

SABR BALLPARKS COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

July-August, 1990

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I SABR CLEVELAND CONVENTION was a great success and it had many highlights for ballparks fans. The tour of Cleveland Stadium included the home clubhouse, press box, luxury box section, dugout, bullpens, and several other "behind the scenes" areas. Several entertaining and informative ballparks-related papers were given in the sessions, including:

- * Ballparks Mysteries... by Phil Lowry, some unanswered questions in his Green Cathedrals research
- * Ballparks: Past-Present-Future: Frank Rashid of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club and their preservation plan; John Pastier and an overview of how ballparks have been planned (or not) over the past 150 years; and Phil Bess and the Urban Baseball Park Design Project and its relationship to current/future work.
- * Ballparks of Cleveland ... a short slide lecture by Bob Bluthardt on League Park and Cleveland Municipal Stadium, putting them in context of parks of the last 100 years.
- * Ballparks of New York: an overview of that state's many ballparks, large and small, by David Pietrusza.
- * Photo Tour of Baseball Parks by Dick Miller, an extensive overview of ballparks, their development, and relationship with American culture.

These five sessions, as well as all other SABR research sessions, were quite good. Congratulations to our committee members who did such a good job!

League Park Tour: those who took the trolley tour were treated to a photo stop at the League Park site in a not-too-prosperous section of Cleveland. The old ticket office and parts of the first base grandstands are left. While the rest of the park is gone, there is a diamond in the right spot and the field dimensions are intact, so that long LF line, deep CF distances, and short! RF pole are clearly understandable.

Business meeting: a separate report is included. We had a great turnout. It was unfortunate that we had but an hour to cover so many good topics. Maybe we can arrange for more time next year.

It was a pleasure meeting many of you at the convention and I look forward to seeing you at SABR-91 in New York City.

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II COUNCIL OF COMMITTEES had its annual meeting, chaired by SABR v.p. Ron Gabriel and later joined by SABR pres. Dick Topp. All committees were represented and I spoke for our committee. The group unanimously rejected the idea of one of the committee chairmen being a direct representative to the SABR board. We thought to be a conflict of interest. Instead, we urged Dick Topp to appoint one of the current board members as the liaison (I am told it is Mark Rucker). We also discussed a list of questions and situations that the current SABR policies do not address clearly:

- * fundraising activity by committees
- * extent of projects by committees as they relate to taking positions, stands, or opinions
- * small postage fees for committee members
- * SABR's support of committees, both financially and philosophically
- * membership on a SABR committee.. what criteria used to take people on or cut "unproductive people" loose.

We agreed to press the SABR board for support to have a winter meeting of all committee chairmen for a workshop to draft new and suggested policy guidelines to strengthen the committees, their operation, and relationship with SABR. While the majority of expenses of the travel and lodging for this gathering would be paid for by the chairmen themselves, we do hope for some assistance by the board.

NOTE your opinion and thoughts as a member of the Ballparks Committee is quite important! Get in touch with me if you have any thing you would like to be heard regarding the abovelisted items--or other items. The strength of SABR can be found in its people and the work they do on the various committees.

Dr. Peter Bjarkman was elected to be our coordinator for this winter workshop. Peter is chair of the Latin American Committee.

III SABR POLL Did you read the results of the membership survey on interest levels for the various committees? The July-90 Bulletin reported that Ballparks trailed only the Biographies in a "total rating." 57% said that they wanted more Ballparks publications/research, the highest rating of any topic. The interest is "out there," so keep those research projects going!

IV GREEN GRIDIRONS, a football companion publication to the Green Cathedrals work, is Phil Lowry's overview of every stadium and facility used for professional football. Published by the Professional Football Researchers Association (PFRA), it costs about \$5 and is a good addition to any stadium fan's library. The PFRA also puts out a newsletter. Bob Carroll is the editor at 12870 Rt. 30, No. Huntington, PA 15642. PFRA memberships are \$25/year. Their "Coffin Corner" newsletter did a great two-part history of the last years of the Polo Grounds.

V THANKS! to the Negro Leagues Committee that will be assisting Gordon Thomas who is coordinating our efforts for a plaque for Washington D.C. Griffith Stadium.

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- VI ROOSEVELT STADIUM plaque is up reports Mike Frank. Our thanks for his pictures. The plaque is housed in a gazebo back by the water. A four-sided post carries the plaque (with space for three other illustrations). SABR is credited on the bottom. If you are in the neighborhood in Jersey City, drop by and see it.
- VII TIGER STADIUM and its future preservation continues to be in the news. The Fan Club recently showed the "Baseball Heirlooms" also called "Baseball's Grandstands" hour-long video on Comiskey, Wrigley, Fenway, and Tiger Stadium. Committee member Phil Bess was interviewed. We keep hearing that this program will be shown on tv, so keep your eyes open to the listings. Contact the Fan Club for info at (313) 964-5991 PO Box 441426, Detroit, MI 48244-1426.
- VIII MINOR LEAGUE COMMITTEE notes that these articles by its members are available:
- (004) Ballparks in the Bushes, Some Awards, by Jim Brown
 - (005) Baseball Parks and Home Run Marks, Minor League Stars I
 - (031) Nicollet Park, 1896-1955, by Stew Thornley
 - (034) The Old & the New, Two Southern League Parks in Alabama, by Jim Brown
 - (045) Waltzing Across Texas, Five Texas League Parks in Five Nights, by Jim Brown
- I am not sure how they are available and for what costs, if any, or what postage, so contact the committee chairman, David Kemp, 716 West 5th Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57104.
- IX REBUILT CROSLY FIELD had its 3rd Annual celebration and Old Timers' game in Blue Ash, OH, on Sunday, August 12. A SASE of 25¢ is you would like a copy of the press release. A recent Sports Illustrated article profiled this ballpark. (6-25-90)
- X THE BROOKLYN DODGERS LIVE, at least in court. A lawsuit and proposed Congressional bill are in the works to protect the name of the "Brooklyn Dodgers Sports Bar and Restaurant" in the NYC borough. A SASE of 25¢ if you want the full story. Thanks to Keith Danish for the information. Also, see item XVIII of the last newsletter.
- XI SAVE OUR SOX FIELD OF DREAMS COMMITTEE seeks to preserve at least a part of Comiskey Park and the field for future use, both as a neighborhood field and a memorial to that great baseball park. At the committee business meeting in Cleveland, a unanimous vote of support was given to the project to save Comiskey from total destruction. The "Dreams" committee has a plan to help the White Sox with extra parking to offset the few hundred spaces lost if Comiskey isn't totally bulldozed. A 25¢ SASE for the full story and press releases. For more information, contact Steve Knipstein, 2102 No. Orleans, #3F Chicago, IL 60614.
- XII PUZZLE ANSWERS to the John Pastier Ballparks Puzzle are enclosed. How many did you get? Valerie and I stayed up very late one evening and got all but an obscure few. Thanks John!

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- XIII OOPS Several sharp-eyed readers, including Kyle Johnson, spotted a major error in the March-April newsletter. Item XIV on McCormick Field noted that "We are encouraging the destruction of such a long-lived facility." Nope, we are not! Nothing more than a missed word there.
- XIV BASEBALL SCULPTURE, especially that outside of major and minor league ballparks, is the interest of Susan Nichols of the "Save Outdoor Sculpture" organization. Do you know of some outdoor baseball-related sculpture? If so, contact Susan at The Papermill, Suite 403, 3299 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20007. Susan is an old friend, so anything you can send her will be appreciated. And our thanks to her for sending us a 7-12-90 article on the Camden Yards facility in Baltimore.
- XV KNOXVILLE & BILL TROY thank you for the assistance as he tried to coordinate an effort to keep the AA level franchise in the city and refurbish the city's ballpark (see May-June, item XXXII). For a 45¢ SASE we'll send you copies of the clippings he sent us.
- XVI SHIBE PARK HISTORY by Bruce Kuklick, a member of our committee, has found a publisher and will be "off the presses" on opening day, 1991! Congratulations! To Everything a Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1970. It will have 22 pictures and 6 maps. Princeton University Press is publishing. Look for it next spring!
- XVII DENVER VOTES YES for the stadium tax bill and now the fun starts as they plan for a new ballpark. As our minutes of the Cleveland meeting will show, it has been pointed out that a facility that is somewhat adaptable, already exists. Anyhow, Steve Bennett kindly sent us a copy of the story outlining the proposed sites for a new facility. If you would like a copy, a 25¢ SASE please.
- XVIII THE NATIONAL PASTIME on ballparks history? Bob Tiemann is considering the idea. This "ballparks special" issue of TNP "ideally would focus on ballparks from pastures to superstructures, meaning long articles on parks that themselves evolved (Sportaman's Park & Tiger Stadium) or shorter articles on short-lived parks. Anything concerning ballparks will be considered." This could be a great opportunity to bring some serious work on parks to print. If you have any suggestions, comments, etc. contact Bob at 4518 Wichita Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110.
- XIX COMPUTER COMMITTEE LIAISON As you may know, the SABR Computer Committee has a new chairman with Jim Johnston. He is trying to assess the needs for assistance by all the committees and by individuals doing special research. Have a computer related problem or suggestion? Contact him at 3212 Stones Throw Lane, #3, Durham, NC 27713. Is there anyone out there with sufficient computer experience who would like to serve as this committee's liaison to the Computer Committee? If so, let me know.

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XX NEW MEMBERS:

John Guilfoyle
50 Henry Road
Centereach, NY 11720

All eras, major league parks, esp. Yankee Stadium, Tiger Stadium, Comiskey & Fenway. Publisher of the Yankee Fan newsletter and has good clippings of 1973-76 period.

Mike Welsh
6113 N. 25th Ter.
St. Joseph, MO 64505

All eras and levels, Association and Exposition Parks in Kansas City, also Municipal Stadium in KC. Interested in first night games in various Negro Lg. parks, and all KC Negro League parks

Todd Klatt
927 East 5th Street
Duluth, MN

Minor lgs., esp. Northern Lg; post-1900 parks. Duluth parks, especially interested in getting that city's Wade Stadium renovated.

Welcome to the committee! Please contact these people if you have mutual interests or ways to assist them.

XXI CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

Sam Pathy, 5144 N. High Street, #202, Columbus, OH 43214
Ethan Casey, 2614 Garfield St, NW, Washington, DC 20008

We remind our membership: please send us your change of address notice when you move. Thanks.

XXII HUNTINGTON AVENUE GROUNDS in Boston, the pre-Fenway Park home of the Red Sox, had some intriguing distances for foul lines and CF. Phil Lowry, ever on the trail of new info, has some material on the 1909 changes to the grounds that cut down those distances, especially in CF and RCF. A 25¢ SASE for the material.

XXIII SEATTLE PILOTS, that short-lived franchise of two decades ago, is the subject of a scrapbook by Chris Drew, 2559 Merriway Lane, Cincinnati, OH 45231. Have you anything to offer on the Pilots and Sick's Stadium? If so, please contact him.

XXIV THE CONSTRUCTION OF YANKEE STADIUM by CCNY grad. student Matthew Kachur, has been contributed to our files. This 34-page paper is quite good. If you would like a copy, please send \$2.50 to cover copying/postage.

XXV WINDS & BASEBALL STADIUMS, THE CLIMATICALLY OPTIMAL M. L. BASEBALL SEASON IN N. AMERICA. As noted in the SABR Bulletin, these pieces were available from Dr. Brent Skeeter, 505 Hayward Ave., Fruitland, MD 21826. Good reading on a subject you don't get much material. Send him a SASE for 65¢ for copies.

XXVI NEW FOOTBALL STADIUM in TAMPA? The 23-year-old Tampa Stadium is under consideration for replacement and some grand plans have been discussed. Nadine Smith of the Tampa Tribune called last month to talk about sports facilities and the factors that make a stadium great. John Pyros sent us a St. Petersburg Times piece on the current facility and new plans. A 25¢ SASE for the information.

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XXVII MISC. NEWS, NOTES

Buffalo has approved the 2.5 million dollars to study the expansion of Pilot Field from 21,000 to 41,000 seats, with the hopes of a major league franchise coming.

Washington may have a new football stadium for the Redskins by the mid-1990s. A 75,000-seat facility could be built on Parking Lot #6 at RFK Stadium.

Bids for the baseball stadium at Camden Yards were received and officials were relieved that they were all near the budget.

The Wausau Timbers, class A affiliate of Baltimore, could be moving from Wisconsin, from the Midwest League to Kane County, IL, and a new facility. The Madison Muskies are also looking at other locales.

XXVIII SYMMETRICAL AND STANDARDIZED BALLPARKS should be the wave of the future, says John Holway, a respected SABR researcher and recent recipient of the society's Bob Davids Award. For your interest we include an article expressing his view. John has expressed interest in joining our committee and I should be receiving his survey form soon.

XXIX HOME & AWAY RECORDS from The Sporting News Playing .500 on the road seems to be an unattainable goal over the long haul.

Best Teams at Home

Based upon won-lost records compiled from 1980 through 1989, these are how the respective major league clubs fared in games played in their home-town ball parks:

American League

National League

	W.	L.	Pct.		W.	L.	Pct.
New York	466	311	.600	Houston	452	330	.578
Kansas City	453	323	.584	New York	446	335	.571
Detroit	458	327	.583	Los Angeles ...	442	343	.563
Oakland	443	342	.564	St. Louis	439	343	.561
Boston	437	343	.560	Philadelphia ...	434	347	.556
Toronto	432	349	.553	Montreal	429	354	.548
Milwaukee	427	351	.549	San Francisco	424	358	.542
Minnesota	429	362	.542	San Diego	420	364	.536
Baltimore	424	358	.542	Pittsburgh	388	390	.499
Chicago	408	366	.527	Chicago	406	376	.519
California	404	378	.517	Cincinnati	399	383	.510
Texas	401	381	.513	Atlanta	374	398	.485
Cleveland	390	389	.501	N.L. Total	5053	4321	.539
Seattle	370	419	.469				
A.L. Total	5942	4999	.543				

SOURCE: The Major League Baseball News-letter

Best Teams on Road

4-25-90
TSN

Based upon won-lost records compiled from 1980 through 1989, these are how the respective major league clubs fared in games played in the opponents' ball park:

American League

National League

	W.	L.	Pct.		W.	L.	Pct.
New York	388	396	.495	St. Louis	386	391	.497
Toronto	385	397	.492	Los Angeles ...	383	398	.490
Boston	384	399	.490	Montreal	382	398	.490
Detroit	381	400	.488	Cincinnati	383	400	.488
California	379	405	.483	New York	370	408	.476
Baltimore	376	403	.483	Houston	367	420	.466
Milwaukee	377	409	.480	Philadelphia ...	349	433	.446
Kansas City	373	411	.476	San Francisco	349	437	.444
Oakland	360	422	.460	Pittsburgh	344	435	.442
Chicago	350	436	.445	San Diego	342	441	.437
Texas	319	458	.411	Atlanta	338	447	.431
Cleveland	320	460	.410	Chicago	329	445	.425
Minnesota	304	472	.392	N.L. Total	4321	5053	.461
Seattle	303	474	.390				
A.L. Total	4999	5942	.457				

SOURCE: The Major League Baseball News-letter

XXX COMISKEY PARK is going out in a blaze of glory with a winning White Sox team and a flurry of media attention. Over the past several months major pieces have appeared in The National, Sports Illustrated (several!), and The Sporting News. Also, many newspaper articles too. If you see something for the files, please send it along! The Chicago-Sun Times called recently and they are putting together a special tabloid section on Comiskey for late September. I would assume that the Tribune will do something too, though not too much as they own the Cubs.

(7) SABR Ballparks Committee
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- XXXI ORAL HISTORY FOR BALLPARKS? John Pastier, Tony Formo, Norman Macht, and other SABR members have suggested this. Comiskey is about to go; Baltimore's Memorial Stadium is going; many minor league parks are being shed for newer facilities. Older fans have great memories and greater stories for the old parks. Chicago area Ballparks Committee people have been asked to consider interviewing Gardner Stern, the 85-year-old White Sox fan who has been attending games at Comiskey since 1910. He was profiled in a July 9 Sports Illustrated story.
- XXXII SATCHEL PAIGE STADIUM, 51st and Swope Parkway, Kansas City, MO, had a fundraising game recently, reports committee member Mike Welsh.
- XXXIII BALLPARKS PHOTO COLLECTION has been loyally cared for by Joe Favano with a display of the new and old contributions at each of the last few SABR annual meetings. After an initial flurry of interest, response has been minimal. So, to revive interest and expand the base, how about a photo or slide contest with a display (or even a panel discussion or session on the entries & winners and entries) at the next annual meeting in New York. Joe and I would appreciate any thoughts, especially if you have participated in such contests. Joe is at 21 Roosevelt Ave., Old Greenwich, CT 06870.
- XXXIV PROPOSED NEW STADIUM FOR THE MILWAUKEE BREWERS, a project for a master's degree in architecture and urban planning, has been done by John Curran of Waupuca, WI, and he has donated a copy to our files. This project examines past ballparks and addresses the strengths and weaknesses to the Milwaukee situation. We'll put in a summary for the next newsletter and see if we can offer copies to interested people. Our thanks to John for his thoughtful donation.
- XXXV CLIPPING FILE ON A NEW SAN FRANCISCO PARK was donated to our files by Ethan Casey who is working on an extended work dealing with the politics and related issues of recent ballparks projects, attempted and completed. Our thanks for his donation of materials. If you have anything to offer him for his project, contact him at the address in item # XXI.
- XXXVI WHOLE BASEBALL CATALOGUE, a paperback book proclaimed as "the ultimate guide to the baseball marketplace," mentions SABR in many places and lists our Ballparks Committee and its newsletter. This explains the calls I have been getting recently from people I have never met! For those who like to know where to find things like equipment, newsletters, info on parks, people, teams, organizations, movies, videos, and much more, then this is your book. It is published by Simon & Schuster. John Thorn and Bob Carroll the editors. Many SABR members have authored sections of the book.
- XXXVII HOW THE MAJOR LEAGUES WERE FORMED is the topic of a book underway by committee David Pietrusza. He needs ballpark photos from the appropriate time frame for the beginning of all the major leagues, including NL, AL, UA, AA, and PL. Examples would include Exposition Park (Pitts) and Wrigley Field in Federal Lg. days. If you have photos, advice, or suggestions, contact Dave at 611 Sande Ave., Scotia, NY 12302.

- (8) SABR Ballparks Committee
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XXXVIII Copies of the following items are available:

- a) "Fan's Guide to the Ballparks (Chicago) Chicago 7/90
by William Brashler
- b) "Doomed Stadiums" (Comiskey), The National, 7/18/90
by Peter Richmond
- c) "Doomed Stadiums" (Tiger Stad.), The National, 6/22/90
by Peter Richmond
- d) "Summer in the City, Out at the Ballpark" (NY) NY Times, 7/1/90
by Gerald Eskenazi
- e) "Ballpark Dining" (NY) NY Times no date, by Bryan Miller
- f) "Era Ending in Chicago" LA Times, 8/13/90, by Bill Christine
- g) "Comiskey's Last at Bat," Boston Globe, Ron Borges, 6/22/90
- h) "Bricks, Vines, & Memories," (Pitts), The National, 6/28/90
- i) "Forgotten Champs," (Negro Lg/Wash.) Post Magazine, 6/3/90

Our thanks to Gordon Thomas, Vin Russo, Mike Frank, Keith Danish, Barry Evans, Norman Macht, Paul Shapiro, Robert E. Bluthardt (my father) and Bob Dobrusin.

ANSWERS TO JOHN PASTIER'S BALLPARKS PUZZLE

ANSWERS: BALLPARKS

TIGER V H G IL H M
 A L THEBIGOWE UNION
 NY H T T X T
 AC SHEA L RUTHBUILT
 O I H O A I L R
 LEAGUE BAKERBOWL BO
 T N M N N I E C O
 S O PALACEOFTHEFANS
 IND E C H I L E
 C DELORIMIERDOWNS V
 K E E A D N H E
 SOS O Y S SO IDOL
 THEHOUSETHAT B T
 IP B F L O A SEALS
 R ROBISONFIELD P T
 TB I K I YAZ A
 E LEHIGHAVENUE R D
 CS N U R R M KIKI
 SPORTSMANS H T L U
 O B L GRANDSLAM

SABR Ballparks Committee Annual Business Meeting, July 27, 1990

Cleveland, OH

Over 35 people filled the conference room for the annual meeting. Bob Bluthardt began with a general welcome to all current committee members, SABR members, and guests. He then touched upon the following issues:

1. Committee Budget had been submitted for SABR FY 91 and he had no doubts that we would receive the funding for our newsletter and related activity. Bluthardt noted that the \$615 covered printing, postage, and little else.
2. City Baseball Magic All agreed that the success of this printing was a great reflection upon the committee, not to mention the subject matter. Bluthardt noted that some copies were left for sale. As soon as the last copy is sold and paid for, a full financial report will be done.
3. Preservation of Comiskey Park, or a part of it, had been proposed by a Chicago organization (see item # XI of July-Aug. 90 newsletter). All agreed that this was a worthy goal and a unanimous vote of support given. The vote allowed Bluthardt to voice the committee's support directly to the preservation effort.
4. Council of Committees Bluthardt updated everyone on the status of the efforts to draft new guidelines for committee activity and the relationship of SABR to its committees. See item # II in the July-Aug. n'letter.

The floor was open and the following people made reports or suggestions:

Steve Lehman of the Minneapolis Review of Baseball voiced his group's pleasure with City Baseball Magic. He hopes to have a reprinting of several thousand issues soon.

Steve Bennet noted the importance of the Denver stadium vote and the assistance City Baseball Magic can have.

Norman Macht thanked the committee for its ongoing work. He reported on an oral history prospect who lives at the site of home plate of Phila's Columbia Park. A marker was discussed for the site. He reported that many items from Comiskey Park will be sold for charity. In Phila., a church is going up on the site of Shibe Park and the pastor was a bleacher fan! A marker was discussed. Bluthardt said he would contact the pastor. Macht said that he trying to interest companies on the idea of a oral history/video program on visiting the sites of old parks. The committee approved of this, supported his future efforts, and asked that he keep in touch and not commit to anything before we could see any proposal. John Pardon asked for consideration of minor league parks. Dick Johnson noted that we need to be careful in any project lest we jeopardize our non-profit status.

Joe Favano reported on the photo project (also see item # XXXIII in July-Aug. 90 n'letter). A photo/slide contest was suggested. Others suggested printing the winners in some publication.

Alex. Bensky and Frank Rashid of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club reported on their group's fight over the past year to save that ballpark. They noted that their presentation would have a slide show and model. Members with similar feelings were urged to join their group.

Bluthardt introduced Dale Swearingen of Osborne Engineering in Cleveland. Dale spoke briefly about the current Cleveland situation. He also noted the drawings and materials the company had. Dale said he would be happy to show these to SABR researchers.

(2) Ballparks Business Meeting
July 27, 1990 Cleveland, OH

(at this point time ran out and we were forced to exit the room in favor of the next committee meeting. About a dozen members/guests reconvened at the coffee room down the hall)

John Pastier opened discussion with the Denver situation. Mile High Stadium was adaptable for baseball and he thought that a new ballpark might not be necessary. Much discussion of the merits of our committee getting involved. We decided to leave this one alone as the vote was upcoming. If the vote was negative for a new stadium, then we would consider pointing out to Denver the options of Mile High Stadium.

Gordon Thomas summarized the last few years and developing work with a plaque for Griffith Stadium. Closer cooperation with the Negro Lg. Committee was supported. Thomas noted that many objections stem from the racial issues of segregated baseball at Griffith. Also an update on the Camden Yards project. No decision on a name for the new park. The "Memorial Stadium" letters will travel to the new park as part of a veterans' park.

Dale Swearingen discussed current stadium situations in Tempe, Cleveland, and Milwaukee

The meeting broke up as the research sessions were about to begin. All enjoyed the meeting but noted that a longer time slot was necessary to get any serious work and decisions/planning accomplished.

Attendance at the business meeting peaked at 40. Twenty-eight signed the registration sheet. A list of the attendees is available from Bob Bluthardt, 244 No. Oxford Drive, San Angelo, TX 76901.

John B. Holway

Post 4/19/90

My Pop Fly, His Home Run

Imagine, if you can, the Redskins traveling to Dallas to play on a field 110 yards long, then flying to San Francisco to play on a 90-yard field, then back to Washington, where the goal post is on the goal line, and off to Philadelphia, where it is at the end of the end zone but 10 feet narrower.

It's now winter, and the Bullets are in Boston to play Larry Byrd with a 12-foot basket. From there they arrive in Chicago to face Michael Jordan and a nine-foot hoop. The floor in Houston is 10 feet longer than the one in Los Angeles, the Phoenix foul line two feet closer than the Portland line, etc.

If you can imagine all that, you can imagine the insane hodgepodge world that major league baseball has been playing in for the past 114 years, where a 486-foot drive in Yankee Stadium was an out, and a 258-foot pop in the Polo Grounds was a home run.

This is the wonderful world of the future that the Baltimore Orioles want to go back to with their new "asymmetrical" park. Today, as they have for the past 35 years, the Orioles will open their home season in Memorial Stadium, where the distances to all points in right and left fields correspond to one another.

In 1992, the team is to move to its new park, where, we are told, right handers will have to hit a ball 334 feet to reach the fence, but lefties will have to hit it only 319 feet. True, there will be a high wall for lefties, but the fact remains that their drives will hit the wall for lefties, while the same drives by right-handers will settle into the outfielders' gloves for outs. Presumably the higher fence in right field elevens things up. Ask Jim Rice of Boston. He estimates

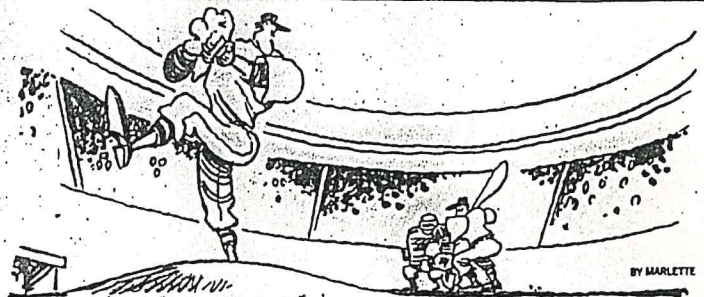
that Fenway's infamous wall cost him more home runs than it helped him get, as his low line drives banged into the wall instead of whistling through it 20 feet more for a homer somewhere else.

Of all people, Oriole manager Frank Robinson should know that this is absurd and unfair. Playing in Crosley Field, Cincinnati, Robbie smacked many a two-base hit against the high scoreboard in left-center. The year he was traded to Baltimore, the Reds drew a white line across the scoreboard and decreed that any hit above the line would be a home run. If they had done it while he was playing, Frank says, he could have hit 10 more home runs a year, 100 more in a career. (How does a lifetime 686 sound?)

Hank Greenberg, the pride of the Bronx, couldn't play for the Yankees because lefty Lou Gehrig was installed on first base and aiming at the tempting 296-foot low right-field railing there. So the right-handed Greenberg played for Detroit in cozy Tiger (then Briggs) Stadium instead. In 1938 Hank smashed 58 home runs, almost tying Babe Ruth. But 39 of them were at home. If he had played in Yankee Stadium, with its gaping "Death Valley" in left-field, he might have hit only 19 at home and ended with 38 for the year, nowhere close to Ruth.

When I asked Greenberg's biographer, Ira Berkow, how Hank would have done in New York, Berkow relayed Hank's posthumous answer: "I would have learned to hit lefty."

Back in the 1930s Mel Ott was the best, or worst, example of diamond gerrymandering. He lifted those patented seven-iron approach shots into the nearby upper deck in the Polo Grounds, and



when he retired, he had 511 homers. They look good in the record book. But two-thirds of them came at home. In an average park, Ott might have ended with about 340, not 511.

You could have picked up Brooklyn's tiny Ebbetts Field and dropped it inside Washington's immense Griffith Stadium and had plenty of room left over. That's why Duke Snider, Gil Hodges, Roy Campanella and other Dodger "sluggers" were able to bump so many homers out of the field.

I figure if Babe Ruth had played in Griffith Stadium instead of New York's friendly "House that Ruth Built," he would have hit about 40 homers in 1927, not 60, based on pro-rating his performance in both parks. (Of course, they would have pulled the Washington fences in for him.)

Goose Goslin was Washington's power hitter in the same era. He ended with only 248 homers to Ruth's 714. But switch parks on Goslin and Ruth, and it might have been Goose's record, not Babe's, that Roger Maris broke.

Kansas City's stormy petrel, Charlie Finley, once tried to erect a wooden Yankee Stadium "short porch" in front of Kansas City's right-field wall to dramatize the great advantage given to left-handed hitters on the Yankees. The umpires made him take it down, but he made his point. Yes, today's modern homogenized "toilet bowl"

stadiums lack the crazy fun of the old parks, where line drives rolled under tarpaulins in the outfield and overhanging upper decks caught easy flies before the waiting outfielders could.

Making them charming again without making them a mockery of competition is a problem for the architects to wrestle with. There are other ways to do it without arbitrarily and needlessly manipulating the dimensions.

Even cutting down on foul territory, which Baltimore proposes, means giving many batters four strikes, as their lazy foul balls drift out of reach the lunging third basemen. That's as big a factor as Fenway's bloated batting averages as the wall is.

The stadium architects in great-grandfatherly day had an excuse for their lopsided designs. They had to fit their parks into the city block the teams had bought.

But today's blueprint-and-protractor artist can't plead that as an excuse. They have all the room they need. Arbitrarily making it easier for some hitters, or pitchers, is a cop-out.

Back to the drawing board. And hold those bulldozers.

John B. Holway has written several books on baseball