Foreword

This book will delight any baseball fan. In addition to the many interesting pictures, Rich Westcott has intertwined countless interviews with ballpark history to make *Philadelphia's Old Ballparks* fascinating reading.

Sports played a major role in the life of any red-blooded boy growing up in the first half of the twentieth century. And if you grew up in the Philadelphia area, sports were undoubtly important. Until 1934, Pennsylvania's blue laws prevented any commercial activity on Sundays. The only stores open were drug stores; there were no movies, no baseball or football games for which admission was charged, and, of course, no television. Radio was in its infancy.

Those restriction made trips to big league ballparks a special treat. On a Saturday afternoon, after half a day at his office, your father would take you to Shibe Park to see the Philadelphia Athletics play. The A's were recovering from the breakup of the team which had won four pennants in five years (1909–1914). In the mid-1920s, the A's were on their way to becoming one of baseball's really dominant teams for the third time, winning three American League pennants in a row (1929–1931) with a roster of future Hall of Famers that has seldom been matched, and which made this teenager a rabid baseball fan forever more.

The Athletics were by far the most popular team in the city, and they played in what seemed to a young fan a baseball palace, Shibe Park. The green double-decked stands were huge, and the perfectly groomed grass field, with its similar distances down the foul lines and great expanse of 450 feet to the center field corner, was truly a field of dreams.

When the game was about to begin, and with no numbers on the uniforms until the 1930s, the lineups for both teams were chalked on a board in right field near the bottom of a 12-foot-high fence. That fence was more than tripled later to put an end to the small stands residents on 20th Street had erected atop their row homes. Residents charged a modest admission

price, cutting attendance at the park, and that didn't sit well with the Shibes. Squatty Babe O'Rourke would use a large megaphone to announce the batteries to the fans on both side of the grandstand. That's the way is was when I first went to Shibe Park.

I remember the game on Saturday, September 14, which won the 1929 American League pennant. Big George Earnshaw shut out the Chicago White Sox, 5-0. The A's Lefty Grove, Mickey Cochrane, Jimmie Foxx, Al Simmons, and others had compiled such a huge lead over the second-place New York Yankees that there was almost no celebration by the players or fans.

The A's went on to beat the Chicago Cubs that year in the five games played in the World Series. The third game, won by the Cubs, 3-1, was the first of almost 200 World Series games I have attended, 158 of which I covered for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Back then, watching the venerable Connie Mack, part owner of the A's whom he managed for half a century, sitting stiffly in the dugout wearing a high collar and tie and using his scorecard to position his outfielders for each opposing batter, was always a unique sight.

There were fans in those days who wouldn't even think of attending Phillies games and many who felt the same way about the A's despite their success. But to a young fan old enough to go to games alone, the Phillies were too interesting to ignore.

Playing at the old Baker Bowl with its famed right field wall, the Phillies games were a sight to see. Their powerful offense, fueled by Chuck Klein, Lefty O'Doul, Don Hurst and Pinky Whitney, made high-scoring games the norm, but inept pitching usually made losers of the Phillies.

Because the Phillies won more games than they lost only once between 1917 and 1949, finding a good seat in old Baker Bowl was never a problem. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Phillies never averaged more than 4,000 fans at a home game. Except on Saturdays or when playing a doubleheader, games usually started at 3:15. Excessive scoring and the many pitching changes often made this young fan late for dinner in suburban Philadelphia.

Sitting in the first row of Baker Bowl on the upper deck at first base was always a favorite, offering an unobstructed view and, because of the minimal crowd noise, an opportunity to hear clearly what the players were yelling to each other. Another favorite seat was in the upper deck behind home plate where only chicken wire separated fans from the press box. Sitting alongside the writers was a real treat for someone who some day hoped to be a baseball writer.

Baker Bowl, which seated only 18,000 compared to 33,000 at Shibe Park, was not only outdated but falling apart with the ownership financially unable to maintain it to major league standards. As a result, the Phillies became tenants of the A's on July 4, 1938, and later the only occupants after the A's moved to Kansas City in 1955. Prior to that, the A's

played host to the 1943 All-Star Game and the Phillies the 1952 game, which ended after five innings because of rain.

After watching the Phillies win their second pennant in their 68-year history in 1950, watching their two one-run losses to the New York Yankees in the World Series from the Shibe Park press box was painful. But that couldn't match the 1964 debacle of the first seven games of their 10 game losing streak played at Connie Mack Stadium (renamed in 1953). It cost the Phillies a pennant they seemed to have wrapped up two weeks from season's end. A 1-0 loss began the swoon and even a three-homer game by Johnny Callison couldn't halt it.

Memorable games played in Philadelphia's old parks include 13 no-hit games and two games in which an opposing player hit four home runs. One Phillies pitcher and one opposing hurler pitched no-hitters in both Recreation Park and Baker Bowl, four A's pitchers and two opponents had no-hitters in Shibe Park, and three opponents performed the feat after the name was changed to Connie Mack Stadium. New York's Lou Gehrig and Chicago's Pat Seerey each hit four homers in a game against the A's in Shibe Park.

One of the most memorable Shibe Park games involved the National Football League's Philadelphia Eagles, who played at the park for many seasons. In 1948, the Eagles beat the Chicago Cardinals, 7-0, with Steve Van Buren powering his way to the score that gave the Birds their first title in the championship game. A snowstorm had made getting to the park that day an adventure. Clearing the field of snow had delayed the start of the game.

Philadelphia's fourth big league ballpark, Connie Mack Stadium, closed on a memorable night, October 1, 1970, when the Phillies beat Montreal in 10 innings, 2-1, and many of the 31,822 souvenir-hunting fans practically tore the place apart during and after that final game. The park had been host to more than 6,800 major league games, several hundred Negro League games, and other sporting events. Veterans Stadium opened in 1971.

The two old ballparks illustrated and remembered here, Baker Bowl at 15th Street and Lehigh Avenue and Shibe Park–Connie Mack Stadium at 21st Street and Lehigh Avenue, will always hold important places in the history of Philadelphia sports. This book documents that history in a way that will delight all.

Allen Lewis

ALLEN LEWIS is a member of the writers' wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, New York. Inducted in 1982, he covered baseball for more than 30 years for the Philadelphia Inquirer *during a distinguished newspaper career that began in 1940. Lewis was the beat writer covering the Phillies for more than two decades before retiring in 1979. During that time, he served for 12 years as chairman of baseball's Scoring Rules Committee. A baseball historian of considerable note, Lewis is a long-standing member of the Veterans Committee of the Hall of Fame and the author of four baseball books.*

Introduction

Philadelphia has an enormously rich professional baseball history that dates back to the Civil War days. That history has been embellished not only by memorable games and events, but by scores of outstanding and sometimes colorful individuals and by teams that have run the gamut from tremendously successful to hopelessly inept.

One other significant contributor to Philadelphia's marvelous baseball tradition has been the ballparks on which the city's professional teams have played. These parks are every bit as important to Philadelphia baseball history as any other part of the sport.

They may lack the human characteristics of a player, a manager, or a team. But probably no segment of Philadelphia baseball has more character or invokes more sentiment than the city's ballparks of yesteryear. And nothing has been more durable.

To this day, Philadelphia's old ballparks—particularly Baker Bowl and Shibe Park—linger prominently in the minds of those who went to them. Despite their eventual shortcomings, the old parks are still remembered fondly. And even among those who didn't have the thrill of experiencing them, there is a strong sense of nostalgia—indeed, a fascination with the old parks—that is seldom seen in other areas of baseball.

Like one's old homestead, no matter what kind, an old ballpark has an allure that cannot be dismissed. It evokes warm memories while suggesting another era when baseball was a kinder, gentler game. One cannot simply forget it. Its grip is far too strong.

Who among us doesn't remember his or her first view of a major league ballpark? Most of us were children at that point, and our first glimpse of a major league ballpark was probably overwhelming.

I will never forget mine. My dad took me to Shibe Park to see the Philadelphia Athletics, his favorite team, meet the Boston Red Sox. It was late in the season in 1946, and the Athletics were rooted deep in last

place in the American League. The Red Sox were running away with the pennant.

Despite being a mere tyke, I already had a growing familiarity with big league baseball and its players. But I had no conception of what a big league ballpark looked like. An incident a few weeks earlier proved how clueless I was. I had seen some teams playing on a sandlot field, and because one team had red on its uniforms, I was sure it was the Phillies, who were playing at home that day.

As my dad and I approached 21st and Lehigh, I could feel the excitement building. Traffic got heavier, and by the time we reached the park, cars and people filled the streets. And the dull murmur of the crowd, pierced intermittently by the whistles of policemen and the shouts of vendors, grew louder as we reached the gate.

After purchasing our tickets, we climbed the steps to our seats. Suddenly, as we did, the interior of the ballpark came into view. To an impressionable eight-year-old, it was absolutely breathtaking.

Everywhere I looked, I saw green. Green seats. Green walls. And the most beautiful sight of all—green grass. To me, that marvelously exquisite playing field, surrounded on three sides by a formidable two tiers of grandstands, was far beyond any level of my comprehension.

I knew instantly that I was hooked on baseball for life.

The game itself was equally magnificent. The downtrodden A's, getting three home runs from Sam Chapman and one from Pete Suder, rode to a 5–3 victory. Luther Knerr pitched a rare complete game to get the win, one of only three he would have that year to go along with 16 losses.

With that game, Sam Chapman became my first baseball hero. And Shibe Park became a place that in the years ahead not only would be my second home, but would play a significant role in shaping my future.

The following season, I saw one of the most memorable games of my viewing days when pitcher Carl Schieb hit a grand slam home run and the A's pulled a Suder–to Eddie Joost–to Ferris Fain triple play in a 16–1 victory over the Chicago White Sox. Years later, I would learn that my future wife, Lois, attended the same game, a discovery that doubtless was an influential part of our courtship.

As a 12-year-old, I stood in line along Somerset Street for five hours so I could buy a bleacher ticket for one dollar to the 1950 World Series opener. My 7:30 A.M. arrival and long wait were rewarded when I saw the Phillies and Jim Konstanty lose a memorable 1–0 game to the New York Yankees.

Over the years, there were other great events at Shibe Park, later to be named Connie Mack Stadium. Collectively, they form an indelible feeling of affection for the old ballpark that will never disappear.

That's what old ballparks do to you. That is also one reason that writing this book has been an enormously appealing project. It has been a continuous series of pleasurable experiences.

Basically, the book is intended to be a combination oral history and documentary on the old major league ballparks of Philadelphia. I have relied heavily on the recollections and eyewitness accounts of many people who have had exposure to the old parks, especially former players, front office employees, media people who covered games, people who worked at the parks during games, neighborhood residents, and just plain fans.

Naturally, the discussion is most heavily focused on Baker Bowl and Shibe Park, two very special parks that while they housed big league teams had a combined lifespan of some 113 years. They are the parks most closely associated with Philadelphia's major league baseball teams, and their histories are deeply ingrained parts of the city's long baseball history.

Along with looks at the evolution, events, and effects of those parks, the book offers a brief discussion of Recreation Park and Columbia Park, the original homes of the National League Phillies and American League Athletics, respectively. Although their histories were short, both were important elements of major league baseball in Philadelphia.

An additional chapter cites some of the other ballparks in which professional teams played. These parks may be mostly forgotten and less important in the broad view of Philadelphia baseball, but they, too, need to be acknowledged.

Overall, it is hoped that this book adds another dimension to the rich tradition of Philadelphia major league baseball history and, equally important, provides enjoyment to those who have soft spots in their hearts for the old ballparks.

Rich Westcott

Early Parks

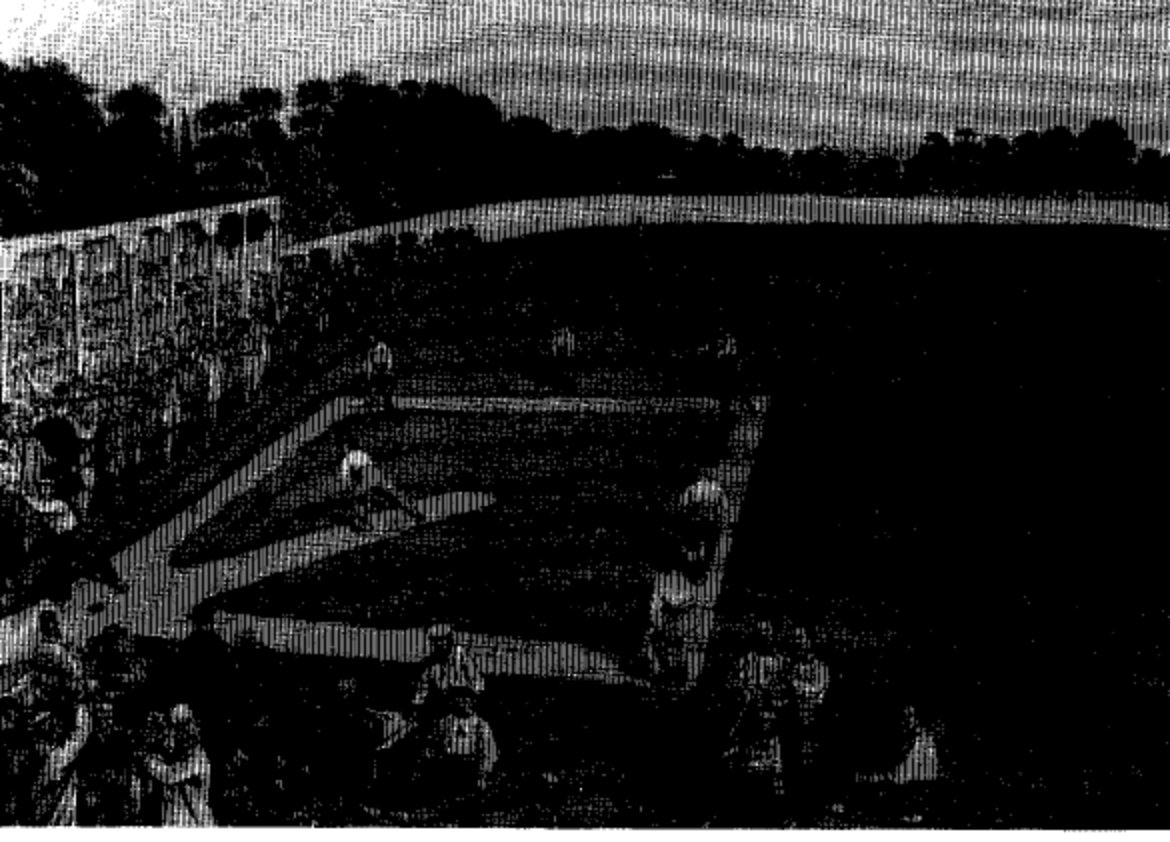
Philadelphia's Oldest Pro Baseball Fields

Philadelphia has been endowed with a rich history of baseball parks, particularly in the northern section of the city where ball fields have been an indelible part of the landscape since the mid-19th century.

Although four primary major league parks—Recreation Park, Columbia Park, Baker Bowl, and Shibe Park—dominated the city's past, numerous other ball fields played brief roles in the local big league scene.

That was especially true in the late 1800s when teams described as being in the major leagues came and went with dependable regularity. At one point, in fact, three teams, all playing in what were considered major leagues, performed within a few blocks of each other. The Phillies of the National League were doing battle at Philadelphia Park at Broad Street and Lehigh Avenue, the Athletics of the American Association held forth at Jefferson Park at 25th and Jefferson Streets, and the Quakers of the Players' League contested the opposition at Forepaugh Park at Broad and Dauphin Streets.

The American Association, represented by the Athletics from 1882 until its collapse after the 1891 season, and the Players', or Brotherhood, League, a circuit for players who had bolted the National League in a labor dispute and existed for just the 1890 season, were two of the so-called major leagues that performed in Philadelphia in the late 1800s. The



The Athletics and the Brooklyn Atlantics battled for the mythical national championship in 1866 at 15th Street and Columbia Avenue.

Union Association, which lasted just the 1884 season, and the National Association, which operated from 1871 to 1875 as the forerunner of the National League, also fielded teams in Philadelphia.

The various Philadelphia teams played at an assortment of fields, amazingly many of them within the same general area of North Philadelphia. The city's first professional team, the Athletics, played in the 1860s at a park at 15th Street and Columbia Avenue. In 1865, having by then become a quasi-pro team, the Athletics—with future Phillies owner Al Reach playing second base and getting paid $1,000 for the season—lost to the Brooklyn Atlantics, 21–15, in a widely anticipated game played before an estimated crowd of 12,000. Newspaper accounts claimed that 20,000 people actually saw the game, with the additional 8,000 who did not get onto the grounds watching it from trees, from rooftops, or through the windows of nearby buildings.

One year later, on October 1, 1866, the two titans of baseball squared off again at the Columbia Avenue park in what was billed as a "true" baseball championship match. The game generated more excitement in Philadelphia than even the most fervent political conventions.

The Athletics were the toast of the town, and according to author

Charles Peverelly, "have done more to advance the popularity of the game by visits to towns and villages where base ball was previously unknown than almost any other Club in the United States."

Before the game, some 8,000 tickets had been sold at 25 cents apiece. By game time, fans were paying five dollars for elevated seats outside the park. Many more brought their own wagons and coaches and plunked down on their roofs to watch the action; others climbed virtually every tree surrounding the park or roosted on the roofs of nearby houses. A special detail of police was unable to keep the huge crowd under control.

As game time approached, gamblers walked through the stands waving fistfuls of bills and accepting bets from all comers, while a frenzied crowd, estimated to have eventually reached 30,000, including many Brooklyn fans, packed the grounds both inside and outside the park. Spectators were jammed so tightly around the playing field that when they spilled over onto the diamond, it became impossible to play. After one inning, by mutual consent of the teams, the game was postponed.

The series shifted to Brooklyn for a game won by the Atlantics, 27–17, then returned to Philadelphia for an October 22 contest. This time, the Athletics erected a large fence around the field and hired a huge special police force. Some 20,000, including 3,000 who paid one dollar each to get inside the ballpark, saw the game. Scoring 22 runs over the last three innings of the seven-inning game, the Athletics emerged with a 31–12 victory. Because the teams could not agree about the division of gate receipts, a deciding game in the series was not played. With more wins than any other team in the league, the Athletics then claimed the mythical championship of baseball, a title they would successfully defend in each of the following two seasons.

The Athletics played at the 15th and Columbia park until 1870. One of their last significant games there occurred June 22, 1870, when they lost, 27–25, to the touring Cincinnati Red Stockings, baseball's first professional team, before an estimated crowd of 20,000. At the time, the Red Stockings were nearing the end of a 2,500-mile, 15-city, 23-game tour.

Managed by Harry Wright, later to become skipper of the Phillies, the Red Stockings one week earlier had their 81-game winning streak come to an end in an 8–7 defeat by the Brooklyn Atlantics. Their game against the Athletics was anxiously awaited by baseball fans in Philadelphia, who began filling the streets several hours before game time.

In the book *The First Boys of Summer* by Greg Rhodes and John Erardi, an account of the game noted that "wagons and carriages filled the streets adjacent to the park, many backed up to the fence with temporary seats upon them so people could see into the enclosed field." So great was the crowd surrounding the park that the Red Stockings had to scramble over a low fence to enter the field.

Jefferson Park was the home of the Athletics during their time in the National Association from 1871 to 1875.

The park was not an easy place on which to play a game. Outfielders had to look into the sun to catch a ball. And infielders had to throw uphill to first base because the field was higher at the initial sack than it was around the rest of the infield.

The field, however, was sold later in 1870, and by the time the Athletics entered the National Association the following year, they had moved to another field at 25th and Jefferson Streets. It was a field that had already seen a fair share of baseball games. In fact, in 1865, the Athletics had dropped a 28–13 decision there to a team called the Actives in a game in which the Athletics blamed the defeat on a lost ball. The ball had been hit over the fence and into the grounds of the adjoining Wagner Free Institute of Science, whose principal refused to return it. A substitute ball was apparently not quite satisfactory for the indignant Athletics.

Called Jefferson Park, or sometimes Athletic Park, the field was the first fully enclosed grounds in Philadelphia. The field had short fences down the foul lines, but it was 500 feet to straightaway center field. A swimming pool was located behind the right field fence. The park seated 5,000.

The Athletics played at Jefferson Park for the duration of the National Association, which extended from 1871 to 1875, even winning the

league's first championship with a 22–7 record. From 1872 to 1875, one of their top players was the legendary Adrian (Cap) Anson, a future Hall of Famer, who hit .352 in his four years with the Athletics before going on to a 22-year career in the National League with Chicago.

The grounds were also the home field of the Philadelphia Quakers, also called the White Stockings as well as the Pearls, of the National Association during their term in the league from 1873 to 1875, and the American Association's Athletics, who played there from 1883 to 1890.

Jefferson Park's most celebrated use, however, came from none of those teams, but from another team called the Athletics, members of the new National League. On April 22, 1876, the first National League game was played at Jefferson Park between the Athletics and the Boston Red Caps.

Playing under cloudy skies with 3,000 spectators watching, Boston, managed by the ubiquitous Harry Wright, scored two runs in the ninth inning to gain a 6–5 triumph. Joe Borden, a Yeadon, Pennsylvania, native who is buried in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and who was later to become the first National League pitcher to hurl a no-hitter, got the win. Three days later, the teams met again at Jefferson Park. This time, with 2,000 in attendance, the Athletics avenged their opening day loss with a 20–3 victory over Borden and Boston.

The Athletics did not linger long in the National League. Despite having the league's first home run champion, George Hall with five, the club won just 14 of 59 games and was mired in seventh place as the end of the season approached. Scheduled for a final western road swing, the Athletics, having insufficient funds and not anxious to waste any more time playing in a futile season, refused to make the trip. The team was expelled immediately from the league.

Jefferson Park, however, remained the site of a considerable amount of baseball activity. After the American Association was formed in 1882, another team called the Athletics moved to the grounds the following year. They played their first game there on April 7, 1883, defeating Yale University, 12–0. The Athletics then played games against teams from Huntsville, Auburn, and Trenton before losing to the Phillies in what was most likely the first City Series game. Throughout the regular season and until the seats and grandstands were sold to pay for past debts after the 1890 season, the Athletics continued to play at Jefferson Park, except on Sundays, when from 1888 to 1890 they played their home games at a field in Gloucester, New Jersey.

In 1883, the Athletics, under manager Lew Simmons, won the American Association pennant with a 66–32 record. Harry Stovey, one of the league's premier players, won his first of five home run crowns while holding down first base for the Athletics. Stovey, who would lead the league in

scoring four times and in slugging average three times while a member of the Athletics, also captured the batting title in 1884 with a .326 average.

All the while, other parks housing major league teams had surfaced in Philadelphia. Oakdale Park, at 11th and Cumberland Streets, was used by the Athletics in their maiden year in the American Association in 1882. Oakdale Park had been a baseball ground used by amateur teams since shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War. It was sold and converted to other uses following the 1882 season.

Keystone Park, at Broad and Moore Streets in South Philadelphia and the original grounds of the Forepaugh Circus, was used in 1884 by the Keystones of the short-lived Union Association, a seven-team circuit that included a team in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Forepaugh Park, at Broad and Dauphin Streets, was the home of both the Philadelphia Quakers of the Players' League in 1890 and the American Association Athletics in 1891.

On April 30, 1890, 17,182 fans jammed Forepaugh Park, by then the new home of the circus, to watch the Quakers in a game with the Boston Reds.

Several other fields were used by professional teams. In 1894, when their own Philadelphia Park was destroyed by fire, the Phillies played at the University of Pennsylvania's Varsity Grounds at 37th and Spruce Streets. The Phillies compiled a 5–1 record during their short stay on the Penn campus.

In the eight-team Union League, which lasted during 1908 only, the Philadelphia entry, also known as the Quakers, staged its home games at a field called 62d Street Grounds at 62d and Walnut Streets in West Philadelphia. The Quakers defeated Brooklyn, 1–0, before a crowd of 2,500 in the opening game April 27. By June 3, the league had disbanded, leaving the Philadelphia club in seventh place with a 10–24 record.

Two other noteworthy baseball stadiums in the Philadelphia area were the home fields of Negro League teams, which were a prominent part of the city's baseball history.

One of them, which never had a formal name, was located at 44th and Parkside in West Philadelphia. It was home base for the Philadelphia Stars from 1935 to 1952. Built in the 1920s by the Pennsylvania Railroad, it had originally been used by a company team. Later, a semipro team called the All-Phillies and operated by Eddie Gottlieb used the 5,000-seat field.

The Stars, league champions in 1934, began playing at 44th and Parkside after performing at Passon Field at 48th and Spruce Streets. Until 1948, the Stars were members of the Negro National League. They then played in the Negro American League until 1952.

Dense smoke often billowed onto the Parkside field as trains passed in and out of the nearby roundhouse, frequently causing fly balls to be lost

and games to be delayed, sometimes for as long as 15 minutes. "Every time we played, we would have to stop the game until the smoke cleared from a train passing by," Stars player Mahlon Duckett recalled.

One of the most memorable games at 44th and Parkside was played in 1947. Toiling for the Kansas City Monarchs, Satchel Paige pitched a perfect game against the Stars for eight innings. In the ninth, he intentionally walked the first three batters, then ordered the seven fielders behind him to sit down. Paige proceeded to strike out the next three hitters on nine pitches to finish his no-hitter.

The other primary Negro League field was Hilldale Park in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, just a few miles from the Philadelphia border. The field was home to the Hilldale Club, which played as both the Giants and Daisies as members of first the Eastern Colored League, then the Negro American League from 1923 through 1932.

Hilldale, which featured such top players as Biz Mackey and Hall of Famer Judy Johnson, won the Eastern Colored League championship three straight years from 1923 to 1925 and won its division title in the Negro American League in 1931.