5-2012

Detroit's Field of Dreams: The Grassroots Preservation of Tiger Stadium

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DETROIT’S FIELD OF DREAMS:
THE GRASSROOTS PRESERVATION OF TIGER STADIUM

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Schools of
Clemson University and the College of Charleston

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Rebecca M. Long
May 2012

Accepted by:
Robert Russell, Ph.D.
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James Ward
Abstract

From 1987 until the time of this writing, several grassroots organizations have fought for the preservation of Detroit’s Tiger Stadium and its historic field. The goal of this thesis is to chronicle those efforts, examine how these organizations fit into the history of preservation movements, and delve into what continues to draw people to this historic site: its ‘power of place.’ In order to accomplish these objectives, this thesis will detail the history of the site from its storied time as the home of Major League Baseball’s Detroit Tigers from 1896-1999, up to the preservation efforts which have been the site’s predominate topic of discussion for the last twenty-five years. Analyzing this history and comparing it the origins of the preservation movement, provides a clearer understanding of the magnetism of the site and how these grassroots organizations represent a reversion to the origins of the preservation movement in America.
Acknowledgements

There are several people whose guidance, help and understanding have been integral to the process of creating this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisers: Robert Russell, Ph.D., Barry Stiefel, Ph.D., and James Ward. Without their input and guidance this thesis would not have been possible. Of this group I would like to especially express my gratitude to my primary adviser, Robert Russell, Ph.D. His suggestions and guidance have been invaluable along my journey to unearth the story of Tiger Stadium’s preservation efforts. Without his direction and counsel there are avenues of analysis and exploration that would not have been fully investigated, and I am deeply indebted to him for this leadership. In addition to my advisers, I also owe a debt of gratitude to Peter Comstock Riley, Bill Dow of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, and Gary Gillette of the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy. All three of these men graciously volunteered their time and intimate knowledge of the grassroots efforts to preserve Tiger Stadium and now its field. It is their information that filled in the holes left by the newspaper articles that simply did not tell the entire story. Of these three, I would especially like to thank Peter Comstock Riley. Without your assistance and contacts I would not have had access to the significant preservation players who contributed to this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and most importantly my family who listened to me talk about Tiger Stadium for the better part of a year. Your patience and willingness to listen was extremely appreciated. In closing, I would like to thank all of the past and present grassroots preservationists involved in the efforts to preserve 'The
Corner. Your extraordinary efforts and perseverance over the last twenty-five years, no matter the outcome, speak to the power of memory and the importance of our shared built heritage; a message that has been an invaluable lesson in my growth as a preservationist.
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**Introduction**

On a cold snowy day in late December I sit in a booth in a restaurant at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull Avenues and I watch. I watch as car after car stops, its passengers emerge and walk around the empty field across the street from the warm confines of the restaurant. Some people linger for only thirty minutes, others stay for hours, taking endless photographs, and walking, just walking. Every so often they stop and glance at their surroundings, taking in the emptiness, the feeling of void, the field and the lone flagpole flying the stars and stripes; the flag that proudly waves as if to say with each cold gust of wind, “I remember. I will not forget.”

“What battlefield is across the street?” “Who was killed at this site that so many would stop and pay homage to an empty field devoid of any objects save the flagpole and a fence?” But I’m not across the street from a battlefield, and no one has died at this site. In fact, I’m not out in the countryside at all, quite the opposite; I’m sitting in a Coney Island restaurant, in one of the grittiest urban settings in America: Detroit. And the empty field that so many make pilgrimages to is none other than the former home of Major League Baseball’s Detroit Tigers, the site of the now demolished Tiger Stadium. The stadium may be gone, the victim of greed and vindictiveness, but its field, the field where so many legends stood, remains.

Just as at a battlefield, these people come to mingle with ghosts, the ghosts of their heroes. To run the same baselines as Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth, to stand on the same pitcher’s mound as Mark Fidrych and Hal Newhouser, to man the same bases as
Hank Greenberg and Charlie Gehringer, to patrol the outfield of Al Kaline, and to stand in the same place that the “Iron Horse” Lou Gehrig stood when he decided to end his consecutive games streak.

These legendary individuals are just a few of the baseball greats that prowled this field, to say nothing of all the others that have once called this field home, and the countless moments in history that this patch of grass and dirt have witnessed. But to many this field and the stadium than once surrounded it are more than just a place for sport, they were and are a place where memories were made, where fathers and sons shared a common bond, where husbands and wives had first dates, and where a city rife with racial strife went to find healing. For almost a hundred years it was a landmark to not just a neighborhood, and a city, but an entire state. In fact, it was a national landmark. And now all but the field is gone. What happens when a structure of this magnitude disappears? Does its function as a figurative and directional landmark also cease? In most cases, the answer would be yes. For without those stands it can no longer provide that safe haven, without those lights it is no longer a beacon, and without those walls we are no longer in its shadows. But this is not the case here. Here in the most unlikely of locales, this field has instead become a place for congregation and remembrance, a place to celebrate the past, and a symbol of possibilities for the future. A future that offers the hope of preservation made possible by a group of individuals who have decided to say “Enough.”
This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters will present the
history of Tiger Stadium. The first chapter will illustrate the history of the site from its
1896 beginning until the early part of the 1980s and the sale of the team to Tom
Monaghan. The second of the three chapters will explain the history and evolution of
the site from Monaghan’s ownership until the abandonment of the stadium at the end
of the 1999 season. The third chapter will examine the sequence of events and
preservation efforts that persisted at the site long after the stadium’s abandonment.

The first chapter will detail the rich history of not just the stadium, and the
individuals who played within its confines, but also the role it played in the community.
Throughout the period detailed in this chapter, Tiger Stadium’s existence was viewed as
secure, an anchor in the Detroit community; it is this factor that is the prime distinction
between the first and the second chapters. Although the fate of the stadium did not
appear to be threatened by Monaghan’s purchase of the team in 1982, it would soon
become evident that the landmark was indeed in danger. Therefore, the second
chapter will explain how this evolution of action came about, what forms it took in the
material fabric of the structure itself, and the effects that its threat had on the
community. It is this tenure of ownership that marked the formation of the first of
many preservation groups, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, an organization formed in 1987
to combat Monaghan’s initial proposal to abandon Tiger Stadium for a new ballpark.
The efforts of the Fan Club will be documented, including their architectural proposal
for the stadium’s renovation known as the Cochrane Plan.
Unlike the first two chapters, the history of the site since the Tigers’ move to Comerica Park has yet to be comprehensively examined in literature. Therefore the information presented in this section will be primarily derived from newspaper and magazine articles as well as first-hand interviews. The preservation movements during this period marked a shift away from a resistance to new stadium construction to concentrated efforts to avoid demolition, and finally to the present day efforts to preserve the field that remains. This section also notes a change in antagonists. While the city shared responsibility with Tigers’ ownership in the push for a new stadium, they become the preservationist’s primary adversaries in the years following the Tigers’ departure. This chapter will also detail the organization that stepped in to grab the baton when the Tiger Stadium Fan Club began to disintegrate: the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy. It is this group that fought for a new use after the stadium’s initial abandonment, fought to halt its subsequent demolition, and is fighting to this day for the continued survival of the baseball field that remains. This chapter will also examine the efforts to preserve the existing field that remains at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. It will examine the Navin Field Grounds Crew, the grassroots organization that has assumed the responsibility of field maintenance, as well as detail the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy’s current efforts to preserve and protect it.

The final two chapters will examine the historic role of preservation movements and the ‘power of place.’ The first of these will examine the historic roles of preservation organizations, and the unique place in history that the Tiger Stadium
preservation groups represent. It will include a short history of preservation in America from its origins in grassroots volunteer-based women’s groups to its transformation into a field dominated by credentialed preservation professionals. Using this information as a foundation it will then analyze how the preservation organizations involved at Tiger Stadium fit into this evolution of the preservation field. The final chapter of this section will examine ‘power of place,’ and will attempt to define how it is manifested in various cultures and societal customs, and will then apply these practices to preservation movements at ‘The Corner’ in an attempt to explain why the site triggers such devotion. It will use the site’s rich history, as well as the continued preservation efforts, to explain the reasons why people from all over the state of Michigan, and across the nation, continue to make pilgrimages to ‘The Corner’ of Michigan and Trumbull.
Methodology

Due to the ongoing nature of the preservation efforts at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, this thesis is the product of both historical and contemporary research. The site as a location for baseball stretches back to 1896. Consequently, with such an extensive history, the amount of material available for research is quite expansive. While many sources were consulted, ultimately the materials that provided the most comprehensive information pertaining not just to the events that took place in and around the stadium, but also the stadium itself, were those that were utilized most often. One of the goals of my research was to document the changes to the stadium, not just physically but also in the way it was perceived by the public. As a structure that stood for almost a hundred years, it was a witness to many changes; changes to the size of the city, changes to the game of baseball, and changes that affected fan attendance. As all of these factors played a part in its use and ultimate abandonment, they were all considered essential to its story.

In addition to studying standard forms of historical documentation, more contemporary sources of information were also widely utilized, as it was this material that provided the resources for the currently unfolding issues affecting the field. These resources primarily took the forms of newspaper and magazine articles, as well as the more unusual source of social media, primarily Facebook fan sites dedicated to the field and the groups of people fighting to preserve it. All of these sources once compiled,
were organized chronologically so that the most complete story available is represented.

While this collection of sources creates a complete timeline from the beginning of the stadium to today, it still leaves holes, especially in terms of the newspapers and magazine articles whose main objective is to report the news in the most concise form possible. Although there were certain exceptions to this in the form of longer editorials, these instances by no means were written often enough to provide the full story. In order to present a more comprehensive account, first-hand interviews were necessary to fill in the gaps. A contact list of individuals involved in many of the grassroots preservation groups was provided to the author by Peter Comstock Riley, founder of Michigan and Trumbull LLC, and one of the primary individuals involved in the battles to preserve Tiger Stadium. In addition to the list provided by Mr. Riley, efforts were also made to contact both Mike Ilitch, current owner of the Detroit Tigers, and George Jackson, the president and CEO of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC). The interviews of various members of the grassroots preservation movements were conducted in December, 2011, during a trip to Michigan. Although the same boilerplate questions were asked of all interview subjects, for the most part each was allowed to just talk, to tell their story, and to explain their particular role in the efforts to preserve the stadium and the field that remains. Possibly the most important question that was asked of all the subjects was, “What does this site mean to you?” The goal of this question was not only to gauge the differences in answers, but also to separate personal
feeling and connection from facts. This was especially true in the case of Mike Ilitch and George Jackson, two men that could be viewed as the ‘opposing side.’ This question was asked of them in the hopes of revealing any sentiment they may have towards ‘The Corner’ and the various efforts made to preserve it, as well as to determine what ‘power of place’ the site held for them. An effort was made to organize the material collected in terms of opinion and fact, in other words, whether or not a particular stream of consciousness was brought about by emotion, and if so how that emotion might color actual events that the individual was trying to relay. Although this effort was made, these emotionally influenced statements were not discounted. While emotion may have influenced certain statements, it by no means was unjustified. For often it was this very emotion that powered the will of the individual to connect so deeply to the site ultimately leading to their participation in preservation efforts. Although the results of these interviews are primarily used here to fill in the historical gaps, or describe and explain those events and opinions that were not covered in newspaper reports, ultimately their true importance lies in their ability to demonstrate ‘power of place.’ The sheer length of time and dedication that many of these individuals have devoted to this cause speaks to this power. Therefore the goal of this thesis - to portray the site of Tiger Stadium’s ‘power of place’- is achieved through material obtained from both archival research and first-hand interviews.
Examination of Utilized Source Material

In order to better understand the topic presented within this thesis, it is necessary to examine the types and nature of the sources from which it draws. There are many different categories of literature that provide these sources, and consequently it is necessary to discuss each one individually. While some of these are traditional academic secondary sources, such as books and journals, the majority of the sources that discuss the current grassroots effort are primarily provided by ephemeral publications, such as newspapers. In addition to these two literature types there is also a necessary reliance on nontraditional material, such as the social networking site Facebook. As the reader progresses through the thesis the sources utilized will continue to transform. While the history of the subject will be presented using traditional primary resources, the more recent issues will be derived strictly from more recent ephemeral sources. The following discussion will survey these sources in an attempt to understand the materials utilized for this thesis.

Books

While books cannot provide information pertaining to the most recent grassroots preservation efforts discussed within this essay, they do supply the background information that explains the reason why this efforts exists to begin with; the history of Tiger Stadium and its cultural, economic and political role within the city of Detroit. In order to understand the importance of Tiger Stadium to so many people
its history must be explained and understood. A wide variety of authors will be drawn upon to provide this history. By employing their material, material that has been researched and gathered, and more importantly for the validity of this argument, material that has been verified, a comprehensive account of the subject presented will be conveyed.

There are several key sources that will be utilized to present the history of Tiger Stadium. Some of these sources may overlap in the information they are conveying, while others, due to the date of publication, may present information which has since evolved. One of the drawbacks of utilizing books for a topic that is so current is the time that it takes to complete and publish them. In this time, while the facts presented remain the same, the circumstances they discuss can change. This is the primary reason for which these sources are only being drawn upon to narrate the history of the stadium and the varied aspects of its relationship with the city of Detroit and its citizens. While many of the current topics these books are covering do have the potential to change, the historical information they present is valuable, and it is this material that provides the history that serves as the foundation for this thesis. What many of these sources lack in terms of current information, they make up for in providing historic snapshots of sentiment and attitude.\(^1\) It will be important for this thesis to understand

\(^1\) One such book is Richard Moss’, *Tiger Stadium*, published in 1976 for the Michigan Department of State, this is the earliest stadium history book sourced and is a valuable resource for understanding the relationship between the Tiger’s organization and the city in the 1970s.
how the attitude of the city of Detroit and its citizens toward Tiger Stadium has changed over time, and how these changes may be affecting the current situation.

There are several books that examine the history of Tiger Stadium and its role as a venue for sport within the city of Detroit. For the most part, all of these sources contain similar information, which explains the specific historic events that occurred at the stadium.\(^2\) The majority of the information available relates to the Detroit Tigers’ time in the stadium as this is the team for which it was built, as well as the team whose move precipitated its abandonment. Although much of the information is similar, the points of view from which this material is told do differ. For this reason it is important that several of these books are sourced for the purpose of providing the most comprehensive possible view of the stadium’s history. Each author may have interviewed different individuals or had access to different information, and most likely had different reasons for writing his book; consequently a quote that illustrates the historic significance of the stadium in one book may not be present in another.

Although this thesis will rely on several different books for historical information, there are a few books that will be referenced more than others. One of these is Richard Bak’s *A Place For Summer: A Narrative History of Tiger Stadium*.\(^3\) Bak is a prolific freelance writer, a resident of Michigan, and an expert on the Detroit Tigers, Tiger

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\(^2\) Most of these center around the sporting organizations that have called the stadium home, primarily the Major League Baseball organization the Detroit Tigers and the National Football League organization the Detroit Lions.

Stadium, and the history of baseball in Detroit. He has published several books, all of which will be utilized to present different aspects of the Tiger Stadium story throughout this thesis. But *A Place for Summer*..., will be utilized for its content more heavily than the others. Published in 1998 by Wayne State University Press, *A Place for Summer*... is the book of Mr. Bak’s which most thoroughly conveys the history of the stadium and the historic events which occurred within its confines. In contrast to his other works, this book looks at the history of the sites of baseball in Detroit dating back to the 1850s, and specifically Tiger Stadium and its site from its earliest use as the western hay market in the city, to its impending abandonment in 1997. Along the way Bak details the significant players, both athletic and administrative, in the history of the organization. He explains how these individuals contributed to the success, and at times failure, of the organization, illustrating what effects these actions had on the stadium and the city of Detroit. By the time of its publication the fate of the stadium as the home of the Detroit Tigers had already been decided and much of the conflict that occurred prior to this decision is presented in this book. It contains many player and staff interviews, which offer valuable insight into the inner workings of the organization, and their opinions regarding the decision to build a new stadium. Bak also adeptly illustrates the attitudes

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—. *Cobb Would Have Caught It*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1991;
of the fans regarding the stadium, taking care to present both sides of the Tiger Stadium abandonment issue. Because it was published in 1998, this book does not contain any information pertaining to the state of the stadium after its abandonment, its eventual demise, or the current efforts to preserve its playing field. As mentioned above, this is the disadvantage of relying on books for the bulk of the information regarding the core of this discussion.

The second book which will be frequently referenced is Michael Betzold and Ethan Casey’s *Queen of Diamonds: The Tiger Stadium Story*. Written by former Detroit News reporter and Tiger Stadium Fan Club member Michael Betzold, and international reporter Ethan Casey, this book presents the most comprehensive material available. Due to Mr. Betzold’s membership in the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, this source presents a much more detailed account of the Fan Club’s struggles to preserve the stadium. Consequently, it contains a plethora of useful comments and opinions presented from the Fan Club’s perspective, a point of view that was much maligned and often absent from newspaper articles published during the Fan Club’s active years from 1987 to 1999. Although Betzold and Casey do present a thorough history of Tiger Stadium, it is the information relating to the stadium’s last years and the Fan Club’s efforts that will be primarily utilized for this thesis.

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As mentioned above the majority of the published sources cited in this thesis will relate to the history of Tiger Stadium, however there are other subjects where they will be relied upon to provide valuable information and insight. These include the cultural, economic and political issues pertaining to Detroit and Tiger Stadium, all of which contributed to the stadium’s eventual abandonment. There are many books that examine different aspects of these issues. It is useful for the purpose of this thesis to examine these issues in order to determine how they may have ultimately affected Tiger Stadium’s preservation. Therefore, the aforementioned disadvantages caused by using books as a source, are not applicable to these topics for the purpose of this thesis.

Although culture is constantly evolving, the events that have placed Detroit and the stadium’s role within it in its current predicament have been occurring for decades; the racial divide that exists within the city did not happen overnight, and did not occur within the last ten years. Rather it is an issue that has been present for over half a century. Of the three books cited throughout this thesis, both Betzold and Casey’s *Queen of Diamonds* and Bak’s *A Place for Summer*... pertain to the general cultural state of affairs within the city of Detroit. The third source, Bak’s *Turkey Stearnes and the Detroit Stars: The Negro Leagues in Detroit, 1919-1933*, will help to relate these racial issues to the Detroit Tigers’ organization.6 The general overview of the racial divide evident within Detroit and its historical relationship to Tiger Stadium provided within these resources is essential to understand the plight of the site and the racial bias that is

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often presented as a possible component of its preservation failure. The books utilized for this purpose present this information in a comprehensive and well researched form which will help to substantiate the arguments presented in this thesis.

**Academic Journals**

Academic journal articles, like books, will be sources that are often utilized throughout this report. The advantages that they present are very similar to books in regards to the validity of their contents in the sense that they present well researched, cited information. However, unlike books, due to their relatively shorter length and the timely manner of the publications in which they are printed, they do not take as much time to research, write and publish. As a result the subject is often more focused and up to date, as the time required to comprehensively write about a broader topic is often prohibitive to journal publishing. Therefore, several journal articles will be utilized as resources which pertain to Tiger Stadium or Detroit. Having said that, not a single of the articles utilized as resources relates specifically to the core concern of this thesis: the grassroots preservation efforts that are currently underway at the former Tiger Stadium site. However, several articles will be employed that relate directly to the cultural, economic and political issues that actively contributed to the stadium preservation’s failure.

The most valuable and pertinent of these is attorney Andy Jacoby’s “Demolition By Neglect In Detroit And The Battle To Save Historic Tiger Stadium: Lessons for
Baseball Park Preservationists.”⁷ Jacoby, a former resident of Ann Arbor, Michigan, presents a detailed account of the Federal, State, and Local laws and ordinances that were utilized to try and protect Tiger Stadium. Invaluable from a legal research standpoint, this article not only details the laws in layman’s terms, but also offers the most recent survey of the preservation battle available thus far. He discusses the legal battle over the use of public funds for new stadium construction and the demolition of Tiger Stadium. He also provides a detailed, unbiased account of the legal and political methods utilized by the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy in the fight to preserve and re-use the stadium. Although the stadium’s legal battle is not the primary focus of this thesis, it is an important component. As a result, Mr. Jacoby’s article is a fundamental source from which to draw legal information.

Aside from Jacoby’s article, there are numerous other articles that will be used throughout this thesis as sources for important cultural and economic information. Like Mr. Jacoby’s article, these also present these types of information as they directly relate to Tiger Stadium. Unlike the books that will be utilized for the same purpose which generally cast a larger net of information, many of these articles such as Peter Eisinger’s “Reimagining Detroit” and John D. Fairfield’s “The Park In the City: Baseball Landscapes Civically Considered” provide a narrower focus.⁸ While Eisinger’s article relates Tiger

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Stadium directly towards feelings of racial prejudice, Fairfield’s work examines Tiger Stadium from the perspective of Urban Renewal and the supposed economic development benefits of new stadium construction.

**Ephemeral Sources**

By necessity newspaper and magazine articles have been counted on to provide the bulk of the information concerning the current attempts at preserving the playing field of Tiger Stadium. The reason for this is exactly what the subject matter suggests; this is a current battle, not a battle that occurred in the past. Consequently the majority of existing information is found in these types of ephemeral resources whose very purpose is to report the issues as they occur. In the course of utilizing these resources the author is aware of the inherent pitfalls, not the least of which is the potential for biased, inaccurate, or incomplete reporting. It is often the case that a specific newspaper may be known for presenting the news from a particular point of view. Like cable news programs that represent the views of a particular political party, newspapers often practice similar tactics. In the case of the fight to preserve Tiger Stadium, both *The Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* predominantly published articles that supported the city’s perspective, oftentimes giving the efforts of the preservation organizations little press. Therefore, in order to minimize covering only these limited sources, the author has attempted to cast a wide net pertaining to the scope of newspapers that this thesis will draw from. This means not merely relying on the two primary newspapers of the city of Detroit to obtain information, *The Detroit News* and
the *Detroit Free Press* but also regional sources, such as the *Metro Times*, a small weekly independent periodical that serves the greater metropolitan Detroit area, the *Windsor Star* from Windsor, Ontario, Canada and the *Toledo Blade* from Toledo, Ohio. Although Tiger Stadium was located in Detroit, the teams that played within in its confines had a fan base that reached well outside of the city limits. Therefore, the ongoing saga regarding the existing playing field’s condition and future is an issue that concerns many more readers than just those who live in Detroit. In addition to the possible bias that may be exhibited by a specific newspaper, there is also the potential for bias by a particular writer. For instance, in the case of the *Detroit Free Press* there are several reporters who have written about Tiger Stadium, most notably Jennifer Dixon and John Gallagher, but not all of them have presented the issues from the same viewpoint. John Gallagher’s articles primarily presented the city’s perspective highlighting its big box re-development options, while Jennifer Dixon repeatedly contributed articles that described the various preservation proposals. When possible, an effort has been made to determine the motives behind these articles, and whether or not they were stories that were suggested by the editors of the paper, or written at the initiative of the individual reporter. Consequently, this author has made every attempt to survey the work of several reporters, and not merely focus on the written product of one individual.

Aside from the potential for bias, there are other disadvantages to relying on newspapers as sources. One of these is timeliness. Earlier in the discussion regarding
other sources, specifically books, the time that it took for them to be published was a disadvantage. This is not the circumstance with newspaper articles; instead in their case this up-to-the-minute reporting can sometimes actually be detrimental to the articles’ accuracy. What books lack in timeliness they are supposed to make up for in well researched, cited material. Newspaper articles do not have this benefit, it is their job to report the news everyday as it happens and sometimes in the process information is misconstrued or incorrectly reported. Utilization of several newspaper sources will decrease the chance of this occurrence. It is the practice of newspapers to print retractions or corrections when information that has previously been reported is determined to be incorrect. It is for that reason that these sources have been constantly monitored throughout the course of research in order to catch any discrepancies and corrections that have been made to all source material.

The negative aspects of employing ephemeral sources are compensated by the up-to-date character of their work. The preservation effort that is the main subject of this thesis is a process that is currently ongoing. Consequently, the only comprehensive information that presently exists concerning efforts to preserve the site of Tiger Stadium is ephemeral. Until someone publishes this thesis, a comprehensive and documented resource on the efforts to preserve Tiger Stadium will not exist. As a result, this author acknowledges that the research for this thesis will terminate before the fate of the playing field has been decided. At this time the preservation efforts continue, and consequently there is still hope.
Newspapers and magazines are not the only ephemeral sources that will be utilized throughout the course of this thesis. The social networking site Facebook will also be frequently referenced. Although this source is a bit unorthodox for academic writing, due to the immediate nature of current technology it is a source that documents what happens as its happening. The ways in which people are receiving their news has greatly evolved, from the daily publishing of newspapers, to the regularly scheduled television news, to entire cable news networks, to the now up-to-the-minute technology offered by social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. For instance, when there is a disturbance at the Tiger Stadium site, or the various organizations involved in its maintenance are meeting to work on it, this information is immediately available on Facebook. By monitoring these sites the author was able to determine how often preservation groups such as the Navin Field Grounds Crew were meeting at the site of Tiger Stadium. It is also through these sites that the author became aware of many pertinent newspaper articles, for anytime an article was published that related to the Tiger Stadium site, someone on Facebook would post a link to that article on one of the fan sites. Once an article was posted to Facebook, the author would then check all of the aforementioned newspapers to determine whether or not the story was reported by all of the monitored periodicals. There are numerous fan pages devoted to Tiger Stadium and the built environment of Detroit on Facebook, and although all of them have been monitored throughout the course of this research, there is one in particular that will be referenced with more regularity: “The Spirit of
This page serves as the sounding board for all things related to Tiger Stadium. In the creator of the site’s words, this page is “For anyone who loved Tiger Stadium as if it was a Second Home. For those who do not want its spirit to die with the structure being Demolished. Then I have one question why let it die? As Spring and summer are upon us, it is time to come together!”

Books, journal articles, newspapers and magazines are resources written by scholars and professional reporters, what is written on this Facebook page is written by the people, the very people whose efforts are the impetus for this thesis.

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10 Ibid.
Chapter 1

To Decipher the Present, One has to Understand the Past

Bennett Park and Early Baseball in Detroit

For over a hundred and fifty years the northwest corner of Michigan and Trumbull in Detroit has been a place for the congregation of the public. A location that has been witness to the history of Michigan for over three hundred years, it was first settled as a ribbon farm in 1747 by Frank Navarre, a descendant of France’s King Henry IV, as a reward from the governor-general of Canada for services rendered as the civic affairs officer of Detroit’s Fort Ponchartrain. The use of the land continued in a similar agricultural fashion into the 1840s. During this span the land would be designated as the western boundary of the city, Trumbull Avenue, and in the 1820s under the ownership and supervision of William Woodbridge, would witness the construction of the Chicago Road, later to be known as Michigan Avenue; the first road connecting Detroit to Chicago, which ran directly through the property. The emergence of this intersection, and the commerce it would produce, created a new neighborhood in Detroit: Corktown. This neighborhood so named for the influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s from County Cork who had fled the ravaging effects of the potato famine in their home country, settled on property leased from Woodbridge in this new land of potential and prosperity. This neighborhood today is recognized as the oldest in

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11 Betzold and Casey, 21.
Due to the rapid growth of the city, and of the neighborhood of Corktown in particular, Woodbridge decided to set aside a space where the public could congregate to enjoy the beauty of nature amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life. The place he would set aside for the public to picnic: the northwest corner of Michigan and Trumbull. Woodbridge Grove as it would come to be known, was a heavily shaded area of hardwood, fruit, and nut trees which offered a perfect respite for the people of Corktown. In their book *Queen of Diamonds: The Tiger Stadium Story*, Betzold and Casey describe how “The spot became so popular that Woodbridge in the 1850s hired a man named Captain Quigly to schedule picnics and to supervise and maintain the grove,” in effect creating the first groundskeeper for the site. From this time on, this corner of Michigan and Trumbull would always be designated for public use and enjoyment. In 1875, Dudley, the son of William Woodbridge, leased the land to the city of Detroit to be used as the site of the city’s western hay and wood market (Figure 1-1), later known as simply Western.

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14 Ibid, 55.
15 Betzold and Casey, 22.
Market. It would continue to function in this manner until 1895 when George Arthur Van der Beck came shopping for a new site for his burgeoning Western League baseball team: the Detroit Tigers.

By the mid-1890s Detroit had a near forty-year history with baseball, and had been a front row witness to the changes in leagues and changes in the game. Prior to Van der Beck’s Tigers, Detroit had fielded professional teams with names such as the Detroiters, the Wolverines, and the Creams. The Tigers were created when sportswriter and Western League President Ban Johnson went looking for a team in Detroit to join his newly formed League in 1894. With this inclusion in the Western League came the prospect of larger crowds, a possibility that Van der Beck welcomed, for he was interested in building a new larger stadium to replace the 3,500 seat Recreation Park. ‘The Corner,’ as it would come to be known, offered the perfect site.

In 1895 Van der Beck started construction of his new ballpark, a stadium that would be named for beloved former Wolverines’ catcher Charlie Bennett who had lost portions of both his legs while trying to board a moving train in Kansas during a hunting trip. Bennett Park opened on Tuesday April 28, 1896 when the Detroit Tigers played host to the visiting team from Columbus, Ohio a game they would win 17-2.
Bennett Park (Figure 1-2) was laid out with home plate sitting near the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, with a first base line that ran north parallel to Trumbull Ave., and a third base line that paralleled Michigan Ave. to the west; a configuration that proved troublesome, for it forced batters to face the setting sun in games that were scheduled in the afternoon. As Richard Bak explains, “An L-shaped wooden grandstand was erected behind home plate and the third base line. Bleachers were built along the first-base line, creating a total seating capacity of approximately five thousand. Fans bought tickets and entered the park at the main gate at Michigan and Trumbull.”

Other than these accommodations the only other structures on the field were a clubhouse for players built in deep center field, and a fence surrounding the park which was conveniently adorned with advertisements touting the wares of the company which had constructed it, Walker & Co.

In 1900 Ban Johnson’s Western League was re-structured into what is now the American League. This League restructuring also ushered in another change, a change

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23 Ibid, 57.
in Tigers’ ownership. On March 6, 1900, George Arthur Van der Beck sold the Tigers to James D. Burns for twelve thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{25} Burns was the son of a brick manufacturer credited with supplying the bricks for many of Detroit’s nineteenth-century downtown structures. He owned a saloon on Michigan Avenue and ran the Cadillac Athletic Company, an establishment known for its production of world champion boxers.\textsuperscript{26} Burns ran the Tigers with the help of George Stallings, the team’s manager and stockholder, with whose assistance he made some improvements such as leveling out the field and extending the first baseline stands.\textsuperscript{27} On November 14, 1901, the team was sold again, this time to Samuel F. Angus, a railroad and insurance man. Angus held on to the team for nearly two years before selling to William H. Yawkey (Figure 1-3) on January 22, 1904.\textsuperscript{28} Yawkey, the same man later to be so widely associated with the Boston Red Sox, was the heir to a ten-million-dollar lumber fortune.\textsuperscript{29} This change in ownership would be instrumental for the Tigers for the next several decades, as the

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Bill Yawkey (left) and Frank Navin, Undated Photograph. Bak, \textit{A Place For Summer: A Narrative History of Tiger Stadium}, 93.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 71.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
man who had negotiated the sale to Yawkey was none other than Angus’ bookkeeper, Frank Navin, whom Yawkey would retain as part of his front office staff. Gradually Navin acquired more responsibility within the organization, filling the roles of secretary, treasurer, advertising manager, and main ticket seller. Eventually Yawkey allowed Navin to buy up stock in the team, and by 1907 he owned half the organization.

According to Bak, “Yawkey, who was moving to New York (where he would quadruple his fortune to $40 million), magnanimously lent Navin the money for the down payment and named him president. The young multi-millionaire remained a silent partner until he died of a heart attack in the spring of 1919.” In addition to his new role as president, Navin was also making changes to the stadium. In time for the 1908 season he added a two thousand seat bleacher section along right field and an additional three thousand reserved seats on either side of the grandstand. As a result of these changes and their infringement onto the field, the diamond itself was also moved forty feet towards the outfield. The additions to the park were not the only changes occurring at Bennett Park. The rise in available seating and the success achieved by the team from the pennant wins of 1907-1908-1909, brought about a new class of patron, the autoworker. This new form of industry would generate not just cars, but lifelong Tiger

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 94.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 95.
34 “It’s an odd fact that baseball at Michigan and Trumbull and the automobile arrived within weeks and blocks of each other.” Ibid, 95.
fans for decades to come, and what they came to see were not just the games, but the legends who would come to call ‘The Corner’ home.

During this time in Bennett Park there were several notable figures that played for the Tigers. One of the most well-known players who is not often remembered for his time in Detroit was George “Rube” Waddell.\(^{35}\) Waddell, a future hall of famer for the Philadelphia Athletics, pitched for Detroit in 1898. Baseball has always been filled with its characters, and Waddell was perhaps one of its greatest. In addition to his astonishing pitching talent, Waddell was known to be easily distracted. Often times opposing crowds would hold up puppies in the stands to break his concentration. Waddell also had to be restrained whenever fire engines passed by the stadium, for he could not possibly contain his curiosity and was known to leave the game in the middle of pitching to give chase.\(^{36}\) Whatever his quirks, Waddell was one of the greatest pitchers, a fact he exhibited on May 17, 1898, when he set a Western League record by striking out eleven Minneapolis batters in Detroit.\(^{37}\)

Waddell was not the only great player to call Bennett Park home, Hall of Fame outfielder “Wahoo Sam” Crawford played for Detroit from 1903-1917. Crawford, a powerful hitter, still holds the Major League Baseball record for inside-the-park home runs with twelve in 1901.\(^{38}\) He also holds the Major League record for triples with three

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 62.
\(^{37}\) Bak, 1998, 62
hundred and twelve, and had a lifetime batting average of .309.\(^{39}\) Possibly his most important role for the Tigers was his instrumental play in their three consecutive pennant victories from 1907-1909. Perhaps the greatest player to ever don the uniform adorned with the old English D, or walk the field at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, also started playing for the Tigers during this time. This man was none other than the great Ty Cobb.

The Georgia Peach, Ty Cobb (Figure 1-4), is widely considered to be the greatest baseball player who ever lived.\(^{40}\) The first man to ever be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame played almost his entire career in Detroit. Signed out of his home state of Georgia, Tyrus Raymond Cobb played for the Tigers from 1905-1926, all but three years of his illustrious career. His statistics are nothing short of astounding.\(^{41}\) Legendary as they

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.

Lifetime batting average: .367
Triples: 297
Hits: 4,191
Batting Titles: 12 (including 9 in a row)
Seasons in which he hit over .300: 23
Seasons in which he hit over .400: 3 (including an average of .420 in 1911)
are, these statistics illustrate only half the story. Cobb played with heart, he was relentless, some would say notorious and not in a positive way. He was known to sharpen the spikes of his baseball cleats, and sometimes had the tendency to slide into base with these razors pointed up effectively spiking the defensive player. Although Cobb is often remembered for this feistiness, his skills as a player far outweigh his sometime unsavory tactics; in short he was nothing less than a baseball genius. In addition to Sam Crawford, it is the signing of Ty Cobb in the beginning of his meteoric rise to baseball legend that will help the Tigers to secure the three pennants from 1907-1909.

The pennant success, and the rising need for more seating were the impetus behind the biggest change at Michigan and Trumbull: a new stadium. For many years Navin had been combatting the erection of wildcat seats, small bleacher sections of seats that were constructed outside of his control behind the outfield fences. This was a predicament he was unable to prohibit, for many of these stands were built on private property that ran along the east side of National Street on the west side of the park. The Tiger’s organization had tried various tactics in the past in order to deter their use, including hanging canvas in front of them, and even taking the various proprietors to court; but nothing seemed to work; they just built higher. The only solution that Navin could see was to construct a new stadium, a prospect that also afforded him the advantage of creating more seating and altering the orientation of the diamond itself.

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Runs: 2,245
Stolen bases: 892
Consequently during the winter of 1911-1912 Bennett Park was demolished, and in its place would rise the modern concrete and steel Navin Field, a structure that would see many additions, come to be known by several names, and be loved by millions until 2009.

**Navin Field: The Birth of a Landmark**

On Saturday April 20, 1912, the same day that Fenway Park opened in Boston, the first game was played at Navin Field (Figure 1-5). A 6-5 win over the Cleveland Indians, then known as the Cleveland Naps, with the first hit coming from Cleveland’s Shoeless Joe Jackson, the game was meant to have been played two days prior on the 18th, but rain and superstition forced the two day delay.\(^{42}\)

Navin’s new stadium, constructed by Osborn Engineering Company, a Cleveland firm still in existence today, was

\(^{42}\) Navin believed that Friday was an unlucky day on which to start the season, let alone christen a brand new ballpark. Bak, 1998, 117.
built of concrete and steel; its horseshoe-shaped grandstand followed the baselines of the new diamond roughly two hundred feet in each direction. As noted by Richard Bak:

A covered pavilion connected each end of the grandstand to the outfield corners. When completed, the park seated twenty-three thousand people, nearly five times the capacity of Bennett Park when it was built fifteen years earlier. Navin Field cost co-owners Navin and Bill Yawkey three hundred thousand dollars. Today, an identical project would cost about $50 million. Navin Field was a sight to behold. It covered an area nearly twice the size of Bennett Park. With no circus bleachers, or other obstacles to clutter the outfield, there was a symmetry to the field and more space to play. The new outfield dimensions were 365 feet down the right-field line, 400 feet to center, and 340 feet down the left-field line. A giant American flag flew from the 125-foot–high flagpole in center field. The flagpole still dominates Tiger Stadium’s skyline and remains the tallest obstacle ever built in fair territory inside a major–league park.\footnote{Ibid, 119.} Navin’s purchase of the properties along the east side of National Street and the south side of Cherry Street, allowed for a larger park and a new orientation for the diamond.

The players would now bat from a home plate that was located near the northeast corner of Michigan and National, eliminating the obstructive western alignment that had affected the play at Bennett Park. In addition to this favorable positioning, the acquisition of this property also eliminated the potential for wildcat stands, as the newly constructed stadium now abutted the streets on all four sides.

With this new and improved ballpark, Navin could create the controlled atmosphere that had been lacking at Bennett Park, as well as bring baseball to Detroit on an even larger scale. Unfortunately, the potential for increased crowds at Navin Field was hindered by a force much larger than a desire to witness America’s game: World

\footnote{Ibid, 122.}
War I. With the onset of the war the nation’s focus and its manpower were shifted overseas resulting in a reduction in attendance that was felt throughout both the American and National Leagues. It wouldn’t be until after the war’s end and the 1919 season that the fans would once again crowd the corner of Michigan and Trumbull to witness the brilliant play of Ty Cobb and company. The following season ‘The Corner’ would bounce back from the anemic crowds of the war years and usher in an era of stadium attendance milestones, with a league record 643,805 fans in 1919.\(^{45}\) Perhaps as insurance during future times of hardship, Navin decided to take on co-owners, and in 1920 Walter Briggs and John Kelsey each acquired one quarter of the Tigers’ organization. Both Kelsey and Briggs were members of Detroit’s rising automotive aristocracy; Kelsey as a wheel manufacturer, and Briggs as a producer of automobile bodies.\(^{46}\) This would not be the only change Navin would institute in 1920 that seemed to signify a tightening financial belt, for this year would also witness the installation of the player-manager in Detroit, and what better man for the job than Ty Cobb?

By 1920 Cobb had been playing for the people of Detroit for fifteen years, he had known no other team in professional baseball, and although his genius on the field was still evident the game of baseball had changed. With the introduction of a new tighter-wound ball and with it the demise of what came to be known as the ‘Dead Ball Era,’ Ty Cobb’s finesse game gave way to a new style of play; the emergence of the power hitter. No longer was it a game of inside-the-park homeruns, and clever plays to gain

\(^{45}\) Bak, 1998, 127.  
\(^{46}\) Betzold and Casey 1997, 43.
field advantage, now it was a game of powerful batters and out of the park homeruns. Into this era stepped the only man who could arguably battle Cobb for the title of the greatest player who ever lived: George Herman Ruth. To Cobb, Babe Ruth represented the erosion of his style of baseball, and the relationship of animosity that would grow out of this contrast would be representative of a rivalry that would eventually completely transform the game of baseball. Although Cobb respected Ruth for his ability, he did not appreciate the way in which that ability changed the game. This sentiment is exemplified by Cobb in his autobiography, *My Life in Baseball: The True Record* when he states, “I can’t honestly say that I appreciate the way in which he changed baseball — from a game of science to an extension of his powerful slugging — but he was the most natural and unaffected man I ever knew. No one ever loved life more. No one ever inspired more youngsters. I have reverence for his marvelous ability. I look forward to meeting him again someday.”  

While he was genuine in his admiration of Ruth’s ability, he was not enamored with the shape in which Ruth kept his form. Cobb, as a man known for his exceptional speed, was conscientious of his shape, and consequently had no respect for Ruth’s, evident in his description of Ruth when he said, “If he’d ever been sawed in half, I think three-fourths of the Yankee Stadium concessions would have been found inside of him.”  

For his part, Ruth also respected and felt animosity towards Cobb, and was once quoted as saying, “(Ty) Cobb is a prick.

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47 Cobb and Stump, *My Life In Baseball*, 222.

But he sure can hit. God Almighty, that man can hit.”49 This fierce rivalry continued for years, bringing crowds to Navin Field to witness not only the feats of their hometown heroes, but also the homerun blasts of the legendary Ruth. This surge in attendance prompted Navin to construct a couple of additions to his ball park. During the winter of 1922-1923 he added a press box to the roof, and a second story to the horseshoe shaped grandstand behind home plate, effectively increasing the seating capacity of the stadium to 30,000.50 It was in this configuration that the highly heated and competitive head to head battles between the Yankees and the Tigers finally erupted in Detroit in the summer of 1924. As Michael Betzold and Ethan Casey relate:

In a game in June 1924 at Navin Field, the rivalry between the game’s two greatest players exploded. When the Tigers’ Bert “King” Cole hit the Yankee’s Bob Meusel with a pitch, both benches emptied and Cobb and Ruth rolled in the dirt at home plate. Some of the fans tore seats from their concrete moorings and threw them on the field. About a thousand patrons joined in the brawl, which lasted thirty minutes. The game was forfeited to New York.51

Although the riots would not continue in future match-ups, the intensity, the high levels of attendance, and the milestones attained at ‘The Corner’ would continue to be indicative of games between the two teams.52 In fact, perhaps the most notable of milestones achieved at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull in all of its 103 years of baseball history, were a product of this rivalry, and more specifically a product of Babe

50 The only other press box in existence at this time was at the newly constructed Yankee Stadium. Betzold and Casey, 43.
51 Ibid, 4.
52 Navin Field set annual attendance records in 1922 with 861,206, in 1923 with 911,000, and in 1924 with more than a 1,000,000; second only to the Yankees in the Major Leagues. In 1924 the each of the two home games between the Yankees and the Tigers would attract 40,000 people. Bak, 1998, 137-138.
Ruth. For on June 8, 1926 Ruth would hit what is considered to be the longest homerun in baseball history, a 626 foot bomb over the twelve-foot wall in right center field.\textsuperscript{53} As Betzold and Casey tell it, “The ball landed on the other side of Trumbull, skimmed over several parked cars, and rolled down Cherry Street. A boy on a bicycle caught up to it at Brooklyn Avenue, two blocks from the ballpark.”\textsuperscript{54} Eight years later on June 13, 1934, Ruth would reach another milestone in Detroit when he hit his 700\textsuperscript{th} career homerun out of Navin Field, a record that would stand for forty years before Hank Aaron surpassed it in 1974.\textsuperscript{55}

**The 1930s: The Depression, the G-Men, the Lions, Joe, and Lou**

The latter half of the 1920s was a time of change in Detroit, as well as the nation. In 1926 Ty Cobb retired, only to re-emerge the following season in Philadelphia where he would play the final two seasons of his career for the Athletics. His departure signaled the end of an era in Detroit and with it the acceptance of the power hitter style of play. The departure of Cobb was not the only change in the Tigers’ organization. In 1927 Walter Briggs bought John Kelsey’s share of the team, becoming half owner in the process. But the biggest change to affect the Tigers at the end of the decade was the dilemma that by this time had engulfed the entire nation: the Depression.

\textsuperscript{53} Betzold and Casey, 45.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 45.
The Depression, like World War I before it, brought about dismal attendance at Navin Field. The number of fans that could afford to attend games at ‘The Corner’ was extremely low, with single game attendance dropping from 11,290 to 4,115. In 1929 overall attendance at Navin Field was 10.1 million, by 1933 this number had trickled down to 6.3 million. The Depression and consequently this drop in attendance precipitated frugality in the organization; players saw their salaries cut twenty percent, player-managers were now considered commonplace, and Navin even had to borrow money from the bank to send the team to spring training. Navin began to schedule other events at the park hoping to draw crowds and make money; donkey baseball, and wrestling and boxing matches were just a few of the events that supplemented the income loss. With the tough times of the Depression, Navin Field became the rallying point for its surrounding neighborhood of Corktown; for the neighbors of the ballpark its patrons represented a source of money. Game days signaled a time when the people surrounding the park could make a little extra money parking cars. The ballpark also served as a respite from the struggles of the time as children from the neighborhood were often allowed to watch the games for free. As Alice Conway a resident of Corktown during the Depression recalled:

“When they put up Checker Cab on Trumbull, people used to go up on the roof and watch the game,...They didn’t charge anyone for that. Anyone in the

\[56\] Bak, 150-151.
\[57\] Ibid.
\[58\] Ibid.
\[59\] Betzold and Casey, 49-50.
\[60\] Betzold and Casey, 49.
neighborhood could do that. We took the ballpark for granted. A lot of the people in the neighborhood worked there. Even during the Depression there was always a job at the ballpark. It was a place where you could always get a few dollars, though the Tigers were never known for being very generous. It was always like everything in the neighborhood revolved around the stadium."

Essentially Navin Field was the community center of the neighborhood; it offered the people of Corktown a source of income, and perhaps more importantly a source of entertainment, a place where they could go to escape the struggles of the Depression.

Although the Depression ushered in an era of financial frugality to the ‘The Corner’, the ‘30s were not an altogether negative time for sports in Detroit, for it would be during this decade that the Tigers and the city of Detroit would witness their first pennant win since 1909. Prior to leaving Detroit, Cobb had acquired one of the most instrumental players to ever wear the Tiger’s uniform: Charlie Gehringer. It would be the play of Gehringer, Leon “Goose” Goslin, and Hank Greenberg, collectively known as the G-Men, along with player manager Mickey Cochrane (all future Hall of Famers), that would turn the tide. Cobb’s departure had signaled more than just a shift in style of play, it had also ushered in several seasons of losing. The acquisition of Goslin, and especially Cochrane, in 1933 put a stop to the bleeding. Cochrane had been a star for Connie Mack’s Philadelphia Athletics, and had it not been for Mack’s financial woes caused by the Depression, the Tigers never would have had acquired him. In fact, had it not been for Walter Briggs’ loan of $100,000 for the trade, Navin never would have

\[\text{References:}\]
61 Ibid, 49-50.
been able to afford him.\textsuperscript{63} Cochrane brought with him not only a mentality allergic to losing, but a batting average that had helped to propel the Athletics to pennant wins in 1929, 1930 and 1931.\textsuperscript{64} Goslin’s background was just as impressive. While playing for his previous team the Washington Senators, Goslin had already acquired one batting title, three pennant wins, and a World Series title.\textsuperscript{65} Gehringer and Greenberg were no slouches themselves. Gehringer, nicknamed the Mechanical Man for his incredible consistency, would play his entire career for the Tigers from 1924-1942, during which time he batted over .300 for thirteen seasons, amassed a lifetime batting average of .321 and collected the American League MVP honors in 1937.\textsuperscript{66} Greenberg, who would be the first Jewish man inducted into the Hall of Fame, would play all but one of his thirteen Major League seasons in Detroit, during which time he also took a four year break from 1941-1945 to fight in World War II.\textsuperscript{67} Aside from his off the field contributions, Greenberg’s baseball statistics were also impressive; during his career with the Tigers he hit a total of 331 homeruns, making a run at Babe Ruth’s single season record with 58 in 1938, amassed a lifetime batting average of .313, batted .318

\begin{footnotes}
\item[63] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
in four World Series for Detroit, and garnered the MVP award in 1935. These G-Men, to say nothing of the pitching talents of Eldon Auker, Tommy Bridges, and Lynwood “Schoolboy” Rowe, would propel the Tigers to pennant wins in 1934 and 1935, finally resulting in a World Series win over the Chicago Cubs in 1935.

As a result of this success, Navin once again increased the seating capacity of his ballpark. Between the 1934 and 1935 seasons, the remaining residents along Cherry Street were evicted and the left field wall was demolished, enabling Navin to construct a bleacher section capable of holding an additional 17,000 fans (Figure 1-6). After the Tigers won the 1935 World Series the following season Navin decided that in order to accommodate the baseball crazy fans of Detroit his ballpark was due for another major expansion. Unfortunately, before he was able to even begin the work on the stadium he suffered a heart attack and died while horseback riding. Walter Briggs was now able to fulfill a lifelong dream to own the ball club, a goal he had set for himself years earlier.

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68 Ibid.  
69 Betzold and Casey, 50.  
70 Bak, 1998, 176.
when as a young man he had been refused entrance to the park.\textsuperscript{71} For $1,000,000 Briggs purchased the remaining shares of the team from Navin’s heirs; the job of expanding the stadium would now fall on Briggs’ shoulders.\textsuperscript{72}

In the winter of 1935-1936 Briggs began the first of two expansions to his stadium; once again Osborne Engineering was hired to design these enlargements. The first addition, which increased the seating capacity of the stadium to 36,000, extended the two-story grandstand down the first base line and into right field, an expansion that posed a bit of a problem for its proximity to Trumbull Avenue, an obstacle that could not be altered.\textsuperscript{73} As Richard Bak explains:

Osborne remedied the space problem by moving the right-field fence forty-two feet closer to the plate. However, the lower deck stands were still distressingly narrow. To compensate, Briggs ordered Osborn to widen the upper deck by ten feet in both directions. This accounted for the bulge in the park’s outer wall along Trumbull and for the famous porch that hangs over right field. The addition increased seating capacity to thirty-six thousand. Not only was the distance down the right-field line pared to just 325 feet, a ball lifted high enough only had to travel 315 feet before plopping into the upper deck instead of the waiting outfielder’s mitt – a cheap home run, complained generations of frustrated flyhawks, but a home run nonetheless.\textsuperscript{74} The unusual porch created in this expansion would come to be known as one of the key features of Navin Field, a unique alteration that was indicative of expansions of early stadiums forced to conform to their neighborhood confines. Two seasons later during the winter of 1937-1938, Briggs took on the second of the two expansions, an

\textsuperscript{71} Betzold and Casey, 42.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 55.
\textsuperscript{73} Bak, 1998, 176.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 176-177.
addition that would cost the auto body tycoon $1,000,000.\textsuperscript{75} He razed the third base pavilion and extended the two storied grandstand around the left field foul pole and along the now closed Cherry Street, this expansion would be connected to its two year old brother in right field by a two storied bleacher section in center field.\textsuperscript{76} This new addition would create the first stadium in Major League baseball to be completely enclosed and to have a double deck that extended all the way around the field, creating enough room for 53,000 Tiger fans. These improvements were not the only ones that Briggs made. In addition to the stands he also added a huge hand-operated scoreboard with room for advertisements on either side atop the upper level bleachers, as well as creating a new press box which hung below the grandstand roof, much to the delight of the reporters who had loathed the old box.\textsuperscript{77} The effect this enclosed space created when entering the park was nearly magical. As Don Shapiro recalls:

> The thing about Tiger Stadium...is when you enter the stadium it’s a cavernous place, inside. I think that’s part of the attraction of the old stadiums. There’s a certain aesthetic, in that you enter the stadium, and you’re surrounded by concrete. You could be in the basement of a huge factory. It’s just concrete, and pillars. There’s nothing particularly attractive about it; it was dark, very dark. But part of the joy, and the thrill, and the ecstasy-the epiphany was walking up the ramp and suddenly emerging to see the green prairie, and the sunlight. It was fantastic: from darkness to light. It was absolutely thrilling.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 185.
\textsuperscript{76} Betzold and Casey, 57.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Walter Briggs probably didn’t know it then, but what he had created that offseason would go on to become one of the most beloved parks in the game, an icon in baseball, a ballpark that for the next twenty two years would be known as Briggs Stadium.

Walter Briggs loved baseball, and he would pay players handsomely to acquire their services in the hopes of bettering his team. But baseball players were not the only people that Briggs had in his employment; he was also the owner of Briggs Manufacturing Company, the largest independent manufacturer of car bodies in the country. A self-made millionaire, Briggs was tight with his money. While he could justify giving Dick Wakefield a fifty-two thousand dollar bonus and a new car to sign with the Tigers, he would cut wages at his auto body plant twice, only paying his employees for the time the line was actually running. Moves like this often landed Briggs in hot water with his employees, and consequently they would end up going on strike (Figure 1-7). But they wouldn’t just picket Briggs’ auto plants, they would also picket Briggs Stadium. It was not uncommon during the 1930s, and the years thereafter, to find thousands of workers picketing outside of the stadium. These instances were just further examples of the growth of Briggs Stadium’s role in the Detroit community. It was gradually becoming more than just a place where the city would go to witness baseball.

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79 Bak, 1998, 182.
80 Ibid, 183.
Nothing exemplified this burgeoning expansion of interests more than the addition of other sporting events to the field at Briggs Stadium, most notably professional football and professional boxing. The Detroit Lions of the National Football League would be added to the home team roster at Briggs Stadium in 1938, a location they would call home for the next thirty-six years (Figure 1-8).  

Although 1938 was the first year that Briggs Stadium housed an NFL team, it was not the first time that it had been home to a professional football team. Before the establishment of the National Football League, Detroit, and the then-named Navin Field, had been home to two prior incarnations of professional football: the Tigers and the Panthers, both products of the 1920s. Although the Lions called Briggs Stadium home

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81 Bak, 1998, 257.
82 Ibid, 247.
for almost three decades it was not the perfect location for football. After all, the stadium had been built as a house for baseball and the altogether different configurations of a football field were difficult to incorporate and often posed a problem for the team’s spectators. As Richard Bak explains, “The gridiron stretched from the first base line to left field. After the game some of the fans that had paid 55¢ for one of the ten thousand unreserved seats complained that the coaches and players standing along the sideline had obstructed their view.” But even with the configuration issues, the Lions, like the Tigers of baseball, would create many milestones during their time in Detroit. Possibly the most enduring is their annual Thanksgiving Day game, a tradition which had its start in 1934 when the Lions played at Dinan Field, but witnessed many of its most intense moments during their time at Briggs Stadium. Although the NFL’s Lions

Figure 1-8: Lions Playing in Briggs Stadium, October 16, 1938
Wayne State University, “Football; Detroit Lions; Crowds,” Virtual Motor City, http://dlxs.lib.wayne.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?q1=detroit%20lions;rgn1=vmc_all;op2=And;rgn2=vmc_all;med=1;size=20;c=vmc;back=back1331946211;subview=detail;resnum=128;view=entry;lastview=thumbnail;lasttype=boolean;cc=vmc;entryid=x-38559-und-1;viewid=38559_1, accessed March 18, 2012.

83 Ibid, 258.
84 Perhaps the most notable of these annual holiday games took place in 1962, in what came to be known as the Thanksgiving Day Massacre. A game in which the 8-2 Lions met their division rival, the 10-0 Vince Lombardi-coached Green Bay Packers. The Packers under Lombardi were the dominant force in the NFL, and they were a team the Lions had narrowly lost to just a few weeks earlier when both teams were still undefeated. Consequently the Lions were bent on revenge. In front of a crowd of 57,598 fans the Lions lambasted the Packers, sacking Bart Starr eleven times, the Lions would go on to hand the Packers their first loss of the season, more importantly they had avenged their earlier season loss.
were the most notable sports addition to the stadium they were not the only one, for the emergence of another Detroit sporting legend was about to make use of Briggs Stadium: the Brown Bomber, Joe Louis.

Joe Louis had grown up on the streets of Detroit. Born in Alabama in 1914, Louis moved with his family to the Black Bottom neighborhood of Detroit in 1926, where he soon became a diehard Tiger’s fan. Although Louis loved the Tigers, his natural talents resided not in baseball but boxing, and by the 1930s this exemplary talent had made Louis the heavyweight champion of the world. Briggs Stadium, the sight of many prizefights in the past, would witness the fight of its hometown hero on September 20, 1939 when Louis fought Bob Pastor in front of a crowd of thirty-three thousand fans for the World Heavyweight Boxing Championship. Louis would defeat Pastor with a knockout in the eleventh round to retain his heavyweight title, effectively adding to the growing roster of memorable events to occur at the ‘The Corner.’

While the 1930s brought many changes and memorable moments to ‘The Corner,’ perhaps the greatest and most poignant of them occurred on May 2, 1939. There are few moments and individuals from sport that end up having lasting effects that reach beyond the boundaries of the game; if ever there was a player who made such an impact it was the New York Yankee’s Lou Gehrig. Like Ty Cobb, Gehrig was a

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86 Ibid.
88 Ibid.

While Louis fought many of his prize fights in Detroit, most were played at Olympia Stadium home of the National Hockey League’s Detroit Red Wings. This was the only fight held at Briggs Stadium.
man whose legend extended beyond the statistics he amassed on the baseball diamond. But unlike the fiery Cobb, his legend was not fueled by intense ire, or flawed by unsavory tactics; instead Gehrig’s legend was marked by his dedication to his family, and to the game he loved. In short, Gehrig’s legend was that of an exemplary man of character, a man who embodied the best of baseball, a true sports hero both on and off the field. But Gehrig was not just a man of grace, he was also a man of skill, an exceptional skill he demonstrated every time he stepped onto the field. Gehrig played from 1923-1939 for the Yankees, his entire career, during which time he had a lifetime batting average of .321. According to the Baseball Hall of Fame, Gehrig, “...had 13 consecutive seasons with both 100 runs scored and 100 RBIs, averaging 139 runs and 148 RBIs; set an American League mark with 184 RBIs in 1931; hit a record 23 grand slams; and won the 1934 Triple Crown. His .361 batting average in seven World Series led the Yankees to six titles.” These statistics would be impressive on their own, but these are not the only feats for which he was known. His most impressive record, the one for which he received his nickname...the Iron Horse, was his consecutive games-played record of 2,130. It is this record that would create the milestone experienced by all in attendance at Briggs Stadium on May 2, 1939, for it was this day that Gehrig’s

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid. This record would stand for 56 years before Cal Ripken, Jr. of the Baltimore Orioles would break it on September 6, 1995.
streak would come to an end (Figure 1-9).\textsuperscript{92} Unbeknownst to everyone in the stadium, Gehrig was suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a degenerative nerve disease that would kill him two years later; an illness that is now referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease.\textsuperscript{93} On that day in May, Gehrig walked to home plate, but this time it wasn’t to bat, but to hand the line-up card to the umpire, a card that did not include his name. Sensing the gravity of the moment, those in attendance gave Gehrig a two minute standing ovation. Art Hill retells what it was like to be in the stadium that day:

There was no shouting, just sustained applause...But they were on their feet, which meant something in those days. A standing ovation was a ritual act, meant to honor a man’s whole career, or some deed of superhuman courage or skill. It was important because it was unplanned; people knew when to do it – and when not to do it, which was most of the time.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Bak, 1998, 191.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
Of all the World Series, all the pennant wins or batting titles, perhaps no other moment in sports symbolized more completely how much the game of baseball could affect society than this one.

**World War II and the Fight for Racial Equality**

The Tigers along with the rest of the nation would eventually emerge from the drought-like effects of the Depression, but the cause of this re-emergence would be an event that once again would affect more than just the world of baseball: World War II.

Before America’s entrance into the war, the Tigers’ would once again capture another American League pennant in 1940, but unlike the 1935 season, they would fail to capture the World Series title, losing to the Cincinnati Reds in seven games. The following season the Tigers watched their winning record disappear finishing, 75-79, their attendance drop by almost half, and waved goodbye to Hank Greenberg when he was drafted into the Army in May of 1941. “He was the first major leaguer of any consequence to be drafted.”

For Greenberg, fighting in WWII was about more than just defending his country, it was about defending his ethnicity. For years he had served as a hero to millions of American Jews, regularly sitting out games in order to observe Yom Kippur. As Richard Bak notes, “In 1938, as thousands of European Jews were herded into concentration camps and Father Charles Coughlin of Royal Oak [a northern suburb of Detroit]...

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95 Bak, 1998, 201.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid, 187.
broadcast anti-Semitic speeches during his radio show, the twenty-seven-year-old Greenberg captivated the country as he mounted an assault on Babe Ruth’s single-season home run mark of sixty, set eleven years earlier. 98 When Greenberg was released from service before Pearl Harbor, he quickly re-enlisted for another four years of fighting. The message was clear: there were more important things than baseball.

Hank Greenberg was not the only Tiger to get drafted or enlist in the armed forces. By the mid-1940s it was hard for teams to even field enough players for a game, and by 1945 almost 5,400 of 5,800 major and minor league players had served in the military. 99 To supplement the loss in income, Briggs began to lease the stadium for Negro League games.

The invention of the automobile and Henry Ford’s subsequent introduction of the moving assembly line in the first decade of the twentieth century had changed the city of Detroit forever. A city which to that point had been known for its lumber and stove industries was turned on its head. Everywhere one looked there was a new car manufacturing plant, and what these burgeoning industrialists needed more than anything were employees. People by the hundreds of thousands moved to the city to fill these positions and in the process Detroit went from a somewhat sleepy city of 285,704 in 1900 to a growing metropolis of 465,766 in 1910. 100 By the First World War there were nearly 140,000 people employed by the various auto manufacturers

98 Ibid, 189.
99 Ibid, 201.
throughout the city. This number drastically changed with the onset of that war as autoworkers by the thousands were shipped overseas to fight. The labor void created by their absence would not exist for long. As early as 1910, Detroit had already begun to notice a small increase in its African American population, but what from 1900 to 1910 barely constituted a one percent increase, would explode over the next twenty years during what would come to be known as the ‘Great Migration.’ Attracted by growing employment opportunities, Southern African Americans, as well as whites, began to migrate north to Detroit. From 1910 to 1920 Detroit’s African American population would grow from 5,741 to 40,838, a 611% increase, a surge brought on by the promise of jobs in the auto plants. The war’s end brought about an upsurge in automobile production, and with it even more opportunities for African Americans. Consequently, by the end of the ‘Great Migration’ in 1930, Detroit’s African American community would number 120,000. The ‘Great Migration’ didn’t just offer people work, it offered them an escape from the Jim Crow politics so persuasive in the South. Although it was not the policy of all of Detroit’s automakers, work in plants such as Henry Ford’s Rouge plant, offered African Americans one of the first opportunities to earn a living at the same rate of pay, doing the same job as a white man. In short, it offered him dignity. Unfortunately, Ford’s equal employment policies for African Americans were not notions that extended to other business and commerce in the city.

101 Bak, 1995, 36.
103 Ibid.
let alone the entire country. So while African Americans were equal in the eyes of at least one of the auto manufacturers, they were still relegated to drinking from different drinking fountains, sitting in different parts of the movie theater, stepping off the sidewalk to make way for white people, and prohibited from playing in Major League Baseball. By the time World War II began and Detroit became the Arsenal of Democracy, separate professional African American baseball leagues—what were known as the Negro Leagues—had been in existence since 1920.104

The history of professional baseball's attitude and policies towards African Americans is as storied as the game itself. The practice of racial separation that existed for more than fifty years had not always been the accepted norm.105 In fact, it was not until an incident in 1887 involving Adrian “Cap” Anson of the National League Chicago White Stockings, in which he threatened to boycott the sport if forced to play with an African American that various leagues began to question the integration of players.106 The fear of player boycotts, and the consequential missed games and lost revenue that Cap Anson’s threat generated, were enough for the International League to ban integration three years later, and by 1898 the last integrated team in baseball ceased to exist.107 To make up for this loss, all African-American teams became the norm, making their living by ‘barnstorming’ from town to town, playing other African American teams,

104 Bak, 1995, 42.
105 Baseball was segregated in approximately 1890 and continued until the Dodgers’ signing of Jackie Robinson in 1947. Ibid, 43.
106 Ibid, 43.
107 Ibid.
or even all white teams along the way. While good money was to be made in this process, there were still those in baseball that desired to view organized professional African American baseball. Out of this desire was born Andrew “Rube” Foster’s eight team Negro National League (NNL) in 1920, of which the Detroit Stars were founding members. The NNL would not be the only Negro League in existence. Three years later inspired by the success of Foster’s NNL, the Eastern Colored League (ECL) was created whose formation, although initially met with hostility from Foster, ended up resulting in the Colored World Series.

While the overwhelming doctrine of segregation was officially ‘separate but equal,’ this was not a notion that was applied to the baseball diamond, or the Negro Leagues. Contrary to the statistics amassed by many of the stars of the Negro Leagues, the talents of the teams were often viewed as diminished in comparison to their white counterparts. Although their talent was recognized by the likes of Charlie Gehringer and other Major League stars of that time, the Negro Leagues, and oftentimes their players, failed to garner the respect they deserved. It was this very prejudice that allowed baseball’s segregation to continue for as long as it did. While owners like Detroit’s Walter Briggs had little issue with making money from the lease of Briggs Stadium for a few Negro League games during WWII, their bigotry kept them from going a step further

108 Barnstorming was the practice of traveling from town to town to play in exhibition matches.
110 Ibid, 92.
111 When asked about the caliber of the Negro League’s players, Gehringer is quoted as saying, “They had some great players, it’s a shame they couldn’t play in the major leagues.” Bak, 1995, 114.
and integrating their teams. This prejudice would finally begin to end in 1946 with Branch Rickey’s signing of Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers. It would be thirteen years before Detroit would do the same.\textsuperscript{112}

Walter Briggs’ bigotry was a well-known fact. Sportswriter Wendell Smith describes Briggs as “oh, so very prejudiced. He’s the major league combination of Simon Legree and Adolf Hitler.”\textsuperscript{113} Briggs prejudice was not a notion that just affected his baseball organization, but a sentiment that also pervaded the floors of his auto body plants. For this reason, Briggs’ ignorance had the potential to affect many more people than just the players and patrons in his stadium. His barely disguised ignorance and fear was even on display during the few Negro League games that he made money on during the lean war years. He was so uncomfortable with the skin color of many of these games’ fans that he went so far as to place guards at all of the stadium’s concession stands. This fear came to a height after Detroit’s 1943 race riots when he used his influence to install three hundred armed troops throughout the stadium for the Tiger’s game with the Cleveland Indians.\textsuperscript{114} This was the first time that federal troops had been utilized for such a purpose at a major league game.\textsuperscript{115} This bigotry and fear kept Briggs from integrating the Tigers, missing the opportunity to sign talented Detroit area youths. In the same decade that he had signed Dick Wakefield for a $52,000 bonus, he

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 110. Jackie Robinson’s first year would be spent in the Dodger’s farm system. He would not see major league action until 1947.\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 211.\textsuperscript{114} Bak, 1995, 211.\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 211.
failed to jump on the prospect of signing a then-young Henry Aaron for the rock bottom price of $3,500.\textsuperscript{116} It was a prejudice that the Tigers would continue after Brigg’s death in 1952 under the new ownership of his son, Walter Briggs Jr. As Richard Bak explains, “By 1953 every team in the majors except Detroit had blacks in its farm system, and by 1958 every club except Detroit and Boston (Red Sox) had integrated its major-league lineup.”\textsuperscript{117} Finally, in 1958 under the new ownership of media magnate John Fetzer of Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Tigers broke the color barrier when they signed third baseman Ozzie Virgil. Even he wasn’t technically African American but Dominican. It wouldn’t be until the following year that Detroit would finally sign Larry Doby, the first true African American to play for the Detroit Tigers.\textsuperscript{118}

The respect and support of the African American community that the Tiger’s organization lost during this prolonged refusal to integrate is hard to measure. But it would seem that the Briggs era brought elation and sorrow to the baseball fans of Detroit. In 1945, while the Tigers ignored the implications of Jackie Robinson’s contract signature, the team celebrated their second World Series victory with a win over the Chicago Cubs.\textsuperscript{119} The result was a euphoria and pride that overtook the city. A Detroit News article of the time described the feeling as “a strange, almost mystical connection between Detroit’s fortunes in the world of sport and the state of the local mind and

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 211.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 211-212.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 212.
\textsuperscript{119} This series marks the beginning of the Cubs “curse of the goat,” as it was the last time in the team’s history that they have made it to the World Series.
morale.” In hindsight one has to wonder if this sentiment was truly shared by all, perhaps the sour taste left by the Tigers’ reluctance to integrate had not yet been fully recognized. In 1948, Briggs Stadium would begin to play host to night games made possible by the stadium’s lighting additions of eight 150’ steel towers containing 1,458 incandescent light bulbs. As impressive as these accomplishments are they are overshadowed by the racial negligence that the team demonstrated during Briggs’ ownership. It’s unfortunate that the beacon he helped to create was not equally felt by all the Tigers’ fans. As we will see, the disregard with which he treated one of baseball’s most defining periods left a scar that has taken a generation to heal; a scar that in all likelihood affected the fate of the stadium that at one time bore his name.

John Fetzer and the Anchor of the City

There were few bright spots for the Tigers in the 1950s, a time that was not only marked by racial unrest, but also losing. One of the few rays of light for the team was the 1953 signing of Al Kaline, ‘Mr. Tiger,’ who would go on to become one of the greats in the history of Tiger baseball. Kaline would play his entire twenty-two year career in Detroit. Perhaps the most lasting memory of his time in Detroit is signified by the

120 Bak, 1998, 212.
121A career in which he amassed 3,007 hits, hit 399 home runs, and compiled a lifetime batting average of .297. In addition to these achievements he would also be selected for fifteen All Star games and win ten Gold Glove awards for his superior fielding skills. National Baseball Hall of Fame, “Kaline, Al,” http://baseballhall.org/hof/kaline-al, accessed February 13, 2012.
name assigned to the stadium’s unusual right field corner; a section that was forever referred to as Kaline’s Corner after his time with the team.\(^\text{122}\)

While Kaline was the bright spot of the fifties, the most significant change to affect the team was its sale to John Fetzer. While it is impossible to surmise what path the Tigers would have taken had Walter Briggs Jr. continued ownership, it is safe to say that his decision to sell to Fetzer guaranteed a change in the course the Tigers had set. In addition to his decision to integrate, Fetzer made a change to the stadium that would stay with it for the rest of its existence, when on April 22, 1960 the stadium’s name was changed to Tiger Stadium. No longer would the stadium be associated with an owner, and all of the connotations good or bad that came along with it, now it would be known for the team and the people of Detroit.

Fetzer was a radio and television mogul. The man who was once appointed by President Roosevelt as the US Censor for Radio, and had helped to formulate the

\(^{122}\) A section of bleachers in the right field corner of the stadium were altered after Kaline repeatedly injured himself trying to catch fly balls. In order prevent further injury to their star player from the collisions the Tigers removed a portion of the section, after which the corner was renamed in his honor.
national broadcast policy and wrote the television code of ethics, would be the first to televise Tigers’ games. By doing so he not only brought the team into every living room in Michigan and beyond, but he also introduced all of those households to Tiger Stadium (Figure 1-10, Figure 1-11). All those people who had never been able to witness a game in the stadium were now a part of the action. Although they couldn’t smell the hot dogs, they could hear the roar, and see the players and the reactions of the fans. In essence, Fetzer brought the now fifty-year-old stadium to life for millions of fans.

The Tigers’ seasons during the 1960s continued in much the same vein as their 1950s counterparts. Although they consistently finished in the top five in the American League, behind the stellar play of stars Kaline, Rocky Calavito, and Norm Cash, for the first half of the decade they could not seem to break through to win the pennant. In 1968 that changed, but not before the city was to go through one of the most defining times in its two hundred and sixty-six year history: the riots of 1967.

\(^{123}\) Bak, 1998, 292.
By the 1960s racial unrest had been brewing in Detroit for decades. The introduction of the highway system to Detroit in 1951, a by-product of the very industry that had attracted many people to the city, was segregating it even further. Inevitably the first neighborhoods to be destroyed in the name of development and Urban Renewal were the “slums” associated with the African American community. Overnight, citizens watched as entire neighborhoods on the east side of the city disappeared under a layer of pavement.  

This widespread dislocation combined with mortgage practices designed to prohibit neighborhood integration united to create an incredibly tense racial atmosphere. One of the most racially volatile areas in the city was the Briggs neighborhood situated just a few blocks north of Tiger Stadium. Briggs, which had experienced limited amounts of integration in years prior to 1950, saw this all change with the displacement caused by highway construction. In the ten year time period, from 1950 to 1960, the Briggs neighborhood watched as its African American population grew from six percent to thirty-three percent. With the introduction of the highways and the subsequent integration of neighborhoods, the white residents of the city began to leave in great numbers. ‘White Flight’ was now in full swing. With the formation of Property Owners’ Associations, the white residents who decided to stay instituted methods of intimidation to prevent African Americans from moving or staying in their neighborhoods. It was not uncommon for African Americans who could afford to move

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125 Hartigan, Jr., 52.
into these areas to be met with open hostility, which often included demonstrations and threats to life and property. This deadly combination of intimidation, hatred, and fear finally exploded on the night of July 23, 1967.

What started out as a police raid on a blind pig just a few blocks north of Tiger Stadium quickly mushroomed, fueled by pent up anger and frustration brought on by decades of racial injustice. The Detroit riots would become some of the deadliest in American history. It would take three days to quell the riots, and by the time the smoke cleared 43 people were dead, 7,231 were arrested, and over 1,700 stores and businesses were looted, resulting in block after block of burned and bombed out buildings.\footnote{Hartigan, Jr., 52.} As John Hartigan, Jr. noted that, it would eventually require, “[a] combined force of 17,000 men from the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan State Police, the National Guard, and troops from the United States Army...” to stop the destruction.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the night the riots began, just a few short blocks away in Tiger Stadium, the Tigers were playing host to the Yankees. Inside its confines people had no idea the war zone the city had erupted into. As Ray Lane and Ernie Harwell were announcing the game on the radio they were completely oblivious to the melee. Lane recalled, “We didn’t know it was a riot at that time...We weren’t allowed to say anything about the smoke coming in over the left field stands. Jim Campbell and WJR told us not to mention it.”\footnote{Bak, 1998, 302-303.} According to legend, Detroit native Willie Horton left the stadium that
night neglecting to change from his Tiger uniform and walked the streets trying to calm the tension. According to Horton’s biography:

He just hurried toward home. ‘I’ll never forget riding toward the Livernois area...I’m in my uniform and seeing these...seeing this happen. It was a shock...(I thought) this is Detroit; this is not happening. And that’s when I realized what was going on...People were shooting, people scurrying...What can I do? What can I say? And I (found) myself walking down...seeing buildings on 12th Street...people breaking in, and I’m trying to talk to people.”

What Horton witnessed was a city in pain. In the wake of the riots the attendance at Tiger Stadium dwindled, even the deciding game in the pennant contest with the California Angels was not enough to create a sell-out crowd at ‘The Corner.’ On October 1, the crowd at Tiger Stadium watched their team squander their chances for a pennant playoff with the Red Sox. Their reaction would be indicative of the pain and frustration of that year’s events. People began to destroy the stadium; some jumped onto the field, bent on destroying the grass, others stayed in the stands, where they ripped chairs from their moorings, tossing them to the field below. It seemed as though this emotional response was not only a reaction to their team’s loss, but also possibly a reaction to that year’s events. Perhaps the greatest outpouring of emotion came from a man not known for such sentiment: John Fetzer. Fetzer wrote a letter to himself titled, “A True Confession”:

On this infamous evening of October 1, 1967, there is no happiness in that section of Mudville near the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. The heroes have fallen and I am ill. I have been here alone for hours but a few tears cannot wash away the hurt. As I tuned in on the waves of reflection, the brilliant lights of

Tiger Stadium began to fade and I watched hundreds of fans give vent to their frustrations. They destroyed scores of stadium seats and piled the rubble on the dugouts. Still others clawed at home plate and the pitcher’s mound, while a bedlam of confusion turned many more hundreds into a near mob scene with the elements of combat everywhere on the playing field. In stony silence I thought of how desperately hard I had fought to build a winner in Detroit. It seemed that my long-sought goal was near fruition. I thought a pennant would have meant more to Detroit than all of the man-made remedies put together. I thought that 1967 would be a crowning year of glory for our city and that the world would soon forget our stormy past.\footnote{Ibid.}

The healing that Fetzer and Detroit were so desperately searching for was not to be found that year. The following season Detroit would realize Fetzer’s dream and win its third World Series. Unlike the previous year, the chaos that erupted in the streets of Detroit in 1968 was not induced by hatred and fear, but elation and pride. A city that one year earlier had been the poster child for destruction, would come together instead for celebration (Figure 1-12).\footnote{http://apps.detnews.com/apps/multimedia/gallery.php?id=13135, accessed March 18, 2012.}

Fetzer would continue to stand behind his team for the next sixteen years. After the end of the 1983 season he
would sell the Tigers to Tom Monaghan, the owner of Domino’s Pizza for fifty-three million dollars; a decision that, unbeknownst to Fetzer, would change the fate of Tiger Stadium forever.
Chapter 2

The Pizza Years: The Turn of the Tide for Tiger Stadium

The Bless You Boys and Tom Monaghan

By the time Tom Monaghan took the helm as the new owner of the Tigers the pieces were already in place for the winning season that would follow. Under Fetzer, the Tigers had signed three of the most iconic individuals to ever don the old English D: manager Sparky Anderson in 1979, and shortstop Alan Trammell and second baseman Lou Whitaker in 1977.\textsuperscript{132} Along with the acquisition of other noted players, such as Chet Lemon, Darrell Evans, Tommy Brookens, Lance Parrish, Willie Hernandez, Jack Morris, and Kirk Gibson to name just a few, Monaghan’s Tigers would come to be known as the ‘Bless You Boys,’ a team that would lead the league from beginning to end.\textsuperscript{133} A season that started with a 35-5 streak, would culminate in a 104 win regular season; a franchise best. This unbelievable record would continue into the World Series against the San Diego Padres, where the Tigers bested their rivals by winning four out of five games, clinching a fourth World Series Championship.\textsuperscript{134}

Like the 1968 victory sixteen years prior, Detroit would once again celebrate its winning team by taking to the streets. Game five of the series was played at Tiger

\textsuperscript{132} Trammell and Whitaker, both signed on the same day in 1977,” would go on to become the longest playing and most successful double play combination in major league baseball history.” Betzold and Casey, 110.
\textsuperscript{133} The moniker the Bless You Boys was given to the team by WDIV broadcaster Al Ackerman.
\textsuperscript{134} The 1984 season was the last time that the Detroit Tigers have won a World Series, they lost to the St. Louis Cardinals in the 2006 championship.
Stadium, and before the game had ended people began driving in from the suburbs to join in the anticipated celebration. Unfortunately, unlike 1968, the elation that followed the victory manifested itself in ways totally unbecoming to the fans and ultimately the city itself. What began with crowds rushing the field culminated in less than celebratory acts outside the stadium that included burning a police car, and officers outfitted in riot gear. What had initially began as a celebration for the people and city of Detroit quickly turned into an embarrassment played out on a national stage in front of the media. The photos and video that surfaced in the aftermath showed to an international audience a vision of Detroit that was becoming all too common; a representation of destruction and violence instead of a picture of safety and prosperity.

This vision was something that the residents of Corktown were all too familiar with. Unlike the revitalized residential and commercial neighborhoods that surrounded its counterpart Wrigley Field in Chicago, Tiger Stadium’s Corktown neighborhood had been eviscerated by highways and various urban renewal projects. Although one of the safest neighborhoods in the city, the urban erosion caused by these projects resulted in its seemingly unsafe appearance - an appearance the Tigers’ organization did nothing to alter. While the Cubs fostered a mutually beneficial relationship with the residents of their Wrigleyville neighborhood, the Tigers acted as though they were an island. Although the residents still relied upon the stadium for revenue in the forms of parking and souvenir sales, gone were the Depression era days when neighborhood children were let in free of charge and residents provided much of the workforce. Part of the
blame for this situation was a hold-over from the Briggs era. By the time the ‘eighties arrived, the city of Detroit had been experiencing a decline in population for almost three decades. This White Flight resulted in a population that was primarily African American, a demographic that was not far enough removed from the Briggs era to disassociate the one-time owner’s bigotry from the stadium that still stood at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. This antipathy was perhaps best demonstrated by former Tiger and Detroit native Willie Horton’s comments regarding the absence of African American fans during the 1984 World Series season when he said, “I’ve heard a lot of tales that the blacks got turned off a long time ago-back to the days of Walter O. Briggs-and they’re still turned off. I’ll tell you something: This is 1984, but they’re still bitter about the way the black players have been treated in Detroit.”

This resentment, along with a Tigers’ organization that lacked any type of public relations savvy, often resulted in a relationship with the residents of Corktown, and the city of Detroit that was frequently viewed with indifference at best. Although Tom Monaghan began to chip away at this resentment through the employment and promotion of African Americans in the Tigers’ front office, these were but small overtures in the eyes of many Detroiter. With the political rise of Coleman Young to the city’s mayoral office the mindset regarding the city’s architectural heritage, a history that was primarily affiliated with a now depleted white population, was in danger. Betzold and Casey argue that,

135 Bak, 1995, 212.
136 Betzold and Casey, 125.
Young habitually had decried preservationists as standing in the way of progress. Perhaps it is because much of Detroit’s past is infected with the cancer of racism. Old Detroit was segregated Detroit, run by whites. Why preserve symbols of that painful, unjust past? Tiger Stadium, particularly, has a segregated past so recent that it still hurts some black Detroiters just to look at it. Tearing it down might blot out some of the pain.  

After the 1984 World Series victory, and the following two disappointing seasons, talk of a replacement stadium had been discussed. And although this was not the first time in its history that a replacement had been discussed, it was decidedly the first time that any actual threat was easily foreseen.

As previously discussed, the population of Detroit had begun to diminish in the 1950s, and by the 1970s this urban exodus had started to threaten the viability of the city’s downtown sports teams. Starting with the Detroit Lions’ move to the northern suburb of Pontiac in 1975, the city, and more specifically its new mayor Coleman Young, were beginning to fear the loss of its remaining three professional sports franchises.  

Coleman Young was born in Alabama and moved to Detroit when he was five years old. A long time protester of segregation and racial discrimination, he became the city’s first African American mayor when he was sworn into office in January of 1974. Too late to affect the Lions’ suburban move, Young concentrated his efforts on both the NHL Detroit Red Wings and the Detroit Tigers, and the NBA Detroit Pistons.  

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137 Betzold and Casey, 125.
138 The other two professional teams in Detroit are the Detroit Pistons of the National Basketball Association and the Detroit Red Wings of the National Hockey League. Young’s fear would later be realized when the Pistons moved to the suburbs to play in the Silverdome and later the Palace of Auburn Hills built exclusively for their use, and as a concert venue.
139 The Pistons played downtown at Cobo Arena until 1979 when they began to play in the Silverdome in the suburb of Pontiac, Michigan.
Successful in his efforts to keep the Red Wings within the city limits, Young turned his attention to the Tigers. Although Fetzer and the Tigers had never intended to move from their downtown locale, the stadium was in need of repair because of a 1977 fire that had destroyed the press box and damaged some of the third deck seating area, as well as some much needed structural care.\(^{140}\) Fetzer, recognizing the city’s interest in his team’s retention, seized upon this opportunity and asked Young for the city’s help in the much needed renovations. Although Young would have rather have built the Tigers a new home, similar to the Red Wings’ newly constructed Joe Louis Arena, he was satisfied with the renovations, secure in the knowledge this would keep the Tigers and the money from their fan base within the city. In an effort to further tie the stadium, and consequently the team, to the city, Young offered to buy the stadium from Fetzer, obtain a five million dollar federal grant for repairs, and lease the stadium back to the Tigers for their use.\(^{141}\) Not one to walk away from monetary aid, in October of 1978 Fetzer agreed to sell Tiger Stadium to the city for one dollar, in the process signing a thirty-year lease with the option for three ten year extensions. The two different bonds that Young secured for the stadium’s renovation resulted in an initial fifty cent ticket surcharge for the first bond, with an additional increase to ninety cents for the second bond.\(^{142}\) Both of these surcharges would be initially added to Tiger’s tickets in order to pay back the federal grant money used for the renovations. Once the bonds were

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\(^{140}\) Betzold and Casey, 108.
\(^{141}\) Betzold and Casey, 108.
\(^{142}\) Ibid, 108-110
repaid the surcharge was set aside for stadium maintenance. Effectively, Fetzer and Young secured the stadium’s use and continued role in Detroit for possibly the next sixty years.

The repairs that Fetzer professed to so desperately need ended up occurring through two different phases of renovation which cost a total of eighteen million dollars over the course of seven years. The securing of the stadium’s concrete and steel structure consumed the majority of the initial bond. The stadium’s exposure to the elements combined with the prolific use of rock salt during Lions’ games from 1938 to 1974, created a recipe that affected the structural integrity of the stadium. The remaining money went to a multitude of features including a new computerized scoreboard to replace the hand-operated scoreboard, new plastic blue and orange seats to replace the green wooden ones, a new press box to replace the one lost in the 1977 fire, an owner’s box, a media box, new broadcast facilities, new smaller light towers with brighter bulbs, two new bathrooms, and modernized team clubhouses. In addition to these interior changes, the stadium’s exterior brick walls were covered with beige metal siding on the upper stories, and graffiti-proof glazed masonry on the lower levels, while forty-eight rolling doors throughout the stadium were either replaced or

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143 Ibid.
144 Ibid, 109
repaired. As Betzold and Casey note, “The renovations were guaranteed for thirty years.”

While the 1970s seemingly ushered in a time of security for Tiger Stadium in both the eyes of its owner and the city, the ‘80s were beginning to show signs that this mindset might no longer have existed. By the 1980s, Young was no longer the “newly” elected mayor, in fact, by 1986 he had already achieved his third of four re-elections. Now he was an experienced politician looking to shape his city and legacy. Gone was the idea of renovation or preservation, now was the time for new ideas, and new structures. A structure whose very existence had been secured by the city until 2008 less than ten years before, was now in danger. Although Coleman Young was one of the loudest voices pushing for the stadium’s replacement, he was by no means the only voice. Some of the others came from within the walls of the stadium itself, specifically the president of the Tiger’s organization, Jim Campbell. This newly expressed viewpoint placed Monaghan in a bit of a conundrum. While he was reluctant to oppose the wishes of members of his staff, he had deep-seated affection for Tiger Stadium. A stance demonstrated by remarks made at the beginning of his ownership when he said, “As long as I own this team, we will not build a new stadium…I like the old stadium, and we’ll do all we can to keep it. We’ll keep fixing it up and making it look as good as possible.” In accordance with the guarantee issued less than ten years earlier, it

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145 Ibid, 110.
146 Ibid.
147 Betzold and Casey, 114.
would seem that the need for maintenance during the beginning of his tenure would be little more than routine. But the sentiments proclaimed by Monaghan in 1983 seemed to be wavering under Campbell’s pressure three years later. As told by Betzold and Casey:

When he was asked how long Tiger Stadium could last, Monaghan said: “I don’t know. I hope forever, but I don’t know. I’ll have to be a little realistic at some point, I’m sure, but I just want to gather all the facts. I want more information than someone just telling me it won’t last. I want to see why...I’m kind of resistant because I like old Tiger Stadium, although Tiger President Jim Campbell keeps telling me that I’m dreaming because it won’t last forever like I think it will.”

While Monaghan was torn, Mayor Young was not. With projects along the waterfront like the Renaissance Center, Young pushed for new construction over preservation. That he had no love for the stadium is evident by his 1988 statement, “It’s obvious the damned thing is falling down.” A new stadium promised more new development, and the added bonus of the obliteration of the negative connotations hidden under Tiger Stadium’s beige metal siding.

The threats implied by both Young’s and Campbell’s statements, and Monaghan’s uncertain attitude precipitated the first organized public response in 1987: the formation of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club. Unlike the city, or the Tigers’ organization, the Fan Club, the predecessor of future preservation groups interested in the preservation of Tiger Stadium, was not a corporate or city entity, but an entity born out of the people; a united organization of fans. For the first time in Tiger Stadium’s history,

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148 Ibid, 124.
149 Bak, 1998, 353.
fans weren’t just speaking with their dollar, they were organizing, speaking through the media and through public demonstrations. On April 20, 1988 the Fan Club organized a human ‘hug’ of the stadium, the first of its kind, when approximately 1,200 people encircled the stadium to show their support. The Fan Club’s outcry demonstrated that the stadium had become more than just a place for sport. Since 1912 it had been a fixture in the community, a constant among the every changing variables of the city. It was an anchor, the place that no matter what turmoil or celebration was going on outside its walls had always been there. The members of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, had witnessed enough change in their city; the threat to Tiger Stadium was too much.

The Tiger Stadium Fan Club

While the Fan Club’s 1988 “Stadium Hug” certainly got the attention of many of those instrumental in the subsequent decision to replace Tiger Stadium, it did little to change their minds. While the indifference the Tigers’ organization displayed towards the Fan Club’s demonstrations was not the reaction the Fan Club had been hoping for it certainly did not deter them, instead it fueled their desire to save Tiger Stadium even more. What had initially been a show of solidarity soon became a campaign, and with this change the power and messages of historic preservation began to come to the forefront. Recognizing the ally that existed in the world of preservation, the Fan Club nominated Tiger Stadium to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. Its placement on the Register made it only the second Major League Baseball stadium to

150 Betzold and Casey, 294.
receive such an honor. \textsuperscript{151} While the Register designation did not protect the stadium from demolition, it did give the Fan Club something extremely valuable: national recognition. While the support of the Tigers’ fans had been unwavering, the attention brought to the stadium via the National Register designation and the stadium’s subsequent placement on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “11 Most Endangered List” in 1991 elicited the support of baseball’s national fan base. In the years preceding the threat to Tiger Stadium, baseball had witnessed the loss of some of its most venerable parks: Crosley Park in Cincinnati, Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, and Ebbets Field in New York to name just a few. \textsuperscript{152} Tiger Stadium was facing the same fate, and without the help of the fans, the everyday people, the threat could easily become the reality. The Fan Club, rallying behind its now national support, recognized that it wasn’t enough to just try and save the stadium, they needed to be proactive. The threats to the stadium were real, and no matter how implausible the reasons for replacement might be, to ignore them could prove fatal.

The arguments in favor of replacement over renovation for older ballparks have always been consistent: it’s structurally unsound, it cannot accommodate luxury boxes, there are too many obstructed views, the area is unsafe, the stadium is impeding the team’s ability to attract high caliber players and ultimately win, and finally a new stadium would bring economic development and jobs to the city. Tiger Stadium would

\textsuperscript{151} The only other MLB ballpark to ever be listed on the National Register is Cleveland Municipal Stadium built in 1931. It was demolished in 1996. Fenway Park was added to the National Register in March of 2012.

\textsuperscript{152} Comiskey Park (1910) in Chicago was demolished the following year in 1990.
be no different. In 1990 Tigers’ fans watched as Chicago’s Comiskey Park, built in 1910, was demolished for false reasons of structural instability.\(^{153}\) In Detroit both the city and the Tigers’ organization had already begun to claim that Tiger Stadium was falling down even though structural assessments completed by various engineering firms stated otherwise.\(^{154}\) It became clear that in order for the Fan Club to save the stadium they would have to show the public, the Tigers’ organization, and the city that Tiger Stadium could be renovated.

The Fan Club was not the first organization to urge renovation, in fact in 1988 the Tigers and the city had called for proposals for both a new stadium and renovations for Tiger Stadium.\(^{155}\) Although proposals for both were submitted, the financial incentives offered and consequently the results clearly favored a new stadium.\(^{156}\) The results of this call for proposals were the impetus for some of the Fan Club’s first wide-scale publicity movements. In the same newspapers that announced the results of the stadium proposal, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club released stories stating that Tom Monaghan was ignoring the wishes of the Tigers’ fans.\(^{157}\) In response to the proposed

\(^{153}\) Although Comiskey Park passed multiple structural integrity tests, the owners of the White Sox claimed that the structure was “crumbling.” Betzold and Casey, 137-139.

\(^{154}\) Betzold and Casey, 139-145. Turner Construction Company, HOK Sports Facilities Group, and BEI Associates were just a few of the firms that declared that Tiger Stadium was structurally sound. Part of the problem was the lack of regular maintenance, because the stadium was not painted regularly as it should have been, areas of superficial rust were left exposed to serve as evidence of deterioration to the untrained eye.

\(^{155}\) Betzold and Casey, 147.

\(^{156}\) The architectural firm asked to propose plans would automatically be awarded the contract to build it. Consequently it behooved the architectural firm to pitch for a new stadium since a $150-$200 million contract for new construction was better than a $40-$50 million contract for renovation. Ibid, 148.

\(^{157}\) Ibid, 150.
stadium the Fan Club decided to come up with its own renovation proposal: something that would become known as the Cochrane Plan (see Appendix A).

In 1983, while still an architectural student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, John Davids met and befriended Tom Monaghan, and became “Monaghan’s architect.”¹⁵⁸ While still enrolled as a student, Davids redesigned Monaghan’s private box at Tiger Stadium.¹⁵⁹ Six years later Davids and his wife Judy would propose an entirely different redesign when they presented their renovation plan to the Tiger Stadium Fan Club. The Davids were long time Tiger fans, frequently attending fifty- plus games a year. Games not spent in the owner’s box they had helped to design, but in the bleacher section. It was the camaraderie and community-like atmosphere of the bleacher section that would eventually facilitate the Davids’ introduction to Catherine Darin a prominent member of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club.¹⁶⁰ It wasn’t long before the Davids were attending Fan Club meetings where they learned of the Fan Club’s desire to create its own renovation plan. Unlike the plans proposed by the city, the Fan Club wanted to maintain the historic character of both the park and the field, while also accommodating the needs of modern-day baseball. In this vein they set out their own criteria which were to:

1. Preserve Tiger Stadium, its historic character, its outfield dimensions and its distinctive features.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 151. “Monaghan’s architect” was the name that many members of the Tigers’ organization informally used when referring to John Davids.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid
¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 152.
2. Keep as many seats as possible as close as possible to the playing field and improve existing sight lines.
3. Retain good, affordable seats in all price ranges.
4. Improve concessions, rest rooms and handicapped facilities.
5. Protect the existing neighborhood and consider the city’s social priorities.\textsuperscript{161}

Although they wished to limit the changes, they realized that the only way to accomplish their goals was to also consider those new features that were important to the Tigers’ organization, primarily luxury boxes. This was the dilemma in which the Davids unexpectedly found themselves. The plan they created not only accommodated the needs of both the Tigers and the Fan Club but also added new unsolicited features.\textsuperscript{162} The prospectus for the Cochrane Plan also provided a list of numerous

\textsuperscript{161} Betzold and Casey, 152.
\textsuperscript{162} The details and intentions of the plan as explained in its proposal state the following:

Historic Tiger Stadium can serve the needs of Detroit’s ball club and its fans for many years to come through a low-cost renovation and expansion proposal.

The Cochrane Plan was design by architect John Davids and his associates at the request of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving baseball in Detroit.

The Cochrane Plans meets the desires of Tiger fans to preserve Tiger Stadium and retain its historic character while improving its amenities.

The Cochrane Plan satisfies the expressed needs of the Detroit Tigers for improvements to concessions, rest rooms, clubhouses, office space, and support services.

The Cochrane Plan provides the club with seventy-three luxury suites to accommodate 1,200 patrons.

The plan preserves or improves sight lines in every part of the stadium.

The Cochrane Plan expands or improves Tiger Stadium’s facilities without altering the existing field dimensions, reducing the seating capacity and variety, or compromising the ballpark’s intimacy.

The Cochrane Plan accomplishes all this through a series of additions and expansions:

- Additions on the stadium’s Cochrane Ave. and Michigan Avenue sides allow for new concessions and restrooms and for expansion of clubhouses, offices, commissaries, and storage areas.
- An addition at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull contains a greatly expanded administrative and ticket selling area.
- An infill building on Michigan west of Cochrane houses a Hall of Fame museum and marketing operations and is connected to the Cochrane addition by a pedestrian bridge and a ground level plaza.
individuals of both local and national architectural importance who had endorsed the plan’s proposed renovations. Perhaps the most significant of these contributions was a resolution passed by the Board of Directors of the Michigan Society of Architects which stated:

The Michigan Society of Architects Board of Directors feels it is important to evaluate the potential of preserving, through renovation, Tiger Stadium as one of the alternatives for maintaining the tradition of professional baseball in Detroit. We hereby endorse a review of the renovation and addition as presented to the MSA Board of Directors by the Tiger Stadium Fan Club.\(^\text{163}\)

This exhibition of support by not only local but national architectural organizations, such as the American Institute of Architects, lent validity and credence to the Fan Club’s proposal. In short, they had produced a legitimate, cost effective alternative to new construction. While the Cochrane plan seemed to satisfy all interested parties the Tigers organization refused to even look at it. The relationship the Davids had previously enjoyed with the Monaghans was of no consequence; their repeated calls to Monaghan were ignored. The Fan Club, left with no other alternative, reverted to the tactic that had so often worked for them in the past: publicity. If the Tigers were

- An optional new level of luxury suites and press facilities replaces the existing third deck.
- This new deck makes likely the removal of forty percent of the supporting columns (posts) from the upper deck.

The Cochrane Plan allows the Tigers to play all home games at Tiger Stadium during the renovation period.

The Cochrane Plan’s total cost is $26.07 million, with approximately half of that expense for the luxury suites. By any measure this represented a small fraction of the cost of a new stadium. This figure includes a fifteen percent contingency and is inflated to assume a fall 1991 construction start.

The Cochrane Plan insures Detroit a first-class sports facility and unmatched tourist attraction well into the twenty-first century.


\(^\text{163}\) Ibid.
unwilling to look at the Cochrane Plan the Fan Club would release the plans to the public; the Tigers could not ignore the existence of a plan that was featured in newspapers, and talked about on the radio and television. The Fan Club believed their increased publicity would force the Tigers to acknowledge the Cochrane Plan. Unfortunately, it didn’t. Instead of commenting on the plan the Tigers continued to refuse to acknowledge its feasibility. The Tigers’ organization maintained that they had already made their decision, that a new stadium was their future and that a new proposal, albeit even one with a more cost effective approach would not be considered.\textsuperscript{164} The Tigers’ tactic was clear, if they ignored the proposal it essentially didn’t exist. This purposeful obliviousness only added legitimacy to the Fan Club’s cause. By refusing to even comment on the plan the Tigers cast themselves in an unfavorable light. With the Cochrane Plan now public the support for the Fan Club’s alternative continued to grow, and by the end of 1990 they could count on the support of 10,000 members.\textsuperscript{165} With this boost in membership the Fan Club conducted another “stadium hug” on June 10, 1990. That season they also began to hand out postcards in the stands at Tigers games, eventually distributing more than 120,000 touting the benefits of the Cochrane Plan. The fans demanded to be acknowledged; the Tiger Stadium Fan Club was not going to go away quietly.

The year 1990 would signal a time of highs and lows for Tiger Stadium. In June of that year the stadium would play host to an entirely different event when the newly

\textsuperscript{164} Betzold and Casey, 157.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 157.
released Nelson Mandela spoke to a multiracial crowd of 49,000 people about the issue of Apartheid. His message was one of togetherness and strength, a fitting message to be disseminated within the walls of Tiger Stadium. Even Coleman Young felt the power of Mandela’s words broadcast through the stadium’s historic speakers when he remarked, “I think we hit a home run tonight, and we picked a good place for it--Tiger Stadium.” While June would feature the highs of the second stadium hug and the Mandela appearance, December ushered in a new low when Tom Monaghan unexpectedly fired long-time announcer Ernie Harwell, effective at the end of the 1991 season. In the eyes of the Tigers’ fans Monaghan had committed an egregious error, not only was he going after their team’s stadium, the site of a wealth of collected memories, now he was going after the team’s voice. Ernie Harwell had been a member of Detroit’s broadcasting team since 1960, and like Harry Carey in Chicago, he was one of the last colorful announcers of baseball. For listeners his delivery wasn’t just a play-by-play it was an illustration of the game. With phrases like his signature, “He stood there like the house by the side of the road” Harwell wasn’t just calling a strike, he was painting it. He had the ability to bring the game to life, and by firing him Monaghan and his new Club President, Bo Schembechler, were further robbing the fans of their traditional Tigers baseball experience. Enraged over Harwell’s dismissal, the fans

167 Bak, 1998, 357.
boycotted the opening game of the 1991 season, instead setting up stands across the street from the stadium.\footnote{Ibid, 356.}

New Tigers president Bo Schembechler became Monaghan’s bulldog, or perhaps more appropriately his wolverine. The retired legendary University of Michigan football coach and athletic director was already well known for his tenacity and ability to win, traits Monaghan hoped he could successfully apply to both the Tigers’ team and the organization’s disputes with fans. While the team failed to improve during Schembechler’s brief two and a half year tenure, he was the warrior Monaghan had hoped for against his biggest foe, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club.\footnote{Ibid, 362-363.} Staying true to the wishes of his employer, Schembechler represented an organization vehemently opposed to Tiger Stadium’s renovation and determined to construct a new stadium, especially if that meant using public dollars.

Citing the stadium as the cause for their losing records, the Tigers demanded public monetary assistance for a new stadium. A stadium Monaghan claimed he could not privately afford to construct. As Richard Bak so adeptly explains, “In an infamous speech given to the Economic Club of Detroit on April 22, 1991, Schembechler drove home the club’s position as if he were reading the riot act to a group of nineteen-year-olds at halftime. ‘It’s unfair...for you to think that you can shackle us to a rusted girder in Tiger Stadium and expect us to compete and win, because it’s not going to

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168 Ibid, 356.
happen.”170 This “rusted girder” was the same structure the city had just ten years earlier spent millions to renovate, a renovation that at the time had been guaranteed for 30 years.171 If the Tigers were going to steadfastly ignore inspections from just two years earlier that revealed the stadium was structurally sound, the Fan Club would have to attack them from a different angle. The approach that ultimately yielded their best results would be to go after the team’s proposed use of public dollars for a new stadium.

The use of public dollars for a new stadium, especially in a cash-strapped city such as Detroit, was a gross injustice in the eyes of the Fan Club. As Frank Rashid, English professor at Marygrove College and co-founder of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, explains:

> Historic preservation has always been important, has always been the issue. The importance of baseball to Detroit has always been important to the issue. But for me, the burning issue became how much money goes into the pockets of team owners and major league baseball instead of into the real services that are needed by the people of Detroit. So for me it really is a case of the people of Detroit subsidizing people who are already very wealthy people who already have a business going. And that became the real fire in my belly as the issue progressed.172

Using this “fire” as motive, the Fan Club, along with the Common Ground Coalition, started a petition to enact an ordinance which would prohibit the use of public dollars

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171 Betzold and Casey, 110.
for a new stadium. In 1991 their cause received another boost when the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the stadium to their annual “11 Most Endangered” list. Usually reserved for battlefields and national historic sites, this recognition reflected the gravity of the situation and marked the first time a sports stadium had ever been included. With their collection of 11,000 signatures the Fan Club and the Coalition were able to place the public dollar issue in hands of the voters. In the spring of 1992 the people of the city spoke, when two thirds of the voters passed the ordinance effectively prohibiting the use of public dollars for stadium construction. Tom Monaghan, tired of fighting, finally threw in the towel on August 26, 1992 when he sold the team to Mike Ilitch, owner of the Detroit Red Wings and Little Caesars Pizza. The Tiger Stadium Fan Club had finally prevailed. The fans had spoken and the majority vote of the people of Detroit had saved Tiger Stadium, at least that’s what they thought.

The Fan Club initially viewed Mike Ilitch’s purchase of the Tigers as a good sign, a victory for Tiger Stadium. After all Ilitch loved the Tigers, having once played in their farm program. He also had a reputation for caring about the city of Detroit. Not only had he invested in the city when he purchased the Detroit Red Wings, but just three short years earlier he had restored the 1920s-era Fox Theatre to its original grandeur. He was a preservationist; of course he would be interested in preserving another of Detroit’s landmarks. Upon purchasing the team, Ilitch’s comments echoed those of Monaghan from a decade earlier, “There is no way I would move this team out of the

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173 The Common Ground Coalition was comprised of individual activists and organizations. Bak, 1998, 364.
city. Never.” Although an encouraging message, it in no way indicated that his inclinations towards Tiger Stadium differed from those of his predecessor. In fact, Ilitch was no more of a proponent of Tiger Stadium’s preservation than Monaghan had been; a position that would soon be evident. In order to regain fan support, Ilitch re-hired Ernie Harwell and met with the Tiger Stadium Fan Club. Although initially viewed as a good sign, the Fan Club would soon realize that Ilitch would be no more receptive to their plan than Monaghan. Recalling the meeting, John Davids, Fan Club member and Cochrane Plan architect states:

In 1992 when Monaghan sold the team to Mike Ilitch I think it really buoyed us for a while. I think a lot of people in the Fan Club felt that Mr. Ilitch had a good reputation in Detroit as someone who’d renovated the Fox Theatre and he had an interest in Detroit, and that he was more of a baseball man perhaps, and that maybe we had more of a chance of having him renovated the stadium with Mr. Ilitch. And in fact within a couple months of him buying the team he did sit down and meet with us. And I don’t think…I think the meeting went very well. I don’t think in hindsight that he ever had any intention of renovating the stadium. But I think he was much more politically astute than Mr. Monaghan and wanted to be able to say, ‘I met with the Fan Club, they’re nice people, they have good ideas. But it’s not what we want to do.’ A much better answer than Mr. Monaghan who just ran away from us for two and a half years.”

The following year, using the money collected through the ticket surcharge, Ilitch made some “improvements” to the stadium: replacing the small parking lot on the southeast side of the stadium along Michigan avenue with Tiger Plaza, a food court and souvenir mecca. As alleged by Peter Comstock Riley, future Tiger Stadium preservationist and employee of the Tigers at the time, and supported by Betzold and Casey, a good deal of

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174 Betzold and Casey, 328.
175 Ibid, 328.
the money used during these “improvements” did not go to the construction of Tiger Plaza, but rather to the construction of Little Caesars Pizza concessions within the plaza, a company owned by Ilitch. As Betzold and Casey explain, “Millions of dollars in checks were written for nonitemized expenses and the surcharge money was mingled with money for Ilitch’s pizza business. A Little Caesars subsidiary, Blue Line Distributing Inc., was paid $732,033 out of surcharge receipts for food counters, menu signs, pizza pans, dough trays, ladles, cheese scoops and oven mitts, among other items.”177 If the surcharge was created to pay for the renovations and later maintenance, why was it being used to pay for Little Caesars supplies? In essence, Mike Ilitch was using this money to build another one of his businesses, rather than using it for the upkeep of Tiger Stadium.

It wasn’t long before Ilitch started expressing his desire for a new stadium, using the same excuses that Monaghan and Schembechler had espoused just a few years earlier. With an estimated net worth of $600 million dollars, and a team with the second highest payroll in baseball (supported by increased ticket prices), Ilitch complained that he needed a new stadium before his last place Tigers would be able to compete.178 The false sense of security the Fan Club had been lulled into just two years earlier quickly dissipated.

The early ‘90s not only marked a change in Tigers’ ownership, but also a mayoral change when Dennis Archer was elected in November of 1993. As Betzold and Casey

177 Betzold and Casey, 336.
178 Betzold and Casey, 329.
explain, “Archer, an attorney and former state Supreme Court justice, was Young’s opposite in personality. While Young thrived on confrontation, Archer was a compromiser and fence-mender.” Like Mike Ilitch, Archer initially appeared to side with the Fan Club by stating his intentions to enforce the Tigers lease which was binding until 2008. Archer seemed reluctant to relinquish the guaranteed income the lease agreement afforded the cash-strapped city, even agreeing to entertain the interests of the Fan Club. While Mike Ilitch was visiting new stadiums in Baltimore and Cleveland, stadiums both considered throw-back designs supposedly based on the unique designs of historic urban ballparks, the Fan Club was flying Archer to Wrigley Field to show him the benefits of preservation. Bill Dow, spokesman, board member, and legal counsel for the Tiger Stadium Fan Club remembers:

...When I read in the paper that Mike Ilitch took Dennis Archer, Mayor Archer to Camden Yards [Baltimore], I called up Dennis Archer and left a message for him saying, ‘Bill Dow, Tiger Stadium Fan Club. Would you please call me back. I wonder if I could take you to Wrigley Field.’ I couldn’t believe it two days later the mayor calls me at my house [and says], ‘if you want to take me and a security person that’s fine, we’ll go to Wrigley Field.’ ...I think about two or three weeks later, we arranged and flew with the mayor and this other person and took a tour of Wrigley Field, and showed him that you could privately renovate it without any public money and create luxury suites, and all this stuff. And when we met with Dennis Archer a couple of times he said, ‘The guy you got to convince is Ilitch.’

179 Ibid, 330.
180 Ibid, 331.
181 Ibid, 330.
182 Bill Dow, interview by author, Birmingham, MI, December 16, 2011.

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Throw-back designs refers to the return to single use stadiums located in dense urban areas and the movement away from largely suburban multi-purpose stadiums.
Although Archer initially showed the Fan Club support, like Mayor Young he would eventually side with Ilitch, publicly rejecting renovation options for Tiger Stadium.\textsuperscript{183} Soon the Fan Club would once again find itself battling yet another owner and mayor over the right to use public money to fund a new stadium. The difference this time around was Ilitch. Much more politically savvy that Monaghan, Ilitch skipped the city bureaucracy and went right to the governor’s office. While the Fan Club’s 1992 ordinance prohibited the use of city funds, it did nothing to preclude Ilitch from using funds acquired from the state.\textsuperscript{184} Although it would seem that a $600 million dollar fortune would be sufficient to pay for a new stadium, the politics of major league baseball would end up playing into Ilitch’s hands when in 1994 the owners forced a player’s strike. Citing hardship due to the Tigers’ lost 1994 season, Ilitch stated he could no longer afford to pay for a new stadium and began to push Michigan governor John Engler for state subsidies.\textsuperscript{185} Writing about the proposed use of these funds, attorney Andy Jacoby explains:

\begin{quote}
...though Engler supported Ilitch’s new stadium plan, the Michigan Legislature, not the governor holds the power of the state purse. To get around this, Engler redirected funds received by his executive branch without seeking appropriation by the Michigan legislature. In 1995, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club brought suit to prevent the state government’s use of these funds to construct a new stadium. The case was premised on the Michigan Constitution’s separation of powers doctrine, and addressed the delegation of funds to new stadium construction where those funds were collected by Governor John Engler from local Indian tribes...Unfortunately for the Fan Club, the Michigan Court of Appeals found the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{183} Betzold and Casey, 331.
\textsuperscript{185} Betzold and Casey, 331.
Governor’s actions laudable. The court ruled that the tribal funds constitute ‘public funds not subject to appropriation.’...Because the funds did not fall within the ambit of the Appropriations Clause, the court likewise found that the Separation of Powers Clause was not violated.\footnote{186 Jacoby, 67-69.}

Now that he had secured the state funds, the Ilitch marketing machine threw its full weight behind their new stadium campaign. Facing a campaign backed by the Tigers, the State of Michigan, and the City of Detroit, the Detroit City Council repealed the 1992 city ordinance prohibiting the use of public funds. Once again forced to fight an issue they’d defeated in the past, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club forced a referendum on the City Council’s action, what would become known as Proposal A. While Proposal A prompted voters to override the City Council’s decision and once again prohibit the use of public subsidies for stadium construction, Proposal B asked voters to support the use of public dollars. Both the Tigers and the city threw their full weight behind Proposal B citing all the developments that the new construction would precipitate including promises for more police, a restored city spirit and pride, elimination of blight, new businesses, and finally new jobs. In a city that desperately needed the fulfillment of all of these promises, the temptation was hard to turn down. It didn’t help the Fan Club’s cause that the advertisements touting the benefits of Proposal B were everywhere: on billboards, flyers, commercials, and even on news programs. In a debate that aired on March 12, 1996, Frank Rashid of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club and Mayor Dennis Archer squared off over the subject. During the debate Mayor Archer rebuffed Rashid’s
accusation that the city did not have the best interests of its people at heart by emphasizing the supposed benefits of voting yes for Proposal B:

That money is being spent right here in the city of Detroit. I resent any time somebody wants to misrepresent the facts. Let’s deal with facts and not fiction, and we can get along very well. When the stadium is up and running, and the businesses around it are up and running we’ll take those dollars and we’ll put them right back in the neighborhood where we’ll put more police officers on the beat we’ll give you better city services. That’s a commitment I can make as mayor. The Tiger Stadium Fan Club has no juice to do anything in this city other than to oppose what’s in the best interest of our city.  

Although the mayor’s premises were convincing at the time, studies measuring the actual realized benefits of new stadium construction have shown that many of these claims have never been fulfilled. While, the constant media and marketing blitz was hard for the Fan Club to combat, the biggest blow came towards the end of the campaign, when their home residence and racial demographic was questioned.

Essentially they were accused of being white suburbanites, not true Detroiter.

Although the four founding members of the club lived and worked in the city, the core racial accusations were difficult to contest. In the Emmy-winning documentary

*Stranded at the Corner*, Cochrane Plan architect John Davids explains the situation:

> One of the struggles we had was the Fan Club was founded by all life-long Detroiter, but they were all white Detroiter. We really had a difficult time finding prominent black supporters that could have been part of our cause which would have been really helpful. And I think part of it was this kind of, this two histories aspect to Detroit. It [Tiger Stadium] represented an era that wasn’t

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188 In March of 2007, Frank Rashid testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Domestic Policy, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, stating that since the opening of Comerica Park, the new home of the Tigers, not a single of the city’s promised benefits had been fulfilled.
something they wanted to celebrate it wasn’t something enjoyable like it was for white Detroiter or white suburbanites at the time.\textsuperscript{189}

Many of the newspaper stories highlighting this accusation of implied racism were timed to coincide with the day of the proposal vote. It was over almost before it started, the Tiger Stadium Fan Club had been defeated. Viewing the vote through the eyes of hindsight, Frank Rashid explains the campaign they were up against, “The politicians went to the churches, they went to the institutions in Detroit, and the Tigers went there, and they basically spent, I forget $600,000-$1,000,000 in a public awareness campaign to defeat our $30,000 campaign, and they creamed us.”\textsuperscript{190} In the end the numbers relating to the amount of stadium funds allocations are murky, most notably pertaining to the amount that Ilitch contributed. According to Andy Jacoby the total amounts paid for the Tigers’ new home, Comerica Park break down as follows:

- Total cost: $260 million
- City contributed funds: $40 million
- County contributed funds: $40 million
- State contributed funds: $55 million
- Funds contributed by bank for naming rights: $66 million
- Funds contributed by Mike Ilitch’s Detroit Tigers: $60 million\textsuperscript{191}

Mike Ilitch would end up contributing less than a quarter of the cost for his new stadium.

\textsuperscript{189} John Davids, ‘Stranded at the Corner,’ DVD, directed by Gary Glaser, Michigan & Trumbull, LLC, 2006.
\textsuperscript{190} Frank Rashid, ‘Stranded at the Corner,’ DVD, directed by Gary Glaser, Michigan & Trumbull, LLC, 2006.
\textsuperscript{191} 81\% of Detroit voters supported Proposal B. Bak, 1998, 389.
\textsuperscript{191} Jacoby, 69.
The Last Days of Tiger Stadium

The lost proposal battle of 1996 marked the beginning of the end for Tiger Stadium. As the stadium’s final 1999 season began the public outpouring of sentiment increased. What had always been a place for happiness slowly turned into a venue for reflection and memorial. The newspapers that for so long had run the stories of the battles to save the stadium, often professing the need for its replacement; now ran story after story devoted to its unique features and historical significance to the city. Each writer found new and flowery prose to devote to the stadium in its death that had rarely been espoused during its battle for survival. As the end of the season neared, tickets to the games became harder to come by as people traveled from across the country to pay their respects for the last time. Quotes from these last time, and in some cases first-time pilgrims filled the local newspapers:

...finally laying eyes on the stadium “was almost emotional. I waited all these years to come here, I didn’t cry, but it was really weird. I was all tingly, it was really hard to approach the ballpark. It was like being a little kid.”

Mike Gilbert – Vermont native, and longtime Tigers fan

“you look at a place like Tiger Stadium and, to me, it represents the same thing as Fenway Park (in Boston) and Wrigley Field in Chicago...these are places where the game was played when it was played at its best. I think of an industrial area when I see that place. I see a blue-collar neighborhood. I see steel plants, iron plants. And there is this ballpark...And then, when you walk into it, you see the

192 Just a few of these articles are as follows:
blue. And then the grass...it’s like a haven, different from the area that’s outside the walls...It says playground. It says childhood.”

John Swede – Santa Monica, California

“You just walk in, and you can almost feel the history...I got goosebumps.”

Chris Hill – Spotswood, New Jersey, Yankees fan

The final major league game in the eighty-seven year old ballpark occurred on September 27, 1999. Fans showed up in the morning, milling about just waiting for the gates to open for the 4:00pm contest to begin. That night members of the Tigers team wore the various numbers of Tigers greats on their uniforms, or in the case of Gabe Kapler who represented Ty Cobb, no number at all. The Tigers would beat Kansas City that night 8-2, and as just Tiger Stadium had been the home of so many significant moments in the past, her last game would be no different. Befitting the history and significance of the night the final hit of the game was Tigers’ rookie Robert Fick’s eighth-inning grand slam off the right field roof. Following the end of the game, sixty-six Tigers of the past, dating back sixty-six years took the field. The eldest was Eldon Auker who had pitched for the Tigers in 1933. Many of the players scooped up dirt from the field, taking one last bit of the stadium which had provided them with so many memories, the most poignant of which was possibly 1970s pitching great Mark Fidrych. Famous for talking to the ball as he stood on the pitcher’s mound, Fidrych bent down and talked to the stadium one last time before scooping up a bit of the mound’s dirt. As the night drew to a close, Tiger Stadium’s home plate was excavated and transported across town.

193 All the quotes above were taken from ML Elrick’s *Detroit Free Press* article: “Fans Heeding The Call Of The Corner Spectators Relive Youth, Mourn ‘Profound Loss’ of Ballpark’s Closing,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 1999.
to its new home in Comerica Park. It seems that even on her last night, efforts were made to overshadow Tiger Stadium’s importance. Many lingered inside for as long as they could, crying, soaking up the memories, and saying their last goodbyes to the stadium that had been so important to so many generations. It was the voice of the Tigers, Ernie Harwell, who echoed the sentiments of so many, when he simply said, “Farewell, old friend Tiger Stadium, we will remember.”

Chapter 3
The Final Decade

The Proposals

While the beginning of the new millennium marked the end of major league baseball at Tiger Stadium, it did not signal the end of the movements bent on preserving it. Although the city had preferred to back a new publicly funded stadium, they did recognize the stadium’s economic development potential. Prior to the stadium’s abandonment in early 1998, the Corktown Citizens District Council (CCDC) recognized the hole the Tigers’ departure would leave in their community. Although many residents would not miss the crowded streets and rowdy fans, they would miss the economic benefits that the Tigers’ presence had provided area residents and businesses.¹⁹⁵ Reticent to part with these benefits the CDCC, with the support of the City of Detroit, developed a plan that proposed to retain the historic field while renovating the stadium into a multi-use residential, commercial, and sporting facility. This proposal included plans for 200 lofts, ice rinks, basketball courts, rock climbing walls, jogging mezzanines, and street level commercial shopping.¹⁹⁶ All told, the

¹⁹⁵ One of the unique aspects of Tiger Stadium’s neighborhood location, were the resident-owned parking lots. When the Tigers moved to Comerica Park this revenue was assumed by Ilitch-owned parking lots. Consequently the move to Comerica which caused a loss of revenue for residents of Corktown, gave Mike Ilitch another revenue stream which had previously been unavailable at Tiger Stadium.

renovation was projected to cost $150 million to $200 million to complete. 197 This plan, while uplifting for the preservationist cause, was a little unrealistic considering developers were only given six weeks to respond to the nationally distributed July 1999 request for proposal. 198 Consequently, it was no surprise when newspapers reported that the city had received only three partial responses. 199 Understanding that perhaps their abbreviated response period had influenced the lack of enthusiastic replies, the city eliminated the deadline. By October of 2000, more than a year after the stadium’s closure, the city’s plan had still failed to garner any feasible responses. According to Sylvia Crawford, spokeswoman for Detroit’s Department of Planning and Development, “Fewer than five developers have submitted plans to redevelop the stadium since the city publicly asked for proposals in July 1999...None of the developers has had the experience the city wants in historic preservation as well as residential and commercial work.” 200

Finally in December of 2001 the Detroit Free Press reported that the city of Detroit had issued a holding letter to Nonrahs-Sinacola Stadium Redevelopment LLC of Livonia, effectively agreeing to not consider any other development offers for a period of six months. 201 Based on the city and CCDC’s original plan, Nonrahs-Sinacola’s mixed-use proposal included condos, shops, offices, and underground parking, as well as a

197 Ibid.
198 Curt Guyette, “A hole in the heart: Corktown’s lost field of dreams.”, Metro Times, August 6, 2003. 99
199 Ibid.
226,000 square foot sports club constructed in a space created by the proposed demolition of the north section of the stadium.\textsuperscript{202} Fundamental to the plan was Nonrahs-Sinacola’s desire to “…preserve the playing field and 8,000 stadium seats for such uses as Little League and high school baseball playoffs, a minor league baseball franchise, concerts and perhaps a outdoor ice rink.”\textsuperscript{203} Unfortunately, the project was never realized. In order to complete studies to determine the feasibility of their proposal, Nonrahs-Sinacola had requested access to the city’s $2 million dollar ticket surcharge fund.\textsuperscript{204} While this request would have been supported by previous Mayor Dennis Archer, newly elected mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick was not so accommodating.\textsuperscript{205}

Mired in the entrails of city bureaucracy, Nonrahs-Sinacola’s repeated letters to the city went unanswered.\textsuperscript{206} On May 30, 2002 Nonrahs-Sinacola’s holding letter expired. By November Kilpatrick’s administration issued new requests for proposals (RFP). According to \textit{Metro Times} writer Curt Guyette, this RFP was “virtually identical to the one issued in 1999. Despite Kilpatrick’s announcement that he had a different vision for the site, his Planning Department apparently still thought the original concept was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Curt Guyette, “A hole in the heart: Corktown’s lost field of dreams.”, \textit{Metro Times}, August 6, 2003
\item \textsuperscript{205} A similar request had been made during an earlier RFP response. At that time U.S. Senator Carl Levin offered to raise federal funds for the feasibility study, which the city declined. Guyette reports, Levin staffer Cassandra Woods stated, “We were advised that the city had a pot of money that could be used for that purpose.” Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Ibid. According to records Guyette acquired through the Freedom of Information Act, although Kilpatrick’s administration alleged to have responded to Nonrahs-Sinacola’s correspondence no evidence of responses was ever found.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
worth pursuing.” Due to Tiger Stadium’s location and access to freeways, Kilpatrick’s “different vision” included plans for big-box retailers, a development option that did not please the residents of Corktown. Guyette reports:

In a March 2002 letter to Kilpatrick, Corktown CDC administrator Kavanaugh wrote: “The RFP (request for proposal) issued by the City was the result of years of community planning – a true Community-Based Initiative...we were afforded the rare opportunity to chart our own future and decide what we actually wanted to happen in our neighborhood.” Kavanaugh then quoted Kilpatrick, reminding him of what he said in his State of the City speech: “CDC’s, neighborhood associations, and communities...are at the table at the front end of the planning process and not the back end.” Kavanaugh says Kilpatrick should practice what he preaches and listen to the people of Corktown when they say they want to see Tiger Stadium reused the way they envisioned it, and not torn down to make way for a big-box retailer.

Kilpatrick’s new RFP received three responses, including a re-submission by Nonrah-Sinacola; all three included the park’s use as a site for minor league baseball. None of them was ever accepted.

Nonrah-Sinacola’s proposed use of minor league baseball at Tiger Stadium was not the first time the idea had been tossed around. In late 2000, Peter Comstock Riley, former Tiger employee and founder of Michigan and Trumbull LLC, approached the city regarding the possibility of bringing minor league baseball to ‘The Corner.’ Riley’s dealings with the city would prove to be just as frustrating as Nonrah-Sinacola’s. Riley’s proposals never included renovation, but rather just continued use, a utilization that

207 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
210 The rejected proposals included a plan by the Navin Field Consortium that suggested a return to the stadium’s original Navin Field configuration. This plan would later be echoed by the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy in their efforts to stave off the eventual 2009 demolition of the stadium.
concerned the Tigers more than the city. Since the Tigers’ 1999 abandonment, the city had paid the Tigers’ $420,000 a year to maintain the city-owned park. For some unexplained reason this payment gave the Tigers the right to decide how the stadium should be utilized.\textsuperscript{211} Frustrated and confused about the Tigers’ involvement in the decision, Riley approached the Detroit City Council where he was told by Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel, “It’s up to Mr. Comstock Riley to decide if he wants to go to the Tigers to see if he wants to negotiate a deal.”\textsuperscript{212} Although he ultimately succeeded in getting two college games at the stadium, this result wasn’t quite what he was hoping for. In 2001 Michigan and Trumbull LLC approached the city yet again, this time Riley’s offer involved utilizing Tiger Stadium as a venue for a Frontier League team, who would not only utilize Tiger Stadium but also manage the site and pay the city for its operating expenses.\textsuperscript{213} The fully funded plan he presented did not restrict the city from developing the site, but rather stated his team would leave should the city find prospective developers whose use did not coincide with minor league baseball. Although this proposal enabled the city to eliminate its monthly maintenance payment to the Tigers, it ultimately declined Riley’s offer. Guyette reported, “Riley contends that the Ilitches have used their political influence to kill any attempts at reusing Tiger Stadium. It’s in their interest to collect the $420,000 in yearly management fees as long as possible, then let the stadium be

\textsuperscript{211} Curt Guyette, “A hole in the heart: Corktown’s lost field of dreams,” \textit{Metro Times}, August 6, 2003. Some of the uses the Tigers sanctioned within the park over the years included the filming of Billy Crystal’s “61*” in 2001 and the 2006 Bud Bowl during Super Bowl XL in Detroit. 
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
demolished so that there is no threat of any sort of competition from The Corner.”

Riley’s opinion was echoed by others, most notably Detroit City Council President Maryann Mahaffey, who stated, “I think what the Ilitches want is to see Tiger Stadium torn down.” The city denied ever receiving any messages from the Tigers’ organization regarding Riley’s offer.

While it certainly seemed that the Tigers’ organization was opposed to anyone else prospering from the stadium’s use, it appeared that is was perfectly acceptable for them to utilize its memory for their own revenue purposes. Shortly after the Tigers abandoned the site they began to sell bottles of dirt from Tiger Stadium at Comerica Park. Referred to as “Ground From The Mound,” these sealed bottles sold for $9.99. Although the bottled dirt was actually the brainchild of local start-up company A Piece of the Field LLC, the Tigers certainly had no qualms about partnering with them to profit from the excavations. This mutual business venture turned out to be rather short-lived. It is unknown how the city felt about Ilitch and others profiting at their expense.

For the next several years various proposals for the stadium’s renovation were submitted to the city. All of them were denied. Steve Thomas, president of the Corktown business Detroit Athletic Company and member of one of the renovation developers, the Navin Field Consortium, explains:

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214 Ibid. Interestingly the money the city paid the Tigers for maintenance was coming at the expense of other city landmarks. In an unrelated article in the Metro Times from March 9, 2005 titled, “The Tragedy of the Aquarium,” reporter Jack Lessenberry related the story of Detroit’s Belle Isle aquarium which was in danger of closing. According to Lessenberry the $420,000 the city paid to the Tigers would have been enough to keep the aquarium open and operating.
216 Ibid.
We actually proposed to the Detroit Tigers that the Detroit Tigers move one of their minor league affiliates to the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. The biggest obstacle is the city of Detroit and the Detroit Tigers don’t want that to happen. The meetings that we had, the reaction that we had was the type of meetings that were over with before they started. Absolutely no interests in the concepts from either the Detroit Tigers or the City of Detroit. And we knew probably within the first fifteen minutes of meeting with the Detroit Tigers that the plan wasn’t going to go forward with the current ownership.217

In order to circumvent the obstacle the proposed minor league use created, Peter Riley decided to try a different tactic. In 2005 he approached the city and offered to maintain Tiger Stadium for free.218 No proposed use, minor league or otherwise, just an offer of complimentary maintenance. He even offered to help the city find interested developers. The city refused. In an emailed reply to Riley’s proposal dated February 1, 2005, chief development officer for the City of Detroit Walter Watkins stated, “After careful consideration, we have decided that we cannot accept your offer. Several prospective developments are under consideration, and we feel we can provide the necessary maintenance and security in the interim. We continue to appreciate your interest in the Stadium and wish you all the very best.”219 Riley viewed this latest rejection as yet another example of Ilitches’ influence, reasoning that there could be no other reason why the city would rather pay the Tigers for maintenance, unless it was to keep one of its richest citizens happy.220 While many rejected developers empathized

219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
with Peter Comstock Riley, the majority of the Detroit metropolitan area was unaware that viable offers even existed.

One of the issues that always plagues stadium preservation movements is the lack of objective reporting. While several respected developers with more than adequate financial backing had approached the city with proposals, the vast majority of these proposals were not reported. With the exception of the Nonrahs-Sinacola proposal, the two newspapers with the highest circulation in the region, The Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press, had failed even to report on the multitude of viable proposals. Instead they ran stories stating that the city had failed to receive realistic proposals, statements that seemed to be written from the desks of city officials. While small independent newspapers such as the Metro Times featured stories relaying potential developer’s frustrations, this perspective was suspiciously absent from the stories featured in The Detroit News or Detroit Free Press; that is if stories regarding the stadium were published at all. Like the media blitz that attacked the Tiger Stadium Fan Club in the waning days of the 1990s, it was this absence of unbiased reporting that now negatively contributed to the future of Tiger Stadium.

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222 While combing through the archives of Detroit area newspapers for information pertaining to the preservation efforts at Tiger Stadium, a lack of reporting particularly on the part of The Detroit News was glaringly obvious. Although the Detroit Free Press and especially reporter John Gallagher, did feature the stadium more often, most of their reporting pertained to its imminent demolition rather than the viable proposals submitted to preserve it. Almost all of the stories that reported on the proposals were products of smaller publications that were either independent such as the Metro Times, or from city’s outside of the Detroit area including the Toledo Blade and the Windsor Star. Mlive.com, a statewide reporting conglomerate also regularly featured stories regarding submitted proposals that occurred in the years prior to the stadium’s demolition in 2009.
In June of 2006 after almost seven years of “entertaining” renovation proposals, the Detroit Free Press reported that “Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick has decided to raze Tiger Stadium, the historic but decaying home of Ty Cobb, Hank Greenberg and the 1984 World Series champion Tigers. In its place, Kilpatrick envisions a ring of retail shops and residential housing surrounding the historic playing field, which will be preserved as a nonprofit park and ball diamond.”\textsuperscript{223} The plan involved the demolition of approximately 90% of the stadium, with the possible retention of the area immediately surrounding home plate, including the dugouts.\textsuperscript{224} Not unlike the Tigers’ earlier scheme to make money from the sale of Tiger Stadium dirt, this new proposal created an opportunity for city revenue through the piecemeal auction of Tiger Stadium seats and other structural memorabilia. Immediately the city began to converse with officials at the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), the non-profit organization in charge of development who would assume control of the site upon the Detroit City Council’s positive demolition vote. Eerily reminiscent of earlier proposed uses, the plan’s most notable difference was the absence of minor league affiliation. As DEGC staffer, Peter Zeiler explained, “…by honoring the history of the site, it provides an outstanding opportunity for young ballplayers to learn the history of baseball.”\textsuperscript{225} Perhaps this new use would not attract the expected disproval of Mike Ilitch.

\textsuperscript{223}“Demolition Set For Fall, Tiger Stadium: It’s History,” Detroit Free Press, June 16, 2006.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
The Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy

From 2006 to 2007 various individuals, including members of the now defunct Tiger Stadium Fan Club, pressed for the preservation of Tiger Stadium. About this time a new player appeared on the preservation front. Known as the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy (OTSC), this non-profit organization was comprised of various Detroit area professionals. Unlike some of the public tactics used by the Fan Club, such as “stadium hugs,” the Conservancy hoped to preserve the original Navin Field configuration by cooperating with and operating through the various bureaucratic channels of the city. Although these plans called for the retention of part of the stadium, many preservationists still held out hope that the Detroit City Council would vote against any type of demolition. In July of 2007, their efforts received an influential boost when Hall of Fame sportscaster Ernie Harwell announced his support of the preservation of a larger portion of the stadium. Through attorney Gary Spicer, Harwell had an ally on the City Council in Councilwoman and Spicer friend, Martha Reeves. Reeves, former lead singer of the Motown recording group Martha and the Vandellas, invited Harwell and Spicer to the June 27, 2007 City Council meeting. At the meeting Harwell spoke before the Council urging them to postpone their decision. Believing they had the support of Martha Reeves, preservationists were shocked when Reeves switched her vote, ultimately becoming the swing vote in the Council’s 5-4 decision to demolish the

226 Bill Dow, interview by author, Birmingham, MI, December 16, 2011.
stadium and hand over its control to the DEGC.\textsuperscript{228} According to one-time Tiger Stadium Fan Club spokesman Bill Dow, who was present at the meeting:

> She looked scared. I’ll never forget this, there was a guy who worked with George Jackson [president and CEO of the DEGC], I remember him grabbing her arm when the session was in recess and saying, “We have you right? We have you?” I mean I witnessed this. And she looked scared, and it was embarrassing for her because standing in front of Gary Spicer and Ernie Harwell who she invited...She turned on us, and it was the swing vote to switch the other way which led to the eventual demolition of Tiger Stadium.\textsuperscript{229}

By handing control of the site to the DEGC, instead of the Economic Development Corporation which would have worked towards the stadium’s partial preservation, the Council had essentially voted for the stadium’s complete demolition. In September Harwell and Spicer dropped their plan to save a larger portion of the stadium and joined the board of the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy, hoping to assist the Conservancy in their mix-use plan which retained the original Navin Field configuration of the stadium.\textsuperscript{230}

> While the Conservancy was still pursuing its plans to save a portion of the stadium, in June of 2008 the city approved a contract for the stadium’s demolition.\textsuperscript{231} Four days later on June 30, 2008 demolition crews began ripping holes in the historic

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\textsuperscript{228} Ibid, and Bill Dow, interviewed by the author, December 16, 2011.  \\
\textsuperscript{229} Bill Dow, interview by author, Birmingham, MI, December 16,2011.  \\
\end{flushright}
Undeterred, the Conservancy continued to push their Navin Field configuration redevelopment plans, at the end of July they reached an agreement with the DEGC. The Conservancy had until March 1, 2009 to raise an estimated $15.6 million for their proposal. Their multi-use dugout to dugout plan had the guaranteed backing of architectural firm Hamilton Anderson and Associates, programming firm Ripken and Associates (owned by former Baltimore Oriole Cal Ripken), and the financial backing of development firm Zachary and Associates. In essence the Conservancy’s plans were extremely viable, and had a realistic chance of gaining the funding. By December Ballpark Digest reported that the Conservancy had raised $12 million towards its goal, but unfortunately just a month later the overall price tag was pushed up to $27 million after the Conservancy met with a contractor to receive an updated restoration estimate. In late February 2009 with the deadline looming, the Conservancy received an influential boost when Michigan Democratic Senator Carl Levin presented them with a $3.8 million federal grant meant for development specifically within the neighborhood.

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of Corktown. By this time demolition crews had finished removing all but the contested dugout to dugout Navin Field configuration of Tiger Stadium. The month of March passed and still no decisions were delivered concerning the fate of Tiger Stadium. Finally in June of 2009 the board of the DEGC voted 7-1 to tear down the remainder of the historic park. Although the Conservancy had been able to raise much of the now $33.4 million goal, the DEGC decided to proceed with demolition. The Conservancy was not notified of the meeting until after it had occurred. The decision, which ignored the $22 million the Conservancy had raised, not only baffled them but caused MSNBC host Keith Olbermann to label DEGC president and CEO George Jackson, “one of the world’s worst people for his role in the demo.” On June 9, 2009 demolition of the stadium continued, and by September 20th the last remnants of the once historic structure were gone. Ninety-seven years of history were gone with it...or so everyone thought.


237 Ibid. It is unclear how or why the $27 million goal was increased to $33.4 million.


Navin Field

For some unexplained reason the demolition crews at Tiger Stadium tore down the structure and left the field untouched (Figure 3-1). Its infield never appeared to have been driven over by heavy demolition machinery or scarred in any way. Consequently, the field that had witnessed so much greatness still existed; the chance to walk in the footsteps of legends was still available. Now it was more easily accessible.

In 2010, several months after demolition crews had cleared away the last remnants of Tiger Stadium, Tom Derry, Redford, Michigan mailman and one-time member of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, drove by the corner of Michigan and Trumbull and became upset. What he saw was not just another unkempt empty lot in the city of

\[240\] While efforts were made to contact George Jackson, he never responded to this author’s request for an interview.
Detroit dominated by four foot tall grass and weeds, but the field of his sporting heroes. He decided to do something about it. He returned armed with landscape equipment, bent on restoring the still recognizable field to its former state, going through several lawn mower blades in the process. Soon Derry’s efforts attracted others, and one by one more and more people appeared at Michigan and Trumbull to assist with its maintenance. The Navin Field Grounds Crew had been born (Figure 3-2). Eventually chalk lines were drawn along the base paths, and bases were placed in their rightful spots; an old home plate was even unearthed from the ground where it had been buried, preserved. Soon people weren’t just showing up to help with the maintenance, but were arriving to play pick-up games.241 The Grounds Crew has embraced the social media website Facebook, which has proven to be the perfect communication tool for their cause. It is through their self-titled fan page that the Grounds Crew is able to communicate when they are meeting as well as any current news which pertains to the developments at ‘The Corner.’ In a sense Facebook has enabled the Navin Field Grounds Crew to attract new supporters, which has consequently influenced many pilgrimages to the site. Perhaps inspired by Derry’s efforts, the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy and Peter Comstock Riley both renewed their efforts to preserve history.

While the Conservancy began to create new development proposals, Riley’s efforts took a different path. When the stadium had been demolished, the demolition crews had

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not only spared the field but also the historic flagpole; original to 1896 and the only structure of its kind to ever exist in fair territory in a baseball park. Peter Comstock Riley decided it was time for the American flag to once again fly from the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. Although soon afterwards someone mysteriously went in and removed not only the flag and its hoisting wire, but also the cleats that secured the flag, Riley was not deterred.\footnote{Peter Comstock Riley, interviewed by the author, Detroit, MI, December 27, 2011.} Riley, along with Claude Grenier, just erected another flag, and attached two cleats at varying heights, to ensure the flag’s security. Since the flag’s installation, the owner of Brooks Lumber across the street on Trumbull Avenue agreed to pay for and install a spotlight which continually highlights the flagpole and field’s history. Meanwhile, the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy had developed another proposal for the Tiger Stadium site (Figure 3-3). This $65.3 million redevelopment plan proposed to surround the historic field with a structure that would house two local nonprofits, a charter school,
retail shops and residential housing. The plan had already received the commitment of two local non-profits, The Greening of Detroit and WARM Training Center, and Corner Stone Charter Schools, when the DEGC decided to reject the economic development plan in March 2011. Their continuous rejections of viable well-funded proposals stand in stark contrast to a non-profit organization whose website claims the “DEGC has been designed to make business success in Detroit possible.” If this is their “mission,” why would they rather sit on the site waiting for a phantom big box store, than nurture one of the many viable, well funded proposals that have been presented to them? Why are they so adverse to any proposal that includes preservation of the field, regardless of its economic potential? Unfortunately, redevelopment proposals would not be the only ones the DEGC would refuse. In September 2011 they continued their anti-preservation position when they announced their rejection of Chevrolet’s offer to maintain the field for free. Although Tom Derry and his Navin Field Grounds Crew continued to maintain

244 Ibid.
'The Corner,' Chevrolet offered to refurbish the field for its future utilization as a site for youth baseball. George Jackson and the DEGC felt that the site’s utilization as a place for youth baseball would make it unattractive to prospective developers. From Jackson’s perspective it was a matter of determining the highest and best use for the property, and youth baseball did not fit into the equation. In an interview with Stephen Henderson on his show ‘American Black Journal,’ Jackson explained, “In New York, when they tore down Yankee Stadium, did they put up a little league field or are they going to develop the land? The term is ‘highest and best use.’ That is what’s best for the city, not for a group that has a special interest.”

Evidently Mr. Jackson was unaware that a little league field along with a softball field, and a re-creation of Yankee Stadium’s original field in its original orientation, now exist at the former site of Yankee Stadium.

In February of 2012, with the deadline for their $3.8 million dollar earmark approaching, the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy once again proposed a new plan for the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. This time the offer is accompanied by the political backing of Senator Carl Levin and State Senator Morris Hood III and fifteen of his colleagues. This current plan includes the full restoration of the historic field and potentially a small museum, while leftover funds would be used for improvements along Michigan Avenue. Echoing Peter Comstock Riley’s proposal from 2005, the proposal also includes their offer to lease the land, giving a city that is currently on the brink of being taken over by an Emergency Manager, a much need revenue source. According to State Senator Hood, “We’re talking mainly about making sure kids have the opportunity to experience baseball...Baseball has done great for us in the past, getting inner city kids the chance to experience baseball, to learn baseball, to play baseball on a baseball field.” Although Mayor Dave Bing has confirmed the city received the letter, at this writing the city has yet to issue any type of response.

While George Jackson’s fear that the stadium’s utilization for youth baseball may be a deterrent for future developers, in essence that is already the case. It may not be

251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
specifically youth baseball that is being played at ‘The Corner,’ but games are being played on a weekly basis none the less. The fact is that other than the proposals that concern preservation of the field, no other development offers of any kind have ever been reported. People from all over the country continue to make pilgrimages to this site, and Tom Derry and his growing crew maintain it on a weekly basis. In a city that is in desperate need of a positive image, the corner of Michigan and Trumbull has once again become a place for community. A place open to anyone, where everyone’s contribution is felt. Perhaps Peter Comstock Riley, a man who has dedicated over a decade to ‘The Corner’s’ memory says it best:

People always say, “how do you feel about...” and I think what they want to say is, “How do you feel about failing? You obviously still like it, like what you did along the way to try and help it.” And I say, “I don’t have any regrets.” I am very thankful to have had the opportunity to have done it for as long as I’ve done it. I did whatever I could do. And the people I’ve met, I’ve met a lot of great people that I wouldn’t have met if Tiger Stadium didn’t exist, or ended the way it ended. I just am disappointed in the outcome, regretful of the outcome. Not anything else. And I’d do it again in a heartbeat; I’d just love to change the outcome. That’s what people remember the final score; they don’t always remember the highlights or the low lights. There’s still hope, it’s nice that I can say we contribute even with the way it is now with the flag. The owner of Brooks has extended the rooftop of Brooks to light it and pay for it, so he’s committed to doing his part, feels honored to do so. The benches that are there the guy that heads up the buying at Brooks who buys the lumber built them. Tom [Derry] and his guys do the cleaning up, and that all stemmed just from opening the gates. That’s what always started the day at Tiger Stadium forever, when the gates opened people started coming in and the memories started. It was all about people.254

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254 Peter Comstock Riley, interviewed by this author, Detroit, MI, December 27, 2011.
Chapter 4

An Earlier Time

The history of Tiger Stadium is not just the history of a stadium and the individuals that played within its confines, but also the story of the various grassroots preservation groups which formed to preserve the stadium and advocate for the site’s protection to this day. Without the knowledge of the stadium’s history it is difficult to comprehend and fully understand the dedication behind these organizations. But their story is greater than just Tiger Stadium, the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, and Detroit; in essence their story represents a return to the fundamentals of preservation in America, a return to its roots.

Today the field of historic preservation is increasingly dominated by government agencies and non-profit organizations staffed by highly educated professionals. The road preservation projects traverse is one littered with the hurdles of government regulated tax credits and Secretary of Interior’s Standards compliance. In short it is no longer a safe path for the everyday amateur pedestrian to hike without a professional guide. But historic preservation has not always been the product of such bureaucracy. Instead the first examples of preservation in the United States occurred as the result of grassroots movements; individuals uniting for a common goal of preservation. The structures that were the beneficiaries of these movements ranged from presidential homes to the homes of famous literary figures. Essentially the individuals and the
structures they were protecting were not very far removed from the various organizations and movements to save ‘The Corner.’

In order to better understand how the various preservation organizations involved at Tiger Stadium fit into the evolution of preservation groups, a short history of two of the early preservation episodes in America will be explored. The first group, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA), was a grassroots organization whose impetus was not unlike the preservation groups involved at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. Like those organizations, the MVLA arose out of a reaction to a recognized imminent threat and heeded the call for action. The second movement that will be explored is the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF) that developed during the efforts to preserve Monticello. Although the preservation movement at Monticello began in a similar grassroots fashion, as an individual’s reaction to a perceived threat, the preservation path that the TJMF chose to follow evolved very differently, and marked the shift to the decidedly more bureaucratic preservation organizations of today. By exploring the origins and subsequent evolution of past preservation efforts, it is easier to understand how the organizations at Tiger Stadium represent a return to the grassroots methods of the origin of preservation in America. A reversion made necessary by contemporary bureaucratic preservation organizations’ failure to react when the stadium was threatened.
Mount Vernon

In the beginning all it took was one concerned citizen and a site of particular historical significance: George Washington’s Mount Vernon and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) was not founded by a group of individuals but was the creation of one woman: Ann Pamela Cunningham. And the impetus for her crusade was not a widely publicized national outcry but a message from her mother. In 1853 while on a steamboat ride down the Potomac River in Virginia, Louisa Bird Cunningham witnessed the deteriorated condition of our first president’s home. Distraught over the sight, she implored her daughter to form a southern women’s group to save the battered structure. Heeding her mother’s advice, Ann Pamela Cunningham and the organization she would go on to found, would spend the next twenty years embroiled in the battle to protect and preserve the house that they envisioned as a “shrine” to America’s patriotism.²⁵⁵ Set amidst one of the most turbulent times of this nation’s history, the Civil War, Cunningham waged her own battles across political lines of north and south, while constantly struggling against the traditional ideological role of women in the home. In the end, Cunningham promoted the historical role of domesticity in preservation, while becoming a symbol of national cooperation. In the process, Mount Vernon became the focus of the nation’s first preservation movement; a grassroots movement originally organized by one passionate individual.

²⁵⁵ West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums*, 5.
It was in this grassroots vein that preservation projects were undertaken throughout the remainder of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century; in the process creating groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Colonial Dames of America. Primarily comprised of women, it wasn’t until after World War I that the field of preservation began to shift from a largely female volunteer based movement to one dominated by educated males; the new preservation professionals. This shift was most evident during the movement to preserve yet another of America’s founding father’s homes; Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello.

**Monticello**

Like Mount Vernon, the push to preserve Monticello was launched by a woman, Maud Littleton. The goal of the organization she would go on to form, the Jefferson-Monticello Memorial Association, would mirror the goals of the MVLA, to create a shrine to patriotism by protecting the home of one of the nation’s founding fathers. Her methods however would differ greatly from Cunningham’s, and it is this methodological shift that would eventually influence a swing away from American preservation’s grassroots origins towards the professionally dominated field that exists today. Littleton believed that Monticello was a sacred place that should be open for the enjoyment and education of America’s citizens, and was prepared to use the eminent domain powers of the Fifth Amendment if necessary to acquire it.\(^{256}\) She asserted that the property’s

\(^{256}\) West, 100-102. The Fifth Amendment grants the federal government the right to condemn and seize property for “public use.”
future conversion into a museum established this public use therefore making it eligible for the employment of eminent domain. Ultimately Littleton’s push for the use of eminent domain was denied, but although she had lost the battle, her call for Monticello’s preservation had been heard. The fight to preserve Monticello for public use was now moved to a national level and its use as a political tool was just becoming clear.

Although Littleton may not have been aware of it at the time, her request for governmental assistance precipitated a transformation of the political realm’s perspective pertaining to house museums and subsequently historic preservation. Up until that time house museums had been primarily viewed as the domain of women. But the potential benefits of Monticello’s utilization as a museum were greater than just simply a symbol of patriotic domesticity. As Patricia West notes in *Domesticating History*, “…William Jennings Bryan… [a] prominent Democratic populist argued that Monticello should be purchased by the government, or barring that, by ‘the Democrats of the country,’ as ‘a memorial of the great Democratic President.’”

Although it would take several more years, during which time the cause would witness the establishment of two other women’s groups, it was this vision that finally prompted Jefferson Levy, the owner of Monticello, to sell the property after World War I. However the receiving organization would not be one of these groups of women, but the newly established Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF).

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257 West, 104.
Unlike the volunteer based female members of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the members of TJMF were educated male professionals. A difference that was primarily evident in the ways they chose to exhibit their respective museums. While the MVLA believed that Mount Vernon should reflect a “home-like” interior not necessarily based on actual historic evidence, TJMF sought to portray Monticello as it would have actually existed. This difference in exhibition reflected a larger shift in museum stewardship. In 1923 TJMF appointed Fiske Kimball to its restoration committee, a position he would occupy for the next thirty years. Kimball, a Harvard-trained architect and professor of art at the University of Virginia, believed in representing Monticello as it would have actually appeared during Jefferson’s time.  

Relying on historical research skills developed during his education and professional career, Kimball would only display objects at Monticello which were able to be supported by documented evidence. One could easily suppose that this new approach resulted from the shift away from female-dominated stewardship, but this would be shortsighted. During Kimball’s tenure with the TJMF, he appointed his wife, Marie, to the position of curator. Like her husband, Marie was an educated and qualified individual. But unlike the members of the MVLA, Marie did not subscribe to the romanticized vision of the period room. Instead she followed in the same vein as her husband, only furnishing Monticello with period-appropriate pieces. Consequently, the

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258 West, 121.
history of Monticello’s stewardship is one that marks an overall shift in the management of the historic site, and subsequently the professionalization of historic preservation.

The formation of the National Park Service in 1916, FDR’s Historic Sites Act of 1935, and later the creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949, all signified the gradual movement away from the prevalence of the grassroots organization towards a largely bureaucratic professionalized field. Today, historic sites are more likely to be procured and protected by established non-profit organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Today the public largely relies on formal preservation organizations to protect our history, often opting out of the opportunity to actively participate. This is what makes the ongoing preservation efforts at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull so remarkable. Here is a case where the Michigan preservation establishment was not the initiator of preservation. Although the National Trust called attention to Tiger Stadium’s plight by placing it on their “11 Most Endangered List” in 1991 and 1992, they were not participating in the stadium hugs, peppering the fans with informational postcards, creating a compatible renovation plan, fighting city council, or maintaining the field that exists today. In fact, though the National Trust, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the local established preservation organization, Preservation Wayne, made statements in support of the stadium’s preservation, they all failed to become actively involved. None of these groups was among the first to recognize these threats or organize efforts to combat them. They weren’t standing outside the stadium or walking the bleachers handing out
flyers that promoted their proposed renovation plans. For they never created, let alone submitted, any renovation plans, both before and after Tiger Stadium’s abandonment. They were rarely quoted in newspaper articles. Instead the statements they made were mainly distributed to a limited group of readers, primarily their own members, through such publications as *Preservation Magazine* and their own websites. But on a large-scale public front, the arena where national, state, and local entities could have had the most influence, they were predominantly silent. Instead it was the grassroots movement conceived by a group of fans that recognized the need for action and responded. Even after these grassroots movements were established, the National Trust, Michigan SHPO, and Preservation Wayne failed to throw the weight of their organizations behind the Fan Club or the Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy; influence that could have possibly greatly affected the outcome. By failing to become actively involved, these organizations effectively sanctioned the actions of the city and Mike Ilitch. A few magazine articles and statements distributed to a limited readership are not enough when the preservation threat emanates from an influential and powerful billionaire business magnate, and a formidable City government. Instead, all preservation efforts were initiated and carried out by everyday people, individuals untrained in the field of historic preservation who navigated the uncertain terrain much like Ann Pamela Cunningham did in the 1850s, though, sadly, with less success. Many of these individuals have now spent decades of their lives volunteering their time and resources to preserving the legacy at Michigan and Trumbull. There is very little that separates
the actions of Ann Pamela Cunningham from those of Frank Rashid, Peter Comstock Riley, and Tom Derry. All three of these men founded volunteer-based organizations united in their dedication to preserve ‘The Corner.’

As discussed in chapter three, social media websites like Facebook, have enabled many of these organizations both grassroots and professional, to call greater attention to their cause. While both make use of the site’s communication capability, the grassroots organizations take this asset a step further. The exposure created by social media gives grassroots organizations, such as Tom Derry’s Navin Field Grounds Crew, the freedom and flexibility to act outside normal channels. Not only does it give them a worldwide platform from which to attract supporters, but it also gives them a stage to present their perspective. If publications like The Detroit News and Detroit Free Press are not giving proper due to the activities of the Tiger Stadium preservationists, Facebook gives them a stage for their story. The opportunity to publicly present and disseminate their plight to such a large national and worldwide audience is an advantage that would not have been possible prior to the creation of sites such as Facebook.

In a time when historic preservation programs such as “Save America’s Treasures” are being eliminated, and funding is scarce, perhaps this reversion to grassroots preservation, aided by the benefits of social media, marks a new period in the evolution of the field. A time when preservation will no longer exclusively be a product of either non-profit organizations and government or grassroots organizations,
but rather a collaboration of all these of entities. From the late nineteen eighties until today there have been several different organizations that have fought to preserve both Tiger Stadium and its field. While the impetus of all of these efforts has been grassroots in nature, a few of these organizations have recognized the need to evolve to better operate within bureaucratic channels in order to ultimately accomplish their goals. Both Michigan and Trumbull LLC and The Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy evolved to fit this mold, the former into a limited liability company and the latter into a 501(c)(3) organization. This status benefited each in different forms. Unlike the times of the MVLA and even the TJMF, today’s modern society is much more litigious. Michigan and Trumbull’s incorporation as a limited liability company allowed its founder, Peter Comstock Riley, the freedom to pursue his preservation goals without risking his personal assets. While The Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy’s 501(c)(3) status made it eligible for federal grants to preserve the site. Both of these entities have learned from their predecessors that the best way to accomplish their goals is to maintain the passion of the grassroots movement while embracing the benefits available to modern preservation organizations. While the grassroots element is still alive and well, it is this combination of movements and organizations that represents the future of preservation at ‘The Corner,’ and perhaps preservation on a national level as well.
Chapter 5

Ernie Harwell Field: if you demolish it they will come...

Ray, people will come, Ray. They'll come to Iowa for reasons they can't even fathom. They'll turn up your driveway, not knowing for sure why they're doing it. They'll arrive at your door as innocent as children, longing for the past. "Of course, we won't mind if you look around," you'll say. "It's only twenty dollars per person." They'll pass over the money without even thinking about it; for it is money they have and peace they lack.

And they'll walk out to the bleachers, and sit in shirt-sleeves on a perfect afternoon. They'll find they have reserved seats somewhere along one of the baselines, where they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes. And they'll watch the game, and it'll be as if they'd dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick, they'll have to brush them away from their faces.

People will come Ray.

The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It's been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt, and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game, is a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good, and it could be again. Ohhhhhhhhh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come.

Terence Mann (James Earl Jones)
(Field of Dreams, 1989)

When the city demolished Tiger Stadium in 2009 they probably never envisioned the pilgrimages the site would inspire. How could they have imagined that the stadium’s demolition, not its preservation, would be the catalyst for heritage tourism? It is unknown why the city chose to spare the stadium’s hallowed field, but by doing so it gave many access to memories and dreams that were impossible to realize when the

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259 Kinsella and Robinson, Field of Dreams, directed by Phil Alden Robinson, 1989.
structure still stood with its doors locked and its gates closed.\textsuperscript{260} It gave people the opportunity to stand in the same place as their heroes, to feel a connection to the past so strong that it washes over you in waves. This feeling, this undeniable emotion that comes over so many when they stand on the field at Michigan and Trumbull, is what many now refer to as ‘power of place.’

‘Power of Place’ is a philosophy that exists in several different cultures. It is not easy to define as it is most often personal; a manifestation of a memory so strong that it is tied to a specific location. But there are instances where this ‘feeling’ is more general, applicable to not only an individual but an entire group, even a culture. Indigenous cultures from all over the world regularly speak of ‘sacred sites,’ sites so inherent to their cultural history that to visit them, or to traverse their paths, is akin to walking with their ancestors. Leslie Silko, a Native American writer explains, “For the Pueblo too, stories are firmly attached to the land, always told as people pass the place where they happened. The date of the incident is much less important than its setting. Stories commemorate events, but they also inadvertently provide crucial geographical information, and thus function as maps. The land’s history guides.”\textsuperscript{261}

Not only are places inherently attached to stories, but they can also serve as geographical warnings and reminders of what once occurred and should never happen again. Battlefields have the power to affect people in this way. To visit Gettysburg,

\textsuperscript{260} Attemps made to contact George Jackson, President and CEO of the Detroit Economic Development Corporation, were unsuccessful.

\textsuperscript{261} Tall, \textit{From Where We Stand}, 17-18.
Antietam, or Shiloh is to encounter the shared landscape of our past, a tangible reminder of struggles and our desire to never repeat them. When one explores the landscape of a battlefield it is much easier to imagine the battles that occurred there; to envision the charges, the victories, and the deaths. Writing about this connection Deborah Tall explains, “The landscape, then embodies the voice of ancestors, is myth and history, is practical, moral advice. Human foibles recur – it happened before, right there. Take note.”

Evidence of our history exists all around us, it is merely up to the individual to recognize and respect it; a practice that is becoming increasingly rare. Today American culture is one increasingly un-rooted in geographical identity. It is a transient society, where people rarely stay in one town or even one region for their entire lives. This is not a recent development. During the nineteenth century “An English traveler was startled to observe that ‘There is as yet in New England and New York scarcely any such thing as local attachments – the love of a place because it is a man’s own – because he has hewed it out of the wilderness, and made it what it is or because his father did so, and he and his family have been born and brought up and spent their happy youthful days upon it.” Gone are the days of living in the house where your parents and grandparents were raised. Instead structures, and the materials they are constructed of are viewed as disposable, and homes are “starters,” devoid of any long term attachment. Essentially much of today’s society is not tied to a location or region, and

262 Tall, 19.
263 Ibid, 36.
therefore is not tied to community. The whole definition of neighborhood has changed. It no longer refers to relationships bound by spatial community ties, but rather actual street boundaries.\textsuperscript{264} Towns and cities have changed in a similar manner, products of nationwide commercialization. Nearly every town, no matter the size of the population has a McDonalds. There is an overwhelming desire to be viewed as modern, to shed the “small town” features that once made places unique. In the process we lose the “mom and pop” shops and restaurants. We lose our identity. Deborah Tall argues that the perversion of this mindset has caused society to “increasingly feel the denial of the ‘here.’”\textsuperscript{265}

This loss of identity, or perhaps an unwillingness to recognize it, is not an affliction that affects all cultures equally. In other modern civilizations, just as in indigenous tribes, the recognition and in fact embrace of identity is inherent. To visit Europe is to travel through a continent of several cultures, cultures defined not just by their language and geographic features, but also by architecture; historic structures that are material reminders of their histories. The protection of these resources is much more recognizable. In these places roots run deep, and the ties to the past are firm. The ‘power of place’ is everywhere.

While not as overtly evident, that same ‘power of place’ exists in America too. Cities such as Charleston, New Orleans, and Sante Fe have recognized the unique characteristics of their built environment and have created historic districts to protect

\textsuperscript{264} Hayden, \textit{The Power of Place}, 4.
\textsuperscript{265} Tall, 54.
them. Like the villas of Italy or the stone cottages of the Cotswolds, these regions have embraced the architecture that makes them quintessentially unique. When visiting these locales, it is this wide scale preservation that enables the visitor to feel as if one has been transported to an earlier time. To walk the narrow streets is to tread in the same footsteps as earlier generations. It is this tie to both the preserved landscape and built environment that creates this relationship. While this ‘power of place’ is most easily recognized in these forms it is not spatially coterminous with entire towns or districts. Rather this potential can exist in even the most unassuming locales, such as ‘The Corner.’ The corner of Michigan and Trumbull is no longer surrounded by the dense neighborhoods of Corktown’s past. Ravaged by the effects of Urban Renewal and freeways, what was once a bustling community is now dotted with abandoned aged structures and decaying symbols of Detroit’s past grandeur. Although there are some signs of new life, this environment appears at first glance to be completely devoid of the ‘power of place.’ But it is there, embedded in the ground at that famous corner, and since the stadium’s demolition it has become glaringly obvious. For it is this ‘power of place’ that Tom Derry recognized when he started to maintain the site, realizing that to allow that field to become overgrown was analogous to dismissing its memory. This field and the stadium’s one remaining structural element, its flagpole, have since become symbols, not just of Detroit’s baseball history, but symbols of the spirit and perseverance of the city. Artists and corporations like Eminem, HBO, and Chrysler have

266 In addition to Tiger Stadium, Corktown is also home to Michigan Central Station, perhaps the most famous ruin in all of Detroit.
all utilized the images of Tiger Stadium, and especially the flagpole, to project the power of their messages. Eminem (Figure 5-1) used images of the stadium’s demolition and its remaining flagpole as a symbol of Detroit’s spirit in his music video “Beautiful,” and the HBO series ‘Hung,’ set in Detroit, included video of the demolition accompanied by the quote “For a glass box they tore out the heart of the city,” in the series’ pilot episode.²⁶⁷ And while both of these images reached nation-wide audiences, perhaps the most prevalent representation of the field and flagpole’s symbolism has been demonstrated by Chrysler in its advertisements (Figure 5-2). In both 2011 and 2012, Chrysler has included video of the site of Tiger Stadium in its Super Bowl commercials. These commercials, and consequently the symbolism of the site, reached the largest television audiences of the year. The 2012 commercial shown during the game’s halftime reached the largest viewing audience in history, a record 114

This symbolism has become recognizable not only at a local level but on a national scale.

While this power has only recently received national attention, its value has been recognizable at the local level for some time, not only as a symbol of Detroit’s spirit but as an equally poignant local landmark. Throughout history the earliest stadiums were anchors of their communities; this is especially true of sporting venues such as the Colosseum in Rome and early stadiums in ancient Greece. As Don Jewell explains:

Certain public assembly buildings by their very nature, should be as close to the center of a city as possible. According to history, the Greeks began their cities by first building theaters and then surrounding these with streets and business premises. Such a plan anchored the heart of the ancient cities and business activity flowed around the focal point.269

Although in this example Jewell is speaking of theaters, this analogy could just as easily be applied to athletic stadiums, as they are essentially serving a similar purpose by

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269 Jewell, Public Assembly Facilities, 23.
acting as centers for community gatherings and as arenas to celebrate and support local endeavors. Tiger Stadium’s historical ties to the community of Corktown and the city of Detroit were not dissimilar to the Colosseum in Rome. Since its inception the stadium and its neighborhood benefited from a symbiotic relationship, a relationship that did not wither after the stadium’s abandonment. Instead local businesses continued to advertise their locations according to their proximity to Tiger Stadium, protest marches completely unrelated to the stadium used the location as their meeting point, albums were inspired by the stadium’s closing, and art galleries exhibited shows with titles such as “Artists Working in the Shadow of Tiger Stadium.”\footnote{Metro Times Staff, “Peaceniks on parade,” Metro Times, April 9, 2003.; Giannini, “Four-lane suburban highway,” Metro Times, October 11, 2000.; Mannisto, “(Sub)urban connections,” Metro Times, April 2, 2003.} Even now in the wake of demolition Corktown businesses like the Detroit Athletic Company continue to reference the site as a geographical landmark, “…our original location near the grounds of historic Tiger Stadium.”\footnote{Steve Thomas, Detroit Athletic Company, http://www.detroitathletic.com/servlet/Page?template=about, accessed March 18, 2012.} The acknowledgement the site continues to receive is a constant reminder of the power of memory and the symbolism of spirit embodied there.

This memory is persistent not only for residents, grassroots preservationists and fans but also for Mike Ilitch. In an effort to present every side of the battle to preserve the site Mr. Ilitch was contacted by the author in February 2012 to ascertain his views of
the preservation efforts at Tiger Stadium. In order to avoid misinterpretation his letter is quoted below in its entirety:

Thank you for your letter regarding the preservation of the Tiger Stadium site. Whenever there is a change of a baseball team’s home playing field, emotions run high about the old ballpark. This is especially true of the Tiger Stadium site where professional baseball had been played for nearly one hundred years. As a youngster, I played games at Michigan and Trumbull as a member of local men’s baseball team, and when I was in high school, I even worked out at the stadium with some of the Tigers greats. So I too have a great affection for the old ballpark. In fact, after I purchased the Tigers, I did a careful study of whether to preserve Tiger Stadium or consider building a new ballpark. Because today’s baseball fans require a total entertainment package in addition to the baseball game, it really made more sense to build a new stadium.

I applaud the efforts of the various preservationist groups that are trying to preserve the playing field. Their love of the history of the site is well understood. But it is also a prime piece of real estate and Detroit is in need of economic development. If a viable, well-funded development project should emerge, I would support those efforts.

I hope my thoughts will help you with your thesis, and I wish you the best of luck with your paper. And congratulations on completing your Master’s Degree.

Sincerely,
Michael Ilitch

He attributes Tiger Stadium’s replacement to the demands of modern fans, a message contradicted by both the fan support for its preservation and attendance percentages at both Boston’s Fenway Park and Chicago’s Wrigley Field. And what exactly does he mean by “total entertainment package”? Is he referring to the Ferris Wheel inside Comerica Park? Or is he perhaps alluding to his various businesses which surround the

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stadium? This business monopolization represents a complete departure from the relationship that existed between Tiger Stadium and Corktown during the Tigers’ time at ‘The Corner.’ While residents of Corktown economically benefited from employment opportunities provided by the stadium, and the even more lucrative business of privately run parking lots, small local businesses profited from the influx of patrons on game days. When Mike Ilitch made the decision to move the team to Comerica Park he not only left an abandoned structure in his wake, he negatively affected the incomes of the people of Corktown. In return Ilitch not only gained a new shiny, largely subsidized stadium, but he also monopolized virtually every available revenue stream surrounding the new ballpark. Comerica Park is located across the street from the Fox Theatre and Hockeytown Café, businesses both owned by Ilitch. And fans who attend games at Comerica Park have a bevy of Mike Ilitch owned and operated parking lots to choose from. Isn’t it remarkable how the somewhat hidden bi-products of Tiger Stadium’s abandonment, the so-called economic development benefits of Comerica Park’s construction seem to primarily benefit Mike Ilitch?

Although he underestimates the fan support for Tiger Stadium, Ilitches’ letter does address the power and history of the site, a subject even he does not deny. He states that he understands “their love of the history of the site” and then goes on to pledge his support of “…a viable, well-funded development project…” which brings up an interesting point. If the memory and history of this site are as beloved as he points out, who or what development company is going to incur the wrath of these fans by
building on the site? Unlike denser cities such as Boston or New York, there are a plethora of open spaces within the city limits of Detroit that offer as much potential for development as the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. Even in New York, a city without these numerous options, the Yankees recognized the historic value of old Yankee Stadium’s site. Today, even though the stadium was demolished, the Yankees have chosen to commemorate the history of that site by retaining the field. They recognized that by acknowledging the site’s ‘power of place’ they were honoring their history while building a new future. While the field at old Yankee Stadium was rebuilt after the demolition, the field that exists today at ‘The Corner’ was never destroyed. As evidenced by pictures taken during demolition, the baselines, the mound, the field in its entirety is the same ground that legends of the past played upon. The potential for commemoration at the ‘The Corner’ is immense, it’s a shame that Mr. Ilitch fails to support that effort.

While it may not be immediately evident, ‘power of place,’ commemoration and the pilgrimages they can inspire are the basis for the establishment of various types of sites all around the world. In medieval times, people believed that contact with the relics of saints connected them to these religious figures.\textsuperscript{274} The relic was viewed as the physical embodiment of that saint, and to view it or touch it was akin to briefly accessing their spirit. During a time when life on Earth was viewed as merely a leg of the journey to the afterlife, this saintly access was seen as the assurance to a safe

\textsuperscript{274} Bruggeman, Here, \textit{George Washington Was Born}, 18.
passage through Purgatory and into Heaven. It was this belief that funded the cathedrals of Europe, and inspired so many to go on religious pilgrimages to view the relics they housed in places of worship such as Canterbury. Today our relics are not only religious in nature, but also patriotic and historical. They are not confined to saints but applicable to national and personal heroes of all movements and professions. Just as people traveled to Canterbury to venerate the shrine of Saint Thomas a Becket, so too do modern visitors travel to Mount Vernon and Monticello to connect to the patriotic heroes of America’s past. At Monticello and Mount Vernon the relic is not a piece of bone or clothing, but rather the structures and the landscapes that comprise the sites. For when people visits these destinations they feel that connection, knowing they are walking the same halls and the same ground as the founding fathers of America.

This reliquary, this vessel of memory and tradition that the ground is capable of becoming is a characteristic of what preservationist Thomas King refers to as a traditional cultural property (TCP). In order to better understand what a traditional cultural property is, it is best to first define the words ‘traditional’ and ‘cultural.’ Thomas King defines traditional as “those beliefs, customs, and practices of a living community of people that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice.”

King goes on to define culture as “the traditions, beliefs, practices, lifeways, arts, crafts, and social institutions of any community, be it an Indian

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Tribe or a local ethnic group, or the people of the nation as a whole.” He then combines the two to explain a traditional cultural property’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places because of “its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community’s history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.” Using these definitions the continued ‘tradition’ or ‘practice’ of baseball at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull by multiple generations of not just Detroiter or Michiganders, but Americans, defines the site as a traditional cultural property. The importance of the site for its continued use for baseball (one of the most quintessential American traditions) since 1896 cannot be overestimated. Although it celebrated its achievement as the “oldest continuous address for professional sports in 1996,” it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this distinction makes it the oldest site for baseball’s continuous use in the United States. The result of this argument does not negate its eligibility as a traditional cultural property. To further qualify the integrity of this eligibility King asks two questions, “Does the property have an integral relationship to traditional cultural practices or beliefs?” and “Is the condition of the property such that

276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
278 Betzold, “Nostalgia,” USA Today Baseball Weekly, June 6, 1996, http://www.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/sbbw0514.htm, accessed March 18, 2012. While the now mostly demolished stadium (the ticket office remains) at Cleveland, Ohio’s League Park was built in 1910, the remaining field dates to 1891, making it five years older than the baseball tradition at Michigan and Trumbull. Where the argument gets a little dicey is that although the “field” at League Park remains and people continue to play there, the basepaths and location of homeplate, essentially the baseball diamond, is not discernible. The argument gets more uncertain when you factor in the re-orientation of the diamond at ‘The Corner’ for Navin Field’s opening in 1912.
the relevant relationships survive?” In the case of the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, the answer to both of these questions is: yes. ‘The Corner’s’ continued relationship to baseball has never changed. Even when it was abandoned the proposed uses always included baseball and the retention of that historic field. And it is the evidence and integrity of that field that has allowed that relationship to survive until this day. Finally King explains that in order for a property to be defined as a TCP it has to be able to be associated with one or more National Register Criteria. According to these criteria, the site of Tiger Stadium is eligible as a result of its “Criterion (A): association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history,” and “Criterion (B): associations with the lives of persons significant in our past.” As mentioned above, baseball is one of the quintessential characteristics of America, and therefore has made ‘significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history.’ The longevity of professional baseball at the corner, begets its association with ‘the lives of persons significant in our past.’ There are few names more significant in the history of American popular culture than Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ty Cobb, and Ted Williams. All of these baseball legends, and many more ran the bases at the site of Tiger Stadium. It is the history, the integrity of the site and its continued importance to the people, and its overwhelming ‘power of place’ that qualifies this site as a traditional cultural property.

279 King and Parker, 11.
281 Evidenced by the commonly known saying “As American as baseball and apple pie!”
It is this connection that draws people to ‘The Corner.’ For the collective memory of that site was not just stored in the stadium, but embedded in the ground. The field that remains to this day is the relic. To stand at home plate is to stand in the footsteps of our sporting heroes. Like the Pueblo for Leslie Silko, the stories of baseball are attached to that land, and the field that still exists commemorates the events that occurred there. But the field not only represents the collective memory of baseball. It is the personal locus of memories. Each individual who visits the site has a different memory attached to it. While everyone may revel in the memory of Kirk Gibson hitting that famous home run in the 1984 World Series, each individual has a different memory attached to that moment: where they were standing or who they hugged or high fived when it happened. The field is not just a reliquary of sport but of first dates, and family memories. It is the collections of all of these memories that tie people to this site. If that nineteenth-century English traveler were to visit ‘The Corner’ he would remark upon the longevity of the site, and its personal connection through memory to so many generations. It could be the blinding antithesis to the lack of identity so evident elsewhere. This identity would be apparent not only in the people who consistently visit the site, but also embodied in the earth marked with their footprints. And it is this memory of sports heroes, this history both good and bad, that should be commemorated. Like the lessons imparted by battlefield visitations, the lessons learned at the site should not be forgotten. The hardship of commemorating the full history of the site, including the racial tension, should be acknowledged. For there is never going
to be an easy answer, it is not possible to appeal to everyone without acknowledging all of the shared history.

So often in preservation we talk about embodied energy. The embodied energy of materials, the embodied energy exerted in the efforts to manipulate those materials, and finally the embodied energy in the use of the building itself. But what about the expended energy of the people? Are their efforts, their time and energy not equally deserving of recognition? They should be. The earth at ‘The Corner’ doesn’t just represent the stadium and its materials, or the individuals that played upon its surface, it also represents the energy of three decades and counting now of grassroots preservationists. Beyond that, it now represents the embodied energy of every individual who has traveled there to relive memories and create new ones while running around its bases.

While I am unable to predict what the future holds for the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, what I can predict is that the preservation efforts will not stop, and the pilgrimages will continue. As long as that field exists, its ‘power of place’ will remain. In the vein of Field of Dreams, a 2011 article written by Marty Gervais of Canada’s Windsor Star explains it best:

Sunday afternoon while the Tigers were in New York, I was in old Corktown, jogging around the basepath under a blue sky, cluttered with clouds as big as cruise ships sailing in the windy air.

And somewhere, maybe from a car parked just outside the gates, I swear I could hear the game being played.

Believe me, it was a magical moment as I rounded the bases. It was something I had always wanted to do, ever since I was a boy. And ever since
that night when I watched a little bemused as my 10-year-old Stephane – with a broken toe – hobbled around third heading for home with hundreds of other eager kids.

Sunday afternoon, I wasn’t the only one there.

Others had parked their cars on Michigan Avenue immediately in front of the iron gates that still stand. One by one, people filed into the park that is now named after Ernie Harwell, the legendary radio announcer. Or at least someone has erected a homemade sign indicating this.

And one by one, these same people made their way around the basepath. Some just walking. Others actually running full out like they had just lined a ball into the corner for a double.

If you remain there long enough on a Sunday afternoon, you’ll soon see a group parading through the gate around 5 p.m. for a game of pickup. Nothing organized. Bats and gloves and wide-eyed grins, and a white ball floating into the lush green of right field. A friendly game on the field that was home to the fearless Ty Cobb, or such giants as Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, Mickey Cochrane and Al Kaline.

Every Sunday.

And you’ll meet Tom Derry, a Redford, Mich., mailman – the self-appointed groundskeeper for the old stadium site.

Ever since Mother’s Day last year, when the weeds were waist high, he has taken it upon himself to maintain the park. That means mowing the grass every week. That means raking the bases and chalking the lines along first and third as well as the batter’s boxes at home plate.

It’s Derry’s own money that’s gone into this. And he’s burned up three lawn mowers in that space of time. It’s his own dream. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

And Derry’s girlfriend’s 13-year-old son, Erik Kuarn, is always there to help. But admittedly, sometimes he just sits back and soaks up the history of the old park. He rests on the wooden bench where the dugouts used to be.

Erik may not be able to tell you much about the players that brought glory to this city, but he senses the importance of their history. He detects it in the voices of those who step on the field.

Indeed we all have a piece of that history in our words.282

Marty Gervais, “Stadium site hallowed ground,”
Appendix

The Cochrane Plan\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{283} All images in the following appendix are courtesy of the Cochrane Plan report. John Davids, Judy Davids, and Harijs Krauklis, \textit{The Cochrane Plan}, 1.
Image 5: Level 1-1 Plan Underground
Image 12: Existing Level 4 Press Box/Abandoned Third Deck
Image 14: Plan Detail, Luxury Suite Level
Image 15: View from Luxury Suite Level
Image 17: Exteriors
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