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THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF LONDON



DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY CLERK
K.W. SADLER, CITY CLERK

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April 2, 1996

H. G. Howlett
Commissioner of Community Services

I hereby certify that the Municipal Council, at its session held on April 1, 1996 resolved:

2. That, on the recommendation of the London Advisory Committee on Heritage, notice of the Municipal Council's intentions to amend the reasons for designation of Labatt Park located on the north side of Riverside Drive (between Wilson Avenue and Ridout Street North) to include the team clubhouse to be of historical and architectural value or interest be given for the attached reasons under the provisions of section 29(3) of the *Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.18. (2/8/PC)*



 K. W. Sadler
City Clerk
/hap

attach.

cc: Ontario Heritage Foundation, 77 Bloor Street West, 2nd floor, Toronto, M7A 2R9
V. A. Coté, Commissioner of Planning and Development
M. Gladysz, Heritage Planner
Documentation Clerk*
London Advisory Committee on Heritage

Reasons for Designation

Labatt Park (north side, between Wilson Avenue and Ridout Street North)

Historical Reasons

Labatt Park is London's oldest sporting facility and is believed to be the oldest baseball grounds in continuous use (in situ) in North America, and hence, the world. In 1877, W. J. Reid bought a swampy river flat in London West, drained and laid out a baseball diamond and grandstand, and named it Tecumseh Park. London's earliest professional baseball team, the Tecumsehs, were founding members of the International League and won the championships in 1877. Oil baron J. I. Englehart was the primary financial backer of the Tecumsehs and also owned a hotel of the same name. In 1892, W. J. Reid constructed a third of a mile brick-dust bicycle track and many professional and amateur bicycle races were held. Former Mayor George Wenige frequently raced on the bicycle track. London's first moving picture was shown at Tecumseh Park in 1895. In 1932, it was the site of a huge civic reception for "Silent Sandy" Sommerville, the first Canadian golfer to win the U.S. amateur title. Over the years, the park has been used for football games, university and collegiate sports meets, political rallies, boxing programs and winter ice-skating. London won the pennant of the Michigan-Ontario Baseball League in 1920, 1921 and 1922. The Labatt family bought the park in 1936 and donated it and \$10,000 for improvements to the City of London resulting in the name change to Labatt Park.

The flood of 1937 swept away the original grandstand and outbuildings, which were replaced with the existing frame team clubhouse. The London Army team won the Canadian Sandlot Congress title in 1943 and 1944. On September 29, 1948, the London Majors won the World Sandlot title over the Fort Wayne Generals, with the fielder Russ Evon ("Ruthless Russell" or "Russell the Muscle" and catcher Jack Fairs. The London Majors continue on in the Inter-County League as the longest-serving tenant of Labatt Park. The Class AA London Tigers, an affiliate of the Detroit Tigers, played here from 1989 to 1993 and won the Eastern League championship in 1990. In 1990, the park won the "Beam Clay Award" as the best natural grass ballpark in North America.

Architectural Reasons

The existing white-frame, cottage-style team clubhouse (c. 1937) is one of the few clubhouses of its type, remaining in the region. Its exterior remains largely unaltered. Originally, both the teams and the umpires used it as a changeroom. Over the years, many famous sports personalities have changed there, including Connie Mack in 1943, Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins in 1984/85 and Oscar "Lefty" Judd. The current London Majors continue to use the old team clubhouse and it remains a significant landmark structure to London's rich sports history.