
Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

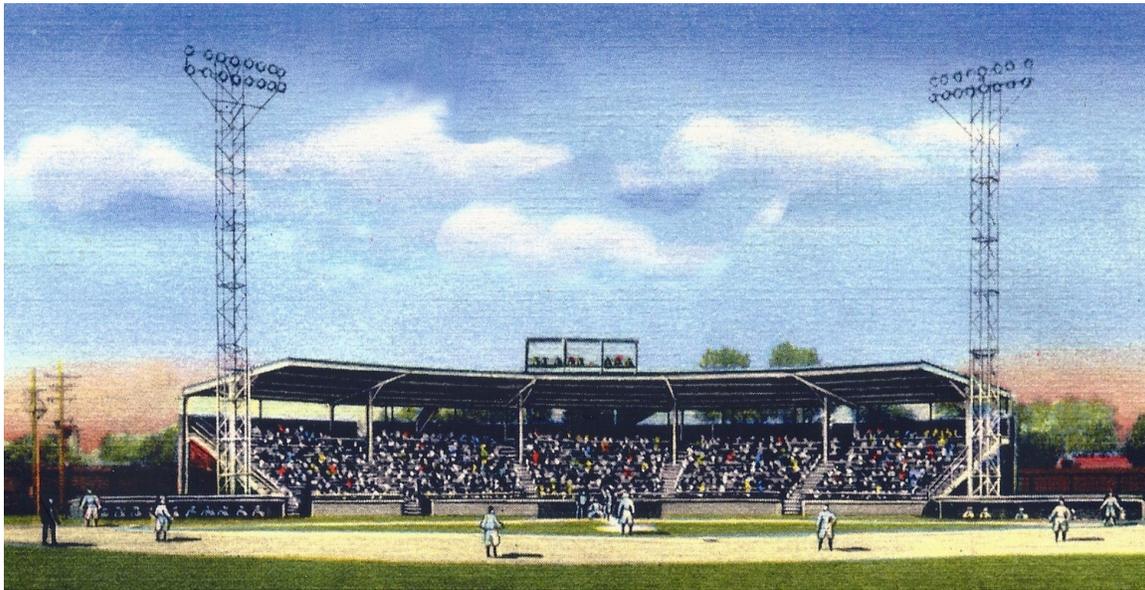
15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

June 2016

Happy 75th Birthday Diethrick Park

Russell E. Diethrick, Jr. Park (nee Municipal Stadium, aka College Stadium) will celebrate its 75th birthday in 2016. The stadium first opened May 6, 1941, with a PONY League baseball game between the Batavia Clippers and the host Falcons.

The following May 1941 article by *Jamestown Evening-Journal* sports editor George F. Dodds gives interesting details about the birth of the facility:



Jamestown's new municipal stadium on Falconer Street at Hopkins Avenue with a 4,200 seating capacity, constructed at a cost of \$60,000, to be formally dedicated with the opening of the PONY League baseball season Tuesday, is a fitting tribute to efforts of public spirited citizens of the community, who cooperated in a movement to attain the project.

The stadium which won popular support may well be hailed as a civic achievement and the start of an extensive recreational center to be developed in the years to come.

The stadium project had its inception early in 1940 when Mayor Leon F. Roberts appointed a committee to confer with the late Joe Schultz, former head of the Pittsburgh Pirates farm system, relative to providing a playing field following abandonment of a proposed site on Baker Street.

Pittsburgh, which operated the PONY League club here in 1939, had transferred its Jamestown franchise to London, Ont. citing the poor conditions of the baseball facility at Celoron Park as a reason for the move.

Ernest C. Kessler, former city councilman, was chosen chairman of the citizen's committee with City Judge Allen E. Bargar heading the financial campaign group which soon began solicitation of funds. Harry A. Taber was treasurer of the fund.

The city, thru Fred A. Chindgren, chairman of the City Council recreation committee, promised its support.

About a year ago the citizen's group purchased a 20-acre tract of land on Falconer Street for \$3,000, turning over the deed to the city. The new stadium occupies about six acres of the total parcel.

Joe Brown, superintendent of Offerman Stadium, Buffalo, assisted the local committee in working out plans for the stadium.

Jamestown returned to the PONY League July 19, 1940 when the former Niagara Falls franchise was transferred here with a new stadium on the horizon. Home games for the last part of the '40 season were played at Allen Park.

Excavation for the stadium started early last autumn after City Council approved a \$23,000 bond issue and later appropriated \$27,000 in the budget for this year. The citizen's committee swelled the fund by \$10,500.



Earlier this year the city entered into a lease with Harry Bisgeier (LEFT), president of the Jamestown Falcons, to play its home games in the new stadium in 1941.

Donations of public utilities' dividend checks and gifts from individuals and organizations aided the city and committee. Labor groups, firemen and policemen constructed the fence this spring.

The bleachers were loaned to the city by the Jamestown Board of Education, being moved from the high school to the new stadium after being repaired and painted by city workmen. It is proposed to play football and other sports as facilities are developed at the new plant.

The contract for the lighting has been awarded and it will be set up next week ready for use by Memorial Day.

George K. Ahlquist had the contract for construction of the stadium, the architects being Beck & Tinkham.

The grandstand has a seating capacity of 1,200 while the bleachers will accommodate approximately 3,000 fans according to Public Works Director Charles J. Strandburg who supervised the construction.

The construction of the new stadium evoked great civic pride and heady optimism as reflected in this *Evening-Journal* editorial of May 5, 1941:

Jamestown's new Civic Stadium, down on the "teeming East Side," isn't alone a playstead in which a boy may race to glory with an inflated pigskin tucked under his arm; or merely a home for this city's representative club in the PONY League.

The world's first great sports arena at Elis, in Olympia, gave birth to the Olympic Games which, more than any peace table, have encouraged international good-will, commerce and undulating waves of amity among nations; so shall the Jamestown Civic Stadium augur for the same achievement among Jamestown and neighboring communities.

The stadium shall be a municipal investment in recreation... that phrase of existence whose necessity is so splendidly expressed in the YMCA's symbolic triangle that bespeaks the betterment of spirit, mind and body.

As stadiums go, Jamestown's isn't the grandest. Some such institutions, dedicated to King Football, for instance, seat from 80,000 to 100,000. A few years ago a gridiron classic attracted 120,000 mortals to Soldier Field, Chicago.

This community's replete and resplendent new stadium might veritably pass unnoticed if lodged in a corner of one of those gigantic stadia. But our stadium shall serve as well for the purpose for which it was intended. The civic-spirited citizenry of Jamestown and vicinity who participated in the movement that made possible the stadium have as surely contributed to the betterment of the lives of their fellow human beings as it is certain that there'll be another crack o' dawn.



We call this new playstead, dedicated essentially to baseball, a "stadium" because it has been ordained that it shall be the scene for a variety of athletic activities. Also, that this range of sports shall hold interest in one way or another for all the people... housing young America's ball playing and racing, music festivals, scout exhibitions etc., and perhaps in the future... swimming, tennis and other diversions. Interest in these affairs shall be expressed in the attendance of both young and old.

When the lid is lifted tomorrow on the 1941 PONY League season and the Jamestown Falcons square off against Batavia's Clippers, the galleries won't be limited to adults.

In years ago a league baseball home site was termed a "park." The layout was intended principally and sometimes exclusively for the performance of a single ball team. But as all purpose stadia were raised throughout the country the appellation "park" became somewhat a misnomer. That's why it's fitting that Jamestown's new recreation center should be called a stadium and not a park.

For utility, as far as baseball is concerned, Civic Stadium is as satisfactory in its appointments as Yankee Stadium, which seats about 80,000 and is the world's largest baseball establishment. Like the president of a jerk-water railroad line once wise-cracked at a banquet of the American Railways Association... "My line may not be as long as yours, but it's just as wide." And so for the purpose of minor league baseball, at least up to Class A specifications, Jamestown's stadium serves the purpose fully as well as Yankee Stadium meets the requirements of the New York Yankees and has a consistently comparative degree of quality.

In not a few ways Civic Stadium will be a revelation to many of its patrons. The expansiveness of the plant, as defined by fencing, easily exceeds anything ever before built hereabouts. The texture and sheeny smoothness of the playing field with its scrupulously-marked foul lines and base paths; concrete dugouts for the rival teams, an immense scoreboard, a steel and concrete grandstand accommodating more than 1,000 persons, carefully calculated entrance and exit appointments, facilities for players such as dressing rooms with showers, club offices... all these features are new in Jamestown's baseball firmament.



122,801 patrons spun the turnstiles at Jamestown's new stadium to see the 1941 Falcons, including CSHOF inductees John Newman, second from left in top row, and Johnny O'Neil, second from left in middle row, win the PONY League pennant.

75 years later baseball is still being played at the same ball yard. The Jamestown Jammers of the Perfect Game College Baseball League will call Diethrick Park home in 2016. Best of luck to manger Anthony Barone and the Jammers.