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Kenmore Square, c. 1950s

Kenmore Square, center of the photo, with its best-known feature, Fenway Park, lower center. The photo shows Fenway lined for football. *Photo by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.*

PHOTO ESSAY

A Brief History of Fenway Park

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Editor’s Introduction: *The Boston Public Library has a wonderful online archive that is available to the public. It includes such collections as “American Revolutionary War Manuscripts” and “Anti-Slavery Manuscripts.” In addition, there is an extensive historic photograph collection titled “Sports Temples.” These images, characterized as the greatest “sports battlegrounds” in Boston, showcase fifteen facilities and span one hundred years from 1872 through 1972. According to the website description:*

These “Sports Temples” are buildings with rich histories and have become consecrated ground in the history of sports in Boston. Some are world famous, others all but forgotten; some are still standing and some have been demolished. But they all, at one time, echoed with the roar of the crowd and bore mute witness to the feats of generations of athletes.¹

For this photo essay, we have selected a dozen photos that span the history of Fenway Park. These images complement the article on Red Sox player Elijah “Pumpsie” Green that appears later in this issue.

* * * * *

Fenway Park opened its gates on April 20, 1912, and has been the home field of the Boston Red Sox professional baseball team ever since. In March 2012 the park was added to the National Register of Historic Places and today is the oldest ballpark in Major League Baseball (MLB). According to the original owner, John I. Taylor, the park was named after the Boston neighborhood in which it was built. (The Fenway neighborhood was so named because it had been partially created in the late nineteenth century by filling in marshland or “fens”).² The opening game pitted the Boston Red Sox against the New York Highlanders, later known as the New York Yankees, a matchup in which the Red Sox beat their opponent 7-6. This famous story is recounted by tour guides at Fenway Park as the proud beginnings of the Boston Red Sox.²

Fenway Park is a relatively small stadium with some famous architectural quirks. The fourth smallest among MLB ballparks by seating capacity, it is one of only seven that cannot accommodate at least 40,000 spectators. The stadium was built to hold about 35,000 fans, but during the 1930s, as many as 47,500 fans crowded into the ballpark. A major fire in 1934 caused owner Tom Yawkey to make some changes to the original configuration, including changing the bleachers from wood to steel seating. And new fire laws in the 1940s severely restricted the number of people in the stadium. Although the stadium has undergone many changes over the years, it has maintained its architectural and social link to baseball’s past as one of the oldest baseball stadiums in the country while remaining one of Boston’s most beloved sports arenas.

From its opening in 1912 until 1933 there was an unusual quirk about the park nicknamed “Duffy’s Cliff.” This was a 10-foot high mound that formed an incline, extending from the left-field foul pole to the center field flag pole. This earthwork formed a “terrace.” This was a common feature of ballparks of the time; its purpose was to make up the difference in grade between street level and field level. It could also serve as a seating area to handle overflow crowds, another common practice of that era. The terrace meant that a left fielder in Fenway Park had to play the territory running uphill. Boston’s star left fielder, Duffy Lewis (1910-17), mastered the skill so well that the area became known as Duffy’s Cliff. In 1934 Red Sox owner Thomas Yawkey flattened the area in left field so that Duffy’s Cliff no longer existed and it became a part of the lore of Fenway Park.

Because of its age and constrained location in Boston’s dense Fenway–Kenmore neighborhood, the park has been renovated or expanded many times, resulting in a number of unique features. Two of those features, the

left-field wall and the jutting angle in center field, have made playing outfield in Fenway Park a difficult task even for even the best of players. Nicknamed the “Green Monster” after it was painted green in 1947, the left-field wall is one of the most famous aspects of Fenway Park. (Prior to 1947 it had been covered with advertisements.) Slightly over thirty-seven-feet high, the left-field wall lies only 310 feet from home plate. It is the highest among current MLB fields and is the second highest among all professional baseball fields, including minor league ones.

The Green Monster is famous for preventing home runs that would have cleared the walls of other MLB ballparks. Instead, balls carom (rebound) off the left-field wall in angles that are difficult to play for outfielders unused to the field’s unusual design, commonly resulting in what is known as a “wallball double.” Some left fielders, however, especially those with a lot of experience at Fenway, have become adept at fielding the caroms off the wall to throw runners out at second base or keep the batter to a single.

It is not only the Green Monster’s height that makes the wall so formidable. When the left field at Fenway is compared to other major league parks, the wall’s placement creates a relatively shallow left field. Because of the wall’s relatively short distance from home plate, many deep fly balls that would have been caught by the fielder in a deeper park bounce off the wall, resulting in base hits. While the wall may prevent many would-be line drive homers, turning them into doubles or singles, its height and placement also allows some high, yet shallow, fly balls to clear the field of play, creating a home run.

Two of the most famous and heartbreaking of such home runs were hit by New York Yankees, including a tie-breaking home run hit by Bucky Dent at the end of the 1978 season and an eleventh-inning home run hit by Aaron Boone in game seven of the American Championship League Series face-off in 2003. For Red Sox fans, a more uplifting memory of the Green Monster is the home run hit by Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk in Game Six of the 1975 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds.

Thomas Yawkey (1903–76) was the legendary Red Sox owner. Born in Detroit, Michigan, he was the scion of a wealthy family that had deep roots in South Carolina due to the lumber mill the family owned there. In 1933, four days after his 30th birthday upon which he inherited a large fortune, Yawkey bought the Red Sox for \$1.2 million on the advice of a longtime friend, superstar hitter Eddie Collins.

The Red Sox had been the dregs of the American League for more than a decade since the infamous Babe Ruth sale to the Yankees by former owner Harry Frazee before the 1920 season. The team had just come off a dreadful 111-loss season in 1932 which is still the worst in franchise history. Yawkey



Babe Ruth at Fenway Park, 1915

Legendary Red Sox pitcher Babe Ruth stands in front of the bleachers. Ruth's contract was sold to Boston's perennial rival, the New York Yankees, in 1919.

Opposite page, top to bottom:

Fenway World Series Crowd, 1912

A crowd packs the left-field bleachers and stands built on Duffy's Cliff along the left-field wall. The scoreboard, top right in the photo, shows the Sox leading 3–0 in the first inning.

Catholic Religious Ceremony, 1919

With stands set up on the infield, ceremony participants occupy the outfield. Advertisements cover the left-field wall where the Green Monster now stands.

Photos by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.



hired Collins as general manager with instructions to buy up as much talent as possible to turn the team around. He also heavily renovated Fenway Park, which had fallen into disrepair over the years. Yawkey remained the sole owner/president of the team from 1933 until his death in 1976, longer than anyone else in baseball history.⁴

Throughout these four decades Yawkey devoted his time and finances to building winning teams. The Red Sox' best seasons occurred in 1946, 1967, and 1975 when they captured the American League pennant but then went on to lose each World Series in seven games: in 1946 and 1967 against the St. Louis Cardinals and in 1975 against the Cincinnati Reds. Unfortunately, Yawkey died in 1976 without having ever achieved his dream of winning a world championship

The Boston Red Sox won the World Series at Fenway Park five times: in 1912, 1915, 1916, 1918, but then not again for another 95 years, until 2013. The Red Sox also won the World Series in 2004 and 2007, but the clinching games of those World Series were not played at Fenway Park. Despite this, the championship in 2004 was of special significance to the Fenway Faithful because it broke an 86-year championship drought. To fans, this meant that



Rally for Irish Independence, 1919

An enormous crowd packs the stands and infield, surrounding the speaker's stand erected on the field. Over 60,000 people came to hear Eamon de Valera, a prominent Irish politician and later president of Ireland. *Photo by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.*



The Postwar Years at Fenway Park

Top: Some of baseball's all-time great pitchers played an Old-Timer's Game at the 1946 All-Star Game. From left are Joe Wood (1908–15), Cy Young (1901–09), Lefty Grove (1934–41), all former Red Sox, and Walter Johnson, who played for the Washington Senators (1907–27).

Above: The Sox practice before a home game in 1950. The Sox finished at 94-60 and drew 1,344,080 fans in 1950, team high marks for the decade.

Photos by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.



Fenway Park teems with fans for a 1951 matchup with the New York Yankees. The Sox won. *Photo by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.*



Game Time

Fans fill the Fenway stands under the outfield clock in 1955, a good year for the team on the field and at the turnstiles. The team finished 84-70 and drew 1,203, 200 fans. Team fortunes on both counts would erode over the next five years. *Photo by Leslie Jones, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.*



Fenway Park, opening day, 2005. The Red Sox beat the New York Yankees 8–1. *Photo by John Keyes, johnkeyes.com*



Monster's Ball

Fenway Park's famous—and feared—left-field wall, the Green Monster, in 2007. *Photo by John Keyes, johnkeyes.com.*

the “Curse of the Bambino,” allegedly started when Babe Ruth was sold to the Yankees in 1919, was over. The “Curse of the Bambino” is just one part of the rich history and folklore of the Red Sox and Fenway Park.

While Fenway Park is known as the home of the Boston Red Sox, it was not always theirs alone. In 1914 the Boston Braves (now the Atlanta Braves) played their World Series games in Fenway Park as their stadium, Braves Field, was being built. Fenway Park also played host to a few different football teams as well. The Boston Redskins played their home games at Fenway Park from 1933 to 1937.⁵ The Boston Patriots (as the New England Patriots were called before they relocated to Foxborough in 1971) also played home games in Fenway Park from 1963 to 1968. In addition, the park has been used by college teams, including Harvard and Boston College, as well as for concerts and many types of civic events.

One hundred years after its opening, Fenway Park still fills with eager Red Sox fans every April. For some it is their first time inside the gates of Fenway Park; for others it has become routine. However, the rich history and the unusual architecture of the park is something that all fans share in common, along with their love of the Boston Red Sox.

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Notes

1. Quoted from the Boston Public Library, Online Collections, Sports Temples, at www.bpl.org/collections/online/sportstemples/ accessed Feb. 24, 2014. The authors would like to thank baseball historian Dr. John Dempsey and Red Sox fan Dr. Nicholas Aieta for their helpful suggestions and corrections on drafts of this article. We would also like to thank Aaron Schmidt from the Boston Public Library’s Print Department for his help in obtaining the Fenway Park photographs.
2. Alan E. Foulds, *Boston’s Ballparks & Arenas* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), 48.
3. Information on this history came from the Boston Public Library www.bpl.org/collections/online/sportstemples/. Other popular sources on the history of Fenway Park that were consulted include Saul Wisnia, *Fenway Park: The Centennial: 100 Years of Red Sox Baseball* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011), John Powers and Ron Driscoll, *Fenway Park: A Salute to the Coolest, Cruellest, Longest-Running Major League Baseball Stadium in America* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2012), Glenn Stout, *Fenway 1912: The Birth of a Ballpark, a Championship Season, and Fenway’s Remarkable First Year* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), and Alan E. Foulds, *Boston’s Ballparks & Arenas* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).

4. Information on Thomas Yawkey comes from Wikipedia (accessed 2-17-14). It was fact checked and verified in several other online sources. See also the in-depth article titled “Tom Yawkey” by Mark Armour at the Society for American Baseball Research, www.sabr.org/bioproj/person/6382f9d5 accessed Feb. 25, 2014.
5. The Boston Redskins were an NFL team that began in Boston in 1933, then moved to Washington in 1937 where they became the Washington Redskins.