

Designing the National Pastime

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“St. Paul is doomed to lose its place on the baseball map!” In words uncannily reminiscent of recent headlines debating the merits of a new park for the Minnesota Twins, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported nearly a century ago that baseball would have no future in the city without

a new stadium. Faced with a setback in plans for a new facility, the St. Paul Saints owner in 1909 “declared forcibly and emphatically that if he were to receive orders . . . to take the team from St. Paul he would go immediately, and that as far as he and the St. Paul club are concerned



they are ready to throw up their hands and quit.”¹ This sort of complaint, tied to anger over management of a ballpark he did not control, is nothing new in Minnesota sports. The importance of a good facility in the right location and with appropriate amenities has been an ongoing concern of teams, owners, and fans.

Ballparks played a significant role in professional baseball’s establishment as America’s national pastime in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Professional teams across the country attempted to win middle-class respectability while staying close to their working-class roots. Their techniques included recruiting women fans, banning gambling, prohibiting Sunday baseball, and thoughtfully designing the space in which the game was played.

The dramatic transformation of baseball-park architecture was most clearly seen in the major leagues, where team owners could afford to build on a monumental scale. In 1902, for example, John Brush, owner of the Cincinnati Reds, built a “Palace of the Fans,” where Beaux-Arts style and first-class accommodations, notably opera boxes, served as enticements to elite patrons. Philadelphia’s 1909 Shibe Park drew on classical architectural idioms to convey a sense of grandeur and purpose, just as the contemporary City Beautiful movement attempted to impose order on the unruly city. The entrance to Brooklyn’s 1913 Ebbets Field included expensive appointments such as Italian marble and decorative chandeliers.²

For the American Association’s St. Paul Saints and Minneapolis Millers, top minor-league teams, construction on this scale was not possible. During the 1890s, however, both teams abandoned small, center-city ballparks in favor of new facilities beyond the city core. Then, in the 1910s both teams rebuilt their parks but in strikingly different ways. In 1912 the Minneapolis club renovated its 16-year-old field and constructed a new ticket office and entrance gate at Nicollet Park, echoing many national trends in ballpark design. In 1916, on the other hand, the Saints completely rebuilt Lexington Park, constructed in 1897, but with design choices that did not follow the emerging national pattern. The stories of these two parks and their renovations help us understand the complex relationships among professional sports, architecture, and urban development.

LEFT: *The utilitarian architecture of St. Paul’s Lexington Park, photographed here with a non-league team in 1948.*

Baseball first appeared in the Twin Cities in 1859, when a St. Paul club formed. By the late 1860s, Civil War veterans returning home hastened the western movement of the sport, and a number of teams competed with each other and with clubs from other towns. Newspapers indicate that large crowds attended games in both cities. The 1884 fielding of the Twin Cities’ first professional clubs in the Northwestern League marked the sport’s growing popularity. In the same year there also emerged in the short-lived Union Association an equally short-lived St. Paul team, Minnesota’s only major league club until the Twins arrived in 1961, nearly 80 years later. Lasting support for local teams was uncertain, as were league arrangements at the regional and national levels through the early 1890s.³

In 1894 the Minneapolis Millers joined the new Western League, and the next year Charles Comiskey moved his Western League team from Sioux City to St. Paul, despite the latter city’s reputation as a “dead” baseball town. Five years later the Western League renamed itself the American League, its first step toward becoming a major league in 1901, and dropped four teams, including the Millers. This change left Minneapolis without a league affiliation. St. Paul was also left without a team, because Comiskey moved his club to Chicago, renamed it the White Stockings, and joined the American League.⁴ After 1902, both the Millers and a new incarnation of the Saints became charter members of the American Association, a professional circuit considered one step below the major leagues. The teams would remain in this league until their departures from Minnesota in 1960.

The longevity of Minneapolis’s Nicollet Park and St. Paul’s Lexington Park contrasts to the earlier Twin Cities’ tradition of frequently changing playing fields. The first ball grounds were informal spaces, of course, sometimes just an open lot without any improvements. As the number of spectators increased, seating and shelter, often in a rudimentary grandstand, and an enclosed playing field became desirable, allowing owners to charge admission and exclude rowdy elements. With

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Fans clamor for a Miller hit in a 1904 series against St. Paul at Nicollet Park, built in 1896 on Minneapolis's suburban edge at Thirty-First Street and Nicollet Avenue.

these simple architectural additions, ballparks became semipermanent facilities.

From 1889 until 1896 the Millers played at tiny Athletic Park in downtown Minneapolis, adjacent to the West Hotel on First Avenue North, the site of present-day Butler Square. Like most early urban ballparks, this one was close to the central business district, confined to one city block, and made of wood. That downtown space, however, became too valuable to be used as a ballpark, and in the spring of 1896 the Millers were forced to leave. The team moved about three miles south to a partially occupied block at Thirty-First Street and Nicollet Avenue, where Nicollet Park was built while the team traveled on a month-long road trip.⁵

Forced moves out of downtowns to cheaper, less densely built areas were commonplace for many professional teams. In addition, as many baseball scholars have suggested, part of the game's appeal to city dwellers was its bucolic setting.

The name Nicollet Park—not Nicollet Stadium—and its new location helped evoke baseball's imaginary rural ideal. This atmosphere was more effectively created in a park beyond the urban core in what came to be called a "suburban playground."⁶

Peripheral locations meant that fans needed transportation via streetcars. Nicollet Park sat along two main lines and across the street from an important car barn. In many cities, ballparks and other amusements were sited along streetcar lines because they were owned by transit companies seeking to increase ridership and profit from real-estate speculation.⁷

After a decade and a half of successful play and good crowds in Nicollet Park, the Millers organization resolved to improve the facility. In late November 1911, the team announced ambitious plans to make Nicollet into the finest park in the American Association. This announcement concluded a series of recent advances in the team's fortunes. In 1907 the Millers had been purchased from an absentee owner by the Cantillon family: Mike Cantillon stepped in as the club's president, and in 1910 his brother Joe ("Pongo") became the team's manager. Under the Cantillons' direction, the Millers prospered both on and off the field. The team won the American Association championship in 1910 and 1911—and

The Minneapolis Millers, 1908, with president Mike E. Cantillon (in suit), shortly after the team's purchase from an absentee owner





Renovation plans for Nicollet Park showing “tasty building of concrete with a red tile roof” and concrete wall replacing the “dilapidated board fence that has all but succumbed to the elements.”

would win again on their new field in 1912. Seeking to capitalize on growing fan support and perhaps to keep rival leagues from invading the market, the Millers decided to completely remodel and renovate its 16-year-old home and to move team offices from downtown Minneapolis to the ballpark.⁸

The Millers’ home field would stay where it was in the expanding commercial district on Lake Street at the hub of major streetcar lines. The block would retain its commercial buildings only along the north side facing Lake Street, while the remaining buildings would make way for a bigger park footprint. The playing field remained small; its right-field line was just under 280 feet, and the distance from home plate to first base may have been two feet shy of the customary 90 feet.⁹

New construction and remodeling were estimated to cost \$30,000, including a ticket office and entrance gate (with the Millers’ offices above), a new clubhouse and locker rooms, and new grandstands, concourses, exits, and restrooms. The worn wooden fence around the park would be replaced with a 14-foot-tall wall “buttressed like a medieval fortress.” Permanent materials like those

being used at new major league parks across the country would include iron, concrete, stucco, and tile.¹⁰

The park’s home plate and the center of the grandstand were located in the southwest corner of the block. Most seating was under the roofed sections of the stand, with a few bleachers at the end of the third-base line. Severe space restrictions prevented left-field bleachers from being built. Even so, the park’s seating capacity jumped from 4,000 to 15,000 spectators.¹¹

In many large baseball facilities such as Shibe Park, the entire back of the grandstand served as the ballpark’s principal facade, with the office and ticket-sales areas built into the home-plate corner. Space and cost issues precluded this layout at Nicollet Park. Instead, its combined ticket office and entrance building was set at the end of the first-base line, diagonally across the corner of the block at Nicollet and Thirty-First Street. The grandstand in this corner was angled toward the field in order to accommodate the little building. This unusual placement allowed the ticket office to face the intersection, rather than one street or the other, and also broke the monotony of the street grid. Further, the location and

orientation kept the structure's impact on the field to a minimum. A similar corner siting of the entrance (although not necessarily at an angle) could be seen in several major league parks, including Cleveland's League Park, built in 1891 and remodeled in 1910, and in Boston's Braves Field, built in 1915.

Nicollet Park's new look and offices reflected both the material success of the ball club and the owners' attempt to mimic larger businesses by creating a corporate headquarters. The relocation fit the booster mentality of Minneapolis's business leaders, and the plans for the new offices attracted considerable press attention. One newspaper article reported that owner Mike Cantillon was deciding which expensive wood should decorate his office interior—mahogany or walnut. Field Manager Joe Cantillon, the article continued, would fit out his office in quarter-sawn oak. At this same time, Mike Cantillon also established his permanent residence in the Washburn-Fair Oaks neighborhood of Minneapolis, home until the 1920s of the city's wealthy millers. Cantillon's subsequent residences reflected a similar awareness of—and ability to afford—housing in elite neighborhoods.¹²

When first announced and illustrated in the newspapers, the new structure's appearance recalled entrances to popular amusement parks such as Coney Island or local imitators such as nearby Wonderland Park on Lake Street. However, the vaguely foreboding amusement-park entrances suggested terrors or mysteries, which was not what the ball club had in mind.¹³ By the early-twentieth century, amusement parks were clearly the domain of the working class. Baseball also claimed that constituency, but now it sought to attract new audiences, as well. The Millers, it was hoped, could become an entertainment option for Minneapolis's increasingly wealthy middle and upper classes, and the ballpark project could help the owners achieve that end.

So it was that the Millers engaged prominent architect Harry Wild Jones to design their new public space. Hiring Jones signaled the team's strength as a business enterprise and demonstrated a kinship to the Minneapolis elite who built commercial monuments in the most popular styles of the day. The fact that Jones was known for designing sacred spaces was an additional attraction in an era when going to baseball games on Sunday still divided working-class spectators from the Sabbatarian middle and upper classes. Baseball had been played at Nicollet Park on Sunday only since 1909, when the state amended its laws against breaking the Sunday Sabbath.¹⁴



Architect Harry Wild Jones in his Lumber Exchange Building office with a secretary, about 1900

Educated at Brown University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Jones had worked briefly in the architecture studio of famed Boston-based Henry Hobson Richardson, who used historic styles innovatively with modern building technologies. After Jones settled in Minneapolis in 1883, he designed hundreds of houses, lake residences, and apartments for the wealthy, as well as commercial buildings for their businesses. (He is perhaps best known for the Clifford House, the Cream of Wheat Building, and the Butler Brothers Warehouse.) Church designs increasingly came to dominate his portfolio by the early-twentieth century, and his famous Byzantine-style chapel at Lakewood Cemetery, completed in 1910, propelled him into national prominence as a church architect.¹⁵

How did the Millers entice Jones to design their new space? He may have had a personal connection to the owners, for he had designed the Colonial apartments on posh Park Avenue, where members of the Herbert and Henry Carpenter families lived. The senior Carpenter owned land in the neighborhood of Nicollet Park, including the ballpark site, which the family leased to the Minneapolis Base Ball Association from the time the park was first constructed in 1896 until the land was sold in 1955 to Northwestern National Bank. Another possible connection was Thomas Lowry, who served alongside Jones on the Minneapolis Park Board.¹⁶

Lowry was the highly successful owner of the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company, whose facilities were across the street from the ballpark. He undoubtedly knew of Jones's commissions in the 1890s for pavilions and restrooms at Lake Harriet.

Jones, however, had fallen on hard times by 1912, when he secured the ballpark commission. Five years earlier, he had been severely injured in a car accident. Now, his work was limited mostly to church commissions, a career direction that may have also reflected his near-fatal accident. The decreasing general popularity of the nineteenth-century revival styles to which Jones steadfastly clung surely contributed to his career decline, with churches giving him a rare acceptable outlet for his historically informed designs. In career crisis, he no doubt welcomed the Nicollet Park commission. It gave him work, income, and public exposure, including publication of his architectural drawings, complete with signature, in the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the *Journal* in November and December 1911.¹⁷

Although the ballpark was part of the city's amusement industry, Jones dispensed with the mixture of eclectic styles frequently seen in amusement parks and instead employed a single style at Nicollet Park. He

linked the design of the exterior elements—the perimeter wall and the entrance building—in materials and motifs. Of particular note was the entrance building, which, while neither extravagant nor grand, was an arresting structure. Jones chose a late-medieval style commonly known as Tudor, but in an unusual Germanic-cottage variation. Comments in Jones's scrapbooks suggested that he consciously used the style of a German or Swiss *rathaus*.¹⁸ The building had a steeply pitched, hipped roof covered with red tile and capped with a tall, ornamented central chimney. Wide bays with slightly pointed arches faced the street; framed with tile-capped buttresses matching those on the perimeter wall, these openings permitted the crowd to pass into the park.

Jones's Nicollet Park designs, especially the ticket office, used idioms he had employed in other settings, including nearby Simpson Methodist Episcopal church. Many of his residential designs had displayed variations on the Tudor theme: decorative half-timber, front-facing gables, towers with ornamental brickwork, and even false thatching on roofs. The ballpark's exterior features would have been familiar to the Minneapolis elite. One later newspaper columnist called it "a wee English cottage."¹⁹

Streetcars and cars delivered fans to Nicollet Park, about 1915 (view looking north on Nicollet at Thirty-first Street).



The renovation of Nicollet Park took months to complete and was barely finished when the season opened in late April 1912. The faster-than-expected completion of the entrance building in late winter had prompted the owners to embark on the full-scale grandstand and seating renovation originally slated for the following year. Under pressure from owner Mike Cantillon, construction continued until the team's rain-delayed opening day, a fact not lost on the local newspapers, which poked fun at the last-minute work.²⁰

Immediate reactions to the park's new look suggest that the design produced the desired effect of raising the team's status in the community. Headlines proclaimed the inauguration of a "classy ball yard." The *Tribune* called it "imposing and handsome," and the *Journal* declared that it would be "one of the most pretentious base-ball yards on the American Association circuit." The new cement wall, the *Tribune* wrote, gave Nicollet Park "a very metropolitan appearance." The paper also commended the entrance building's "artistic structure" and the stands' "handsomely appointed rooms for men and women." A lighter-hearted description in the *Journal's* sports section called it "a tasty building of concrete with a red tile roof."²¹

In order to concentrate attention on the park, the team elected to cancel the traditional opening-day street parade. As one account put it, such parades were unworthy of a prosperous city and team. Minneapolis, said one newspaper, had "outgrown that bush league attraction" thanks to Nicollet Park.²²

In many ways, Jones's design choices for Nicollet Park were an attempt to reflect baseball's claim to an imagined pre-industrial past. The choice of the medieval-revival style, however, also reflected concerns about social conflict. Growing class tensions were evident in the industrial United States, and for many people the political and social question of the day was how to create a capitalist society without class antagonisms. The imagined medieval world, with its web of shared responsibilities linking master and servant, seemed to some to offer an alternative. Nicollet Park's new pre-industrial exterior masked the functional, industrial aesthetic of the park's grandstand and bleachers with a charming and appealing human-scale public facade, suggesting social harmony. In this way, professional baseball in Minneapolis sent the message that all social classes were welcome in the park and, while enjoying the game, they could expect to share the experience with those of different means. At the same time, it was clear that social order would be maintained.

Rather than a raucous arena in which society's hierarchy was challenged, the new Nicollet Park promised that all could rest comfortably in their assigned roles—and in their assigned seats.

Across the river in St. Paul, the Saints were less settled than the Millers. In 1895 and 1896, the Saints played at the Aurora Grounds, located between Fuller and Aurora Avenues at Dale and St. Albans Streets, not far from downtown. Erected quickly in the spring of 1895, the site was typical of many other small, late-nineteenth-century ballparks, including Minneapolis's Athletic Park. The Aurora facilities were made of wood, enclosed by fences, and no larger than a city block. The Saints, like many professional teams of the era, soon learned that they could not legally play on Sundays because sporting events violated the Sabbath and generated noise and "uproar." When noise brought protests and legal action against the team, owner Charles Comiskey fought the Sunday ban in the courts, while the Saints played Sunday games elsewhere in the city.²³

From 1897 until 1899, when Comiskey's Saints moved to Chicago, the team played at the newly constructed Lexington Park, located at Lexington and University Avenues. St. Paul businessman Edward B. Smith built the park for Comiskey in 1897 for \$75,000. Smith was known at the time as "an old base ball man" who had been president of the National League's team in Buffalo during the 1880s and was certainly familiar with the profit potential of urban ball clubs.²⁴

Although the Lexington-University district was already served by the streetcar system, it was not yet heavily populated, and it was assumed that the conflict between Sunday games and Sabbath propriety would be avoided. More spacious grounds and facilities, as well as amenities such as ample parking for bicycles and stalls for 50 horses, would be provided. The new field's dimensions were generous (with the park's shortest fence at 570 feet), grandstand fans were to be seated in opera chairs, and even bleacher seats had backs. Claiming that the grounds had no superiors, *The Sporting News* wrote: "Comiskey pronounces it, as do all of the players, the finest ballpark in America."²⁵

Comiskey's departure after the 1899 season left Lexington Park without professional tenants, but the facility was used again in 1901 when George Lennon's



Opening Day at St. Paul's new Lexington Park, "the finest in the country," according to the May 1, 1897, Pioneer Press

St. Paul Baseball and Amusement Company formed a new professional Saints club. Lennon's downtown St. Paul clothing business had sponsored a number of amateur baseball clubs around the turn of the century, which presumably helped draw his attention toward professional baseball. In late 1902, after two seasons at Lexington Park, Lennon threatened to move the team unless a new ballpark were built. His concern was low attendance, which he blamed on the ballpark's remote location. The following spring he constructed a new park at Twelfth and Minnesota Streets just north of downtown. Called Downtown Park, the grounds opened in July 1903 and served as the team's home through the beginning of the 1909 season. Criticism of the park's size and orientation suggest that it was unpopular from the start. Small enough to fit in a city block, it was nicknamed "Pill Box Park." Complaints about baseball on Sunday also continued to plague the team, and in May 1907 a neighboring church sued the club. In April 1909, when the state legislature passed a bill allowing Sunday games, the team still had to resort to a lawsuit to force its right to play downtown.²⁶

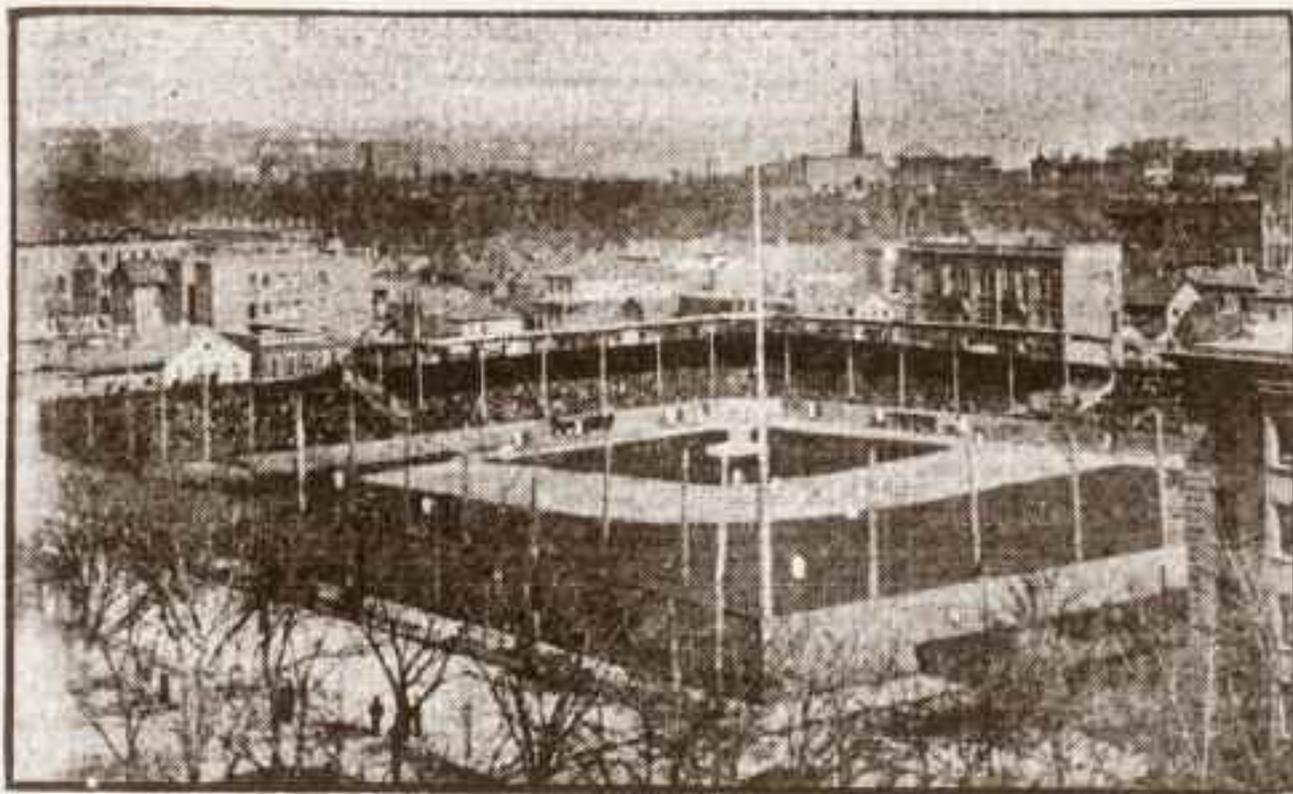
Apparently worn out by the battles, Lennon signed a ten-year lease in June 1909 to return to Lexington Park. It was immediately rebuilt using plans developed four years earlier for Neil Park, the American Association grounds in Columbus, Ohio, and the Saints began to use the facility, even while major renovations were underway. One year later, Edward Smith sold Lexington Park to Lennon, thereby unifying ownership of the team and its field but requiring more commitment and capital than Lennon would ultimately provide.²⁷

By 1914 Lennon faced serious financial problems and had grown unpopular with the fans. One newspaper report claimed that the public so disliked him that they "withheld the support by which alone the game can be made successful." By his own admission, he attended only five or six games in the entire 1914 season. Another source stated that "the St. Paul club broke all known records in the civilized world for general inefficiency in every department." Attempting to address these difficulties, Lennon sold the club in a transaction that would end up in the courts. The sporting public was pleased to have the impetuous Lennon out of the way in favor of a presumably well-heeled owner. After agreeing first simply to broker the sale, local real-estate developer John Norton elected to make the purchase himself in October 1915.²⁸

Norton's clients included wealthy and prominent figures in the St. Paul business community, most notably the Benz family, whose eventual involvement in the Saints linked liquor wholesaling, real estate, and baseball in a way that mirrored larger national trends. Norton's real-estate experience, together with Benz money and ambition, had helped fuel a building boom in downtown St. Paul: stores, office buildings, hotels, and theaters were among the facilities constructed in their deals. When Norton first gained control of the team in early 1915, he and Herman Benz embarked on a successful campaign to make the St. Paul team popular for fans and lucrative for the owners.²⁹

Meanwhile, Lexington Park had a serious setback. Late on November 13, 1915, watchman Emil Bossard discovered a fire in the grandstand. By the time it was

PILL BOX PARK DURING OPENING GAME



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW BY PIONEER PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER
Taken during yesterday's struggle with the Millers

St. Paul's tiny Downtown Park at Twelfth and Minnesota Streets served the Saints from 1903, the year of the team portrait (right), through 1909.

brought under control, the stands were almost completely destroyed at a loss estimated between \$15,000 and \$25,000. According to the next day's reports in the *Minneapolis Journal* and the *Minneapolis Tribune*, whose coverage of the conflagration was somewhat more probing—or malicious—than their St. Paul counterparts', the district fire chief believed that the fire had been set.³⁰

A few days later, a columnist for the *Journal* stirred things up by repeating the story of an earlier threat to burn not Lexington, but Downtown Park:

One day in a pinch two St. Paul players had been thrown out at first base and [Manager Mike] Kelley was sore. In a purely general way Kelley remarked that he wished to Moses that the ballpark would burn down and that he'd give anybody \$50 to touch it off. The game went on and Kelley forgot the remark until 10 o'clock that night when his phone jangled and

when he answered one of his ball players was on the wire. The player was fairly well anointed, meaning pifflicated.

"Say, Mike," he opened, "did what you said today go?"

"What do you mean," asked Kelley.

"About burnin' the ballpark. I'll do it for 50 bucks."

"Go on, forget it, go to bed, it don't go at all, I was only kidding," spluttered Kel.

"I think a lot of you, Mike," coaxed the player. "I'll burn her for \$20."

"Stop that stuff!" yelled Kel through the phone. "I don't want it burned at all. I was only joking, speaking in a temper, joshing—get me? Only joshing!"

"All right, Kel," came back the voice of the souse. "If that's the way you feel about [it,] I'll burn her for nothing just to show you that I'm y'r friend."

The article, however, hastened to add that Kelley had spent the night at the park to prevent its demise and subsequently persuaded his players that he loved the place.³¹

While the narrative was intended to be humorous, the hint of arson could hardly have been accidental. Even with its recent 1909 remodeling, Lexington Park was an antiquated wooden structure in a decade witnessing the introduction of new materials and construction techniques. Further, the principals in the story—John Norton, George Lennon, and Herman Benz—had all recently been involved with another disastrous fire at St. Paul's Market Hall building. The insurance money collected by Lennon and the Benz family came to nearly \$100,000. Major fires and insurance payments were not novel experiences for these men.³²

The ballpark fire was not the only calamity facing the Saints organization at this time. Within two months, legal dispute over the club's ownership reached the courts. Lennon's sale of the Saints team to Norton was contested by Lennon's wife, Minnie. As the majority

stockholder, she believed she should have been consulted about the transaction.³³

The suit generated some of the rich theater and public attention typical of many trials. The first judge assigned to the case was removed when it was pointed out that, while a city attorney, he had prosecuted Lennon for unpaid debts. Though listed as a defendant, Lennon soon came to support his spouse's case publicly.³⁴

The other defendants denied the allegations, claiming that Lennon had freely entered into the sale. As for Minnie not knowing about it, some 90 articles had appeared in the *Pioneer Press* and *Dispatch*. When Judge Grier Orr finally ruled in favor of Norton, his victory was cause for much rejoicing among St. Paul's baseball fans. Norton had acquired several good players, suggesting to fans that the team was bound for greater things.³⁵

Immediately after the November 1915 fire, Norton and the Saints grandly pledged to rebuild the ballpark and add a row of revenue-generating buildings along Lexington Avenue while moving the playing field slightly



to maintain its size. Although the announcement occurred in the wake of the disaster, planning appeared to the public to have been put on hold until after the lawsuit was settled in the spring.³⁶

In fact, by the end of 1915 John Norton had turned to the local architectural firm of Buechner and Orth, well known to him from other projects in downtown St. Paul. Charles Buechner had been a railroad surveyor in the 1870s, worked in the architectural offices of Clarence Johnston in the 1880s, and then started his own firm with John Jacobsen in 1889. Upon Jacobsen's death in 1901, Buechner established a partnership with Norwegian-born architect Henry Orth, and they had worked together in St. Paul for almost 15 years by the time they were hired to design the new Lexington Park. Among their works were institutional structures, government buildings (including many courthouses in Minnesota and North Dakota), commercial buildings, churches, and theaters.³⁷

The drawings for Lexington Park, dated January 6, 1916, focused on relocating and reconstructing the grandstand and bleachers in concrete and iron and building a new clubhouse under the right-field bleachers. Both the park's undamaged entrance area and the grandstand were to be newly situated so that home plate and the ticket offices would occupy the northwest corner of the site, an unorthodox orientation in baseball fields. This was explained as being more convenient for fans entering and exiting the park, especially in inclement weather.³⁸

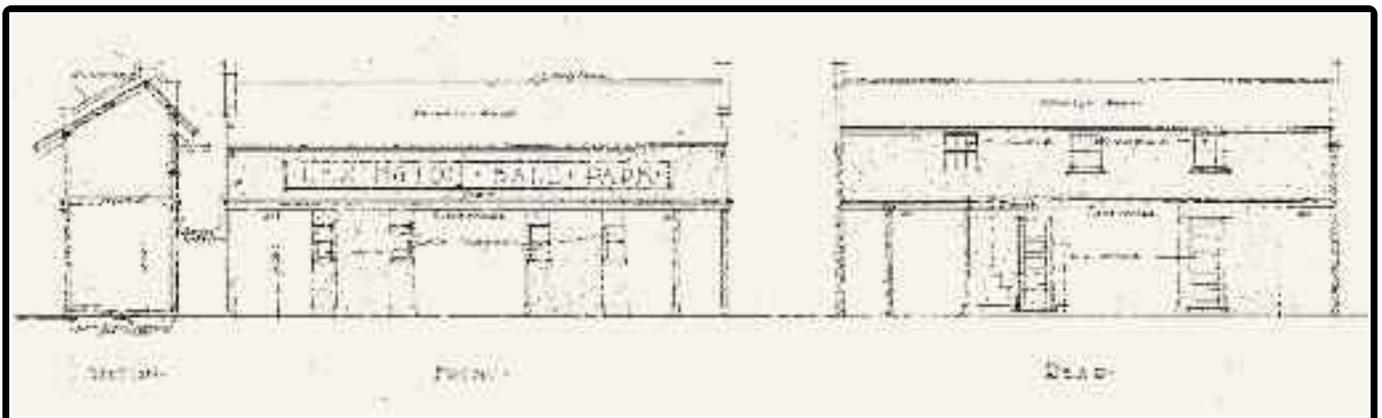
Lexington Park's entrance was to be constructed out of the existing ticket office by separating and placing halves at right angles. This modest reuse was abandoned in the revised plans, dated March 7, which show a new structure, still simple, featuring four ticket windows in two units, all under a single roof, and a large sign unifying the park's entrance facade. Economy was not com-

pletely forgotten, however, since windows and doors from the old structure were to be reused. This last-minute redesign of the office fit with other minor attempts by the club to upgrade its image, including the purchase of new players' uniforms.³⁹

Unlike Nicollet Park's 1912 remodeling, Lexington Park's 1916 redesign did not boast a stylish, unified facade and decorative exterior elements. Instead, the owners emphasized function. Lexington Park would have modern equipment, such as an electric scoreboard and a field tarp of advanced design. In fact, the park was often described as a baseball "plant." The deliberate and repeated use of this industrial term reminded people that the ballpark was a business enterprise that sold a product. This terminology reflected the ballpark's utilitarian aesthetic, one that was reinforced with the addition of unadorned light towers and the later remodeling of the ticket office. More than Nicollet Park, Lexington Park's character and identity were derived from the functional elements of the facility's interior spaces. The task was to speed fans—and more of them—to their seats. Baseball in St. Paul was amusement for the masses, without the elite imagery sought by more established clubs, including the Millers and many major league teams.⁴⁰

This emphasis on function rather than style reflected the tenuous, even chaotic, nature of St. Paul's team and its parks. The Saints had moved from park to park in search of a permanent home. The uncommitted ownership of the Lennon years and the contested ownership of 1914–1916 further accentuated the team's marginal status. Therefore, the team needed to be successful on the field, and, in order to do that, they needed to hire better players, paid for by increased ticket revenue. The new ballpark would help to provide economic stability. Lexington Park was a money-making venture for a team in

Lexington Park gatehouse elevation drawing dated March 7, 1916, by St. Paul architects Buechner and Orth





Aerial view of Lexington Park, about 1925, with Lexington Avenue running diagonally to the north

search of capital. Its design disdained the decorative direction of that generation's ballpark architecture in order to anchor the team in the community as a profitable enterprise.

When comparing the two teams and their ballparks, one finds expected similarities and some surprising differences. The Minneapolis and St. Paul baseball clubs played in the same league through most of their histories. The proximity of the teams—and their cities, fans, and parks—meant that off-field, as well as on-field, competition would develop. Each city had two and sometimes three newspapers to report and comment

on the activities. Further, regular games between the two squads brought them and their fans to the opposition's grounds. The most famous contests were the Streetcar Series doubleheaders, eventually scheduled annually on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day. The first game was held in one city and the second game across the river, with the fans traveling on streetcars from one park to the other.⁴¹

When each team rebuilt its facility in the 1910s, its owners made design choices in the context of national architectural trends. The stable Millers were able to hire a fashionable architect to help them place a stylish facade around the field. The more mobile Saints had little opportunity to enclose Lexington Park in such a facade



*Nicollet Park in 1955 (above), replaced the next year by Bloomington's Metropolitan Stadium;
and Lexington Park in 1956 (below), replaced by Midway Stadium in 1957.*



because the field was set back from both University and Lexington Avenues (except at the entrance gate) and hidden by commercial buildings at the intersection and a large dance hall along the left-field wall. Lacking capital, fan support, and on-field success, the Saints could not compete in an architectural style show. Instead, the team sought to establish Lexington Park as functional and practical, thereby making it modern and an integrated part of a commercial and entertainment district.

The rebuilt facilities of the 1910s created the appearances and configurations that would last until Nicollet

Park was abandoned in 1955 and Lexington Park in 1956. While national trends in architecture, the transformation of baseball clubs into corporate enterprises, and the personalities of team owners shaped the parks, the renovations helped both the clubs and their cities maintain distinct and lasting identities. □

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Notes

1. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 18, 1909, p. 6.

2. G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903–1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10–46; Lawrence S. Ritter, *Lost Ballparks: A Celebration of Baseball's Legendary Fields* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 51; Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark from Elysian Fields to Camden Yards* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 72.

3. David Anderson, ed., *Before the Dome: Baseball in Minnesota When the Grass was Real* (Minneapolis: Modern Press, 1993), 21–23; *The Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Official Record of Major League Baseball* (Toronto: Macmillan Publishing, 1969), 111; Rich Arpi, “Saint Paul Saints History,” <http://www.spsaints.com>; Cecil Monroe, “The Rise of Baseball in Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* 19 (June 1938): 162–81; *Pioneer Press*, July 8, 1941, p. 16.

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6. *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 28, 1912, sec. 3, p. 1. See also Stephen Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

7. For a discussion of siting, see Benjamin Rader, *Baseball: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 85; “Street Railway Parks in 1904,” *Street Railway Review* 14 (Mar. 20, 1904): 177–81; Russell L. Olson, *The Electric Railways of Minnesota* (Hopkins: Minnesota Transportation Museum, 1976).

8. *Minneapolis Journal*, Dec. 3, 1911, sports sec., p. 2, Jan. 28, 1912, sec. 3, p. 1; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1911, p. 2. The team’s offices had been in the Kasota Block at Hennepin Avenue and Fourth Street, an office building designed by prominent architect Franklin Long.

9. Dave Mona, “Nicollet Park: Home of the Millers,” in *Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome Souvenir Book: A Pictorial History of the Twins, Vikings, Gophers, Millers, Saints—and Metrodome!* (Minneapolis: MSP Publications, ca. 1982), 25.

10. *Journal*, Dec. 3, 1911, p. 2; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1911, p. 2, Feb. 1, 1912, p. 13.

11. *Tribune*, Apr. 26, 1912, p. 14.

12. *Journal*, Jan. 28, 1912, sec. 3, p. 1; *Minneapolis City Directories*, 1910, 1912.

13. See John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 72.

14. *Tribune*, Apr. 26, 1909, p. 3; Stew Thornley, *On to Nicollet: The Glory and Fame of the Minneapolis Millers* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 1988), 27.

15. For brief biographical sketches of Jones, see *Illustrated Minneapolis: A Souvenir of the Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis: Bramblett and Beygeh, 1891), 45; M. D. Shutter and J. S. McLain, *Progressive Men of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Journal, 1897), vol. 2, p. 465.

16. *Minneapolis City Directories*, 1895–96; Building Permits, Department of Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library; plaque text, Wells Fargo Bank Building, Thirty-First and Nicollet.

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18. Research notes, Harry Wild Jones

file, Department of Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library.

19. Undated magazine article by Jones, scrapbook, Harry Wild Jones Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; Barbara Flanagan, *Minneapolis Star*, Jan. 1, 1974, p. 1D.

20. *Tribune*, Apr. 16, 1912, p. 12, Apr. 26, 1912, p. 6.

21. *Tribune*, Nov. 25, 1911, p. 2, Feb. 1, 1912, p. 13, Apr. 28, 1912, sports sec., p. 1; *Journal*, Dec. 3, 1911, sports sec., p. 2.

22. *Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1912, sports sec., p. 1.

23. *Sporting News*, May 18, 1895, p. 1; *Pioneer Press*, May 12, 1895, p. 4; Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Reference to Baseball Grounds, Yards and Stadiums, 1845 to Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co.), 353.

24. *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 25, 1897, p. 5.

25. *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 25, 1897, p. 5; *Sporting News*, May 8, 1897, p. 1.

26. *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 21, 1903, p. 8; *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 20, 1909, p. 4.

27. *Dispatch*, June 8, 1909, p. 13. On Neil Park, see Benson, *Ballparks of North America*, 120–21.

28. *Dispatch*, Feb. 11, 1916, p. 10; *Pioneer Press*, Jan. 26, 1916, p. 9.

29. Gareth Hiebert, “Mostly John Norton—That’s St. Paul’s Building History,” *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 7, 1955, p. D1; Millett, *Lost Twin Cities*, 150–51. Although Norton sold the team in 1924 after several championship seasons (1919, 1920, and 1924), he retained ownership of Lexington Park and continued to develop and maintain commercial interests in the vicinity of the ball park, including the Coliseum dance hall that shared a wall with the left field fence, cafes and sandwich shops, and the Lexington Center Village, a prototypical strip mall across Lexington Avenue.

30. *Journal*, Nov. 14, 1915, p. 1; *Tribune*, Nov. 14, 1915, p. 1.

31. *Journal*, Nov. 30, 1915, p. 20.

32. For the fire details, see *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 28, 1915, p. 2.

33. *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 11, 1916, p. 1.

34. *Pioneer Press*, Jan. 25, 1916, p. 14.

35. *Pioneer Press*, Jan. 16, sec. 4, p. 5, Jan. 19, p. 13, Feb. 9, p. 9—all 1916.

36. *Journal*, Nov. 15, 1915, p. 17, Dec. 1, 1915, p. 21.

37. *Dispatch*, Aug. 13, 1924, p. 1; *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 7, 1946, p. 20.

38. *Pioneer Press*, Nov. 28, 1915, sec. 5, p. 1; "New Grand Stand at Lexington Park for St. Paul Base Ball Club, Buechner & Orth, Archts.," architectural plans, Northwest Architectural Archives, Manuscripts

Division, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis.

39. *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 17, 1916, p. 12.

40. *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 23, 1916, p. 12; *Dispatch*, May 3, 1916, p. 16.

41. Gordon Hayes with Norvy Mulligan, "1924's 'Prime Underdogs' And Their Two-Title Victory," *Ramsey County History* 10 (Spring 1973): 19.

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A maintenance crew laying baseline-marking tape at Lexington Park, about 1940



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