

field at that time was 505 feet from home plate and the fans stood behind restraining ropes.¹¹

For 30 years, a series of minor league and semi-pro teams used the field. In 1973, the Boston Red Sox moved their AAA farm team from Louisville, Kentucky to Pawtucket. This team struggled along near bankruptcy for a few seasons until 1977, when Ben Mondor, a successful renovator of old mills in the Blackstone Valley, bought the barely breathing franchise and turned it into one of the most successful and highly regarded minor league teams in the country.

Nonetheless, half a century of great games and championship teams could not change the fact that McCoy Stadium was constructed over a swamp. In 1993, the Pawtucket Red Sox had envisioned a 2,500-seat expansion along the right field line. The proposal was thwarted when soil testing proved that the ground would not support the structure. The ghost of Hammond Pond forced another change in construction plans. Fortunately, the Pawtucket Red Sox creatively installed 700 additional bleacher seats to help hold overflow crowds at this immensely popular minor league facility. Finally, in 1998-1999, a \$16 million renovation project increased capacity to 10,000 and added several new amenities to the

oldest park in AAA-baseball. Today, McCoy Stadium is viewed as one of the jewels of the International League and physical testimony of Pawtucket's political and environmental history. Mayor Thomas McCoy would also be proud that \$12 million for the renovations came from a statewide bond issue, which once more brought new construction jobs to Pawtucket.

Notes

- ¹⁻⁸ Joseph A. Kelly, "McCoy's Dream Stadium To Cost \$1,100,000 Or More." *Providence Journal*, October 26, 1941.
- ⁹ "Mayor Lays Cornerstone At Hammond Pond Stadium." *Pawtucket Times*, November 4, 1940.
- ¹⁰ "Thousands Gather To View Opening of City Stadium." *Pawtucket Times*, July 6, 1942.
- ¹¹ George Patrick Duffy, "Hammond Pond Becomes Site of McCoy Stadium in the 1940s." *The Evening Times* (Pawtucket, RI), July 11, 1988.

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Photos courtesy Pawtucket Red Sox.

Samuel Less

The Ballpark at St. George Station, Staten Island, New York

Stephen King may have considered it and then discarded the story line as too improbable. Imagine, if you will, a parcel of land that seems to demonstrate a preference for the development it will support; or, that through the years during which it quietly endured abuse as a railyard, it insidiously steers human affairs so that it can relive its past glory and realize its destiny. A haunted stadium? Give you goose bumps?

The environmental impact statement prepared for the new minor league baseball stadium that will become the home of the Staten Island Yankees, a minor league affiliate of the New York Yankees, will clearly not read like a Stephen King

novel, but some chance discoveries almost instill this administrative document with a literary plot.

When a baseball stadium project was proposed in 1999, the development site served as a commuter parking facility for the Staten Island Ferry. Little evidence remained of its past use, which for 80 years, was a railroad freight yard. While the layer of rail yard history is a rich and hallowed ground for many, it only obscured the irony that a baseball stadium, actually a long forgotten covered grandstand, had previously existed on the site. In addition, the baseball nine that formerly played there bore the name of the major league rival of the future stadium's occupants.

The waterfront area in the vicinity of the stadium site in what was known as New Brighton

was rural until the 1830s. Upland of the site, fashionable hotels faced the picturesque Kill Van Kull and New York Harbor until the first half of the 19th century. Around the time ferry and rail routes were being consolidated by local developer Erastus Wiman (1834-1904), the area was renamed St. George, not in anticipation of George Steinbrenner (current New York Yankees owner), but rather for entrepreneur George Law whose land was used for the ferry terminal.

Wiman had purchased the 1884 league champion New York Metropolitans in 1885 and brought them from the Polo Grounds in Manhattan to his Staten Island Amusement Co. property, located at the base of Wall Street and 300 feet from the ferry landing. The “Mets” had lost the 1884 playoff to the Providence Grays of the National League in what is considered by many to be the first World Series. The Staten Island Amusement Co.’s entertainment complex featured baseball, lacrosse, concerts, electric displays, illuminated fountains, and fireworks. It also included a dining facility and ice cream salon.

In 1886, advertisements proclaimed the Staten Island facility as the home of the New York Metropolitan Club (“Mets”) of the American Association. Characterized in Harper’s Weekly as a handsome and convenient building for spectators, the grandstand, which formally opened April 22, 1886, was a major feature of the Staten Island Amusement Co. and was constructed at a cost of more than \$85,000. The 5,000-seat grandstand commanded views of the game and of the harbor. This concept has inspired present-day designers who now offer Manhattan as a target to tantalize (and frustrate) the would-be

slugger. Likewise, the proposed stadium will have a similar seating capacity (6,500).

In 1886, the “Great Mets” of New York City under the management of James M. Gifford were part of the American Association which featured “nines” from Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis. The total aggregate league payroll in 1886 was \$150,000, not even starting salary for a single major league player today. The “Mets” home ballpark in Staten Island was short-lived (Wiman sold the team in 1887 to the Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers). Construction of the new stadium is underway and the “birthright” of the site has been reconfirmed.

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