

Report to London Advisory Committee on Heritage

To: Chair and Members
London Advisory Committee on Heritage

From: George Kotsifas, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Application to National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to Nominate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada

Date: October 20, 2021

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Director, Planning and Development, with the advice of the Heritage Planner, the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to the application to the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to nominate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada:

- a) The above noted initiative **BE ENDORSED**; and,
- b) The Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to submit the application to the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada with respect to this matter.

Executive Summary

Labatt Memorial Park is the world's oldest baseball grounds. Located at 25 Wilson Avenue, the cultural heritage value of Labatt Memorial Park is recognized locally by the property's designation pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and inclusion in the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District, designated pursuant to Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. At its meeting held on June 15, 2021, Municipal Council endorsed the initiative to begin the nomination process and directed civic administration to assist a volunteer steering committee to prepare a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada application process requires a resolution from a Municipal Council endorsing a municipality's nomination for designation as a National Historic Site. The intent of this report is to provide a report back to Municipal Council with the complete application, seeking Municipal Council endorsement to apply to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to nominate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada pursuant to the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act*.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This recommendation supports the following 2019-2023 Strategic Plan areas of focus:

- Strengthening Our Community:
 - Continuing to conserve London's heritage properties and archaeological resources.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Report to London Advisory Committee on Heritage, Nomination of Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site, May 12, 2021.

1.2 Property Location

The Labatt Memorial Park property at 25 Wilson Avenue is located on the east side of Wilson Avenue, just north of its intersection with Riverside Drive. The property is located northwest of the Forks of the Thames River (Appendix A).

1.3 Description

The property at 25 Wilson Avenue, commonly known as Labatt Memorial Park consists of the baseball diamond, a grandstand, and bleachers (constructed in the 1990s), and the Roy McKay Clubhouse, originally constructed in 1937 (Appendix B). Opening in 1877 as Tecumseh Park, the park has played an essential role in the growth and development of baseball in London and Canada and is the world's oldest baseball grounds. Labatt Memorial Park continues to be used for various levels of recreational and competitive baseball and is the home of the London Majors of the Intercounty Baseball League.

1.4 Cultural Heritage Status

To recognize and protect its cultural heritage value, the Labatt Memorial Park property was designated pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1994 by By-law, L.S.P.-3237-544 in 1994, and amended by By-law, L.S.P.-3237(a)-319 in 1996. The park has been used today by the London Majors of the Intercounty Baseball League since 1925.

As a municipally-owned heritage property, the City continues to be stewards of its history and conservators of its cultural heritage value. As a part of its long-term conservation and protection, the Roy McKay Clubhouse is assessed as a part of conservation master planning for municipally-owned heritage properties to set out short and long term maintenance plans over a 10-year horizon. Recent improvements to the park and clubhouse include a restoration of the clubhouse in 2008, and improvements to the dugouts.

In 2015, the property was designated pursuant to Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* as it was included within the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District, designated by By-law No. L.S.P.-3437-179, which came into force and effect on May 15, 2015.

Labatt Memorial Park continues to be a hub of community activity. Most recently, Tourism London offered public tours of Labatt Memorial Park throughout the summer of 2021 as part of a "Southwestern Ontario Baseball Heritage Pass". Further, in September 2021, the London Sports Council inducted Labatt Memorial Park into the London Sports Hall of Fame, the first facility to be inducted.

In recent years, Labatt Memorial Park has been the subject of further research in baseball history. Competing with historic baseball fields in Clinton, Massachusetts and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Labatt Park was subject to study by researchers and historians from the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and the Centre for Canadian Baseball Research (CCBR), concluding that the park was in fact, the world's oldest baseball grounds. Building on its successful claim as the world's oldest baseball grounds, members of the Friends of Labatt Park, the Canadian Centre for Baseball Research, the London Majors Alumni Committee, and heritage community members have requested that the City of London pursue National Historic Site designation for Labatt Memorial Park to recognize its importance in the growth and development of baseball in Canada.

In 2008, Guinness World Records certified that Labatt Memorial Park was in fact the oldest baseball diamond in the world.¹

1.5 Historical Background

1.5.1 Early History

The first complete London Township survey was undertaken beginning in 1810, by Deputy Provincial Surveyor Mahlon Burwell. The Burwell survey extends north from the Thames River and focussed on the first six concessions laying out the grid of lots and concessions. The survey was interrupted by the outbreak of War in 1812, however, by 1819 Crown patents were being given to settlers.²

Located at the Forks of the Thames, the property that would become Labatt Memorial Park was originally located within a low-lying flood plain bound by the North Branch of the Thames River to the east and the main branch of the Thames River to the south. Following Burwell's survey of London Township, much of the floodplain was granted to Joshua Applegarth. An early settler in London Township, Applegarth was granted the land in 1810 for the purpose of growing hemp intended for cordage and sails for the British Navy. Applegarth's residence was located within the vicinity of the current bend in Charles Street, west of Wharncliffe Road North but his land was used for hemp growing. Ultimately, the Applegarth initiative was unsuccessful and by 1819 moved south of the Thames River.³

Another early land owner and settler in the area surrounding what would become Labatt Memorial Park was John Kent. Kent, born in Staffordshire, England, immigrated to Upper Canada in 1823 where he later purchased Lots 1 & 2 east of the Wharncliffe Highway. The lands, totalling 192 acres stretched to both the east and west sides of the Thames River and included what became known as the "river flats" which would later become valuable farming land and building lots.⁴

In 1848, Kent had a portion of his land in Lots 1 & 2 east of the Wharncliffe Road between the existing Blackfriars Road south to the Thames River surveyed into Park Lots that ranged in size from 3 to 9 ¼ acre lots. Further, he had a road surveyed down the middle of the lots, known first as Centre Street, later re-named to Wilson Avenue. The survey would become registered as Plan 191, and Lot 6 on the east side of Centre Street (Wilson Avenue) would become home to Labatt Memorial Park. Upon Kent's passing in 1859, his will left his land holdings in the newly subdivided area to his sons and daughters.⁵

An analysis of early mapping depicts the gradual subdivision of land within the area that would become home to Labatt Memorial Park. By 1850, the *Sketch of Part of London Township* shows the Wharncliffe Highway and the road that would become Blackfriars Street in existence with the area undeveloped. The 1863 Township of London map prepared by Samuel Peters shows a similar arrangement with the area that is now the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District simply identified as "Kent Farm Subdivided". By 1872, the *Bird's Eye View of London* depicts the area as quickly developing. Several dwellings are depicted as constructed along Centre Street (Wilson Avenue), but the area that would become Labatt Memorial Park remained generally undeveloped. Two years later in an 1874 "Map of the Village of Petersville

¹ Since the Guinness World Records certification, the terminology in identifying historic baseball parks, grounds, and diamonds has been subject to on-going debate by baseball and sports historians. The most-widely agreed upon term that is used for Labatt Memorial Park at this time, is that is the "world's oldest baseball grounds".

² John H. Lutman and Christopher L. Hives, *The North and the East*, 53-54.

³ Corporation of the City of London, *Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District Study Report*, p. 12-13; Daniel Brock, *Fragments from the Forks*, p. 5-8.

⁴ *Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District Study Report*, p 14; John Lutman, *The Historic Heart of London*, p. 12.

⁵ *Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District Study Report*, p 18; RP191(W); LRO 33, Instrument #5468, 9 July 1859.

(London West) was prepared showing the subdivided building lots in the area including most of the side-streets off Centre Street (Wilson Avenue) that now terminate at the Thames River. Lots 4, 5, and 6 on the east side of Centre Street were shown as undivided park lots at that time.

1.5.2 The London Tecumsehs and the Early History of Tecumseh Park

By the 1870s, the London Tecumsehs, a baseball team founded originally in 1868 was in need of a new permanent playing field. In 1876, the Tecumsehs became champions of the Canadian Association of Base Ball. Until that point the club had previously been using the only viable sports field in London, today's Victoria Park. However by the mid-1870s growing crowd support for the ball club fuelled by the team's rivalry with Guelph's team, the Guelph Maple Leafs, combined with the demand for use of the Victoria Park as the provincial exhibition grounds during the late season games necessitated a new permanent ball field. By 1877, W.J. Reid, a merchant and financial backer of the London Tecumsehs found the land on which Tecumseh Park would be constructed exclusively for the team.

Reporting on the need for a new permanent ball field, the *London Advertiser* of April 16, 1877 reported:

*“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.”*⁶

In May 1877, the newly constructed Tecumseh Park, named after the team for which it was constructed officially opened for baseball. At the first official league game hosted at the park, the *Advertiser* reported that 2,000 spectators were in attendance to watch the opening game between the Tecumsehs and the Hartfords of Brooklyn, New York. The *Canadian Illustrated News* referred to Tecumseh Park as “without doubt the best for its purpose in the Dominion.”⁷

The same year, the London Tecumsehs, together with the Guelph Maple Leafs, joined several other American-based baseball teams in forming the International Association, a “major-league” competitor to the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs – now the National League of Major League Baseball. In the league's inaugural year, the Tecumsehs sported a record of 47 wins, 26 losses, and 7 ties. On October 13, 1877 the Tecumsehs beat the Pittsburgh Alleghenys at Tecumseh Park to become the first champions of the International Association making them what journalist Brian Martin identifies as “Canada's First Major League Baseball Champions.”⁸ In covering the event, a New York newspaper noted “Nothing better could have happened for the advancement of the popularity of baseball in Canada.”⁹

Unfortunately, the early success of the team and league was short lived. Within the span of a few years the Guelph Maple Leafs (funded by the success of brewer George Sleeman), and the London Tecumsehs both dropped out of the league due to financial reasons, low attendance, and suspicions of league-wide

⁶ *London Daily Advertiser*, “The Ball Field”, April 16, 1877.

⁷ Robert K. Barney and Riley Nowokowski, “A Canadian Distinction of Note: London, Ontario's Labatt Memorial Park, Baseball History's Oldest Continuously-Operating Baseball Precinct”, *Ontario History*, Volume 113, No. 2, Fall 2021; William Humber, *Diamonds of the North: A Concise History of Baseball in Canada*, p. 38.

⁸ For a comprehensive history of the London Tecumsehs and their International Association championship, Brian Martin, *The Tecumsehs of the International Association: Canada's First Major League Baseball Champions*, 2015.

⁹ “The International Championship” *The Brooklyn Clipper*, October 13, 1877.

cheating scandals. In losing the Canadian teams, the league changed its name to the National Association but by 1880 had dissolved in trying to compete with other major baseball leagues.

Despite the initial loss of a baseball presence on an international stage, Tecumseh Park continued to be a hub for sporting activity in London in its first few years of existence. In the late 1870s and early 1880s it was used not only for baseball but also for bicycle racing and lacrosse (See Section 1.5.7).

However, in 1883, the first of two major floods hit London. Overnight between July 10 and 11, 1883, a storm dropped a torrential amount of rain on London resulting in extensive damage to Blackfriars/Petersville area.¹⁰ Tecumseh Park was extensively damaged in the flooding. In describing the damages in London West, the *Advertiser* wrote: “The whole of Tecumseh Park, fences, stands, and houses, together with Massie’s boat house, all went down the river.”¹¹ Nonetheless, the park was eventually re-fenced, albeit with a relocated home-plate and infield to protect from further flooding damage and to present spectators with a view to London’s core.¹² Following the flood, baseball and other sporting activities continued at Tecumseh Park throughout the first decades of the 20th century.

Through the 1890s to the 1920s Tecumseh Park continued to be the home of several London-based baseball teams, including the Tecumsehs, and the Alerts. Between 1911 and 1915, the Tecumsehs entered a newly formed professional league called the Canadian League. In an exhibition game against the Detroit Tigers in August 1914, the park hosted one of its largest crowds hoping to see the Tigers star player, Ty Cobb. The Canadian League folded in 1915 as a result of the First World War.

Following the war, professional baseball returned to Tecumseh Park in 1919 when the London Tecumsehs entered the Michigan-Ontario League. The league operated until 1925. During that period various would-be professional baseball players either played for or against the London Tecumsehs at the Tecumseh Park. Charlie Gehringer, a second baseman for the Tecumsehs would later play for the Detroit Tigers, and the Tecumsehs again hosted an exhibition game against Ty Cobb and the Tigers in September 1920 in front of a crowd of 3,000 fans. Gehringer would later be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. The park also hosted exhibition games between the Tecumsehs and the Boston Red Sox, the Pittsburgh Pirates, and the Washington Senators which included visits from Hall of Famers Tris Speaker, Walter Johnson, and Honus Wagner.

At one particular exhibition game in 1921, London’s baseball fans were delighted to host the Pittsburgh Pirates, managed by London’s own George “Mooney” Gibson.

Baseball continued to gain popularity in London throughout the 1920s well into the 1930s with the establishment of both men’s and women’s baseball and softball leagues, as well as church leagues, and industrial leagues operated and sponsored by businesses, all of which functioned in Tecumseh Park. It was

¹⁰ The area that is now generally known as the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District has been known historically by various names including Blackfriars, Petersville, Kensington, and London West, among other names used to describe the flats immediately west of the Thames River.

¹¹ *London Advertiser*, “The Latest: Terrible Destruction by Water – London West and Low Points of the City Submerged – Immense Loss of Life Feared – Moving Tales of the flood – The Damage to property Incalculable”, July 11, 1883.

¹² The location of home-plate has been changed various times in the history of Labatt Memorial Park to protect against potential future flooding as well as to accommodate alternative uses of the park. The details of the re-location are further explored in Robert K. Barney and Riley Nowokowski, “A Canadian Distinction of Note: London, Ontario’s Labatt Memorial Park, Baseball History’s Oldest Continuously-Operating Baseball Precinct”, *Ontario History*, Volume 113, No. 2, Fall 2021.

during this period that the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL) was founded in 1925. London's team was originally called the London Braves but changed their name often depending on company sponsorship. The team played under the names, the London Winery, the London Silverwoods, and of course, the London Majors.

1.5.5 Transition to Labatt Memorial Park and the Flood of 1937

By the mid-1930s, the future of baseball at Tecumseh Park was in jeopardy due to much-needed facility upgrades. Team sponsorships also gradually dropped due to the Great Depression and the facilities at Tecumseh Park were in decline. In an attempt to "save" the park from concerns about potential private purchase and demolition a Tecumseh Park "booster day" was held in June 1936, which included a game between Stratford and London. The intent was to raise the necessary funds to prevent its sale, and the day included guest appearances from Fred Goldsmith, a former pitcher for the Tecumsehs on the 1877 championship team.¹³ The *London Free Press* commented on the success of the event:

"The success of the day will save Tecumseh Park for this year, but this does not solve the problem for the future. Anyone who was at the game on Saturday must have been thoroughly convinced of the necessity of retaining the park as a centre for athletics in London. It is ideally and centrally located and could, without a great expenditure, be converted into the best athletic field for all sports in Canada. One hesitates in these days of financial stress, as far as taxpayers are concerned, to urge that the city should purchase the property. What an opportunity for some philanthropically-minded citizen to do something worth while for London!"¹⁴

Whether the article was written with a specific "philanthropically-minded citizen" in mind may never be known, however, six months later the *Free Press* highlighted positive momentum in the park's history with an eye-catching headline: "City is Given Tecumseh Park, \$10,000: Famous Playground Donated by Labatt Family to Citizens".¹⁵ John and Hugh Labatt purchased the park as a means to honour their father John Labatt Sr. upon the advice of their neighbour, Mooney Gibson. The park was renamed "Labatt Memorial Park", and given to the City with a donation of \$10,000 to maintain and update the park.¹⁶

The excitement and optimism for the donation of Labatt Memorial Park was short-lived as London was again devastated by flooding a few months later. In April 1937, after weeks of unusually high amounts of precipitation, the Thames River again flooded the area causing extensive damage to the City. Like in 1883, the newly named ballpark sustained extensive damage to the grandstand, bleachers, and fencing. It was not until mid-June that the London Silverwoods were able to return to Labatt Park as their home field. In its reconstruction, the newly-named park included a new grandstand, fencing and the construction of brand new cottage-style clubhouse that included changerooms for the teams, public washrooms, and concessions.¹⁷ A distinctive Art Deco style entrance gate was also constructed fronting onto Dundas Street (later re-routed for Riverside Drive), The Art Deco gate no longer remains, however, the clubhouse, now known as the Roy McKay Clubhouse is extant on the property.

¹³ Fred Goldsmith was a former pitcher for the London Tecumsehs. His career has been a part of on-going debate centred on the invention and usage of the "curveball" pitch used in baseball. His life and baseball career is extensively documented in John R. Castle Jr., *Goldie's Curve Ball: How Fred E. "Goldie" Goldsmith Invented, Demonstrated, Mastered, and Championed The Curve Ball*, 2010.

¹⁴ *London Free Press*, "Tecumseh Park", June 29, 1936.

¹⁵ *London Free Press*, "City is Given Tecumseh Park, \$10,000: Famous Playground Donated by Labatt Family to Citizens" December 15, 1936.

¹⁶ Barney and Nowokowski, "A Canadian Distinction of Note", *Ontario History*; Martin, *The Tecumsehs of the International Association*, p. 216-217.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

1.5.6 Continued Baseball Legacy at Labatt Memorial Park

The 1940s brought men's and women's championship baseball at various levels to Labatt Park. Women's softball gained popularity during the war years, attracting large crowds and to the park. Many of the teams and leagues were sponsored by local businesses including Kellogg's, McCormick's, and Silverwood's. By 1942, the "London Ladies' Softball Association" was organized by the City. The women's league gained popularity resulting in the formation of two travelling teams, the most prominent of which was the London Supremes of the Michigan-Ontario League. The Supremes won the league championship in 1948. Before disbanding in 1951, the Supremes played a series of exhibition games across North America including games in Arizona and California, where they defeated the reigning US Ladies champions, the Orange County Lionettes.

The men's teams competing at Labatt Park were just as successful in the 1940s. In 1944, Bill Farquharson, the Director of the Public Utilities Commission for the City of London assumed responsibility of London's IBL team and re-named the team the Majors as a recognition to Major Chet Smith his predecessor and manager of the formerly-named London Army team. In 1948, Farquharson entered the Majors into the National Baseball Congress, Can-Am Championship Series. In the same year, they defeated the Fort Wayne Indiana General Electric's in Game 7 of the Championship Series to become the only Canadian team to win the Can-Am Championship. Game 7 was estimated to have had 10,000 spectators in attendance including London-born professional ballplayer Frank Colman, New York Yankees catcher Yogi Berra, and Detroit Red Wings Gordie Howe and Ted Lindsay.¹⁸

The 1950s to 1970s brought continued success and growth of the game in London and Canada. The 1950s started with the London Majors winning the IBL Championship in 1951, followed by the purchase of the team by Frank Colman in 1954 before winning the Championship again in 1956. In the 1960s, the ownership of the Majors switched hands numerous times and with that came name changes including the London Diamonds and the London Pontiacs. This trend continued in the 1970s with London's team becoming known as the London Avco's, the London El-Morrocco Majors, and finally a return to the Majors in 1975. That same year, they won the IBL Championship, an honour that London had simply not yet accomplished until this year. On October 1, 2021, the London Majors defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs at Labatt Memorial Park to win their first IBL Championship in 46 years.

Baseball's modern era of the 1980s and 1990s brought some of the more recent big name athletes to London. Between 1989 and 1993, Labatt Park was home to the London Tigers, a Double-A Minor League affiliate to Major League Baseball's Detroit Tigers.¹⁹ It was during this time that Londoners and Canadian baseball fans could see future Major Leaguers on their way through the minor league systems. Some of the more prominent players include Cliff Floyd, professional MLB and National Football League player Deion Sanders, All-Stars Jeff Bagwell, Jim Thome, and Travis Fryman, Pete Walker (current pitching coach for the Toronto Blue Jays) as well as World Series MVP Manny Ramirez. Sarnia, Ontario's Rob Thomson, current bench coach for the Philadelphia Phillies, also called Labatt Park home for a season, coaching 1st base for the London Tigers.²⁰

Labatt Park was also home to two of London's additional professional teams in the modern era. The Kalamazoo Kodiaks of the Frontier League, an independent professional league in North America relocated from Kalamazoo, Michigan to

¹⁸ Brock, *Fragments from the Forks*, 253.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁰ Rob Thomson also won a World Series championship as a member of the coaching staff for the New York Yankees in 2009. He was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 2019.

London in 1999 becoming the London Werewolves. The Werewolves won the Frontier League Championship in their inaugural season in the league, but would later relocate to Canton, Ohio. In 2003, the London Monarchs were London's representatives in the short-lived Canadian Baseball League. The first official game of the league was held at Labatt Park to a sold-out crowd.

In recent years, Labatt Park has continued to play an important role in the growth and development of baseball in Canada. The park was used for the 2001 Canada Summer Games, the 2018 Ontario Summer Games, and continues to host Baseball Canada and Baseball Ontario championships.

1.5.7 Additional Uses of Labatt Memorial Park

In addition to baseball, Labatt Park has hosted various sporting purposes since its early days.

Dating to its first few years in operation, the then Tecumseh Park hosted lacrosse as early as 1883. The London Lacrosse Club made Tecumseh Park their homefield. They opened their season in that year at Tecumseh Park in a game against the Brantford Brants. Reportedly, a crowd of 2,000 spectators visited the park to watch the game.²¹

In addition to lacrosse, Tecumseh Park also hosted rugby and football games, primarily at the collegiate level. Western University's rugby team began hosting their games at the park in 1907 with their inaugural game that year against the University of Toronto. The Western University football team continued to use Tecumseh Park for their games in the early-20th century as well. Aerial photography indicates the grid-iron football field laid out over the top of the baseball diamond, indicating the field's multi-sport usage. Western use the field until the late-1920s when the university constructed J.W. Little Stadium on campus.²²

Lastly, one of the most popular alternative uses of Tecumseh Park in the late-19th century was for bicycle track racing. In the 1880s, a cycling craze swept much of North America including London, which created the London Forest City Bicycle Club. In 1895, construction began at Tecumseh Park to create a third of a mile powdered brick and clay track intended for amateur and professional bicycle racing. The *Advertiser* noted the planned improvements for the park to accommodate a cycling track and noted it would be "one of the best athletic parks in Canada" including the third mile track with proper banking on the turns, and the baseball diamond configured on the interior of the oval, with a new grandstand to accommodate 2,500 spectators. Cycling remained popular in London and at Tecumseh Park until the middle of the First World War, when its popularity began to wane.²³

On a local level, the facility was used to host the City of London's "Playground Olympics" in the mid-20th century. Based on the success of the PUC's Outdoor Recreation Program managed by Bill Farquharson between 1935-1973, Labatt Park was used annually to host this event, which was a culmination of the Outdoor Recreation Program's activities and athletics competition. The program and the event drew thousands from across the City on a regular basis and provided children with the opportunity to participate in community-based sporting events. The program was referred to and applauded by its participants as one of the best in North America, and one that promoted inclusivity in sport.

²¹ Barney and Nowokowski, "A Canadian Distinction of Note", *Ontario History*.

²² Barney and Nowokowski, "A Canadian Distinction of Note", *Ontario History*; Robert S. Kossuth and Kevin B. Wamsley, "Cycles of Manhood: Pedaling Respectability in Ontario's Forest City" *Sports History Review*, Volume 34, Issue 2, p.167-189, 2003.

²³ "It's a Go", *The Advertiser*, May 25, Barney and Nowokowski, "A Canadian Distinction of Note", *Ontario History*.

In addition to sports, Tecumseh Park/Labatt Memorial Park was also used (and continues to be used) for community activities. In July 1927, the park was used for a Chautauqua event.²⁴ By the mid-20th century the park was used for military drumhead services. In 1997, the park was used as a facility from which to fire a 21-gun salute during the Queen Elizabeth II's Royal Visit to London. The park has also been used for public skating, civic receptions, the RCMP Musical Ride, and political rallies. On an annual basis, the park is used for Canada Day celebrations, usually including a baseball game and fireworks.

Most recently in August 2021, Labatt Memorial Park was used as a venue to celebrate the accomplishments of the London-based Canadian Olympic athletes who competed for Canada at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Among the athletes who were in attendance were women's rower Jennifer Martins, opening ceremony flag-bearer and women's basketball team member Miranda Ayim, member of the gold-medal winning women's eight rowing team Susanne Grainger, gold-medal swimmer Maggie MacNeil, and gold-medal winning decathlon champion Damian Warner.

Labatt Memorial Park continues to be valued by Londoners, Canadians, and sports-fans in North America.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Historic Sites and Monuments Act

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) was established in 1919 and oversees the National Program of Historical Commemoration. The HSMBC is mandated through the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* (1953) and makes recommendations to designate persons, places, and events of national historic significance to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada (Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration*, 2019). Unlike, the *Ontario Heritage Act*, as federal legislation the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* does not protect or regulate property, but rather identifies and commemorates place, persons, and sites of national historic significance.

Currently, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is responsible for designating places, persons, and events of national historic significance. Parks Canada is the agency of the Government of Canada that provides professional and administrative services to support the HSMBC including the historical and archaeological research needed for evaluation applications for National Historic Site designation. The agency is mandated to "protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future

2.2 National Program of Historical Commemoration

National Historic Sites are places of profound importance to Canada, each telling their own unique story, contributing a sense of time, identity, and place to our understanding of Canada as a whole. Over 2,100 places, persons, and events have been commemorated by the Government of Canada for their national historic significance. Any aspect of Canada's human history may be considered for a national designation if it has had a nationally significant impact on, or illustrates a nationally important aspect of, Canadian history. In Canada, National Historic Sites represent a variety of historic places, encompassing sites as diverse as sacred places, battlefields, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, ships and shipwrecks, structures, and districts. Many are still used for work, religious practices, commerce and industry, education, and leisure.

In addition to National Historic Sites, the Government of Canada recognizes National Historic Persons and National Historic Events. National Historic Persons

²⁴ *London Advertiser*, "Rotary Bringing Chautauqua Here" July 1, 1927.

are individuals who have made a significant and lasting contribution to Canadian history. National Historic Events are designated if they represent a defining action, episode, movement, or experience in Canada history.

2.3 Eligibility Requirements and Application Process

2.3.1 Eligibility

The eligibility of a potential national historic designation is guided by criteria and guidelines set out by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Currently, the Minister is advised by the HSMBC based on the *Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subject of potential national historic significance* (Fall 2017) (See Section 2.3.1.1). The guideline document sets out the detailed criteria and guidelines followed by the HSMBC. The following summary highlights the key concepts for criteria for national historic significance.

Any aspect of Canada's human history may be considered for ministerial designation of national historic significance. To be considered for designation, a place, person, or event must have had a nationally significant impact on Canadian history or must illustrate a nationally important aspect of Canadian human history.

Subjects that qualify for national historic significance will meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. A place may be designated of national historic significance by virtue of a direct association with a nationally significant aspect of Canadian history. An archaeological site, structure, building, group of buildings, district, or cultural landscape of potential national historic significance will:
 - a. Illustrate an exceptional creative achievement in concept and design, technology and/or planning, or a significant stage in the development of Canada; or,
 - b. Illustrate or symbolize in whole or in part a cultural tradition, a way of life, or ideas important in the development of Canada; or
 - c. Be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with persons that are deemed of national historic importance; or
 - d. Be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with events that are deemed of national historic importance.
2. A person (or persons) may be designated of national historic significance if that person individually or as the representative of a group made an outstanding and lasting contribution to Canadian history.
3. An event may be designated of national historic significance if it represents a defining action, episode, movement, or experience in Canadian history.

In general, only one designation will be made for each place, person, or event of national historic significance. Uniqueness or rarity are not, in themselves, evidence of national historic significance, but may be considered in connection with the above noted criteria. Firsts, per se, are not considered for national historic significance.

Buildings, ensembles of buildings, and sites that are 40 years of age or older²⁵ may be considered for designation of national historic significance. A place must be in a condition that respects the integrity of its design, materials, workmanship, function and/or setting to be considered for designation of national historic significance, insofar as any of these elements are essential to understand its significance.

²⁵ Unlike national historic designations, age is not a criteria for designations pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Individual properties designated pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* must meet one or more criteria of Ontario Regulation 9/06, Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest.

Persons deceased for at least 25 years may be considered for designation of national historic significance, with the exception of Prime Ministers, who are eligible for commemoration immediately upon death.

Events that occurred at least 40 years ago may be considered for designation of national historic significance. Historic events that continue into the more recent past will be evaluated on the basis of what occurred at least 40 years ago.

2.3.1.1 Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subjects of potential national historic significance

The Minister is advised by the HSMBC based on the *Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subject of potential national historic significance* (Fall 2017). This guideline document sets out the detailed criteria and guidelines for the HSMBC to frame their advice to the Minister. The specific “criteria” are those found in the *Criteria for National Historic Significance* (1998) (See Section 2.3.1 above). The guidelines included within the *Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subject of potential national historic significance* (Fall 2017) refer to both the “General Guidelines” as adopted by the HSMBC in 1998, as well as “Specific Guidelines”, which are based on HSMBC decisions to address specific aspects of commemoration, adopted over time.

Sporting facilities, parks and fields are not specifically identified as a specific aspect of commemoration, however, the *Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subject of potential national historic significance* (Fall 2017) includes specific guidelines related to the identification of parks and gardens of national significance, as well as specific guidelines in evaluating Canadian athletes. Read together, the guidelines assist in understanding the criteria and guidelines considered when evaluating sport facilities that may be evaluated for their national historic significance such as Labatt Memorial Park.

The specific guidelines of Section 3.10 (Identification of Parks and Gardens of National Significance) note:

In November 1994, the Board recommended that:

A park or a garden may be considered of national significance because of:

- 1) the excellence of its aesthetic qualities;*
- 2) unique or remarkable characteristics of style(s) or type(s) which speak to an important period or periods in the history of Canada or of horticulture;*
- 3) unique or remarkable characteristics reflecting important ethno-cultural traditions which speak to an important period or periods in the history of Canada;*
- 4) the importance of its influence over time or a given region of the country by virtue of its age, style, type, etc.;*
- 5) the presence of horticultural specimens of exceptional rarity or value;*
- 6) exceptional ecological interest or value;*
- 7) associations with events or individuals of national historic significance;*
- 8) the importance of the architect(s), designer(s), or horticulturalist(s) associated with it.*

The Board stated, however, that it expected the case for national commemoration of any garden or park would not rest solely on one of the eight guidelines adopted, save in the most exceptional of circumstances.

The specific guidelines of Section 4.7 (Evaluating Canadian Athletes) note:

In July 2007, the Board adopted the following guidelines:

An athlete may be considered of national significance if:

- 1) he or she fundamentally changed the way a sport in Canada is played through his or her performance; and/or he or she greatly expanded the perceived limits of athletic performance; and*
- 2) he or she came to embody a sport, or had a transcendent impact on Canada*

Note: When these guidelines are applied to a sport team, the team will be presented to the Board as an “event” rather than a “person”

2.3.2 Nomination Requirements

Parks Canada has set out criteria for all nomination requirements submitted to the HSMBC for national historic designations. Nominations are submitted to the HSMBC Secretariat. All nominations must contain the following information:

- Identification of the Applicant – a point of contact for inquiries, clarifications, and correspondence between the Applicant and the HSMBC;
- Identification of the Subject – identification of the place, person, or event for nomination including important dates, buildings or structure, construction dates, and/or parameters of an event;
- Documentation and Suggestions for More in-depth Research – suggestions for research, including historical sources, photograph collections, documents, bibliographic reference, and contact person

Additional special requirements are necessary for nominations for National Historic Sites. This includes:

- Consent of the Property Owner(s) – written consent of the property owner (if the applicant is not the owner) is required, otherwise, the HSMBC will not consider applications for the designation. If the property falls under a municipal authority, consent may take the form of a Municipal Council resolution to endorse the nomination;
- Boundaries of the Site Proposed for Designation – description of the boundaries of the property being proposed for designation, which may include a sketch map, legal description, or survey map;
- Components of the historic property – identification of all of the major built and/or natural components of the property;
- Site Condition – description of the condition of the site, identify any existing potential threats to the integrity of the site; and,
- Additional Documentation – photographs, plans, and/or elevations of buildings if necessary.

The endorsement of Municipal Council in pursuing the nomination is a critical component of the nomination requirements.

2.3.3 Application Process and Timelines

The application process for national historic site designations can take several years (Appendix C). Upon receiving a nomination, the HSMBC Secretariat confirms that all required components have been submitted prior to sending the nomination to the Parks Canada Cultural Sciences Branch. Preliminary research is conducted to ensure that the nomination meets the criteria and guidelines and that there is sufficient documentation for a report to be prepared to the satisfaction of the HSMBC. This initial step can take approximately four months for completion.

If a nomination is successful in the preliminary evaluation stage, Parks Canada historians prepare a comprehensive report for submission to the HSMBC at one of their bi-annual meetings. During the meeting, the HSMBC reviews the reports for each subject and issues recommendations or may seek clarification on

aspects of an application. When clarification is requested, the subject is resubmitted at a subsequent meeting.

HSMBC recommendations are brought forward to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change for approval.

2.4 Implications for Maintaining National Historic Site Designation

Every National Historic Site has a set of reasons or an explanation for why it is significant or distinctive. The reasons why a National Historic Site are important are established by the HSMBC, and are laid out in a Statement of Commemorative Intent (*Framework for History and Commemoration*, 2019).

The *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* does not have the scope to legally protect designated sites, as the designation is commemorative in intent. As federal legislation, the federal government does not regulate privately owned property. A National Historic Site designation helps focus public attention on a particular site, but it does not affect ownership of the site or provide protection against interventions. However, before undertaking alterations to a National Historic Site, Parks Canada recommends following the guidance of the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*²⁶. Alterations to a National Historic Site that have a profound impact on the site's "integrity" or the reasons outlined the Statement of Commemorative Intent, may result in the removal of the National Historic Site designation.

For Labatt Memorial Park, the property's "double-designation" pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act* provides legal protection for the property's cultural heritage value. Heritage Alteration Permit approval may still be required for alterations to the property.

A National Historic Site designation is not anticipated to result in implications to the day-to-day operations or planned infrastructure improvements of the Labatt Memorial Park property for City staff.

2.5 Letters of Support

Letters of support from organizations and individuals are encouraged to accompany the nomination to demonstrate community support for the nomination. City staff and steering committee members have been successful in gathering support from individuals in the sports, heritage, and political community on a local, provincial, federal, and international level. A list of individuals and their representative organizations have provided letters of support in nominating Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada. The valuable contents of their support letters can be found in Appendix E.

Support letters have been received by:

- John Thorn, Official Historian, Major League Baseball;
- Paul Beeston, Former President and Current President Emeritus, Toronto Blue Jays;
- Canadian Centre for Baseball Research Board of Directors – Andrew North, Robert K. Barney, William Humber, Brian "Chip" Martin;
- Dr. Colin Howell, Centre for the Study of Sport and Health, Saint Mary's University;
- Frank Consentino, Professor Emeritus, York University, Grey Cup Champion and Vanier Cup Champion;
- William Humber, Educator, Author, Historian, and Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame Inductee, 2018;
- Dr. Stephanie Radu, Beachville District Museum;

²⁶ The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* was prepared by Parks Canada in 2001, as a part of an initiative called the Historic Places Initiative (HPI). The primary purpose of the document was to provide consistent best practices and guidelines for heritage conservation in Canada. The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation Historic Places in Canada* has not been adopted by the City of London.

- Zanth Jarvis, Director, Sport Tourism, Tourism London;
- Jennifer Grainger, Past President, London Region Branch, Architectural Conservancy Ontario;
- Terence Kernaghan, Member of Provincial Parliament, London North Centre;
- Scott Bush, CEO, Society for American Baseball Research; and,
- Barbara Barclay and Brenda Logan, Co-Chair, Hamilton Road Community Association and Members of the Hidden History of Hamilton Road.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Financial Requirements

There are no costs to apply to the HSMBC for a national historic site designation. Likewise, there are no costs or fees to maintain status as a National Historic Site.

3.2 Financial Opportunities

National Historic Sites are eligible for the National Historic Sites of Canada Cost-Sharing Program. This program supports preparatory aid projects and conservation projects, as well as the development of heritage presentation for owner and eligible lessees of national historic sites. A site owner may be reimbursed up to 50% of eligible costs incurred in the conservation and presentation of a National Historic Site. Funded projects include planning and works to conserve the heritage fabric of a site, as well as presentation projects to communicate the reasons for federal designation. The guidelines and calls for supported projects for this program are established annually.

Lastly, as a designation that is honorary in nature and commemorative in intent, National Historic Site designation increases public awareness of heritage places. Combined with the success of Tourism London's public tours of Labatt Memorial Park, as well as the partnership with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum and the Beachville District Museum in a "Southwestern Ontario Baseball Heritage Pass", National Historic Site designation has the potential to increase public attention for Labatt Memorial Park and a tourism site for London, Ontario.

Conclusion

First opening in 1877 as Tecumseh Park, now known as Labatt Memorial Park was initially the home of the London Tecumsehs. The park has played an important role in the growth and development of baseball in Canada and is recognized as the world's oldest baseball grounds.

National Historic Sites are places of profound importance to Canada, each telling their own unique story, contributing a sense of time, identity, and place to our understanding of Canada as a whole. To highlight its importance in Canadian sport history, staff recommend submitting the application to the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to nominate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada.

Acknowledgments

Staff would like to acknowledge the numerous baseball and sport historians, enthusiasts, and volunteers who graciously contributed their time and effort to assist staff in researching the history of Labatt Memorial Park. Special thanks to Barry Wells who has long advocated for the commemoration of Labatt Memorial Park. Special thanks also to Stephen Harding, Riley Nowokowski, and Robert Barney who have provided continuous support to staff in researching Labatt Memorial Park and for gathering support for the application to the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

Prepared by: Michael Greguol, CAHP, Heritage Planner

Reviewed by: Britt O’Hagan, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Community Planning, Urban Design, and Heritage

Recommended by: Gregg Barrett, AICP, Director, Planning and Development

Submitted by: George Kotsifas, P. Eng. Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development

Appendix A – Property Location

Appendix B – Images

Appendix C – Historic Documentation and Images

Appendix D – Parks Canada National Historic Designation Flowchart

Appendix E – Letters of Support

Sources

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Appendix A – Property Location



Figure 1: Location map, showing Labatt Memorial Park located at 25 Wilson Avenue.

Appendix B – Images



Image 1: Photograph looking west from the outfield towards the grandstands at Labatt Memorial Park.



Image 2: Detail looking west from the outfield showing the infield and grandstand.



Image 3: Photograph showing the scoreboard at Labatt Memorial Park, noting the park as the “World’s Oldest Baseball Grounds”.



Image 4: View looking down the third base line from leftfield.



Image 5: Photograph showing third base dugout and grandstand.



Image 6: Photograph showing the third base dugout.



Image 7: Photograph showing view through the front gate to Labatt Memorial Park from Wilson Avenue, showing the view to downtown London.



Image 8: Photograph showing a tour of Labatt Memorial Park in progress during the summer of 2021.



Image 9: Photograph showing one of the “fan-favourite” components of the tours of Labatt Memorial Park – an opportunity to play catch on the world’s oldest baseball grounds.



Image 10: Photograph showing the Roy McKay Clubhouse, constructed in 1937, located behind the grandstands along the third baseline.



Image 11: Photograph showing the Roy McKay Clubhouse. The cottage-style clubhouse is identified as a heritage attribute protected by the heritage-designating by-law for the property's designation pursuant to Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.



Image 12: Photograph showing the interior of the Roy McKay Clubhouse as shown during the tours of Labatt Park during the summer of 2021.



Image 13: Photograph showing display within the Roy McKay Clubhouse during the tours of Labatt Memorial Park in the summer of 2021.



Image 14: Photograph showing display within the Roy McKay Clubhouse during the tours of Labatt Memorial Park in the summer of 2021.

Appendix C – Historic Documentation and Images



Image 15: Excerpt from the 1850 Sketch of London Township, showing the Forks of the Thames River. The Wharcliffe Road is shown west of the river running in a north-south orientation.



Image 16: Excerpt from the 1863 Township of London map prepared by Samuel Peters. The area that is now known as the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District is shown primarily as "Kent Farm Subdivided", including the location of Labatt Memorial Park.



Image 17: Excerpt from the 1872 Bird's Eye View of London, Ontario showing approximate future site of Tecumseh Park.

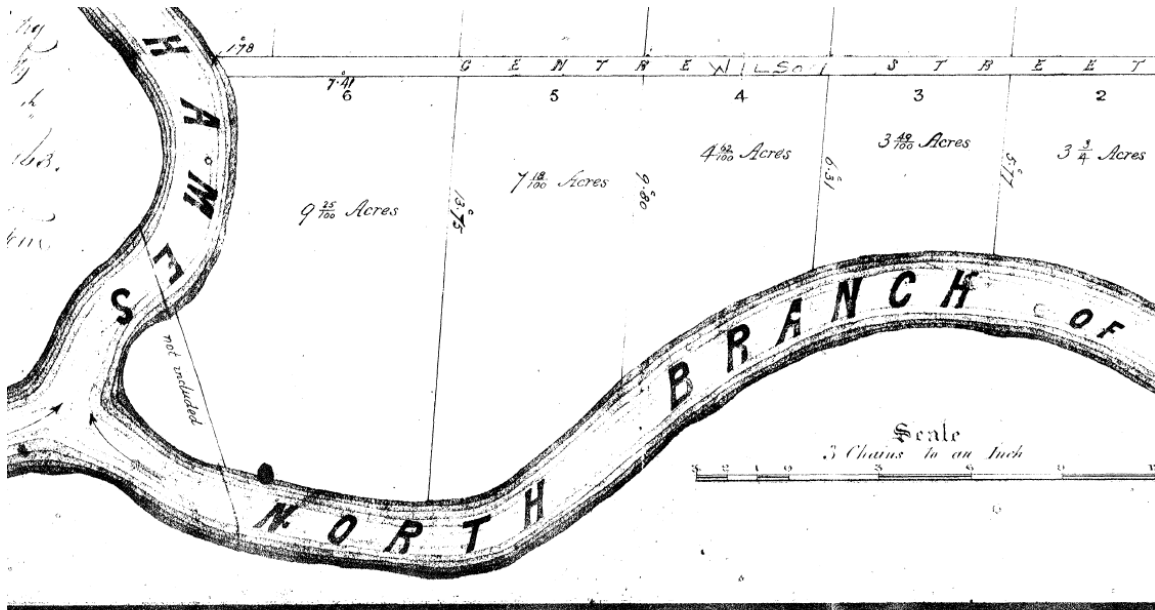
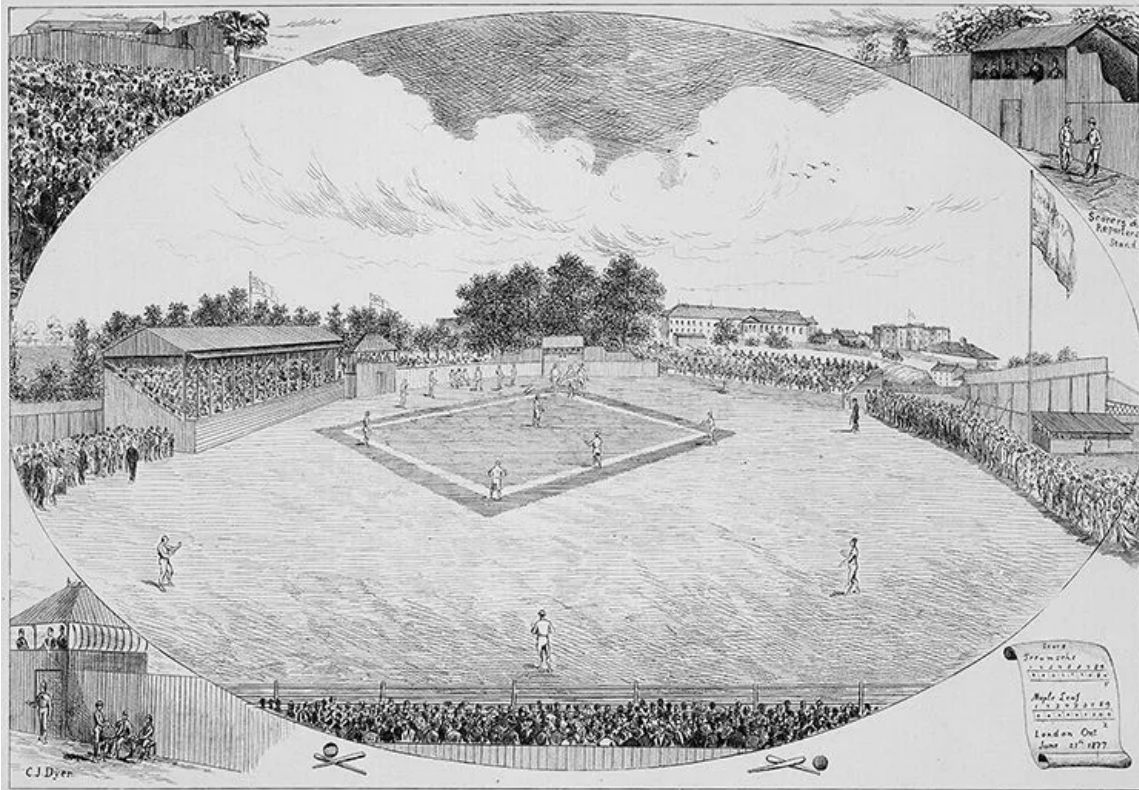


Image 18: An excerpt from RP191(W) prepared for John Kent showing Lots 5 and 6 on East of Centre Street (now Wilson Avenue). Tecumseh Park would later be constructed on a portion of these park lots.



LONDON, ONT.—INTERNATIONAL BASE BALL MATCH BETWEEN THE TECUMSEH CLUB OF LONDON, AND THE MAPLE LEAF CLUB OF GUELPH.
FROM A SKETCH BY C. J. DYER.

Image 19: Sketch showing an “International Base Ball Match Between the Tecumseh Club of London and the Maple Leafs of Guelph”, as shown in the *Canadian Illustrated News*, July 14, 1877 (Western Archives).



Image 20: Image showing an early baseball game held at Tecumseh Park in the 1870s. The Middlesex County Courthouse is depicted in the distance (Western Archives).



Image 21: 1876 London Tecumsehs baseball club as shown in the *Canadian Illustrated News*, July 15, 1879 (Western Archives).



Image 22: Historic photograph of a baseball game taking place at Tecumseh Park, c. 1920 (Photograph from the Hines Collection, Western University Archives).

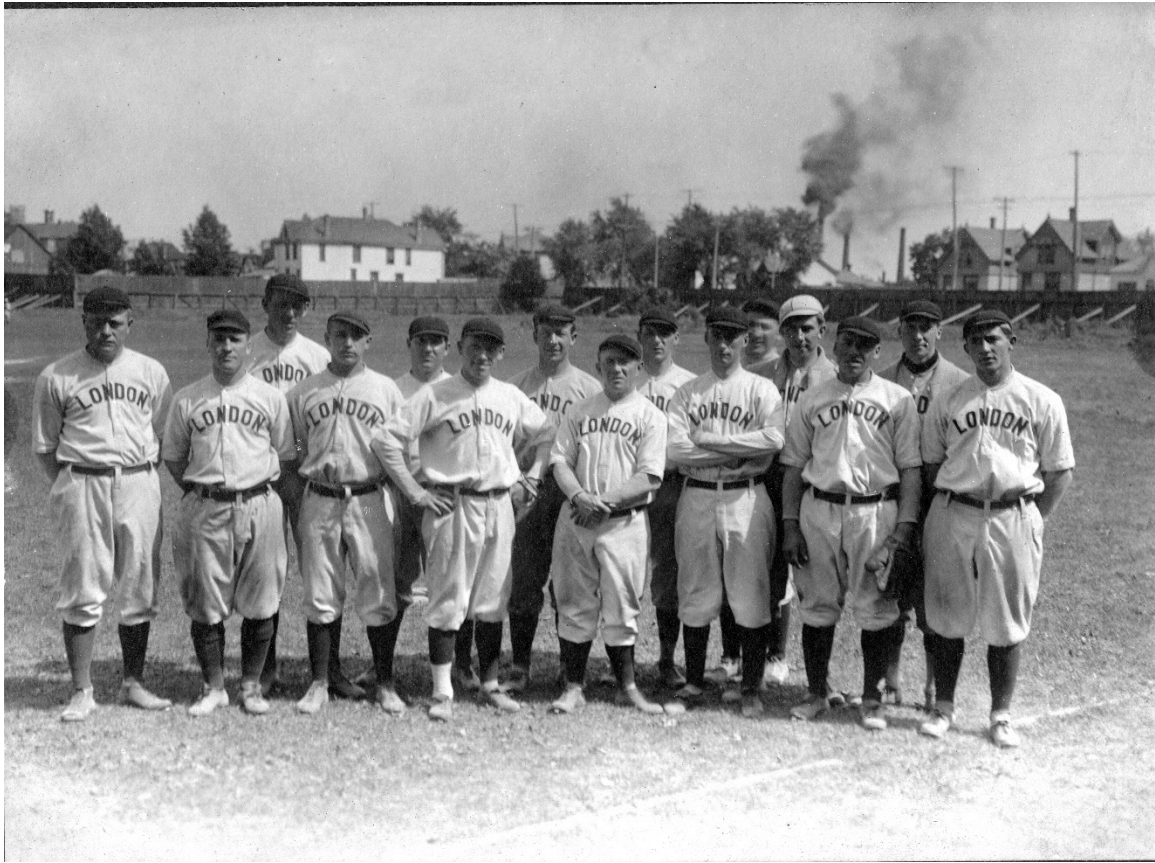


Image 23: 1911 London Tecumsehs of the Canadian League (Western Archives).



Image 24: Photograph of London's own catcher George "Mooney" Gibson (Western University).



Image 25: 1922 Aerial Photograph showing Tecumseh Park at bottom right. Note, the grid-iron pattern of the football field can also be seen in the aerial photograph. (Map and Data Centre, Western University).

London Majors, Canadian Senior Champions 1944



Front row: Wallace Woods, of.; Tim Burgess, of.; Bill Farquharson, Pres.; Clare VanHorne, Mgr.-of.; Tommy White, p.; Russ Evon, ss. and John Gilhes, p. Back Row: Bill Knowles, util.; Bob Bloxam, of.; Bill Brown, c.; Wilf Dippel, of.; Bobby Rose, 2b; F. Chase, p.; Gil Betzel, trainer; Duncan Galbraith, c.; Dick Watts, of.; Ossie Swift, 3b.; and Hank Biassatti, 1b. Maskot: Don Donahue.

Image 26: Photograph of the 1944 London Major team, as shown in the London Free Press (Courtesy of the London Majors Alumni Association).



Image 27: 1947 photograph of the Kellogg's women's softball team that held a reunion at Labatt Memorial Park. The team won at least one Ontario championship during the 1930s (Courtesy of the Friends of Labatt Park).



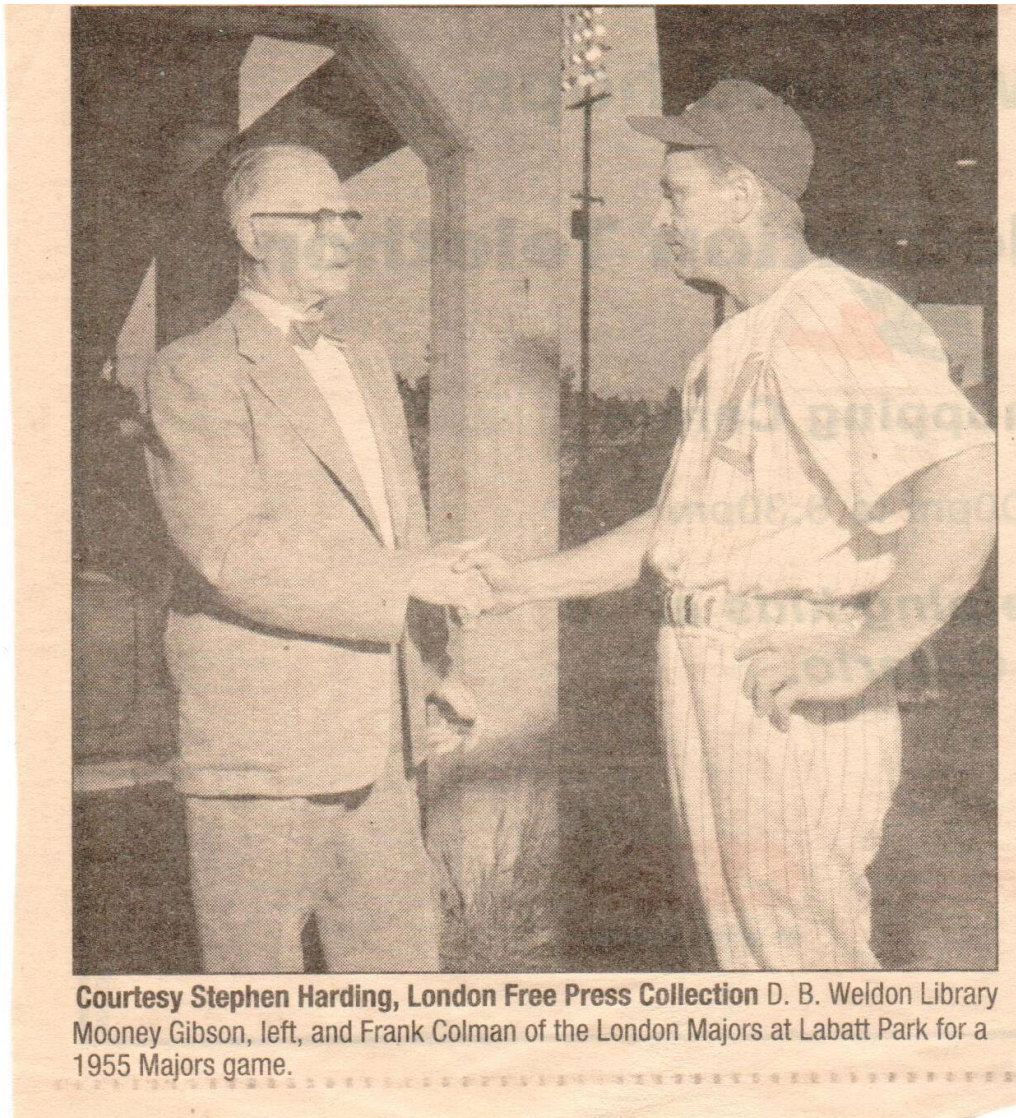
Image 28: Photograph of the 1948 London Majors (Western Archives).



Image 29: Photograph showing Labatt Park c. 1940 shortly after the reconstruction following the flood in 1937. Note, the Art Deco style gates providing access from Dundas Street can be seen at bottom left (Ron Nelson Collection, Western Archives).



Image 30: Detail of the Art Deco style gates that provided access to Labatt Memorial Park from Dundas Street. The gates were officially opened in 1940 (Ron Nelson Collection, Western Archives).



Courtesy Stephen Harding, London Free Press Collection D. B. Weldon Library
Mooney Gibson, left, and Frank Colman of the London Majors at Labatt Park for a 1955 Majors game.

Image 31: Photograph shown in the London Free Press, including George "Mooney" Gibson at left and Frank Colman, 1955 (Courtesy of Stephen Harding).



Image 32: Promotional photograph appearing in the London Free Press in 1989, marking the use of Labatt Memorial Park by the London Tigers (London Free Press).



Image 33: Photograph showing the first ever pitch at a London Werewolves game in 1999.



Football Game - Labatt Park - London Ontario

circa 1920

Image 34: Photograph showing rugby being played at Tecumseh Park in the 1920s, one of the many alternative uses for Tecumseh Park, later Labatt Memorial Park (Western Archives).

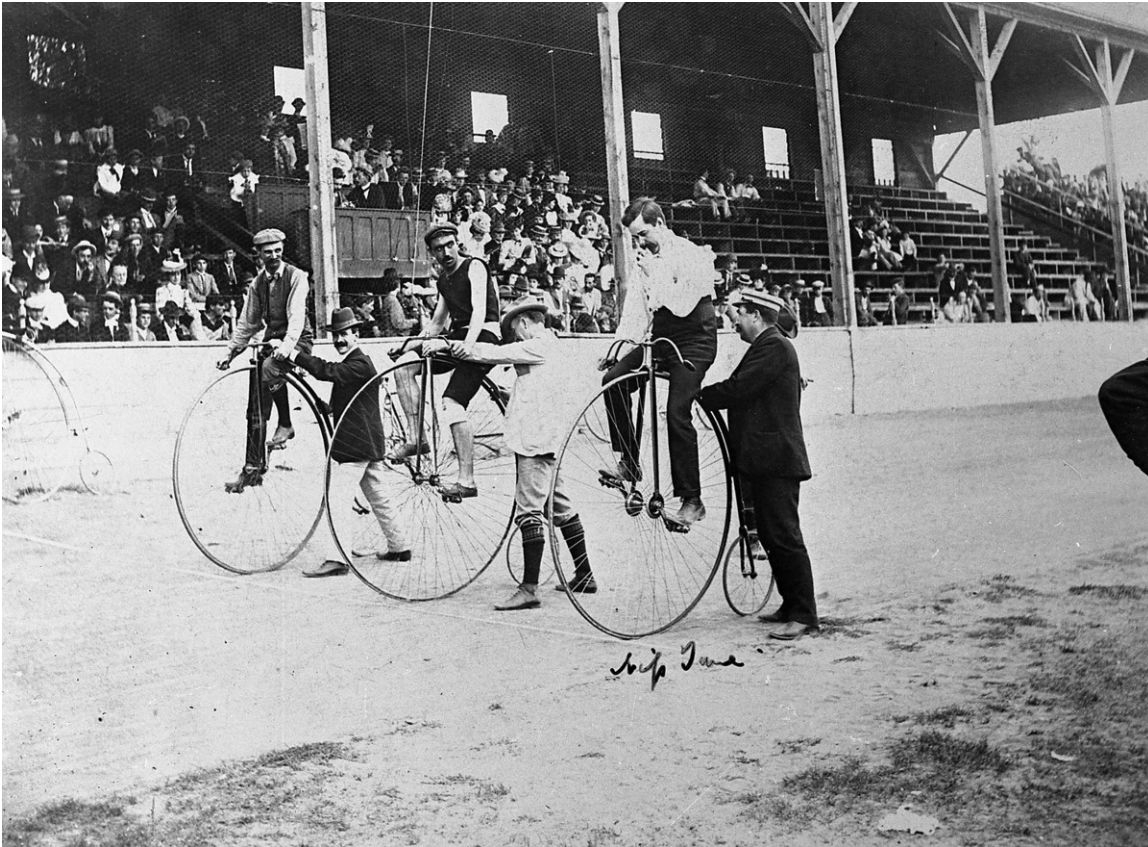


Image 35: Photograph showing the starting line of a bicycle race in the 1890s (Western Archives).

City Playground 'Olympics' Draw 1,200 to Two-Day Meet



COMPETITION KEEN AT LABATT PARK JUNIOR OLYMPICS
 --- young supporters cheer their favorites

--- Free Press Photos by George Blumson
PRINCESS ELIZABETH PUPIL IN BROAD JUMP
 --- Jim Hoover flies through the air

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Image 36: Newspaper clipping highlighting the successful and popular Playground Olympics as a part of the City's Outdoor Recreation Program. The "Olympic" event took place annually at Labatt Memorial Park throughout the mid-20th century (Courtesy of the Friends of Labatt Park).

Appendix D – Parks Canada National Historic Designation Flowchart

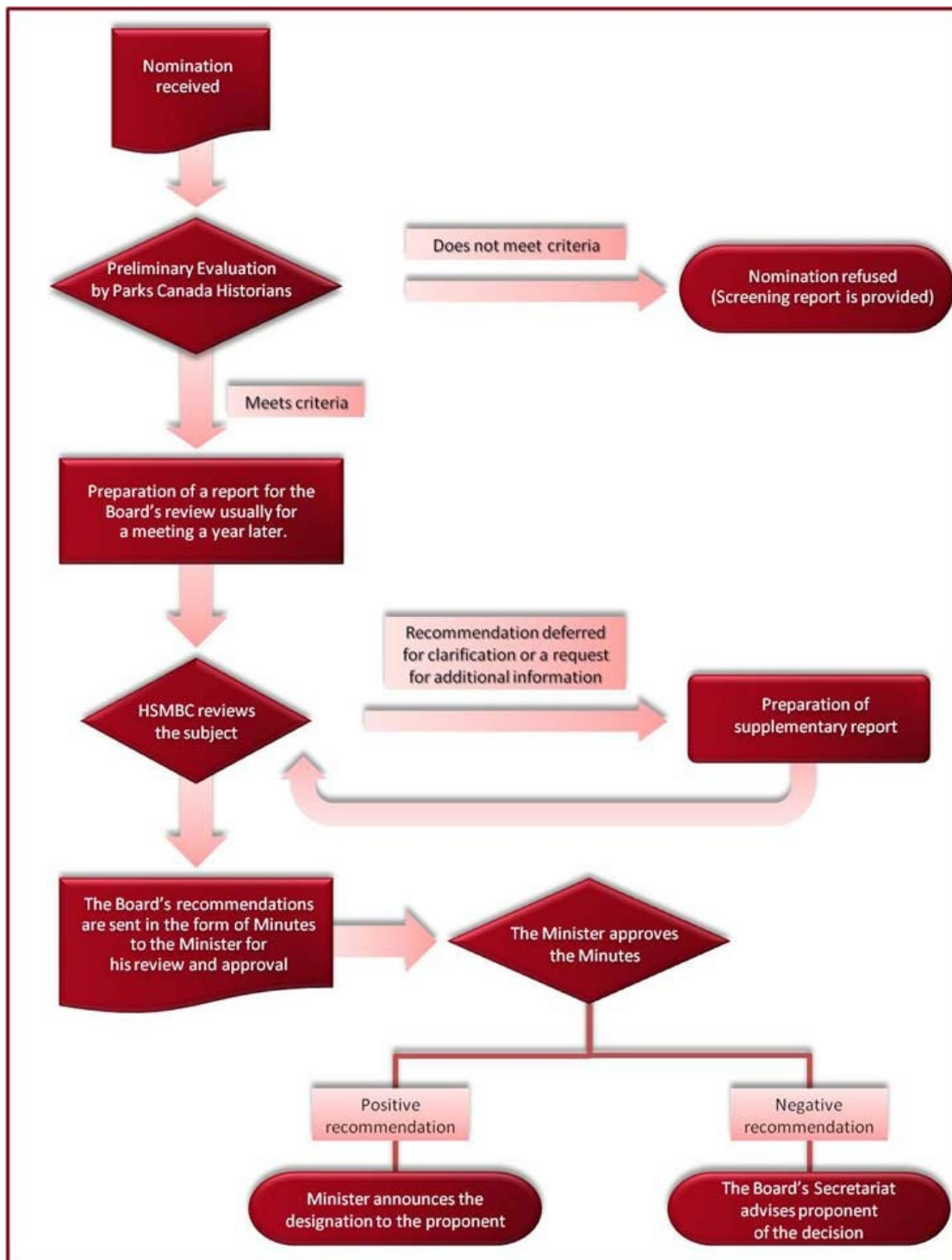


Figure 2: Flowchart provided by Parks Canada showing the nomination and designation process used when evaluating national historic designations.

Appendix E – Letters of Support

Letters of Support for nominating Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada [attached separately].