PITTSBURGH Pirates baseball fans, between the 1991 and 1992 seasons, were subjected to a tease. The administration of Mayor Sophie Masloff proposed building a new publicly financed baseball-only stadium to be called Roberto Clemente Field, in honor of the late Pirates Hall of Fame outfielder. The proposal came as a shock to media and citizenry alike and was quickly embraced, surely, by every true baseball fan who ever bought a ticket at Three Rivers Stadium farther from the field than a box seat. Due to a variety of reasons, including a luke-warm reception from the general public asked to finance it, Masloff quietly but quickly withdrew the proposal. Nevertheless, the city, 22 years after the opening of Three Rivers, effectively admitted that it inadequately serves its most routine function as the baseball home of the Pirates.

Clemente Field would have been both a step forward and backward — forward because it was conceived along lines pioneered in Buffalo in 1988 with the opening of Pilot Field, home of the Pirates’s minor league franchise, and backward because such neoclassic design tries to recreate the ambiance, intimacy, and reduced scale of baseball’s classic old parks in Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York. Most ironic of all, Clemente Field would invariably have been compared to the Pirates’s home for five decades — Forbes Field, thought by many to have been the most classic of all. It was demolished in 1972 in the Oakland neighborhood, to bring...
professional sports downtown — a general national trend which has contributed greatly to baseball’s modern condition as a corporate, upscale entertainment of $40 million players and $100 family evenings.

Many cities are like Pittsburgh, with 25-year-old round, “multipurpose” stadiums. The new generation of outdoor stadiums going up around the continent now suggests that designers are heading away from the massive concrete facilities of the late 1960s and early ‘70s. Realizing that attempts to build large capacity structures to accommodate many diverse activities resulted in generally mediocre accommodations for most everyone, the trend is toward smaller, separate parks for baseball and football.

Three Rivers is widely criticized as “unfriendly,” although stadium aesthetics is admittedly a highly subjective field. Three Rivers’s circular design places the majority of ticket-holders, including those in popular but increasingly expensive field box seats ($14 in 1993 for baseball), far from the field of play and cut off from other sights and sounds of the city. Although occupying perhaps the most dramatic stadium site in America, a historian noted in Pittsburgh History in 1992 (page 32), Three Rivers “might as well be situated in the Mojave Desert” as in a city defined by historic rivers with a spectacular downtown skyline and picturesque bluffs. Due to the enclosed design but also because of its Astro-turf and concrete, the stadium, like many of its era, has a contrived and sterile feel. Finally, many people have complained since shortly after its opening that Three Rivers is not easy to get to or away from.

Pittsburgh, in the future not too far away, may reach a stadium crossroad. When approaching any crossroad, it is appropriate to look back — in this case, way back. Forbes Field was the second of the so-called “classic” ballparks. The first was Shibe Park in Philadelphia, which opened in April 1909, three months ahead of Forbes Field. Others were League Park (Cleveland, 1910), Comiskey Park (Chicago, 1910), Griffith Stadium (Washington, D.C., 1911), the Polo Grounds (New York, 1911), Crosley Field (Cincinnati, 1912), Fenway Park (Boston, 1912), Tiger Stadium (Detroit, 1912), Ebbets Field (Brooklyn, 1913), Wrigley Field (Chicago, 1914), Braves Field (Boston, 1915) and Yankee Stadium (New York, 1923). Only Fenway, Tiger Stadium, Wrigley and Yankee Stadium remain.

The short articles which appear here with this main story speak to Forbes Field’s importance in Oakland’s neighborhood life. This article, however, focuses on the engineering and architectural features which made Forbes Field famous for its functional beauty.

Organized baseball was played for roughly 25 years before the turn of the century, when a loyal following of fans developed. The game was troubled by cutthroat competition and a lack of trust between owners and players; cities where teams played, who played on those teams, and what leagues they played in were constantly changing.

Some owners recognized that their survival depended on cooperation, which came in the spring of 1903 in the form of an agreement between the competing National and American leagues. The agreement provided for common playing rules for each circuit, harmonious schedules, player contracts which prevented them from moving as free agents between teams, and a minor league draft system. What followed was a spectacular increase in
interest in baseball in the first quarter of the 20th century.

One owner in these formative years was Barney Dreyfuss. A German immigrant who had settled in Kentucky at age 17, Dreyfuss first worked as a bookkeeper and dabbled in the stock market. He came to Pittsburgh after his baseball franchise in Louisville, Ky. folded when the league withdrew its support. The 32-year-old Dreyfuss bought into Pittsburgh’s baseball franchise in 1900 on the promise that he could deliver his best players from Louisville. This roster included the great Fred Clarke and Carnegie, Pa. native Honus Wagner.

Dreyfuss’s impact was immediate: Pittsburgh won the league championship in 1901 and 1902. He also bought out his partners and became majority owner of the franchise. In 1903, his team was on its way to a third straight title when the owners negotiated their peace agreement; this made possible the first “World Series,” in which the American League champs, the Boston Pilgrims, defeated the Pirates. The large crowds and media coverage of the first Fall classic convinced a few owners, including Dreyfuss, that the time was right to invest heavily in the game’s future.

High on his list of priorities was better accommodations for fans, a step which would also project a professional image. This meant getting his club out of Exposition Park, the Pirates’s home since 1891. Exposition Park, so-named because circuses and other big tent shows camped there when in town, occupied ground less than 50 yards from the Allegheny River, near present-day Three Rivers Stadium. Dreyfuss remarked, “The game was growing up, and patrons no longer were willing to put up with nineteenth century conditions.” Symbolizing baseball’s instability before 1903, stadiums like Exposition Park were also typical homes for franchises in other cities. Such parks’ wooden grandstands were susceptible to fire, collapse, and rot. At Exposition Park, frequent floods hurt attendance and disrupted schedules.

Perhaps as important as floods and rotting bleachers, however, was Exposition Park’s location in what Dreyfuss considered the wrong neighborhood. He was quoted as saying that the “better class of citizens, especially when accompanied by their womenfolk, were loathe to go there.”

Dreyfuss saw the game as an entertainment vehicle that would need to attract citizens more affluent than the working class. He reasoned that the key to success was not only to increase attendance, but to increase the profit per ticket. The same rationale to increase revenues is used today by every major sports entity in the nation (college or pro) and is the driving force that brought loge boxes and sky boxes to modern stadiums.

**SEARCHING FOR A SITE (1903-1908)**

The search coincided with the development of Oakland. The area was dominated by an expansive estate owned by Mary Schenley, heir to one of the area’s oldest family fortunes. As a young woman she married an officer in the British military and left Pittsburgh permanently, but in 1889, she generously donated 300 acres of Schenley Farms to the city as a public park. Prompted by Schenley’s gift, Pittsburgh industrialist Andrew Carnegie one year later funded the securing of land and the building and endowing of his Carnegie Institute. It ultimately included a library, museum, and concert hall.

Upon Schenley’s death in 1903, Carnegie was named one of three executors of her estate. As he had with steel decades before, he now held a virtual monopoly on influence as to how Oakland would develop. Carnegie continued to invest heavily in Oakland and his involvement spurred the philanthropy of other Pittsburgh millionaires with names like Mellon, Frick, Phipps, and Heinz. In 1905, he began building Carnegie Technical Institute, which evolved into the internationally known Carnegie Mellon University.

Dreyfuss watched Oakland grow. One acquaintance was Franklin F. Nicola, who next to Carnegie and Schenley was arguably the person most influential in Oakland’s changing face. His development firm was called the Schenley Farms Co. In 1907, Nicola lured the Western University of Pennsylvania to move three miles from downtown Pittsburgh to a 48-acre tract in the heart of Oakland. (The school was also renamed the University of Pittsburgh.) Nicola also was responsible for a variety of Oakland residential tracts and buildings: the Schenley Hotel (1898), Pittsburgh Athletic Association (1909), Masonic Temple (1914), Syria Mosque (1915), and Schenley Apartments (1922). His offices were in the Farmers Bank Building (still at 301 Fifth Ave.), from which Dreyfuss ran the Pirates.

Dreyfuss reasoned that Oakland would be ideal for baseball. Although a large, ethnically diverse working class residential district developed there in the twentieth century, by 1908 the community also was established as both the cultural and entertainment center of Pittsburgh. It featured two colleges (Pitt and Carnegie Tech), the area’s largest library and museum, the concert hall home of the Pittsburgh Symphony, Phipps Conservatory, and Schenley Park, the largest public park in Allegheny County. Luna Park, an amusement park along North Craig Street, claimed to attract 25,000 customers a day during the summer from 1905 to 1909. Regular trolley service from downtown Pittsburgh had been established since 1888, and a premier hotel, the Schenley Hotel, had opened in 1898. All considered, Oakland had every feature that Dreyfuss thought necessary for success.

In 1908, Carnegie told Dreyfuss about an Oakland property that might be right for his new ballpark: a seven-acre parcel along Bouquet Street one block south of Forbes Avenue. Although the parcel
also bordered the oldest part of Oakland, the working class residences west of Bouquet Street, its clear advantage was that directly to the east, many of Pittsburgh’s wealthy industrialists and financiers were building mansions in the adjoining residential areas of Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, East Liberty, and Homewood. The property was largely a deep gully (Pierre Ravine) that would require a lot of backfill. Although not suitable for buildings except along its northern edge, that was fine for Dreyfuss, since the greatest part of a baseball park is open field. (Before Dreyfuss came along, a portion of the lot had been graded for use by Pitt and Carnegie Tech as a football field, complete with wooden grandstands.)

Dreyfuss bought the property on Oct. 18, 1908 from the Commonwealth Real Estate Co. He later said people laughed at his decision. “There was nothing there but a livery stable and a hot house, while a few cows roamed the countryside. The more I looked over the property, the better I liked it. I had a strong hunch, which amounted to a conviction, that Pittsburgh would grow eastward.”

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION (1908-1909)

Since no architect in the nation had any baseball park design experience, finding one for Forbes Field was not easy. Dreyfuss, instead, looked for expertise in the building of thoroughbred racetracks, which he frequented on East Coast business trips. This led him to a 38-year-old New York City engineer named Charles Wellford Leavitt, Jr., whose designs included several concrete and steel grandstands for tracks in New York.

Steel and concrete were the rave because they allowed for larger crowds and, more importantly, were virtually fireproof. In addition to Leavitt’s technical abilities, Dreyfuss may have liked him because he believed Carnegie would approve. Leavitt’s principal clients were wealthy New England estate owners. He was a methodical and mannered individual whose references Carnegie most likely knew. However, Leavitt was not an architect; he called himself a landscape design specialist.

Little information is available regarding Dreyfuss’s design requirements. He seems to have insisted only that Leavitt carry out the then radical idea that the majority of seats in the park be suitable for premium pricing. The location of Pierre Ravine and the path of the sun dictated the orientation of home plate and the park’s main entrance to the north, at the corner of Bouquet and Louisa streets. (This portion of Louisa Street was later renamed Sennott Street.) Leavitt conceived a three-tier grandstand 889 feet long and 74 feet high from field level to roof top. (To compare, the first row of seats in the upper deck at Three Rivers is about as high as the roof of Forbes Field, meaning that nearly every seat in the upper deck is farther from the field than the worst seat at Forbes Field.) Exposed bleachers were attached to the grandstand on the third base side. The original outfield wall was masonry block and red brick that extended from the left field foul line to right-center. A temporary wooden fence completed the enclosure from right-center to the right field foul line. Dreyfuss was advised by Leavitt to wait several years to build the right field bleachers, to assure complete settlement of the fill in Pierre Ravine. They were added in 1925, bringing the field’s capacity to 33,500.

Dreyfuss tapped Franklin Nicola to build the park. Nicola’s younger brother, Oliver P. Nicola, served as president of a general contracting firm that was a sister company to the developer’s. Structurally simple and easy to build, Leavitt’s design emphasized the setting more than the structure on it. The park’s only exterior extravagances were the arched windows which lined up in series at street level along the exterior facade.

Ground-breaking was Jan. 1, 1909. Clearing, grading, and the placement of over 60,000 cubic yards of earthen fill were completed in two months. On March 1, grandstand construction began. The Raymond Concrete Piling Co., the only subcontractor still operating today, completed the foundation piles March 21. The left field bleachers were completed by March 28. Double work shifts and favorable weather allowed work to progress ahead of schedule. On May 9, the Pirates announced that the first game at the new park would be played June 30. By May 12, all of the steel girders were in place and even the park’s seats were on site. Nicola hustled to complete the structural details over the next six weeks. Seven acres of green sod trucked in from Crestline, Ohio was the finishing touch. The price tag for the project, finished in under six months, was about $2 million.

GRAND OPENING

Forbes Field was a resounding business success thanks, in part, to the world championship caliber team Dreyfuss fielded in 1909. The Pirates sold all 300 boxes (8 seats per box, at $10 per box) for the season two weeks before the first game. Box seat season ticket-holders (at $100 a seat) had their names engraved on a removable brass plate on the rail of their box. Roof boxes (7 seats per box) went for $8.75; reserve seats $1; general admission $.75; left field bleachers $.50; and temporary outfield bleachers went for $.25. The best seats may have been those in the first few rows of the second tier — Dreyfuss reserved several for his exclusive use.

The owner proclaimed June 30 to July 7 as Dedication Week. Railroads offered special rates to Pittsburgh, and various parades and rallies marked the calendar. On opening day, the crowd began arriving an hour before ticket windows opened at 10 a.m. Gates opened at noon, and eventually 30,388 fans bought tickets, some 5,000 more than capacity. (The
over-flow stood behind ropes in the outfield.) Attending were many franchise owners, National League President Harry Pulliam, American League President Ban Johnson, Pittsburgh Mayor William A. Magee, and a man referred to affectionately as Uncle Al Pratt, who managed the first major league Pittsburgh team in 1882. The park was awash in color. The lush green of the playing field corresponded with the distant green backdrop of Flagstaff Hill in Schenley Park. A sunny blue sky formed a solid mat against which American flags waved from poles at roughly 50-foot intervals along the inside and outside edges of the roof. All structural steel was painted green, which contrasted against a buff-white terracotta exterior facade. And all was topped with the orange glow of a copper sheathed roof.

Leavitt is also credited with designing the campuses of Lehigh University, the University of Georgia, and the University of South Carolina. He also was responsible for laying out Washington Crossing Park along the Delaware River. In 1915, Leavitt designed the 10,000 acre estate of Charles Schwab in Loretto, Pa. Schwab, a close business associate of Andrew Carnegie, was the first president of the United States Steel Corp. and later, of Bethlehem Steel Corp. His Loretto estate is still a popular tourist attraction.

Leavitt, who did his work on Forbes Field at age 38, died April 22, 1928 at his home in Hartsdale, N.Y. He was 57 years old and 19 years had passed since he submitted his only baseball park design to Pirates owner Barney Dreyfuss. A 1911 color portrait of Leavitt, painted by his cousin, Cecilia Beaux, survives today.

Leavitt is also credited with one other project that sort of has a baseball angle. In 1917, he was commissioned to lay out the grounds of a cemetery in Valhalla, N.Y. just north of New York City. Years after Leavitt’s death, the Gate of Heaven Cemetery became the final resting place of the immortal Babe Ruth, and in the 1980s, of fellow New York Yankee, Billy Martin.
Leavitt revolutionized fan movement with inclined ramps between decks, instead of steps. Elevators went from the main entrance to third tier roof boxes. The design included electric lights, public telephones, and roomy clubhouses equipped with laundries. Leavitt’s most innovative feature, however, was the spacious promenade beneath the grandstands at street level. This feature made Forbes Field the only ballpark in the league where everyone in the main grandstand could find cover to wait out rain showers.

The Pirates lost the inaugural game to the Chicago Cubs, 3-2. The media, however, saw nothing but victory. One national baseball publication wrote glowingly:

“People grew up with Forbes Field and the beauty of it. Even the visiting writers loved the park, because of the background, and the fact that they wouldn’t allow signs in it. Dreyfuss did not, never allowed a sign. The only sign he ever allowed was during World War II; he allowed a war savings bonds sign on the left field fence. It was a beautiful park, so green and so big. You were close to the play. Except for the little boxes at Three Rivers, you’re miles away from those players.”

And there was a tradition about the place. And you could get to the park. And if you wanted to have a beer after the game, you didn’t have to take a bus. You could go up to Gustine’s or some place else in Oakland. And you could walk to it; the people in Squirrel Hill used to walk to Forbes Field. Or you could get a streetcar, and get off a block from the park. Or a bus. Well, the game has changed. Of course the turf has changed everything. Turf is the biggest change, I guess, in baseball.”

Forbes Field a “state-of-the-art” feel for many years. Leavitt revolutionized fan movement with inclined ramps between decks, instead of steps. Elevators went from the main entrance to third tier roof boxes. The design included electric lights, public telephones, and roomy clubhouses equipped with laundries. Leavitt’s most innovative feature, however, was the spacious promenade beneath the grandstands at street level. This feature made Forbes Field the only ballpark in the league where everyone in the main grandstand could find cover to wait out rain showers.

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The formal opening of Forbes Field was an historic event; the full significance could be better felt than expressed. Words must also fail to picture to the mind’s eye adequately the splendor of the magnificent pile (Pirates) President Dreyfuss erected as a tribute to the National game, a beneficence to Pittsburgh and an enduring monument to himself. For architectural beauty, imposing size, solid construction, public comfort and convenience, it has not its superior in the world.

Baseball Magazine intoned: “The new park is the greatest achievement in Civil Engineering and as beautiful as well as secure a construction as has been undertaken in this country since baseball first began to be the national pastime.”

The opening day crowd was the the largest ever to attend a baseball game anywhere and more than three times Exposition Park’s largest crowd. Fans thronged to Forbes Field throughout the summer of 1909. The three World Series games played there that fall against the Detroit Tigers and Ty Cobb attracted 82,885 fans, more than the entire World Series gate of the two previous years. Dreyfuss’s gamble was destined to be a complete success.

**EVOLUTION**

Like all parks of the classic era, Forbes Field was designed to allow for changes and modifications. It was intended to evolve as baseball, technology, and the park’s neighborhood changed. Barney Dreyfuss tore down the original left field wall in 1918 because he felt it yielded too many cheap home runs. Advertising was never allowed on the outfield walls, so as not to mar the natural setting. The only exception was during World War II, when a large soldier was built in left center to promote war bonds. Permanent right field stands in 1925 added capacity for the first World Series there since 1909. In 1938, in anticipation of a World Series that did not materialize, the third tier roof boxes were expanded. People in the back rows of the third tier then sat so high that these seats would forever be popularly referred to as the “Crow’s Nest.” It would take as long to install flood lights in 1940 as it took to build the grandstands in 1909. But when the wiring was complete, the era of megaphones ended and the electric public address system began. Seats called “Greenberg Gardens” along the left field fence were another modification, from 1947 through 1953. The last permanent modification came in 1959, when three rows of box seats were added in front of existing boxes to provide VIP seating for the 1959 All-Star Game. The Pirates invited President Dwight Eisenhower, who instead sent his vice-president, an aspiring presidential candidate named Richard Nixon.

Franklin Nicola remained a friend of Barney Dreyfuss’s all of his life. His last speculation, the Schenley Apartments, along Forbes Avenue a block from the ballpark, served as his last address as well as Dreyfuss’s last residence. They are now Pitt dormitories. Both Nicola and his brother Oliver, the builder of Forbes Field, died in the 1930s.

Dreyfuss died Feb. 2, 1932 of pneumonia following an operation. He was 65. Dreyfuss had been greatly saddened by the death less than a year before of his son Sammy, part of the Pirates’s management. Control of the business fell to Dreyfuss’s widow, Florence. She convinced her son-in-law, William E. Benswanger, to leave his successful insurance business to assume the position of team president.

On Aug. 8, 1946 Florence Dreyfuss sold the Pirates and Forbes Field for $2.5 million to four investors headed by Indianapolis banker Frank McKinney. The other partners were renowned entertainer Bing Crosby, Columbus real estate developer John W. Galbreath and Pittsburgh attorney Thomas P. Johnson, who is still active in the Pittsburgh law firm of Kirkpatrick and Lockhart.

**TWILIGHT YEARS**

**(1945-1970)**

The era of new ownership in Pittsburgh coincided with the end of World War II, the start of Pittsburgh’s urban renewal called the “Renaissance,” the westward expansion of baseball, and new developments in Oakland. Each played a role in the demise of Forbes Field.

In 1945, Pittsburgh Mayor David L. Lawrence joined with Pittsburgh’s wealthiest and
The following interview excerpts appear courtesy of WQED-TV, Pittsburgh. Producer Rick Sebak interviewed LaVallee in 1990 for his “Things That Aren’t There Anymore” series. LaVallee and her brother still own Kunst Bakery on Forbes Avenue in Oakland, the business started by their father, Peter Kunst, in 1945.

“Really, I can hardly find the words to explain the ball park. I can’t tell you how thrilling it was, and people, well you’d stop in say, ‘I’m going to the ball game,’ and it was just, just great. My father loved it. He would go almost every day, even for a couple of innings. You just knew everyone: ‘Hello, hello, where you going?’ Everybody was going to the game. All of Oakland was happy — on the streets — and it was just nice.

“I don’t think it’s better on the North Side. The North Side doesn’t have the atmosphere. People loved to come to Oakland to go to the ball game. There were things to do here and if you wanted to go up to the museum or you wanted to go to Phipps — you could do so many more things.

“I live in Oakland and I’ll always live here. Everybody in the ball park knew one another. The ushers would seat you — they knew you, and they would be in your store or they lived around the corner.

“I think everybody loved Forbes Field. You sat right on the field. You felt like you could go out and play the game. You could stand up and almost feel them when they hit the ball. When they said they were tearing it down, I think I’m not the only one who cried, I think everybody cried.”

most Republican native, Richard K. Mellon, in a major effort to revitalize the region. Their efforts resulted in the redevelopment of the Golden Triangle, the lower Hill District, and the near North Side. The latter included construction of Three Rivers Stadium, an idea first proposed by the Allegheny Conference for Community Development in 1955.

Baseball franchises were the envy of many growing western cities in the early 1950s. Beginning in 1953 with the Boston Braves’s move to Milwaukee, baseball entered an era when cities openly wooed franchises by offering special incentives including municipally financed stadiums. Before the decade was out, the St. Louis Browns, Philadelphia Athletics, Brooklyn Dodgers, and New York Giants would follow the lure of public assistance, perks, and financing to Baltimore, Kansas City, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The franchises that stayed put, like the Pirates, found themselves increasingly viewed by the community as a public institution rather than a private enterprise.

The Pirates, in contrast to franchises like cross-state rivals, the Philadelphia Phillies, never publicly solicited for a new stadium. Instead, the combined needs of Pittsburgh’s urban renewal and the ever-increasing appetite of the University of Pittsburgh for Oakland real estate made it easy for the Pirates to rid themselves of a costly maintenance liability. A vocal proponent of a new stadium was ex-Pirates’s President Bill Benswanger, who argued the futility of maintaining the old park: “It’s an exposed building and winter and weather take their toll.” In 1958, Pitt’s chancellor proposed the purchase of Forbes Field for $3 million with an agreement to lease it back to the Pirates for 10 months to four years. Pitt ultimately bought the field and leased it to the Pirates for 12 years.

On June 28, 1970 the Pirates played the last game at Forbes Field against the same team they faced in the first game, the Chicago Cubs. The second largest crowd (40,918) in Forbes Field history attended. They watched Bill Mazeroski record the last out by fielding a ground ball from Don Kessinger and stepping on second base to force out Willie Smith.

EPILOGUE

Forbes Field survives today in bits and pieces. A section of the ivy-covered outfield wall stands beside Pitt’s Katz Business School. The 457-foot mark remains a memorial to Dreyfuss’s conviction that his ballpark not be known as a place where a man could hit a cheap home run. (Dead center at Three Rivers is 400 feet.) Across the street from that section of wall is Pitt’s Forbes Quadrangle building. Inside the main lobby, the home plate from Forbes Field is encased in plexiglass and set in the floor. Other parts of the park can be found at the Allegheny Club at Three Rivers Stadium, including several of the original arched windows and wooden seats. Two bronze plaques are also there, including the memorial to Barney and Sammy Dreyfuss that stood for many years in deep center field at Forbes Field and the memorial to Babe Ruth’s final three home runs that used to be attached to the green wall in right field. Finally, the Honus Wagner statue that stood in the plaza beyond Forbes Field’s left field wall now stands at the Gate C entrance to Three Rivers.

Most Pittsburgh fans didn’t realize fully what was being lost, caught up as they were in another pennant race and the media-whipped euphoria that accompanied the opening of Three Rivers. As the years passed, its inadequacies, coupled with the almost idolod rever-
ence baseball fans have for the surviving classic ball-
parks, have combined to magnify the loss. What's
more, Three Rivers was hailed for its versatility, but
Forbes Field must certainly be considered to have
been its equal. Besides hosting professional baseball,
Pitt, Carnegie Tech, Duquesne University, and the
Steelers played football at Forbes Field. It was the
place where one went to watch a wrestling show or a
boxing match. The Pittsburgh Symphony, Civic
Light Opera, and various popular music entertain-
ment acts played there. The park saw numerous polit-
cial rallies, religious congregations, prayer services for
departing GIs, and even the circus which used to play
at Exposition Park. This broad scope of events meant
that just about every Pittsbourger experienced its
special feel.
Yet its reputation survives primarily for one sport.
In 1969, Benswanger lamented that Forbes Field was
“a little bit different from any other ballpark. The fan
sits back and looks out on a green terrain that doesn’t
include factories. There are thousands of people who
will regret its passing; that’s human nature. I don’t
know of a better playing field. But it can’t last forever.”
Bill James, a noted baseball historian, summed up

Unlike modern stadiums, Forbes Field was an important
rallying point for community groups, especially those in
Oakland. The relationship was often reciprocal: the Pittsburgh
Athletic Association, a private club two blocks from where the
park stood, hosted Pirate social functions in Oakland for half
a century.
Three Rivers Reconsidered

The stadium built downtown on the north shore of the Allegheny River was the last of three designs formally considered. The Pittsburgh architectural firm of Deter and Ritchey led a design team that included as engineers the Michael Baker Corp. of Pittsburgh and Cleveland's Osborne Engineering Co.

William Sippel, D&R's lead architect for the project, said that before the final spot was picked in 1964 numerous sites were studied, including an airport-area location and one atop Monument Hill on the North Side where the Community College of Allegheny County stands today.

Perhaps the most intriguing spot was along the north shore of the Allegheny River between the Sixth and Seventh Street bridges. The Seventh Street Bridge would have been converted into a pedestrian walkway, to firmly tie the stadium to downtown life just across the river. The long hike from downtown is one of the most obvious problems at Three Rivers, and proposed remedies have included subway links and elevated people-movers; last year a footbridge linked the walkway on the Fort Duquesne Bridge with Gate C. Plans to widen the bridge walkway are pending.

Design work on Three Rivers began in 1958, Sippel said, before new stadium projects of the era in other cities, although parks in St. Louis, Los Angeles, and New York ended up being finished first. The design team visited many of the completed stadiums, but only Houston's Astrodome had a profound impact. Its artificial turf, scoreboard electronics, and overall design made it the epitome of the modern stadium.

The two earlier design concepts for Three Rivers envisioned semicircular structures with an open end facing the Golden Triangle. The first used a complex "space frame" to transfer structural loads to the foundation, instead of relying on the traditional series of beams and trusses. The design proved to be unpopular because its construction would have required thousands of engineering calculations uncommon for the day — before high capacity microcomputers.

In 1966, the low bid for building D&R's design #2 (see photo page 69) was 38 percent over budget. Each steel and concrete support section would have required custom construction — far more costly than the nearly identical sections that prevailed in the end — to allow the structure's sloping profile. Such a profile provided maximum seating behind the infield area and yet kept outfield seats reasonably near the field as the stadium wrapped around the V-shaped playing surface. Unwilling to increase financing costs, the city's Stadium Authority asked for a third design, a process which ended with what we have today, at roughly the previously budgeted price.

One result was that fans have not come in the predicted numbers. Indeed, not until 1988 at Three Rivers did the Pirates match their single season attendance record set in 1960 at Forbes Field. The problems with downtown multipurpose stadiums, so apparent today, are not unique to Pittsburgh and consequently have been discussed in various professional publications and at trade conferences.
Stadiums like Three Rivers incorporated design features intended to increase revenue but which may ultimately spell their demise:

- A multipurpose facility requires design concessions to football because the grandstands must be arranged so that they can be moved around to make a football field. One result is more good seats for football and less for baseball.
- Multiple levels of corporate boxes, roughly in the center of the stadium, raise patrons’ seats in the upper decks to heights unheard of in the classic parks.
- Designers of all the 1960s-era stadiums hailed the removal of vertical steel posts, which at Forbes Field supported the upper deck but also created partial obstructions for fans seated behind them in the lower deck. (Obstructed view seats and the shortage of parking were typically cited as the two biggest drawbacks to Forbes Field.) Without these vertical posts, the upper deck at Three Rivers is not only higher (due to the corporate boxes), it is also further from the field because support is achieved by a cantilever design which allows the deck mass to hang without traditional vertical supports under it.
- The classic ballparks were fitted into small or unusually shaped lots, which resulted in irregular uses of space that made each park unique.
- Modern stadiums were built to be self-sufficient, surrounded by acres of parking. Because of the importance given to the automobile, the park is isolated from small businesses and all the other features that connect any building to its immediate neighborhood. This design component made fans more captive and has led to almost yearly resentment about increases in concession prices.

Vertical support posts pose obstructions for fans, so Three Rivers has cantilevered steel-and-concrete (cross section on opposite page), so grandstands can hang out toward the field without visible posts. Many designers today are questioning the trade-off. Top: The second of three proposed designs — discarded due to cost — would have opened up the outfield for a downtown view. Above: Inside Three Rivers, with the original scoreboard, 1970.
precisely what no longer exists: “Forbes was regarded for many years somewhat the way Dodger Stadium [in Los Angeles] is regarded today, as the crown jewel in the diamond tiara. It was never the biggest, but it seemed, somehow, the best — the sight lines were the best, it contained and expressed the enthusiasm of the crowd the best; it was just the best place to watch a baseball game.”

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 Demolition after the University of Pittsburgh’s acquisition. A classroom-office complex now occupies the site.