Twin Cities Ballparks

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http://stewthornley.net/twincityballparks.html
Early Minneapolis Ballparks

Athletic Park

In 1889, the Minneapolis Millers moved into Athletic Park, a bandbox at the corner of Sixth Street and First Avenue North, behind the West Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. Estimates are that the distances down the foul lines were barely 250 feet, creating some high home run totals even in this era of the dead ball. So small was the park that players had to frequently “leg out” base hits to right field, and it wasn’t uncommon for a runner to be thrown out at first base on an apparent single to right.

Athletic Park hosted a major league baseball game in 1891. Milwaukee of the American Association, a major league in its final year of operation, transferred its final series of the season, against Columbus, to Minneapolis. Bad weather wiped out two of the games, but on Friday, October 2, despite heavy clouds that threatened rain or snow, Minnesota hosted its first—and until the Minnesota Twins arrived in 1961, its only—major league game as Milwaukee beat Columbus, 5-0. The Brewers’ Frank “Red” Killen, who had started the season with Minneapolis and had hurled a no-hitter for the Millers the year before, held the visitors scoreless on six hits.

Minnehaha Park

The Minneapolis Millers continued to be the main attraction at Athletic Park, and, a few years later, produced a slugger able to take full advantage of the ballpark’s tiny dimensions. First baseman Perry Werden hit 42 home runs in 1894, an unheard of total until he topped it by hitting 45 the following season (36 of them at Athletic Park). From that performance, Werden held the organized-baseball record for home runs in a single season that lasted until Babe Ruth took up the business more than two decades later.

Werden wasn’t the only heavy hitter on the team; the Millers averaged over 10 runs scored per game in 1894 and 1895.

In May of 1896 the Millers were given their eviction notice from Athletic Park. On May 23rd, the Millers played their final game at Athletic Park, then left on a lengthy road trip and returned several weeks later to find a new ballpark in south Minneapolis on Nicollet Avenue.

The site of Athletic Park is now occupied by Butler Square, across the street from Target Center basketball arena and a block away from Target Field.

Minneapolis Millers in the Hall of Fame

Roger Bresnahan (1898-99)  George Kelly (1930-31)  Monte Irvin (1955)
Jimmy Collins (player-manager 1909)  Ted Williams (1938)  Orlando Cepeda (1957)
Rube Waddell (1911-13)  Billy Herman (player-manager 1948)  Carl Yastrzemski (1959-60)
Urban “Red” Faber (1911)  Ray Dandridge (1949-52)  Dave Bancroft (manager 1933)
Bill McKechnie (1921)  Hoyt Wilhelm (1950-51)  Jimmie Foxx (coach 1958)
Zack Wheat (1928)  Willie Mays (1951)
Early St. Paul Ballparks

Fort Street Grounds

The first fully professional league featuring Minnesota teams was the Northwestern League, which started its 1884 season with teams in Stillwater, Minneapolis, and St. Paul; the league later added a team in Winona.

St. Paul didn’t decide on a site for its ballpark until May, only a month before its home opener. The ballpark was located just off Fort Street (also known as West Seventh Street) on the north side of the Short Line Railroad Tracks. The park was bounded by St. Clair Avenue on the north, Duke Street on the east, Oneida Street on the west, and the railroad tracks. (Fire insurance maps aren’t conclusive but seem to indicate that home plate was in the southeast corner of the lot, meaning that the right field fence was parallel to St. Clair with the left field fence running along Oneida Street.)

Many of the teams in the Northwestern League were financially unstable. By early September only Milwaukee and St. Paul were left. The league’s final game was played between the two survivors on September 7. St. Paul left on a barnstorming tour to the west while Milwaukee indicated a desire to close out its season in the Union Association, in its only season as a major league. Like the Northwestern League, the Union Association had seen its share of teams disband in the course of the season and was always on the lookout for clubs to replenish the ranks. It eventually admitted both Milwaukee and St. Paul.

St. Paul played its first major league game on Saturday, September 27, losing in Cincinnati. St. Paul played two more games in Cincinnati, moved on to St. Louis for a two-game series, then went to Kansas City for three games before coming back to St. Louis for what turned out to be its final game. The Fort Street Grounds were still considered the home ball park for St. Paul even though the team never played a game there during the time it was in the majors.

Athletic Park on State Street

In the later 1880s, St. Paul professional teams played in a couple of ballparks across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Paul (an area known as the city’s West Side because it was on the west bank of the river, even though it was actually south of downtown). One was known as Athletic Park on State Street. Athletic Park was sometimes underwater as it was prone to flooding in the spring (shown at left). In 2002, architectural historian Paul Clifford Larson found the building permit for the State Street park and discovered that the architect for the ball park was listed as the firm of Gilbert and Taylor, consisting of James Knox Taylor and Cass Gilbert. Gilbert later designed the Woolworth Building in New York and the Supreme Court Building in Washington as well as the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul.

It’s not clear if Gilbert actually had a role in the design or if it was handled by one of the firm’s draftsman, although Larson said it is clear that Gilbert was not involved in supervising the construction, even though that was commonly the role of an architect at that time.
The Western League, which eventually became the American League and a major league, was formed in 1894. Minneapolis was a charter member but St. Paul didn’t get a team until 1895. The Sioux City franchise was dropped from the league, and a new team, in St. Paul, was granted to Charles Comiskey, who had retired as a player and decided to try ownership.

In early April 1895, Comiskey began to build a ball park in the block between Dale and St. Albans streets and Aurora and Fuller avenues.

The grandstand and two sets of bleachers provided 3,000 seats within the ballpark. During some exhibition games played before the regular season, though, Comiskey discovered that another 1,000 people were able to watch the game from a hill along St. Albans Street. Comiskey moved to put an end to their freeloading by erecting additional stands on that side of the field. On the morning of the first regular-season game, Tuesday, May 7, 1895, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported, “The advantageous position on the hill has been blocked by a high row of seats on that corner of the park, and that congregation of person who would otherwise probably not pay their half-dollar to see the game will be disappointed.”

Prior to the first official game, the Saints and the Milwaukee team toured the city in a couple trolley cars, headed by a car containing a band. The parade ended at the ballpark, where the teams worked out for a couple hours before the game began at 3:30. Tony Mullane started on the mound for St. Paul and also homered in the game, which was delayed by rain for about a half-hour in the third inning. Despite the rain, the attendance was 3,000, and the Saints won 18 to 4.

Although Comiskey eliminated the free view from St. Albans, he quickly discovered another problem, according to the article “When Charlie Comiskey Came to St. Paul” by the Junior Pioneer Association (on file at the Minnesota Historical Society): “Within a few weeks the small fry had bored more than 200 peep-holes in the fence. Comiskey merely grumbled, ‘Boys will be boys,’ and created a second fence six inches inside the other.”

This ball park was called, alternately, the “Dale and Aurora Grounds” or, more simply, “Comiskey Park.”

In addition to owning and managing St. Paul, Charles Comiskey played 17 games as a first baseman, which marked the end of his career as an active player.

The team had another problem with this park than just fans getting a free peek at the game. Some people in this neighborhood got an injunction prohibiting games on Sunday.

The St. Paul team solved its Sunday problem in 1897 by moving to Lexington Park (see page 7), which lasted them 60 years, but there was another ball park in the early part of the 20th century that became a key part of the team’s heritage. By this time, the St. Paul Saints were playing in a new minor league called the American Association. Lexington Park was its primary home, but George Lennon, the owner of the Saints, wanted a more centrally located park.

Known as the “Pillbox” and sometimes referred to merely as the “Downtown Ball Park,” this short-lived park popped up in the shadow of the emerging state capitol (seen in the photo on the left) and satisfied George Lennon’s desire to be closer to the central business district. In late 1902, Lennon announced plans for a new park between Robert, Minnesota, 12th, and 13th streets. Work began in early May of 1903, and the first game was played on Monday, July 20, with the Saints beating Minneapolis 11-2 before more than 4,500 people.
According to the article “The Downtown Ball Park” by the Junior Pioneer Association, “The ‘pill-box,’ as it was generally called, was not a thing of beauty, and few pictures of it exist. A high fence surrounded the park, topped by a wire screen about 20 feet high. Home plate was in the south-east corner of the block, as the management did not wish to antagonize the people in the area by having the entrance at Minnesota and 13th. The stands were only 10 to 20 feet from the base lines, which gave the spectators a good view of the players,’ according to the papers, although home plate was not visible from some points in the stands. When the umpire worked behind the plate, he had his back against the screen in front of the stands. Catching high fous was impossible. The right fielder played with his back against the fence, and was only a few feet behind the second baseman even then. A 3-bagger was practically unknown, and would only result from a ball taking a freak bounce off a fence post or thru some other accident. There were plenty of 2-base hits due to special ground rules; balls hit over the right and left field fences counted for two bases, and home runs were scored only over a limited area of the center field fence.

Except for Sunday games, which were played at Lexington Park, the Pillbox was the regular home of the Saints through the 1909 season. (The Saints played one Sunday game at the Pillbox, in May 1907, an experiment to see how disruptive Sunday ball would be to the neighborhood. The conduct of the spectators would determine if more Sunday games could be played downtown. The St. Paul Pioneer Press quoted Saints manager Ed Ashenbach as telling the fans, “We hope to play here again, and I hope you will not make any more noise than is necessary.” Although the Pioneer Press reported that the game was “perhaps the most orderly crowd that ever attended a Sunday baseball game in this city,” it was the only Sunday game played at the Pillbox.)

In addition to the Saints, the Pillbox was home to an all-black team, the St. Paul Colored Gophers, and hosted a series in 1909, billed as the “world’s colored championship,” in which the Gophers beat the Leland Giants of Chicago.

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<tr>
<th>St. Paul Saints in the Hall of Fame</th>
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<td>Charles Comiskey (player-manager and manager 1895-1899)</td>
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<td>Miller Huggins (1901-03)</td>
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<td>Bill McKechnie (1912-13)</td>
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<td>Leo Durocher (1927)</td>
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<td>Walter Alston (manager 1948-49)</td>
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In 1896, Nicollet Park replaced a tiny ball park in downtown Minneapolis, Athletic Park, and represented a move outside the core area of the city. The location was picked, in part, because of its proximity to public transit, just off the corner of Nicollet Avenue and Lake Street in south Minneapolis.

Although spacious compared to the band box that it had abandoned (Athletic Park), Nicollet Park soon became known for its modest dimensions, particularly the short distance to the right-field fence, which ran along Nicollet Avenue and was an easy target for strong lefthanded hitters. Although slightly farther away from home plate, the left-field fence, separated from Lake Street by a row of buildings, was also reachable.

Home plate was in the southwest corner with a grandstand that extended down the down the third-base line along Blaisdell Avenue and down the first-base line, along West 31st Street, which separated the ball park from the streetcar barns and garages of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company.

According to figures cited in a 1951 article when Nicollet Park was sold, the ball park covered approximately four acres with 450-foot frontages on Nicollet and Blaisdell avenues and 379 feet of frontage on West 31st Street.

Nicollet Park had a pennant winner its initial season as the Minneapolis Millers finished first in the Western League, and it continued as the home of the Millers when the team became a charter member of the American Association in 1902. Over the next 10 years, the ball park got a new look.

The main grandstand was rebuilt prior to the 1909 season with a tier of box seats put in front of the regular seats, necessitating the moving of the players’ benches as well as the press box. “A private box has been built for the newspaper scribes and this season will prove a sad one for the nosey fan who has always insisted on hanging over the back of the press box to show the pencilpushers where they are wrong in their scoring,” wrote the Minneapolis Journal of April 20, 1909. In addition, repairs were made to the third-base bleachers, and the first-base bleachers were converted into a grandstand and covered. The main entrance was also changed to the 31st Street side of the ball park.

“When the fans turn out Thursday afternoon to get the first glimpse of the 1909 Millers on the home grounds,” reported the Journal, “they will hardly recognize the place.”

An even greater facelift took place following the 1911 season, a $30,000 renovation that included a new grandstand and bleachers that had “a solid concrete base with iron columns supporting an ornamental red tile roof,” according to the November 25, 1911 Minneapolis Tribune. The main entry remained at the corner of 31st Street and Nicollet Avenue, in the right-field corner, with a walkway running under the grandstand and taking fans into the stands on the first-base side of the field. The seating capacity of Nicollet Park swelled to approximately 10,000, two-and-a-half times what it could originally hold. The headline on the December 3, 1911 Minneapolis Journal proclaimed “Minneapolis Fans Will Not Recognize Their Old Ball Yard Next April,” the second time in fewer than three years that the newspaper made this claim.

The architect for the renovation was Harry Wild Jones, who had designed homes, churches, and commercial buildings in the city. The hiring of 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,” wrote Augsburg College professors Kristin M. Anderson and Christopher W. Kimball in an article for Minnesota History magazine.

Besides the new grandstand, the board fence surrounding the grounds was replaced by a 14-foot-high concrete wall topped with red tile, but the most prominent addition was a Tudor-style entry building at the on the corner of 31st Street and Nicollet Avenue, topped by a steeply pitched red-tile roof. In addition to the ticket windows and turnstiles at street level, the building had management offices, which previously had been housed in downtown Minneapolis, and locker rooms on the second floor.

To accommodate the new structure, the grandstand in the right-field corner was angled toward the field. The foul line intersected with the stands, 279 feet from home plate. The roof over the grandstand created an overhang in right field, which at times could affect play. One example occurred in 1953 in the afternoon game of the Independence Day doubleheader. Trailing St. Paul 9-8, the Millers had two out and nobody on in the ninth when Clint Hartung walked and Ray Katt lifted a soft fly toward right. It appeared Saints right fielder Walt Moryn would be able to catch the ball until, as described by Halsey Hall in the Minneapolis Tribune, “the breeze caught it and it came down, scraping the screen UNDER the jutting grandstand roof. But it had kissed that screen so gently and was a home run, Raymond completing that most joyous jaunt of all and being mobbed by fans and teammates.”
Stories of Nicollet Park’s quirkiness abound, their veracity at times dubious. Some of the tales revolve around the characters who inhabited the ball park. One was Bill Veeck, who owned the Milwaukee Brewers during World War II and became friends with Millers owner Mike Kelley. In his book, The Hustler’s Handbook, Veeck tells of some of the challenges of dealing with Kelley, including the problems that resulted from Kelley’s Dalmatian, who sat with his owner in the front row of the right-field seats during games. Veeck claims that his Brewers once lost a game when the Millers with two out in the last of the ninth on a base hit to right field, near where Kelley and the Dalmatian sat. As Milwaukee right fielder Hal Peck attempted to field the ball, the dog “came flying over the railing to bite Peck right in the leg.” The dog continued to threaten Peck as he attempted to pick up the ball. As a result, two runs scored on the play, winning the game for the Millers. However, in all the games that Milwaukee played at Nicollet Park during the time Veeck owned the Brewers, there was never a game that ended in such a fashion. Thus, this story enters the ranks of legendary, but mythical, tales told about Nicollet Park and by Bill Veeck.

Longtime fan Fred Souba says he remembers Kelley sitting in the front row beyond first base with his Dalmatian (sometimes more than one), but he does not recall any instances of the dogs affecting the game in any manner and certainly not by coming onto the field.

There were also stories of long home runs to right setting off alarms of businesses across Nicollet Avenue from the ball park, and at least one of these is documented. On Saturday night, August 26, 1950, Johnny “Spider” Jorgensen won a game for the Millers with a two-run homer in the last of the ninth off St. Paul’s John Van Cuyk. According to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, “The ball sailed across Nicollet Ave., crashed through the heavy plate glass door of an appliance shop [Johnston’s Appliance] and set off the burglar alarm.”

Nicollet Park went out a winner. As a new stadium was being built in the suburbs for the Millers (along with the hope of a major league team), the final games at Nicollet Park were played in September 1955 as part of the Junior World Series between Minneapolis and Rochester Red Wings of the International League. The series was tied at three games each with the decisive seventh game played at Nicollet Park on Wednesday night, September 28, 1955. The Millers beat the Red Wings 7-4 to win their first Junior World Series in what was also the last game played at Nicollet Park.
Lexington Park, like its counterpart in Minneapolis, was well removed from the center city when it opened in 1897. It was built by Edward B. Smith, who operated a St. Paul real estate company (and had been a part-owner of a National League team in Buffalo in the 1880s), for Charles Comiskey. Smith leased the ball park to the Saints until 1910, when he sold it to then-owner George Lennon for $75,000.

On the southwest corner of Lexington Avenue and University Avenue, approximately one mile west of the park the Saints had been using off Dale Street, the ball park occupied a lot 600 feet square, large enough to provide for generous field dimensions.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press was effusive in describing the new grounds in a story the day Lexington Park opened, on Friday, April 30, 1897: "St. Paul fans will see a ball ground that is not excelled in the West, and those who are familiar with the National league parks say that few, if any, of them surpass the St. Paul park. Some of them have stands that will seat more people, but so far as the field itself concerned and the general accommodation of the public, there is probably nowhere in the country a superior."

The only complaint offered was that the extra street cars dropped passengers at the corner of University and Lexington. While this would seem to be the right spot for people going to the game, it was the spot of dead center field since home plate, when the park opened, was in the southwest corner, and the Pioneer Press said that this “left the crowd a very long block to walk to the entrance of the grounds.”

Lexington Park served as the home of the St. Paul team until Charles Comiskey moved the team to Chicago after the 1899 season. After a year without professional baseball, St. Paul got a team in the Western League in 1901 and then as a charter member of the American Association the following year. George Lennon was finding the location of Lexington Park too remote, though, and had a new park built in downtown St. Paul. Sunday games were played at Lexington Park, but from 1903 to 1909, the downtown site served as the primary home of the Saints. Starting in 1910, the Saints played full time at Lexington Park.

Lexington Park had already had a serious fire, in October of 1908, but an even greater one occurred following the 1915 season. The fire, which destroyed the grandstand, was discovered at 11 p.m. on Saturday night, November 14 by night watchman Emil Bossard. When the park was rebuilt, Bossard served as its groundskeeper for nearly 20 years before taking a similar job with the Cleveland Indians and becoming the patriarch of a groundskeeping family, causing the name Bossard to be synonymous with well-groomed fields in baseball.

The rebuilding of Lexington Park following the 1915 fire included a reconfiguration of the playing field. The diamond was turned 90 degrees, moving home plate from the southwest toward the northwest corner of the lot. “The principle reason for the radical change in the arrangement is that it will prove a great convenience for the fans,” explained the St. Paul Pioneer Press on November 28, 1915. “The new plan would bring the fans into the grand stand almost as

Continued on next page
soon as they went through the gates, and the bleacherites would have less than half a block to walk. Under the present arrangement grand stand patrons have to walk the distance of two long blocks before they reach their seats in the grand stand, and the bleacherites have about the same distance to cover, and sometimes when rain has interrupted the game the fans have had a long run before they could reach the streetcars.”

The plan called for Lexington Park to be set back 100 feet from University Avenue, which was on the north side of the ball park, and 100 feet back from Lexington Avenue to the east. The main entrance to the grounds was behind home plate, at the corner of University Avenue and Dunlap Street.

With the new configuration, Lexington Park had familiar landmarks outside the stadium. The most prominent was the Coliseum Pavilion beyond the left-field fence, its roof being the landing site for many home runs. To the south, behind right field, was Keys Well Drilling, which erected a sign bearing the company name that, although outside the ballpark, was clearly visible to those inside.

This sign wasn’t hit by home runs with the frequency of the Coliseum roof (if a ball ever hit it). In fact, for most of the life of the rebuilt Lexington Park, few balls cleared the right-field fence. The distance down the foul line in right field was 365 feet. A 12-foot-high wooden fence sat atop an embankment that led up to the fence.

Home runs to right field at Lexington Park were so rare as to be memorable. When the New York Yankees came to St. Paul for an exhibition game in June of 1926, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported that only nine home runs had been hit over the right-field fence since the park had been rebuilt before the 1916 season. Bruno Haas was the only player to have twice homered over the fence.

Just as Lexington Park could be a nightmare for a lefthanded hitter, Nicollet Park in Minneapolis produced the opposite effect. In 1933, Joe Hauser of the Minneapolis Millers set a professional record with 69 home runs, breaking his own record of 63 (set three years earlier with Baltimore of the International League). Hauser was helped by the friendly dimensions of Nicollet Park in Minneapolis. However, it was at Lexington Park, on Labor Day, that Hauser equaled and surpassed his own mark, hitting his 63rd and 64th home runs of the season and becoming the first player to hit two home runs to right field in the same game since the park was rebuilt.

In 1950 Lou Limmer of the Saints, a lefthanded hitter, led the American Association in home runs, even though he hit only one at home. Limmer’s only season with the Saints was 1950. Thus, he missed out on the shortening of the distance to right field, which took place during the 1951 season.

Disaster struck the Twin Cities on Friday, July 20, 1951 as high winds and floods caused millions of dollars in damage. One of the casualties of the gale was the right-field fence at Lexington Park, torn apart by winds reported to have reached 100 miles per hour. The Saints were in Kansas City at the time, giving management a chance to rebuild the barrier before the team returned. By August, when the Saints were back from their road trip, Lexington Park had a new right-field fence, and this one was much closer to home plate. The distance down the line had been shortened to 330 feet. To make it a bit more challenging, a double-decked fence was erected that was 25 feet high, although the embankment that the previous fence had rested atop was gone.

As Minneapolis interests were building a new baseball stadium in a southern suburb, both for the Minneapolis Millers and to lure a major league team to the area, St. Paul began construction on a new stadium for the Saints and to join the battle to get a major league team for its ballpark. The final game at Lexington Park was played in September of 1956.

Halsey Hall Chapter members have been involved in a pair of fund-raising activities to collect donations from former players and fans to erect historical markers on the former sites of Nicollet Park and Lexington Park.

Millers and Saints in the American Association

When the Millers and Saints packed up their spikes and shin guards for the final time, in 1960, they had left a legacy of winning baseball. In their 59 years in the American Association the Millers had won 4,800 games and lost 4,366 for a .524 winning percentage, best by far of all the teams. The Saints had the second-best record. The Millers and Saints also shared the league record for pennants won, with nine each.
Midway Stadium, St. Paul

In September 1955 ground was broken in a suburb to the south of Minneapolis for a new baseball stadium. The Minneapolis business community, which sold the bonds to pay for the stadium, hoped the stadium would be enough to get a major league baseball team in Minnesota. The minor league Minneapolis Millers would use the stadium until a major league team could be acquired.

Not wanting to be left behind, the city of St. Paul also explored stadium sites and included $2 million as part of a $39 million bond issue for municipal improvements. Several sites were considered, including one by the State Fair grounds, but complications developed in procuring land from the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota.

Instead, a gravel-pit site to the southeast of the fair grounds was selected. Below the grade of surrounding areas, the stadium site was on the east side of Snelling Avenue and was bounded on the north and south by railroad tracks. Like the new suburban stadium for the Millers, the St. Paul facility was not confined by city blocks and had a parking lot outside the stadium.

Brooklyn Dodgers president Walter O’Malley came to St. Paul for the groundbreaking in April of 1956 (the St. Paul Saints were owned by the Dodgers). One year later, on Thursday, April 25, 1957, Midway Stadium opened with a day-night doubleheader, the Wichita Braves beating the Saints in both games. The distances down the line to both a day-night doubleheader, the Wichita Braves beating the Saints in both games. The distances down the line to both left and right field were 320 feet and 410 feet to center, and the outfield fence was 18 feet high. Joe Koppe of Wichita was the first player to clear the fence with a seventh-inning home run in the first game, before a crowd of 10,169, slightly below capacity. Another 5,800 fans showed up for the second game that night.

A road was squeezed in between the stadium and the Great Northern railroad tracks on the south, but there were problems with traffic jams, and access to Midway Stadium remained a problem throughout the life of the ballpark.

The stadium had a single deck but was designed to provide for additional decks if needed to provide more seating for major league baseball. “It will be very easy to expand this park to seat from 30 to 40,000 fans,” St. Paul city architect Alfred Schroeder told St. Paul Pioneer Press reporter Bob Schabert. “We could go up either one or two levels, depending upon the number of seats we need. Before we put on another level, however, we would probably extend the ramps extending into the Stadium proper.” The seats were color-coded to match the ticket color: green for the box seat near the field, grayish white for the loge seats (which Jones called an “upper level box seat”), red for reserved seats, and blue for general admission. “Even a trip through the public rest rooms proves inviting,” wrote Jones. “Completely tiled with face brick tiling from top to bottom, they offer the finest in comfort and sanitation.”

The city of St. Paul made it clear that they wanted Midway Stadium to eventually host a major league team. Even though Metropolitan Stadium (as the Millers’ stadium would eventually be named) was not in Minneapolis, it was not acceptable to St. Paul interests. As early as July 1954, the city’s mayor, Joseph Dillon, said that “under no circumstances” would St. Paul support the suburban site that was then under consideration and eventually chosen.

In August of 1959, a group of St. Paul fans began a petition stating they would not support major league baseball unless 50 percent of the games were played at Midway Stadium.

No major league games were ever played at Midway Stadium. When the Twins came to Minnesota to begin the 1961 season, they played at Metropolitan Stadium. The arrival of the Twins also meant the departure of the Minneapolis Millers and St. Paul Saints. Midway Stadium had lost its primary tenant and missed out on the one it hoped to get.

For the next 20 years, the stadium was used for a variety of activities—high-school and other amateur sports, exhibitions such as famed softball pitcher Eddie Feigner with the King and His Court, a practice facility for the Minnesota Vikings football team, and wrestling. However, Midway Stadium became a drain on the city and was frequently referred to as a “white elephant.” It was demolished in 1981 as a new energy-park development took shape between Snelling Avenue and Lexington Avenue to the east.

A new stadium, smaller and less elaborate than Midway Stadium, was built on the other side of Snelling Avenue and later became home to a new Saints team in 1993.
Left: December 1960 photo of Met Stadium; right: May 9, 1964 game between Kansas City and Minnesota.

About the time that the Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee in 1953, the first geographic shifting in major league baseball in a half-century, the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce began exploring the possibility of a major league team in the Twin Cities. It became apparent that a new stadium would be needed to lure a team to Minnesota.

The Minneapolis Minute Men, a group formed to raise money for a new stadium, sold more than $1.2 million in bonds, and in September 1955, ground was broken in what had been a corn field in the southern suburb of Bloomington.

Despite a February 1956 explosion and fire, a result of butane heaters to warm recently placed concrete, the stadium was ready for the opening of the Minneapolis Millers season two months later.

The new ballpark had three decks, which extended only to the end of each of the dugouts. What it didn’t have were posts to support the upper decks; the cantilever construction, rare in sports structures at the time, allowed fans an unobstructed view of the field.

The Millers played at Met Stadium from 1956 through 1960. The announcement near the end of October 1960 that Washington Senators owner Calvin Griffith was moving his team to Minnesota culminated the state’s quest for major league baseball. The incoming Twins would play at Met Stadium, which would be expanded. The first two decks were extended down the right-field line although the grandstand on the third-base line never was. Bleachers filled the gap down the left-field line with wooden bleachers providing seating beyond the outfield fences. Eventually, a double-decked grandstand was built in left field for the Minnesota Vikings, the National Football League team that shared the stadium.

In addition to the Twins and Vikings, the Met hosted the Minnesota Kicks soccer team as well as events ranging from wrestling matches to a concert by the Beatles.

The Twins played at Metropolitan Stadium through 1981, and the team, along with the Minnesota Vikings, moved into the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis in 1982.

Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome and Target Field, Minneapolis

The Minnesota Twins played at the Hubert Humphrey Metrodome (shown during pre-game introductions before the final major league game in the stadium, October 11, 2009) and Target Field (shown during the Twins’ first regular-season game in the ballpark, April 12, 2010).