

By James E. Casto

Photographs courtesy of the *Herald-Dispatch*

A college or university is more than just buildings. It's people. It's hopes. It's dreams. Nevertheless, for most of us, the mention of a school's name quickly brings to mind a campus scene of some sort. For many people, the words *Marshall University* summon memories of Fairfield Stadium.

Today, Marshall plays football at its handsome Joan C. Edwards Stadium, but for more than 60 years—from 1928 to 1990—Fairfield was the home of the Herd. At the same time, the red brick stadium, located a half-dozen blocks from Marshall's main campus on Huntington's historic South Side, was the site of countless high school football games and a variety of community events.

It has been years since the last football game was played at Fairfield. The east-side stands were demolished long ago for safety reasons. Now, its west-side stands are coming down to help make way for a new Marshall building—a \$22-million facility for the Edwards School of Medicine and the Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health.

The current demolition is the final chapter in a story that started in 1925 with the creation of the Huntington Board of Park Commissioners. One provision of the park board's charter empowered it to join with Marshall College and/or the city of Huntington and the local school district to erect a stadium. To that end, the park board purchased a tract of land located between Charleston and Columbia

avenues, and 14th and 15th streets for \$25,000.

Originally a gravel pit owned and operated by businessman W. M. Prindle, the property had been briefly leased by the city and used as a garbage dump. Marshall wanted to build an on-campus stadium and the Huntington Chamber of Commerce argued that League Park in West Huntington would be a better location, but the park board stuck to its guns.

Eventually, an agreement was hammered out whereby the park board, Marshall, and the Cabell County Board of Education would jointly build and own a stadium at the Prindle site. The 10,000-seat stadium's final price tag, after the inevitable cost overruns, was \$130,000.

When it came time to name the new structure, park board President George Wallace jokingly suggested "Cockroach Commons." Fortunately, Prindle prevailed with his proposal that the stadium be named after his home county of Fairfield, Ohio. Huntington High School (HHS) played the first game in the new stadium, defeating Portsmouth (Ohio) High School 18-0, on September 29, 1928. Marshall didn't play its first game at Fairfield until the following October 9, when it teamed up with Huntington High for a doubleheader and the stadium's official dedication. HHS defeated Logan 21-0, and then Marshall made it a double whitewash by routing Fairmont State College 27-0.

Over the years, Fairfield would be home field not only for HHS but also for Huntington

East High School, which opened in 1940. The two high schools were consolidated in 1996, and today the Huntington High Highlanders play on the school's Route 10 campus. The Herd played for the last time at Fairfield on November 10, 1990, losing 15-12 to Eastern Kentucky University.

In addition to football games, Fairfield played host to a variety of events over the course of its history. For many years, bands from throughout the state descended on Huntington each May for the West Virginia High School Band Festival. Organized for the first time in 1935, the festival included not only a big parade but also precision marching and maneuvers at Fairfield Stadium. During its heyday in the early 1950s, the festival attracted dozens of bands and thousands of young musicians, their bright uniforms turning Fairfield into a kaleidoscope of color. By 1957, the festival had grown too large

for one city to handle and was split into regional events. The stadium maneuvers were discontinued.

In 1959, Cabell County celebrated its 150th anniversary with a mammoth outdoor pageant at Fairfield called "Cabellrama," which featured a cast of 1,500 actors and actresses, singers, and dancers. On May 30, 1964, a crowd of nearly 12,000 people packed the stadium to hear famed evangelist Billy Graham preach.

Still, the history of the old stadium wasn't an entirely happy one. From the outset, the stadium's three-way ownership was a prescription for trouble. With no one group solely in charge, routine maintenance was neglected, and the stadium began deteriorating. The situation became so bad that in 1962, inspectors slapped a CONDEMNED sign on the stadium, declaring it unsafe from structural, health, and fire safety standpoints. City Building



On hand for the 1928 opening of Fairfield Stadium were these dapper looking Huntington newspapermen. From left to right, they are Fred Burns, Douglas L. (Dug) Freutel, Raymond Brewster, and William T. Bess.



In 1962, City Building Inspector Lawrence Mayeinscheine, shown here looking at a gap in the top wall of stands, declared that the stadium should be torn down and rebuilt.

Inspector Lawrence Mayeinscheine suggested “tearing it down and building a new one.” Dr. Bruce H. Pollock, director of the Cabell-Huntington Health Department, labeled the food-handling concession areas “disgraceful.” Modest repairs were made and Fairfield reopened the following year, but it appeared the stadium was operating on borrowed time.

Marshall voiced a willingness to invest in a major upgrade of the stadium in exchange for sole ownership. In 1970, the park board and the school system surrendered their shared ownership. Marshall installed an Astroturf playing surface and new dressing rooms and made room for 6,800 more seats by lowering the playing field. Nevertheless, the old stadium still showed signs of age. In 1984, an inspection deemed that the east-side stands were in danger of collapsing, so the upper level of the stands

was demolished and replaced with new bleacher-type seats.

When Marshall moved to its new stadium, it left behind a facility that was one of the most dilapidated stadiums in college football. In the years since, the old Fairfield dressing rooms have been remodeled and expanded to house Marshall’s Forensic Science Center, and the playing field itself has been used by nearby Cabell-Huntington Hospital as an overflow parking lot.

Now, what’s left of old Fairfield is coming down. A spokesman says that, in addition to the new medical building slated for the site, Marshall is “thinking about an entrance plaza that would memorialize the stadium and the teams that played there.” 🗣️

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In the 1962 inspection, some Fairfield seats crumbled at a touch. Here, Dr. Bruce H. Pollock, director of the Cabell-Huntington Health Department, holds a handful of rotted wood.