Kauffman Stadium) opened up the outfield section to let portions of the city outside into the park – even if that outside was a sea of cars.

The construction of Baltimore’s Camden Yards in the early 1990’s revolutionized ballpark design

and re-incorporated the city back into the ballpark experience. While incorporating many modern conveniences, the park harkened back to the past with funky dimensions, a main entrance in the outfield, retro details in the seating and structure, and a view of a neighboring warehouse. Its success led an explosion of “retro” parks that lasted into the 2000’s and whose influence is still felt today. These parks are baseball-only facilities that are smaller in scale, more intimate in nature, and are often draws in and of themselves. Many of the ballparks have been constructed in the previously abandoned urban areas reflecting societal trends towards the return of the elite to inner cities and downtown gentrification.

The most recently constructed ballparks, according to Goldberger, have entered a new phase in ballpark design where the ballpark is only a piece of an entire entertainment area. As people are increasingly returning to cities not for work, but for amusement, shopping, and dining, the ballparks are beginning to reflect this trend by focusing not just on what is inside the ballpark, but also on what is outside. The Ballpark Village project in St. Louis is designed to allow people to live in the buildings abutting the ballpark. Renovations to Wrigley Field have incorporated the neighborhood immediately surround the park into the ballpark experience. Goldberger expresses concern that ballparks such as Atlanta’s SunTrust Park are being constructed not in the midst of a real urban environment, but rather in a fabricated one – a “simulacrum of a city”. The public social experience that was once part of the fabric of ballparks is increasingly becoming a private one not accessible to all levels of society. This bears watching.

Of note in the book is that Goldberger does offer a review of every major league park operating in 2019 – often accompanied by wonderful photographs that highlight specific points. For every park he makes an effort to address how the park does or does not fit into to the local fabric of the community as well as discussing the experience inside the park. And it is the fan experience inside the park that he most stresses providing a language for assessing ballparks. To me this is best put forth when he discusses Dodger Stadium. After mentioning the impact on Dodger Stadium of the “one major piece of public architecture” in Los Angeles in the 1950’s – Disneyland – he goes on to explain that it “... was not a great work of architecture by any means, but it showed how much ordinary architecture, well conceived, could contribute to the experience of attending a baseball game.”

Of note to members of SABR’s Ballparks Committee is extensive coverage and praise that Goldberger gives to Philip Bess’s Armour Field proposal in the chapter on Camden Yards. The Armour Field project was suggested as an alternative to the design that the White Sox were planning to use to replace Comiskey Park. The proposal was presented to and sponsored by SABR’s Ballpark’s Committee and although it got a hearing with the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority, it was rejected. The ballpark would have left the neighborhood around Comiskey Park intact while incorporating old-style design elements into an intimate horseshoe shaped structure that would have beaten Camden Yards to the punch with respect to the “Retro Park” trend.

My complaints about the book are few and minor. I did come across some factual mistakes (such as claiming that the first best of seven World Series was played in 1922) that had no bearing on the story being told. When discussing the construction of Municipal Stadium Goldberger seems to have completely missed out on the impact that luring the 1932 Olympics had on its construction. Of slightly bigger concern is a lack of discussion of how the sixties urban unrest contributed to “white flight” in society and possibly to the bunker-like design of the “concrete doughnuts”. For a time, attendees *wanted* the city and its problems shut out. But otherwise, this was a wonderful read.

Richard Smiley

WRIGHT STREET GROUNDS: Jim Nitz and Ron Selter contributed the following entry on Milwaukee's Wright Street Grounds.

SABR BALLPARK BIOGRAPHY PROJECT

Wright Street Grounds, Milwaukee

By Jim Nitz & Ron Selter

Between 1879 and 1883, Milwaukee did not have a professional team, major or minor league. The Northwestern League included Milwaukee in its 1884 minor league schedule, and a new ballpark, the Wright Street Grounds, was erected early that year to house the new club. Often also called Milwaukee Baseball Park or Wright Street Park, the facility was located in a near-north side residential Milwaukee neighborhood.

The Wright Street Grounds were located on a vacant site that was bounded by West Wright Street on the south, empty land then West Clarke Street on the north, North 11th Street on the east, and North 12th Street on the west. The property was purchased by the club for \$11,592 in February of 1884. The club never sought any other location because two street car lines had promised to extend their routes to the Grounds by opening day. Construction on the ballpark began immediately after the purchase of the land with the Bradley Brothers of Rockford, IL, serving as architects.

The Northwestern League Milwaukeees (or Grays) opened the Wright Street Grounds on May 1, 1884, and used the facility until late that season when Milwaukee was awarded a major league franchise in the Union Association. This team, which went by the same names, finished 8-4 (all 12 were home games at the Wright Street Grounds) in its short tenure from September 27 to October 12. The Milwaukeees never played a big-league contest again as the Union Association was disbanded before the 1885 season.

The Wright Street Grounds reportedly had a capacity of 5,300 in its first year, and the UA Milwaukee team was said to have drawn 4,000-5,000 to its last games. The main grandstand behind home plate was 20 feet high and 24 feet deep with a composition roof. It was tucked into the southwest corner (12th and Wright) of the park site and served as the entrance for fans. A two-inch wire mesh screen was placed in front of the grandstand in June of 1884 to protect "ladies" from foul balls. Uncovered 16-foot-high stands flanked the grandstand on both the first and third base side. In addition, a 12-foot-high uncovered stand was connected to the first base 16-footer and extended to 11th Street. Left and center fields and right-center field to the junction with the right-field stands was protected from "gymnastic youngsters" by a ten-foot-high wooden board fence topped with barbed wire. The wooden fence in front of the right-field stands was only three feet high and extended from the junction with the 11th Street fence to the right-field foul line. Dressing rooms were located underneath the stands. The scorer sat with the fans, and because there is no mention of a press box, reporters likely also sat in the grandstand.

The exact configuration of the playing field is unknown. Home plate was known to have been located near the center section of the grandstand. A home plate-backstop distance of 70 feet was assumed consistent with the typical backstop distance in other 19th Century major league ballparks. The Rascher's Fire Insurance Atlas map of the Wright Street Grounds was used on which to draw a playing field diagram with home plate located 70 feet to the northeast along a line perpendicular to the front of the center section of the grandstand. Because the park site was constrained in the E-W dimension (300 feet), the right-field line on the diagram was angled 13

degrees to the north of an E-W line to increase the right-field dimension from 150 to 200 feet. This alignment meant the left-field line was offset 13 degrees to the west from a N-S line and hit the perimeter fence in the left-field corner. The very small 300' by 400' park site would explain the frequent right-field ground-rule doubles and the over-the-fence home runs to right field. Assuming the 70 foot backstop distance, other dimensions can be reasonably estimated as follows: left field 303 feet, straightaway left field 295, left-center 305, center field 338, center-field corner 362, right-center 300, straightway right field 247, right field 228 (five degrees; at the junction of the 11th Street fence and the right-field stands), and right field 200.

The Wright Street Grounds was home to only two more major league games. On September 4 and 25 of 1885, the Chicago White Stockings of the National League played neutral site regular season games in Milwaukee in which all five home runs were hit over the right-field fence. Local baseball executives were hopeful that the crowds of 2,000 and 2,500 would impress major league operators enough to grant Milwaukee a franchise. This did not happen; thus, the Wright Street Grounds remained home to minor league clubs through 1887.

Even though new benches replaced many of the chairs in an 1887 upgrade, the Wright Street Grounds was considered small in both seating capacity and playing field dimensions. Also, ballpark comfort and accessibility to newer street car lines were inadequate for the city's more discerning fans. In addition, the Milwaukee club desired ownership of its facility. When the 1888 rent was raised without corresponding improvements by the Grounds' owners, the Kipp brothers, the team decided to build its own park that could also be used year-round as a general athletic grounds.

During 1888, the Wright Street Grounds was employed by local amateur baseball leagues such as YMCA circuits, along with tennis, cycling, and running enthusiasts. After that, the property fell into disuse and a controversial alley ran directly through it by 1895. Eventually, houses and stables were built on the site and, to this day, the block remains filled with homes.

Wright Street Grounds Bibliography

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WIEDENMAYER'S PARK: Bill Lamb contributed the following article and photos on Wiedenmayer's Park in Newark, New Jersey.

WIEDENMAYER'S PARK: THE LONG-VANISHED HUB OF MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL IN NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

by Bill Lamb

Opened: April 1902

Destroyed by Fire: May 1925

On July 17, 1904, future Hall of Famer Clark Griffith pitched the home-standing New York Highlanders to a 3-0 victory over the Detroit Tigers in a contest that was atypical for the era in several respects. First, the game, a make-up of an earlier rained out one between the clubs, was played on a Sunday. Avoidance of New York City blue laws that prohibited the playing of professional baseball on the Sabbath was achieved by another unusual aspect of the proceedings: a change of venue. The contest was moved from Manhattan and staged some 15 miles to the southwest in non-restrictive Newark, New Jersey. Finally, the Tigers-Highlanders match has the distinction of being the first, last, and only regular season major leagues game ever played at Wiedenmayer's Park, otherwise the home ballpark of Newark's clubs in the Eastern and International Leagues of 1902-1918. Largely abandoned after World War I and destroyed by fire a few years thereafter, Wiedenmayer's Park was New Jersey's first noteworthy ballpark. The story of this long-vanished hub of minor league baseball follows.

The Wiedenmayer Brewery: Beer Begets a Baseball Park: Given its substantial number of inhabitants of German descent, mid-nineteenth century Newark was home to a multitude of breweries.¹ Among the most prominent was that established around 1840 by Christian Wiedenmayer, later mayor of Newark. The important family actor in our narrative is his son, George W. Wiedenmayer (1848-1909). When George came of age, he entered the family business, but set up his satellite brewery operation in New Brunswick, not Newark. Capable and ambitious, he greatly expanded the brewing capacity at the company's central facility when he returned to

Newark to assume control of the family business in 1876. And like his father before him, George, a Democrat, soon became a force in local politics, serving several term as president of the Newark Common Council. In 1889, he was also elected to the New Jersey State Assembly.

By then, the city had long established itself as a hotbed of baseball, with amateur nines calling Newark home as early as the 1855. When professional minor league baseball began to take root in the early 1880s, clubs soon took up residence in the city. Beginning with the 1884 Newark Domestic of the newly-formed Eastern League, Newark hosted local teams in a variety of minor league circuits (International League, Central League, Atlantic Association, Atlantic League) through the end of the century.

Newark was obliged to do without a professional baseball club during the 1901 season, but plans were soon afoot to rectify that situation. Over the winter, a group of prominent local businessmen, including George Wiedenmayer and several other city brewery owners, formed the Newark Base Ball and Amusement Company. Their objective was placement of a Newark franchise in the recently-reconstituted Class A minor Eastern League. To that end, veteran minor league manager Walter Burnham was placed under contract, tasked with signing playing talent, game management and strategy, and general oversight of the prospective ball club's operations. But an immediate obstacle confronted the venture: the lack of a ballpark suitable for a high minor league team in Newark. Promptly coming to the rescue was George Wiedenmayer.²

Since at least the late 1890s, Newark amateur baseball, football, and soccer clubs had been afforded access to a green expanse located on Hamburg Place.³ The property was owned by George Wiedenmayer and sat adjacent to the grounds of his Newark brewery operation. This local sporting venue was dubbed "Wiedenmayer's Park," and quickly became the focus of attention of the city's ball club backers. As a viable ballpark location, the site was not without problems. The grounds were not situated in or nearby the city's downtown business and commercial core, but in a gritty industrialized neighborhood known as the Ironbound some distance to the northeast. And while relatively open and flat, the playing field was rutted, marshy in spots, and imbued with the stench emanating from the garbage-strewn Passaic River close by. Strongly in the location's favor, however, was the fact that the same trolley and rail service that brought workers to the Ironbound each day would also deposit Newark baseball fans within short walking distance of the site. More important, the property was owned by franchise supporter George Wiedenmayer, and he was willing to make it available. The arrangement subsequently reached replicated, if unintentionally, that involving the Polo Grounds and the club owners of the New York Giants: the new ballpark would be built and owned by the Newark Base Ball and Amusement Company, but the land on which it sat would be leased from Wiedenmayer & Sons, Inc., George's brewing company.⁴

Wiedenmayer's Park, the Early Years: Once the real estate details had been worked out, ground was broken and construction commenced at the breakneck pace common to the wooden ballpark era. By early April 1902, Wiedenmayer's Park was ready for exhibition game play.⁵ Describing the ballpark in its earliest years is problematic, as the edifice was a work in constant progress throughout the first decade of its existence. [Note: A description of Wiedenmayer's Park in its final configuration is offered within.] Suffice it for now to say that the initial iterations of the ballpark had few admirers. The original Wiedenmayer's Park was small-sized, poorly landscaped, and offered few amenities for either players or spectators. At season's end, the *Spalding Guide* observed that the "Newark club would find it advantageous to improve the grounds," comparing them unfavorably to West Side Avenue Park, the ballpark used by the Jersey City Skeeters, a nearby Eastern League rival.⁶ Commentary by a *Sporting Life* correspondent was blunter; it called Wiedenmayer's Park an "eyesore."⁷

The newly-christened Newark Sailors began the Eastern League campaign on the road, going 4-3 in their first seven contests and setting the stage for the official debut of Wiedenmayer's Park as a minor league ballpark. On May 8, 1902, the home opener was preceded by a parade, speeches by local dignitaries, and a ceremonial first pitch thrown by Newark Mayor James M. Seymour.⁸ The fact that the "large and enthusiastic crowd of baseball lovers"⁹ totaled only 1,800¹⁰ suggests the intimate size of the initial version of Wiedenmayer's Park. The Toronto Maple Leafs then spoiled the festivities with a 9-4 beating of the home side. The outcome was a harbinger of things to come. Toronto would go 85-42 (.669) and capture the EL pennant. Newark headed in the opposite direction, its woeful final log of 39-98 (.285) securing the league cellar, 51 games behind the Maple Leafs.

In nine seasons as an Eastern League member, Newark never won a championship (although the club was a second-place finisher in 1909 and 1910). Notwithstanding that, the operation consistently turned a profit for the Newark Base Ball and Amusement Company. Much of that revenue was poured into improvement and expansion of Wiedenmayer's Park. Prior to the start of the 1903 campaign, club major domo Burnham had the uneven, often soggy infield dug up and large quantities of sand laid down to improve drainage. The infield was then re-sodded and rolled to play dry, fast, and smooth.¹¹ During the ensuing off-season, the first of several major ballpark renovations was completed. A new 1,400 seat grandstand with roofing was installed behind the home plate area. "Private boxes with opera chairs have been placed at the front and arrangements made for the convenience of women patrons," reported *Sporting Life*.¹² The infield was again re-sodded, while the outfield dimensions were deepened by 30 feet.¹³ The covered grandstand was extended alongside first and third base, while bleacher sections were constructed along the right and left field foul lines. A clubhouse behind the grandstand was also added to the grounds.¹⁴ By the time the Tigers-Highlanders game of July 1904 was played, Wiedenmayer's Park was fully equipped to accommodate the 6,700 fans who attended the contest.

Just prior to the start of the 1907 season, rumor had it that the Heller & Mertz Chemical Company, an expansion-minded dye and alkaline manufacturer whose plant bordered the ballpark, was attempting to acquire the Wiedenmayer's Park property.¹⁵ But nothing came of such reports – for the time being. The following year, the Newark ball club acquired a new nickname (Indians) and a new field leader, George Stallings.¹⁶ After several off-season conferences with George Wiedenmayer, Stallings announced plans for additional improvements to the Newark grounds. In the weeks thereafter, the grandstand behind home plate was enlarged to seat another 1,000 spectators, while bleacher sections were placed behind the right field fence. This brought the seating capacity of Wiedenmayer's Park to 8,000.¹⁷ The ballpark's early years, however, ended on a somber note. On September 5, 1909, George Wiedenmayer died "after a long illness from a complication of diseases" at his summer home in Toms River, New Jersey.¹⁸ He was 61. George's role with the Newark ball club was assumed by his sons Gustav and Joseph, but they would never wield the degree of influence over franchise affairs asserted by their father.

The Heyday and Decline of Wiedenmayer's Park: Under new field manager Joe McGinnity, the Newark Indians finished a strong second in the 1909 Eastern League pennant chase. And on Opening Day 1910, more than 10,000 fans were on hand at Wiedenmayer's Park to witness McGinnity pitch the home team to a 2-1 victory over the Rochester Bronchos. Unhappily for the Newarkers, Rochester prevailed in the long run, edging out the Indians for the 1910 EL championship. But with club fortunes on the upswing, the Newark Base Ball and Amusement Company poured more money into their ball grounds. As the 1911 season loomed, sportswriter Edward S. Gearheart proclaimed that "great changes have been made and fans will hardly recognize the fine, newly-sodded field as old Wiedenmayer's Park."¹⁹ At a cost of \$3,000, vast quantities of ashes were laid down beneath new field turf to fill in ruts and marshy spots. The

ballpark was expanded as well, with the outfields considerably enlarged. "Hard hit grounders getting past the outfielders will [now] likely be home runs," predicted Gearheart.²⁰ The ballpark seating capacity was increased to 13,000, with 2,000 more temporary seats on hand for use "in a pinch." With standing room available in open areas behind the left and left-center field fences (and in front of them in the just- deepened outfield, when necessary), Gearheart estimated the new and improved Wiedenmayer's Park was capable of accommodating up to 20,000 spectators.²¹

Nor were amenities neglected. A large new ladies rest room was decked out with mission furniture, upholstered reclining chairs, a telephone booth, and daily fresh flowers, with a matron stationed in the facility to ensure provision "of all things necessary for the comfort of the fair sex."²² The wooden ballpark received a fresh coat of paint – steel gray with metallic brown trim – while new steel seats were installed in the grandstand.²³ The danger of fire, meanwhile, was "reduced to zero by the installation of a complete system of fire protection."²⁴ All in all, observed Gearheart, Wiedenmayer's Park was now a ballpark that Newark fans could "be proud of."²⁵

Although the precise contours of the grounds went undiscovered by the writer, the Gearheart reportage and circa 1911 photographs support the view that as fully-developed Wiedenmayer's Park was a first-rate Deadball Era minor league ballpark. My guesstimate of the playing field dimensions – 305-410-305 – mirrors the dimensions of Davids (later Ruppert) Stadium, the successor ballpark erected atop the Wiedenmayer's Park footprint, and were appropriate to the time. In its final iteration, Wiedenmayer's Park was a single-level ballpark, with a covered first base-to-third base grandstand and open bleachers ringing the playing field, except for empty space behind the fences in left and left-center field. But regrettably, Wiedenmayer's Park would remain in its prime for only a few seasons.

The ballpark's decline coincided with a change in ownership of the Newark Indians. In late 1912, a majority interest in the franchise, now affiliated with the Class AA International League,²⁶ was acquired by the newly-formed Newark Amusement and Exhibition Company. A New York City manufacturer and club investor named George L. Solomon was installed as club president, with Joseph Wiedenmayer elected VP.²⁷ But in reality, the franchise was controlled behind the scenes by a National League force: Brooklyn boss Charles H Ebbets and his partners in the Dodgers.²⁸ Lacking local knowledge and more concerned about advancing Brooklyn interests than those of the Newark club, the new regime did not place a priority on operation of the Indians and was viewed with hostility by many Newark baseball fans. A particular fan irritant was new club president Solomon, who intruded on the prerogatives of manager Harry Smith, publicly quarreled with the sportswriters of the *Newark Evening News*, and generally made a nuisance of himself. Despite that, the Newark Indians captured the 1913 International League pennant. This success, however, did not dispel the widespread rumor that Ebbets had put the Newark franchise up for sale.²⁹ But soon thereafter, he decided that the Newark ball club was a good landing spot for footloose son Charles H. Ebbets, Jr., and had him installed as club president.³⁰

Under the stewardship of Ebbets, Jr., the Indians promptly tumbled to fifth place and incurred a substantial financial loss.³¹ More ominously, oil tycoon Harry Sinclair had decided to invade Newark with a 1914 Federal League championship club transplanted from Indianapolis. With the Indians having a secure lease on Wiedenmayer's Park and no suitable ballpark building sites in Newark proper available to Sinclair, he was compelled to place his Newark Peppers across the Passaic River in the abutting mini-city of Harrison, New Jersey. By mid-April 1915, Harrison Park, a spacious, modern ballpark, was ready to host the Peppers. But after a capacity-plus crowd upwards of 30,000 made the inconvenient trek to the Peppers home opener – there was no direct trolley or rail service from Newark to Harrison Park and walking across the Jackson Avenue Bridge was both difficult and hazardous – attendance fell off sharply. But next to no one was

attending the games of the Newark Indians. On July 2, 1915, the Indians abandoned Newark, relocating to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And before season's end, the money-losing franchise was forfeited to the International League.³²

The demise of the Federal League during the winter of 1915-1916 once again made Newark an attractive minor league venue. Shortly thereafter, the Newark territory and franchise rights were acquired by baseball-savvy investors James H. Price and Fred Tenney. But the new club owners were not disposed to pay the high fee demanded for rental of Harrison Park.³³ To Price and Tenney, it made more economic (and geographical)³⁴ sense to renovate Wiedenmayer's Park instead.³⁵ The wooden ballpark had suffered from the lack of maintenance that had accompanied its abandonment the previous summer. To remedy that, carpenters, painters, and other repairmen were dispatched to refurbish the ballpark.³⁶ But the halcyon days of Wiedenmayer's Park were now behind it. The 1916 Indians plummeted to the IL cellar. Soon thereafter, the approach of World War I began to have a chilling effect on sport, particularly minor league baseball. Before the 1918 season, a new ownership group headed by late-19th century Boston Beaneaters star Tommy McCarthy took control of the club, now called the Newark Bears. Although the International League was one of the few minor league circuits able to complete the 1918 season, the future looked uncertain. But shortly after the season ended, the issue was rendered moot – at least as it concerned Wiedenmayer's Park.

In early-December 1918, the neighboring Heller & Mertz Chemical Company managed to acquire title to enough of the real property of Wiedenmayer's Park so as to render the grounds unusable for professional baseball.³⁷ Reluctantly, the Newark Bears then transferred their operation to Harrison Park. The time of Wiedenmayer's Park as home to Newark minor league baseball was over. Yet just before it closed its gates, Newark's first significant ballpark staged probably its most celebrated event – a championship boxing match. On September 23, 1918, more than 10,000 fight fans entered Wiedenmayer's Park to see welterweight champion Ted "Kid" Lewis and lightweight titleholder Benny Leonard battle to an eight round no-decision.³⁸

Demise and Aftermath: Apparently, expansion of the Heller & Mertz plant did not consume the entirety of the old ballpark's playing field. Nor were the grandstand and bleachers totally disassembled. During the summers of 1919 and 1920, therefore, the remnants of Wiedenmayer's Park hosted games played by the amateur Ironbound Manufacturers League.³⁹ Thereafter, the grounds lay idle.

In May 1925, what remained of Wiedenmayer's Park was totally destroyed by fire. Yet within a year, the departed ballpark, like Phoenix, rose from the ashes. The property was purchased by minor league entrepreneur Charles L Davids who erected a modern steel-reinforced baseball stadium atop the very footprint of Wiedenmayer's Park. Originally called Davids Stadium but renamed for New York Yankees owner Jacob Ruppert in 1931, the site served as home ballpark for the juggernaut Newark Bears farm teams of the late 1930s-early 1940s Yankees. Ruppert Stadium was razed in 1967, and today an industrial park sits on the property. Sadly, no memorial to long-vanished Wiedenmayer's Park or its successors graces the site.

¹ By the 1890s, no fewer than 57 different breweries were located in Newark. Today, only the Budweiser plant remains operational.

² George Wiedenmayer exercised power but generally preferred to operate quietly behind the scenes. The visible actors on the board of directors of Newark's early-1900s minor league clubs were his sons Gustav and Joseph.

³ See "Games of Baseball," *Jersey (Jersey City) Journal*, April 20, 1899: 8; "Association Football," *Jersey City News*, October 2, 1999: 4.

⁴ From 1889 on, various iterations of the Polo Grounds were constructed and owned by the club owners of the New York Giants. The far north Manhattan real property on which the ballpark sat was not. Rather, it had to be leased from the wealthy and vastly-property Gardiner-Lynch family via its estate agents, first James J. Coogan, thereafter his heiress wife, the formidable Harriet Lynch Coogan.

⁵ The first game played at Wiedenmayer's Park was an April 5, 1902 exhibition game between Newark's new Eastern League club and the semipro Star Athletics. From that day to this, the ballpark's name was often misspelled. The correct spelling is WiedenMAYER, not WiedenMEYER.

⁶ *1903 Spalding Guide*, 41.

⁷ See James F. Grealey, "Newark News," *Sporting Life*, April 30, 1904: 17.

⁸ See "Toronto a Winner in Opening Game," *Newark Evening News*, May 9, 1902: 6. Perhaps establishing a tradition of sorts for politicians, the mayor's first pitch failed to reach home plate in the air.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The attendance figure is provided in "Thielman Wins for Toronto at Newark," *Worcester Daily Spy*, May 9, 1902.

¹¹ As per "Eastern League News," *Sporting Life*, April 25, 1903.

¹² Grealey, "Newark News," *Sporting Life*, April 30, 1904: 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ As reported in "Eastern League Events," *Sporting Life*, March 19, 1904: 6. These improvements to Wiedenmayer's Park were implemented only after efforts to secure new ballpark grounds near Newark's city center had come up empty.

¹⁵ See e.g., *Sporting Life*, April 17, 1907: 22. Vintage photos of Wiedenmayer's Park often depicted the Heller & Mertz smokestacks that loomed behind the third base stands.

¹⁶ Stallings would later become the acclaimed field leader of the 1914 Miracle Boston Braves.

¹⁷ As reported in "Improvements in Newark," *Sporting Life*, April 11, 1908: 17.

¹⁸ Per "G.W. Wiedenmayer Dead," *New York Times*, September 7, 1909: 9.

¹⁹ Edward S. Gearheart, "Newark News," *Sporting Life*, April 22, 1911: 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* Under ordinary conditions, the deep outfield doubled as an automobile parking area.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The steel seats were an innovation recently introduced at Shibe Park and Forbes Field.

²⁴ Gearheart, *Sporting Life*, April 22, 1911: 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The changes in name and classification were cosmetic. The eight clubs in the 1912 International League were the same as the eight members of the 1911 Eastern League.

²⁷ Per "In New Hands," *Sporting Life*, December 28, 1912: 11.

²⁸ Ebbets had purchased a minority share in the Newark club in 1911. Under the new regime, he and his Brooklyn club partner Ed McKeever held 70 shares of Newark stock, while Solomon held another 45. The Wiedenmayer brewing company was the only other significant stockholder with 36 shares, while a sprinkling of shares was retained by original Newark club backers Abram Feist (8), John McLaren (2), and C.P. Schmidt (2).

²⁹ See e.g., "Newark Club Still on the Market," *Trenton Evening Times*, November 1, 1913.

³⁰ As reported in "Ebbets, Jr. President of Newark Club," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 3, 1913: 12; "Ebbets, Jr. To Head Newark," *Colorado Springs (Colorado) Gazette*, December 6, 1913: 6, and elsewhere. Erstwhile President Solomon, meanwhile, was demoted to club vice-president.

³¹ Per John G. Zinn, *Charles Ebbets: The Man Behind the Dodgers and Brooklyn's Beloved Ballpark* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019), 148.

³² Earlier, Ebbets and McKeever had sold their interest in the Newark franchise to Solomon for a nominal \$1, but he and partner Henry Medicus were unable to meet franchise financial obligations. In the end, the International League assumed ownership of the Newark club, per "Newark Still League Territory," *Sporting Life*, July 17, 1915: 19. The club's debts included about \$2,000 in unpaid real property rental fees owed to the Wiedenmayer brewing company, according to "Can Get Newark Grounds," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 26, 1916: 8.

³³ As part of a tentative settlement with Federal League club owners, the National Commission, Organized Baseball's governing body, agreed to lease Harrison Park from Sinclair for the next 20 years at \$10,000 per annum. The Commission expected that a good part of this expense, however, would be recouped from a new minor league team paying rent for use of the Sinclair-built ballpark.

³⁴ It was no secret that many Newark baseball fans resented their city's team playing elsewhere and had refused to attend games at Harrison Park.

³⁵ See "Price and Tenney Prefer Baseball Park in Newark," *Newark Sunday Call*, March 5, 1916: 11.

³⁶ Per "Minor League News and Gossip," *Sporting Life*, April 1, 1916: 12. The repairs included rebuilding the ballpark clubhouse, damaged by a recent fire.

³⁷ See "Picked Up Outside of National League Meeting," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 12, 1918: 4.

³⁸ As reported on newspaper sporting pages nationwide. At the time in many states, an official victory could only be awarded based on a knockout or disqualification. Sportswriters covering the bout between the two future boxing hall of famers were about evenly divided on whether Lewis or Leonard had gotten the better of the action. At the match's end, both champions retained their respective titles.

³⁹ As reported in various issues of *Speed Up*, the official weekly of the Submarine Boat Corporation of Newark.

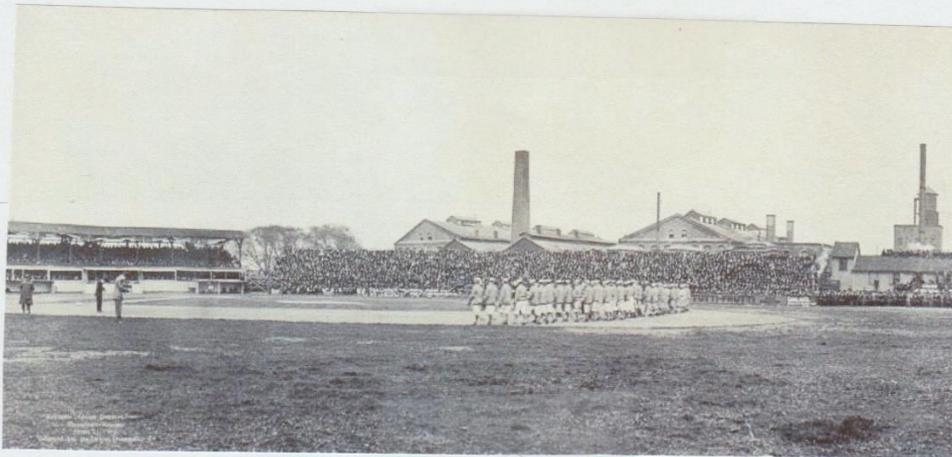
WIEDENMAYER'S PARK



George W. Wiedenmayer



Wiedenmayer's Park: Opening Day 1910



Wiedenmayer's Park: 1904



Wiedenmayer's Park: 1911 Newark Fire Insurance Atlas



Wiedenmayer's Park: Circa 1915 game action