

# For Argument's Sake:

## The Case for London's Labatt Park Against Its Challengers for the Distinction of Being the World's Oldest, Continuously Operated Ballpark in Baseball History

Robert K. Barney

Western University



Labatt Park, 2018

On a sun-laden Sunday morning, 14 August 2005, with the *Boston Sunday Globe* in hand, I sat down on the front porch of our Barney Point family cottage on Newfound Lake on the southern edge of the great White Mountain chain in central New Hampshire to read up on the latest fortunes of my almost lifetime devotion to the fortunes of the Boston Red Sox Baseball Club. Getting beyond the sports section, a headline article in the *Globe's* City & Region Section caught my eye. "Fielding dreams," it read. Its subtitle, however, brought me up short: "A Central Massachusetts Town Hopes An 1878 Map Will Bring Visitors And Bragging Rights To A Spot In Baseball History."<sup>1</sup> The "town" in question was Clinton, Massachusetts. An "1878 map" of Clinton, "darkened and dog-eared by

age,” pictured a baseball diamond location in the exact “spot” where Fuller Field, Clinton’s foremost contemporary baseball facility, is situated. The argument thus presented by local historian A. J. Bastarache proclaimed Fuller Field as history’s oldest surviving, continuously functioning baseball grounds.

Having attended a London, Ontario civic celebration on Canada Day a decade prior to 2005 (July 1, 1994), at which an elaborate historical heritage plaque was unveiled revealing, indeed celebrating, that Labatt Memorial Park, established in 1877, stood as baseball history’s oldest continuously functioning ballpark, I was nonplused to read of the Clinton claim, one that directly confronted the distinction that for over a decade prior had been celebrated in London. But I did nothing towards further examination, except to file away the *Boston Globe* clipping, thinking that someday I’d get around to an investigatory effort.

When I learned that the Third Annual Canadian Baseball History Conference was scheduled to be held in the old Middlesex County Court House (London) overlooking historical Labatt Park, I was motivated to take up a task I had too long ignored. Which claimant, London or Clinton, indeed any other party, is authoritatively deserving of the distinction “baseball’s oldest, continuously functioning ballpark”?

In addressing the problem, only three municipalities appear to have sought the heritage appropriation. One, of course is London and its Labatt Memorial Park. Another, as noted earlier, is Clinton’s Fuller Field. A third, less publicized than London or Clinton, but nevertheless fanciful of its Wahconah Park as a serious claimant to what might be called a “coveted heritage citation,” is Pittsfield, Massachusetts. My study is based on a physical examination of each of the three physical sites and their historical legacies embedded in their respective communities. It is upon “steadfast continuity” between origin and contemporary times that each “candidate” presents itself as the oldest, continuously operated baseball park (grounds, field, diamond, if you will) in the history of the sport that from its earliest times to its transition to modernity has occupied much national attention in both Canada and the United States. Upon what basis can any of the candidates legitimately claim the distinction of being the world’s oldest, continuously operated ballpark? Let us begin an exploration to find the answer!

## **The Pittsfield Plaintiff**

The town of Pittsfield lies in the folds of western Massachusetts Berkshire County. Pittsfield, a town of some 40,000 plus souls, reflects a neat tidiness to the visitor—well-kept domiciles, manicured lawns, attractive thoroughfares, a pleasing downtown aura. The area has long been a centre for the activities of thousands upon thousands of annual tourists seeking relief from their urban surroundings in the hiking footpaths of the Berkshires, the collections and special exhibits of some of the nation's most renowned museums, and an impressive menu of concerts at Tanglewood, the summer home of the historic Boston Symphony and Boston Pops Orchestras.

Pittsfieldites have long been players and spectators of baseball, indeed ardent followers of the Commonwealth's two premier aggregations, the Red Sox and, till the turn of the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Braves and their Boston National league antecedents. Baseball proper was being played in Pittsfield during the 1850s. In 1859 President William R. Plunkett of the Pittsfield Base Ball Club offered Pittsfield as a neutral site for the first intercollegiate baseball game ever played—a contest played under New York Rules between not-too-distant Williams and Amherst Colleges.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, Pittsfield presents to baseball history the oldest known literary source authenticating the game's presence in American sport culture. Observe the September 1791 Pittsfield, Massachusetts "Broken Window Bylaw," discovered in 2004 by Ann Marie Miles, a Berkshire Athenaeum librarian:<sup>3</sup>

*Voted: The following Byelaw, for the preservation of the windows in the new Meeting House in said town ... viz,*

*Be it ordained by the said inhabitants that no Person, an inhabitant of said town, shall be permitted to play at any Game called Wicket, Cricket, Base Ball, Bat Ball, Foot Ball, Cat Fives or any other Game or Games with Balls within the distance of Eighty Yards from said Meeting House and every such Person who shall play at any of the said Games or other Games with Balls within the distance aforesaid, shall for any instance thereof, forfeit the Sum of five shillings to be recovered by Action of Debt brought before any Justice of the Peace to the Use of the Person who shall sue and prosecute therefore;*

*And be it further ordained that in every instance where any Minor shall be guilty of a Breach of this Law, his Parent, Master, Mistress, or*

*Guardian shall forfeit the like Sum to be recovered in Manner and to Use aforesaid.*

Almost coincident with the discovery of the historic 1791 “Byelaw” was the completion of a study aimed at quantifying Pittsfield’s oldest known baseball venue, historic Wahconah Park.<sup>4</sup> The antiquity of Wahconah Park dates precisely to 9 August 1892!

In the Park’s inaugural contest, “On an eight-acre piece of property behind Brennan’s saloon on Wahconah Street owned by George W. Burbank who began preparing it for the game of baseball on 14 June 1892,”<sup>5</sup> the Pittsfield team easily defeated the Gises from Albany” (N.Y.).<sup>6</sup> The antiquity of the 1791 document and the 1892 Wahconah Park event led many a Berkshire resident to believe that baseball itself must have been “invented in Pittsfield.”<sup>7</sup> But baseball abounded in Pittsfield long before 1892, as *Baseball in the Berkshires: A County’s Common Bond* details. As in other New England locations, a transformation from “The Massachusetts Game” to the “New York” style of play took place beginning as early as the 1850s and continued in some areas well into the 1870s.<sup>8</sup>

Since its inception date of 1892, Wahconah Park has undergone many changes and improvements, just as Labatt Park and Fuller Field have, but essentially maintains its original lot dimensions and configuration. When one visits Wahconah Park today it becomes obvious that it bears a striking resemblance to Labatt Park. Both are similar in town/city-location (adjacent to civic center). Both are similar in diamond and precinct configuration. Both are similar in baseball team and spectator accommodation and amenities. Unlike Wahconah Park, however, Labatt Park has a well-developed “entrance aura” and “general surround” in the form of attractive landscape features and spectator friendly amenities. Fuller Field in Clinton has little of these qualities.

As early as 2002 Pittsfield authorities, including the mayor’s office, announced that the town’s Wahconah Park, in view of its longevity and continuous use, would seek to gain “listing” on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>9</sup> The civic initiative was motivated by the fact that if such certification was achieved, Wahconah Park might qualify for a share of Commonwealth of Massachusetts Annual Awards to Historic Locations of roughly \$5 to \$8 million for upgrades.

Though the National Register initiative developed no further, Wahconah Park's "continuous use" distinction lingered in Pittsfield's psyche. Written in 2016, 125 years



after the recognized establishment of Wahconah Park: "... baseball is still played on the site, where a full-fledged ball park gradually developed, making Wahconah Park *one* of the oldest, continuously-used ballfields in the country."<sup>10</sup> Its definitely established date of origin in 1892, however, is a decade and a half short of Labatt Park's historicity. Wahconah Park aside, the case of Clinton, Massachusetts presents a much more challenging examination and conclusion.

### The Clinton Plaintiff

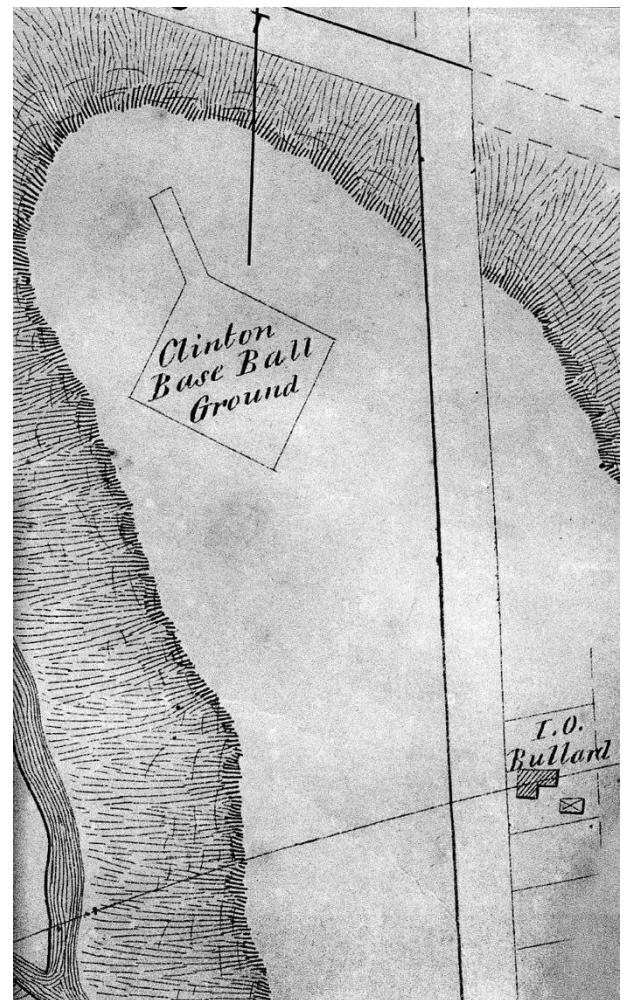
Clinton, Massachusetts, nestled close to Worcester, some 40 miles west of Boston, presents a much different picture than Pittsfield. Clinton, once a bustling 19<sup>th</sup> century town of world fame, characterizes few of the attractive assets of Pittsfield, including sports infrastructure. Several of its business/industrial components render the impression of being in recession. Many of its streets and sidewalks are in sad disrepair. A fatigue-like mist appears to envelop today's Clinton, but in its heyday in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Clinton was a dynamo community, featuring some of America's best known manufacturing firms, most especially those linked to a booming textile industry.

In fact, Clintonian Erastus B. Bigelow rose to become one of the world's most important and best known inventors/entrepreneurs with his invention and development of the power-loom, including his subsequent scientific application of the power-loom to what we know today as the process by which screening for windows, doors, and porches is manufactured. Think about the importance of those inventions in a world health and comfort context. Then, too, Clinton was an enviable center of cultural flamboyance.

Appearing in Clinton's civic halls and private salons for over a half century were many of America's most celebrated writers, entertainers, cause-conscious lecturers, sports stars, even Presidents of the United States, a legion of men and women that included such historical luminaries as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, Carrie Nation, John L. Sullivan, Agnes Moorehead, and two Roosevelts, Franklin and Theodore.<sup>11</sup>

Baseball has been a fixture in Clinton for nearly as long as some of the earliest historical records of the sport in American culture attest. We can certainly pinpoint an 1865 Clinton newspaper notice offered by one of the local baseball clubs inviting ladies and gentlemen to attend its annual "base ball-sponsored ball."<sup>12</sup> As the years rolled by, baseball on various fields and lots in Clinton, especially the town's Central Park, became the scenes of spirited ball play.<sup>13</sup>

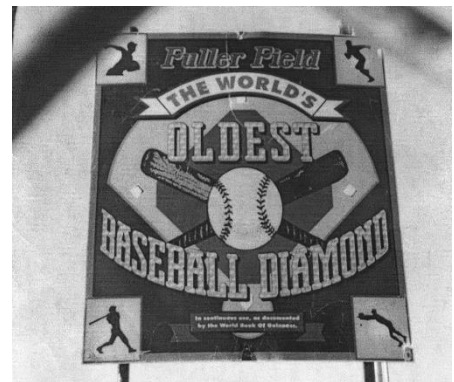
Discovered by the officials of the Clinton Historical Society in 2004, a "darkened and dog-eared by age" four by five foot oilcloth survey map of Clinton, dated 1878, depicts a baseball infield diamond on property bounded by High and Allen Streets.<sup>14</sup> Clinton's argument proposes that the infield diamond presently in place on Fuller Field, a "multi-purpose" facility operated by the town's Parks and Recreation authority, is situated in exactly the same place as the baseball diamond depicted on the 1878 "oilcloth survey map." Researching into the antiquity of baseball parks and diamonds, local Clinton historian A. J. Bastarache found no other claim equal to or offering an older date of baseball diamond origin and continuous use, except the case pertaining to a Canadian baseball facility, Labatt Memorial Park in London, Ontario. Upon inquiry to London's Labatt Park historians, Bastarache learned that Labatt Park, though predating Clinton's 1878 "origin claim" by one year (1877), was devastated by a flood in April 1937, causing



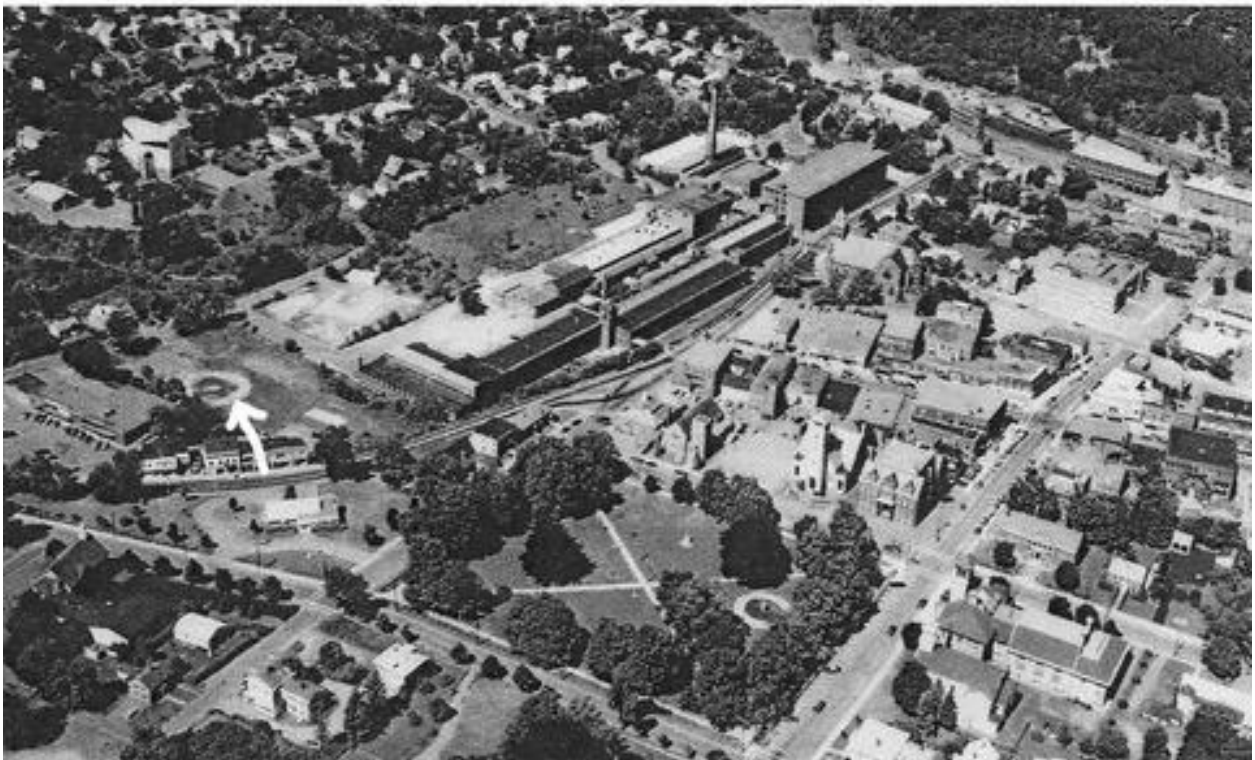


it to cease function for an interim, not to reappear until 1937 as Labatt Memorial Park.<sup>15</sup> And, in Bastarache's incorrect conclusion, "moved" to a completely different location. To Bastarache, then, Labatt Park's "continuous use" claim could not be defended after the season of 1936. But, obviously unknown to Bastarache was the fact that Tecumseh Park/Labatt Park was never moved. In the wake of the devastating 1937 flood, Kensington Flats, including Tecumseh Park, was inundated, its playing surface and ballpark infrastructure damaged beyond repair. Operations at the ball grounds ceased entirely. Over time, the flood waters receded; the Flats returned to normalcy. But the ground's ballfield and supporting infrastructure were ruined. Nevertheless, the John Labatt Brewing Company purchased the former Kensington ballfield land and promptly deeded it to the City of London in perpetuity. Further, Labatt's donated \$10,000 to the City for the restoration of the Tecumseh baseball park in the identical spot of its origin. Tecumseh Park rose in all its original splendor, renamed Labatt Memorial Park.

But Bastarache was on a mission. Hence, to *Guinness World Records* and the National Park Service, he proceeded to launch a quest to have Clinton's Fuller Field ordained as the oldest continuously used baseball field in the World, dating to 1878.<sup>16</sup>



Fuller Field 2018



TOP: Clinton map, 1876. Arrow denotes that no baseball site existed, refuting general claim.

LOWER: Clinton map, 2001. Arrow denotes actual site of Fuller Field.

In fact, Bastarache went further, claiming that the Fuller Field baseball site “may actually date back to 1865 when baseball began in Clinton.”<sup>17</sup> If Bastarache had seen fit



to consult an 1876 Clinton map, he would have found that the Fuller Field baseball site was clearly not in place prior to 1878.<sup>18</sup> Whereas *Guinness* certified Bastarache's claim, and hence, in its 2007 annual edition, proclaimed Fuller Field's unique baseball antiquity authenticity, certification of the "Clinton distinction" failed in the halls of decision making in the National Park Service's *National Registry of Historical Landmarks*.<sup>19</sup> I would suspect that the National Park Service's *Registry of Historical Landmarks* was and is decidedly more rigorous in its survey of "origin evidence," to say nothing of the proof of "continuous use," than a commercial press such as *Guinness*. The silence from government authority, the custodian of historical landmark claims, is a deafening commentary on the legitimacy of Clinton's claim. On *Guinness's* website notation (Waymarking.com) appears the following: "The claim (Clinton) is based on maps of the town that date as far back as 1878, and box scores from games played every year."<sup>20</sup> This is the only occasion where a reference to evidence of "continuous use" ("box scores") is offered, but only a "reference to," not one shred nor example of such evidence. If such evidence exists, Bastarache would surely have brought forth such a corpus to support the "continuous use" aspect of his argument. I believe no such evidence exists, but if it does indeed exist, it has never been examined relative to the Clinton claim. Disastrous to Clinton's claim was the removal of Fuller Field from *Guinness World Records*, replaced in its 2009 edition by Labatt Memorial Park in London.<sup>21</sup>

### The London Plaintiff

So, what about the historic Park that resides just across Queen's Avenue from us here in the Middlesex County Court House? There it is in all its contemporary glory. To recount the Park's historical authenticity with regard to the argument proposed here this afternoon, I turn to the pages of the *London Daily Advertiser* of the spring months, March, April and May 1877. With knowledge that London's premier professional baseball aggregation, the Tecumsehs, had been accepted as a charter member of the new International Association, a genuine "major league" competitor to the equally new (1876) National League of Professional Baseball Clubs for urban franchises and baseball's best players, the *London Advertiser* of March 31st sought to educate its readers on the forthcoming 1877 season's prospectus by offering for sale at 10 cents per copy the *Canadian Baseball Guide* containing the "Constitution and Championship Code of the International Association," the "Playing Rules of the League," and "other valuable

information connected with the Game.”<sup>22</sup> There is little doubt that the prospect of the Tecumsehs playing in the new International Association sparked great interest among London’s sporting public.

Two weeks and two days later, on April 16<sup>th</sup>, in a column headed “The Ball Field,” the *Advertiser* provided its readers with the “inside scoop” on reasons why a new baseball park was needed. Such a need was associated with limited Tecumseh practice and playing time on London’s only viable field-sports venue, today’s greater Victoria Park area, which, in 1877, served chiefly as the expansive parade and drill field for the Crown’s military garrison. Consequently, a new playing venue had to be secured, one with total Tecumseh control over its availability.



London Tecumsehs, 1876

Stated the *Advertiser*:

*The vexatious delays in getting possession of part of the Park property, and the threatening attitude of certain parties who appear determined to have*

*the ball ground at their own disposal, so as to benefit by the custom which large crowds invariably draw to people in their line of business, compelled the abandonment of the idea of utilizing the waste lands of the city for a ball field. The conditions imposed by the Park Committee, one of which limited the size of the field to such narrow dimensions that it would be too small for either baseball, cricket or lacrosse, added another reason why it would be folly for the club to go to the expense of enclosing and preparing the portion of the Artillery Block set apart for its use. After visiting London East, the northern suburbs of the city and the Petersville and Kensington Flats, the most convenient plot, taking everything into consideration, that could be secured, was a piece of meadow land adjoining the west end of Kensington Bridge, on the north side of the road, and an agreement has been effected by the owners of it for its lease or purchase. Work will be commenced on it at once, and the expectation is that it will be ready in ten days, or a fortnight at the furthest. It is nearer to the business centre of the city than the exhibition grounds, and when the Street Car Company extend their track to the brow of the Court House hill, which would be to their interest to do, it can be reached from all parts of the city readily and comfortably.<sup>23</sup>*

At the end of that same week, on Friday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, the *Advertiser* was once again prompted to comment on developments at the new ballpark site:

*The rain of the past two days has retarded the work of preparing the new grounds for the Tecumsehs, but an extra force is at work to-day endeavoring to make up for lost time. The contracts for two thousand yards of sodding has been let to Mr. Murdoch. The fencing and stands for the accommodation of spectators will be rushed rapidly forward. There is a brisk competition for the lease of the refreshment stands on the grounds. Everything is expected to be in readiness by the first of May.<sup>24</sup>*

As the historic featured inaugural contest on their new grounds, named appropriately Tecumseh Park, approached, the professional Tecumsehs played a practice contest on the old Military Park grounds. The result, an 8-2 victory over the Atlantics, “an amateur team of this city,” was played out before “a large attendance of spectators.”<sup>25</sup>

Baseball fever-related activities surrounding the new Tecumseh Park under development continued in the *Daily Advertiser*:

*The Great Western Railway have ordered reduced rates at all stations on their main line and branches for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of May, to give people an opportunity of witnessing the base ball games between the Hartfords and Tecumsehs. Proposals are invited for leases of the refreshment stands on the Tecumseh's new grounds; also for the privilege of decorating the fences with advertising announcements.*<sup>26</sup>

On the last day of April, as the series against the Hartfords drew ever nearer, the *Advertiser* updated its readers on the new Park's condition:

*The Tecumseh's ball grounds are beginning to look as pretty as a picture. The diamond is beautifully sodded and the clay paths around the bases serve to bring out the rich green surrounding them with double effect. The grandstand is a fine commanding building, and comfortably suited. The reporters and scorers, and telegraph operators are also well provided for. A large tier of open seats is being erected in the southeast angle. Though the grounds will be ready for playing on next Saturday, when the Hartfords open the season with the Tecumsehs, they will not be in their best condition for some weeks to come. The progress made during the past two weeks is something wonderful.*<sup>27</sup>

And then, the critical moment in Labatt Park history—its first documented competition—a practice game with the London's amateur Atlantics on the afternoon of Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1877. The outcome, a 5-1 victory for the Tecumsehs, is inconsequential to our study here, but the *Advertiser's* commentary on Tecumseh Park itself is enlightening. On the eve of the “official” opening of the season against the Hartfords, one gets a full picture of the now classic baseball venue:

*The new grounds are nearly complete in every respect of any of the kind in Canada, and but few American cities have such a convenient playing field. The place has been levelled under the management of Mr. Kitchen, who has worked hard in getting things into shape. The diamond and several feet around the borders are nicely sodded, while the base lines have been formed of clay, and are as hard as a rock. Mr. Murdock deserves a great deal of credit for the way he has done the sodding. A pipe well has been*



Tecumseh Park, 1878. Artist's engraving, *Canadian Illustrated News*.

*sunk, and a full supply of cool water is thus always in the ground; the well will also be useful in watering the grounds. A grandstand capable of seating 600 persons has been erected in the northeast corner of the field. This is for the use of members of the club and the seats have already been reserved for the entire season. At the southeast corner is the general stand, open to the general public in payment of a fee. To the south of the grandstand, which by the way is covered in a Directors' Pavillion, erected at the expense of the President, Mr. J. L. (Jacob Lewis) Englehart, who with Mr. Plummer, has given a good deal of attention to overseeing the fitting up of the grounds and buildings. Directly behind the catcher is a booth to be used for a dressing and store room by the players, and above this is a point of observation for scorers, telegraph operators and reporters. It is*



*hoped that they will be left alone by outsiders, as persons who have work to do and don't care to be bothered by people shouting applauding or criticising the play.*<sup>28</sup>

On the afternoon of Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1877 the Tecumsehs met and were defeated by the Hartfords by a score of 6-2. The *Advertiser* reported that “fully two thousand persons” attended.<sup>29</sup> Two days later, on the afternoon of Monday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1877 the second game of the two game series unfolded, an 8-4 series sweep victory for the Hartfords. The *Advertiser*, while reporting a crowd of “probably fifteen hundred,” extolled the visitors as “a fine body of men, quiet and gentlemanly in their manner, and never once in their two games did they question a decision or make a remark to which any exception could be taken.”<sup>30</sup> Scarcely a week later, on Tuesday afternoon, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1877, “at 3:00,” Tecumseh Park spectators, among them “a large number of Maple Leafs” from Guelph,<sup>31</sup> witnessed a 2-0 Tecumseh defeat at the hands of the Pittsburgh Alleghenys (Pennsylvania), in “the first game of base ball in this city in the international series.”<sup>32</sup> There followed in London a two game series against the Stars of Syracuse (New York), both contests of which the Tecumsehs won by scores of 9-8 and 7-2.<sup>33</sup> And thus closed the first and earliest chapter in the history of what we know today as Labatt Park. The defense rests!

## **The Verdict**

What is there left to argue to a jury? There is actually very little. With regard to the Pittsfield claim, the precise date of June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1892 can be recorded as the beginning of the town's iconic baseball park, a date 15 years later than the established date of Tecumseh Park's origin (renamed Labatt Memorial Park in 1937).<sup>34</sup> There is no question of Wahconah Park's “continuous use” character, as well documented by Jim Overmyer and his Berkshire investigatory colleagues.

Clinton's claim focusses solely on a map showing a baseball infield, nothing more. With regard to the 140 years since the 1878 map identification of a plot of ground labelled “Clinton Base Ball Ground” (now Fuller Field) the question must be asked: Does “home plate” still rest in its original 1878 location? Hardly likely. Does Fuller Field qualify as a bonafide baseball park? Beyond its field of play there is a noticeable absence of surrounding enclosures, infrastructure and amenities for players, officials, and spectators,

beautification properties, commercial and business elements, all factors identifying a baseball park beyond a simple infield/outfield diamond.<sup>35</sup> The development of such factors are often the result of much deliberation, debate, indeed graphic documentation, as is presented in the case of Tecumseh/Labatt Park. I submit that had the Clinton diamond case argument been presented to the National Park Service's *National Registry of Historical Landmarks* with the type of primary source documentation that distinguishes Labatt Park's historical legacy, it would have demanded much more currency than it obviously has commanded.<sup>36</sup> Bastarache has no illusions that his Clinton diamond distinction will forever hold, at least, as he himself said: "until someone else finds an old map in a closet."<sup>37</sup> If a judge were to regard the evidence substantiating Pittsfield and Clinton claims, respectively, that either Wahconah Park or Fuller Field are history's oldest baseball facility still in use today, there seems little doubt that he or she would dismiss each case with due dispatch, especially in consideration of the evidence undergirding the Tecumseh Park/Labatt Park argument.

In the early spring of 1877 the London Tecumseh Baseball Club inaugurated its newly developed baseball grounds in London's Kensington neighborhood. Today, as we peer out the windows of this lecture venue, we see that ancient ancestor's most modern progeny, Labatt Park, as it was in 1877, remaining situated in the exact geographical place of its origin. Today, as it was in 1877 for the London Tecumsehs, the precinct presents enduring qualities, among them, a surrounding fence, admission fees for contests, landscape attractions, grandstands for its patrons along the left-field and right-field foul lines, a pressbox for scoring and media officials, and a grass and clay playing surface greatly admired by players, indeed, from an esthetic and comfort point of view, by patrons of the game. The only essential difference between the original Tecumseh Park and today's Labatt Park is that home-plate now rests in a northwest location of the greater precinct rather than in its original 1877 northeast spot, and the fact that there are now team dugouts rather than simple benches. In both instances, in 1877, and today, in 2018, the Tecumseh/Labatt Park was and continues to be a matter of great civic pride and attention in London. Its 1994 *Ontario Heritage Act* declaration remains unchallenged as baseball history's oldest, continuously operating ballpark!<sup>38</sup>



Labatt Park, 2018

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Schworm (*Globe* staff writer), "Fielding Dreams: A CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS TOWN HOPES AN 1878 MAP WILL BRING VISITORS AND BRAGGING RIGHTS TO A SPOT IN BASEBALL HISTORY," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 14 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Overmyer, Larry Moore, Kevin Larkin, and Tom Daly, *Baseball in the Berkshires: A County's Common Bond* (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Melville Press, 2004), pp. 12-13. Steadfast adherents of "Massachusetts Rules" for playing "base ball" prior to the late 1850s, New England in general began to favour "New York Rules" following their first appearance in a game played on the Boston Commons in 1858.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. The "byelaw ordinance" was enacted to protect the much acclaimed new meeting house built in the center of town to satisfy the civic and religious needs of a largely Presbyterian-oriented community. The building was designed by Charles Bulfinch, original designer of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Statehouse, and later, an architect of the U.S Capitol building in Washington, D.C. For more on the historic meeting house and the need for its glass windows to be protected, see Martin Langeveld, Historian of the First Church of Christ, Congregational, Letters to the Editor: "More on the fateful meetinghouse," *Berkshire Eagle*, 16 May 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Here I turn to the history of Wahconah Park compiled by Robert M. Boland, Joseph O. Guzzo, James R. McGrath, David J. Potts, and Anne Everest Wojtkowski in their *Wahconah Park & Grandstand Chronology, 1892-2003* (unpublished, but dated January 2004). The *Chronology* was assembled to provide information supporting a Town of Pittsfield application to state and federal agencies for placing Wahconah Park in the *National Register of Historic Places*. I am grateful to the librarians of the Berkshire Athenaeum Library in Pittsfield for providing me with this document at the time of my visit there in August 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See Boland, et al., p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> "Wahconah Park – Successful Opening Yesterday. Pittsfield Easily Defeats The Gises," *Berkshire Evening Eagle*, 10 August 1892.

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<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Overmyer, et al., *Baseball in the Berkshires*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-20.

<sup>9</sup> See "Ball field historic listing sought," *The Berkshire Eagle*, 19 July 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Overmyer, et al, *Baseball in the Berkshires*, p. 31. Emphasis italics mine.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Bastarache, "Introduction," *An Extraordinary Town: How One of America's Smallest Towns Shaped the World* (Clinton, Massachusetts: Angus MacGregor Publishing, 2005), p. 1. When Mark Twain lectured in Clinton in November 1969, the noted American humorist was less than impressed with Clinton. Wrote Twain to his fiancé Livy Langdon: "Stayed in the Clinton House, and a villainous one it is . . . shabby bed, shabby room, shabby furniture, dim lights, everything shabby and disagreeable." I am grateful to the librarians of the Bigelow Free Public Library in Clinton for providing me with historical documents appropriate to Clinton's place in this study during my visit there in August 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See A. J. Bastarache, "Making Sports History," *An Extraordinary Town*, p. 95. The invitation for Thursday Evening, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1865 came from the "We'll Try Base Ball Club."

<sup>13</sup> See A. J. Bastarache, "Oldest Public Park in America: Clinton Central Park - 1852," in *An Extraordinary Town*, p. 209. The Louis Olmstead-inspired New York City Central Park, established in 1853, has long been looked upon as America's oldest public park, but Clinton's Central park predates it by one year.

<sup>14</sup> The term "darkened and dog-eared by age," is not quoted, rather it is expressed to his readers by the *Boston Globe* writer Peter Schworm in his article, "Fielding Dreams." It may in fact have been spoken directly to Schworm by his interviewee, A. J. Bastarache.

<sup>15</sup> The "historian" here is identified as Barry Wells, prominent member of "Friends of Labatt Park," and long-time pursuant of City of London historical distinction for Labatt Park as history's oldest, "still in existence" baseball grounds. Reminisced to the author by Wells himself in an aside during a Labatt Park Tour conducted by Arthur Lierman on 10 November 2018.

<sup>16</sup> See J. A. Bastarache, "Making Sports History," *An Extraordinary Town*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> See the superimposed Clinton maps of 1876 and 2001 for my assertion made here, in A. J. Bastarache, "Clinton - Then and Now," *An Extraordinary Town*, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> For the earliest notation of the *intended* National Park Service submission, and the actual *Guinness* submission, see Schworm, "Fielding Dreams," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 14 August 2005.

<sup>19</sup> See, A. J. Bastarache, "World's Oldest Baseball Diamond - 1878," *An Extraordinary Town*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>20</sup> "World's Oldest Baseball Diamond in Continuous Use Fuller Field, Clinton, MA", Waymarking.com, Guinness World Record category, last modified December 11, 2008, accessed October 9, 2018.  
[http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM5566\\_Worlds\\_Oldest\\_Baseball\\_Diamond\\_in\\_Continuous\\_Use\\_Fuller\\_Field\\_Clinton\\_MA](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM5566_Worlds_Oldest_Baseball_Diamond_in_Continuous_Use_Fuller_Field_Clinton_MA),

<sup>21</sup> See *Guinness World Records*, 2009, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> See "Ready," *London Daily Advertiser*, 31 March 1877.

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<sup>23</sup> "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Monday, 16 April 1877.

<sup>24</sup> "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Friday, 20 April 1877.

<sup>25</sup> "Out-Door Sports," *London Daily Advertiser*, Monday, 23 April 1877. The Atlantics, though a team composed of amateur players, were a formidable aggregation. By 1877 they deserved the distinction of being known as one of the top amateur baseball teams in the Dominion.

<sup>26</sup> "Base Ball," *London Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday, 24 April 1877. The Hartfords, a seasoned professional team from New York City's Brooklyn borough, were not members of the International Association. They visited London after playing games in Chicago and Detroit.

<sup>27</sup> "Summer Pastimes," *London Daily Advertiser*, Saturday, 30 April 1877.

<sup>28</sup> "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Friday, 4 May 1877. Parentheses mine.

<sup>29</sup> See "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Monday, 7 May 1877.

<sup>30</sup> See "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday, 8 May 1877.

<sup>31</sup> The reference to "Maple Leafs from Guelph" refers to players and officials from the Guelph Maple Leafs Baseball Club, the London Tecumsehs' chief Canadian baseball rival, as well as a fellow member of the new International Association.

<sup>32</sup> "The Ball field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, 10 May 1877.

<sup>33</sup> See "The Ball Field," *London Daily Advertiser*, Monday, 15 May 1877.

<sup>34</sup> "Labatt Park, a designated historic site at the Forks of the Thames River in London, is believed to have been used non-stop for baseball since at least 1877, the year it was christened Tecumseh Park after Chief Tecumseh, the legendary native hero on the side of the British in the War of 1812. On July 12th, 1883, the Thames River overran its banks and washed away Tecumseh Park's benches and fencing, prompting London sports officials to reorient the diamond. Home plate was moved so batters would no longer have to stare into the sun while facing pitches. The Labatt Brewing Firm bought the park in 1936 and donated it to the City of London along with \$10,000 for improvements, resulting in the name change to Labatt Memorial Park." See Website--*London Tecumseh Baseball Club of 1877 – World's Oldest Baseball Diamond / London Public Library*.

<sup>35</sup> The argument here is that the terms baseball park, baseball grounds, baseball diamond, connote much more than simply the playing surface of the precinct, in the same way, for but one instance, that Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky connotes much more than simply the mile and a quarter dirt track upon which the storied Kentucky Derby is run each year.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. There is more authority to underscore "official heritage status" on Labatt Park. On 30 May 1994, the City of London under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* named Labatt Park as an Ontario Heritage Landmark Site. One month later, on 1 July 1994, a plaque was unveiled at well-attended Canada Day ceremonies at the park presided over by Mayor Tom Gosnell. I was present at those proceedings, in fact, rendered the keynote historical commemorative address. Further accolades have been bestowed on Labatt Park. In 2000, the Labatt Ballpark received the Black Clay Award for being the "best natural grass baseball field in North America for cities less than 300,000 population." Finally, in a three month online contest conducted by Baseball Canada, Labatt Park won the distinction of being named "Canada's Favorite Ballpark."

<sup>37</sup> See Schworm, "Fielding Dreams," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 14 August 2005.



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<sup>38</sup> The author would like to recognize and thank Alan and Jennifer Noon for their technical and painstaking aid in preparing the graphic representations displayed in the text. Further, I am grateful for Jennifer Noon's editorial suggestions to the essay's theme and structure. I am also appreciative of the work done by Eva Nagel, PhD candidate at Western University, in retrieving copies of the *London Daily Advertiser* used in the study.

R.K. Barney  
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