

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 22 1992

NATIONAL
REGISTER

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: Rickwood Field

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number: 1137 2nd Avenue West

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Birmingham

vicinity: N/A

state: AL county: Jefferson

code: 073

zip code: 35204

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: structure

Number of Resources within Property:

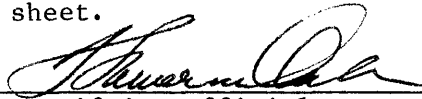
Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See continuation sheet.



Signature of certifying official

12-14-92

Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
 See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the
National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the
National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____

Mary M. Gray 2/11/93

So _____
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: sports facility

Current : RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: sports facility

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification:

No Style

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation concrete roof shingle
walls concrete other steel
frame

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Entertainment/Recreation
Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period(s) of Significance: 1910-1942

Significant Dates : 1910

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property: 12.7 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>16</u>	<u>514710</u>	<u>3707120</u>	B	<u>16</u>	<u>514520</u>	<u>3707120</u>
C	<u>16</u>	<u>514520</u>	<u>3707260</u>	D	<u>16</u>	<u>514710</u>	<u>3707350</u>

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries of Rickwood Field, Birmingham, are contained within the legal description: all of Block 2; Lots 1-5 of Block 5; Lots 13-24 of Block 7; and Lots 20-24 of Block 8; Section 4, Township 18, Range 3; as recorded in the Office of the Judge of Probate of Jefferson County, Birmingham, Alabama.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries were determined by the legal description of the property.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

Name/Title: Chloe S. Mercer/National Register Intern; Melanie Betz/AHC Reviewer

Organization: Alabama Historical Commission Date: August 19, 1992

Street & Number: 725 Monroe Street Telephone: (205)242-3184

City or Town: Montgomery State: AL ZIP: 36130

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Section number <u>7</u>	Description	Rickwood Field	Page #1
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Rickwood Field, honored as the oldest baseball park in the nation, was dedicated on a Thursday afternoon in August 1910. The Birmingham baseball stadium features a two-story gate and ticket area and a lengthy grandstand. The park was home of the minor league Birmingham Barons and Negro league Birmingham Black Barons. The stadium remains in good condition, retaining its original ticket booths, gates, stands, press boxes, dugouts, and water fountains.

Situated on a corner of a block on the west side of Birmingham, Rickwood Field gate and grandstand rise two stories above the grass field. The gate, which occupies the corner of the block, has a three facet facade, is constructed of stucco over concrete, and features a lower level projecting gallery. The parapet roof has a central projecting parapet that bears the name "Rickwood Field". Ticket booths are located on the lower level, and offices are found on the upper level. The grandstand is constructed of concrete with steel beam supports and wraps around just past the first and third base edges of the field. A total of 9,312 seats account for the long grandstand from first and third base to home plate. The two-tiered stands have seats and bleachers and are sheltered by a steel truss roof. Metal frame stadium lights are suspended from the roof. Two frame press boxes perch above home plate.

Several changes have taken place including the removal of the section of bleachers along the left field and right field foul lines for safety reasons, the replacement of seats in the early 1980s for safety and comfort reasons, and the addition of a parking lot and structure for batting practice in the area of the removed bleachers. The outfield fence has been moved in to accommodate more home runs, and red Spanish tile on small roof slants on the front gate has been replaced with composition shingle.

Rickwood Field is currently owned by the City of Birmingham and leased to the Birmingham Board of Education and used for high schools, amateur teams, and city police leagues.

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Section number 8 Significance Rickwood Field Page #1

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CRITERION A (RECREATION AND CULTURE):

Built in 1910, Rickwood Field remains the oldest surviving baseball park in the country. It has seen some of the best minor league players and major league exhibitions, and it stands as a memorial to the baseball greats and the nation's favorite pastime. Rickwood Field remains an important institution to the people of Birmingham.

CRITERION A (ETHNIC HERITAGE):

Rickwood Field is significant for its association with the Negro American League and the Birmingham Black Barons. It was the playing field for the Black Barons since their formation in the 1920s-30s and until the abolition of the Negro League. The ballpark became a source of pride to the black people of Birmingham because of the high level of performance of the Negro team that allowed them two pennant titles. Because of their establishment with the Black Baron team, many black players had the opportunity to cross the racial barrier into the major leagues.

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The period of significance for Rickwood Field extends from 1910 (date of construction) to the arbitrary date of 1942, which reflects the NPS 50-year rule for nominating properties to the National Register. The playing field is still in use and continues to attain significance as the country's oldest surviving baseball park.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY:

A.H. "Rick" Woodward was trained as a locomotive and mining engineer and inherited Woodward Iron Works.(1) He saw an opportunity to bring baseball to Birmingham and bought majority stock in the city's club.(2) The Birmingham Barons played at Slag Field, but Woodward wanted to provide the best facilities for his new team. He inspected other baseball parks before planning Rickwood Field and eventually spent \$75,000 on the park.(3) It was modeled after Pittsburgh's Forbes Field, which is now gone.

Dedicated in August of 1910, Rickwood Field broke attendance records with an estimated 10,000 people and brought Birmingham into the baseball world. The people of Birmingham welcomed the Birmingham Baseball Association to make their team one of the best in the league.(4) The first game in Rickwood Field brought the Montgomery Climbers to play against the home team Birmingham Barons. This big event caused stores and even the City Hall to close at 3:00 pm so everyone could go to the game. The town was congested with baseball fans and supporters of the new Birmingham pastime.(5) The Birmingham Barons won the Southern League pennant in 1914 and gained favor from all in Birmingham.(6) Under Jim Crow laws, all black spectators had to sit in the far, unsheltered bleachers 335 feet from home plate.(7) When Rickwood Field was turned over to the Black Baron team on alternate weekends, the seating was reversed so that the black spectators would sit in the grandstands and the white spectators would sit in the far, concrete bleachers.(8)

The ballpark was home to both the Southern League's Birmingham Barons and the Negro League's Birmingham Black Barons. Baseball celebrities like Reggie Jackson, Joe Rudi, and Rollie Fingers passed through Rickwood Field on their way to the major leagues. Major league team exhibitions brought players like Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, and Hank Aaron to the park. The Black Barons

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produced greats like Satchel Paige and Willie Mays.(9) Rickwood Field was home for the Barons until the end of the 1980s.

THE BASEBALL CULTURE:

Ever since the first baseball game was recorded in 1846, the sport has caught on as many people's favorite pastime. Even during the Civil War, Union soldiers passed the time in camps and prisons by playing "town game." The game was influenced by English sports, and in the beginning, was a mass-participation game played by the colonists.(10) As the rules were perfected to create an organized sport, teams formed and matches were played.

After a decline in interest of games sponsored by the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (est. 1871), a Chicago businessman organized the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs. In 1876, William Ambrose Hubert formed the league of eight teams that would become the victor by winning the most games.(11) Baseball became very popular across the United States and manifested itself in the form of baseball parks in most cities. During the beginning of the 20th century, the teams "barnstormed" cities across the country bringing the big leagues to the masses. Before television, barnstorming was the best way to bring the baseball greats to small towns.(12) During the popular stages of baseball, any town with substantial population and support had a baseball franchise. A minor league team was determined as such by the size of the city and the level of skill of the players.(13) There was an unbelievable turnout from people in both rural and urban areas. The teams were multiplying and prospering until the debut of television allowed people to remain at home to watch the baseball games. A steep decline in attendance and a threatened survival of teams occurred in the mid 1950s when television appeared.(14)

Black men were officially barred from early clubs, major leagues, and recognized minor leagues of organized baseball from 1868 to 1946. Members of the National Association of Base Ball Players wanted to avoid the discussion of politics; in fact, the Northerners in the Association shared the Southern belief that Negroes were inferior. So they simply created the "color line" and excluded them from playing with whites. They were forced to play on all-Negro teams and usually played a majority of games against white teams.(15) The International League allowed a few black players, but they were physically and mentally abused by white teammates and opponents until 1889 when they were completely forced out of the league.(16) Negro leagues played year-round and were underfinanced and poorly managed.(17) The Birmingham Black Barons were charter members of the Negro Southern League of 1920 and represented the west.(18) Players like Mule Suttles, Satchel Paige, Jimmie Crutchfield, Piper Davis, and Willie Mays were part of the Black Baron team at one time. They won the Negro American League pennant in 1943 and 1948.(19) Several Black Barons followed Jackie Robinson's 1947 lead in crossing the color line into major league teams. They include Dan Bankhead to the Dodgers, Piper Davis to the Red Sox, and Willie Mays to the Giants.(20)

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The color line existed in Birmingham as well. The city had a minor league team, the Birmingham Barons and a Negro league team, the Birmingham Black Barons. The Barons were members of the Southern Association and travelled around the country and won the Southern League pennant in 1914. They were affiliated with several major league teams after World War II including the Yankees, the Athletics, and the Red Sox. The minor league players would have the opportunity to move up to the big leagues if they proved their skill. The Atlanta Crackers was the first team to break the color line in the Southern Association by bringing Nat Peeples to their team in 1954. Many fans refused to attend the games when Peeples played. The Barons broke their ordinance in 1963 that prohibited blacks and whites from playing sports together.(21) The Barons and the Black Barons took road trips to many of the great big league parks like Chicago's Comiskey and New York's Polo Grounds.(22) Because of the razing of those old parks, the Baron's home field, Rickwood, is the oldest ballpark in the nation.

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- 1
White, Marjorie Longenecker. The Birmingham District, An Industrial History and Guide. Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1981, pp. 136-137.
 - 2
"Woodward, Jr. Sells His Club." The Birmingham News. September 22, 1912.
 - 3
The Birmingham News. August 18, 1910.
 - 4
"Record Is Broken At Great Opening Of Rickwood Park." The Birmingham News. August, 18, 1910.
 - 5
The Birmingham News. August 18, 1910.
 - 6
McMillan, Malcolm C. Yesterday's Birmingham. Miami, Florida: E.A. Seemann Publishing, Inc., 1975, pp. 111.
 - 7
"Birmingham Ballpark Grows Old Gracefully." The Montgomery Advertiser. August 10, 1991.
 - 8
"Southern Bases." Production of Atlanta Public Television, 1992.
 - 9
"Birmingham Ballpark Grows Old Gracefully."

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10

Durso, Joseph. Baseball and the American Dream. St. Louis: Missouri: The Sporting News Publishing Co., 1986, pp. 26-27.

11

Durso, pp. 21,23.

12

Durso, pp. 209.

13

"Southern Bases."

14

"Southern Bases."

15

Peterson, Robert. Only the Ball Was White. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970, pp. 3, 17.

16

Peterson, pp. 40-43.

17

Peterson, pp. 80.

18

Peterson, pp. 101.

19

Peterson, pp. 278, 285.

20

Peterson, pp. 203.

21

"Southern Bases."

22

Smith, Ken. The Willie Mays Story. New York: Greenberg: Publisher, 1954, pp. 19.

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Section number 9 Bibliographical References Rickwood Field Page #1
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"Birmingham Ballpark Grows Old Gracefully." The Montgomery Advertiser. August 10, 1991.

The Birmingham News. August 18, 1910.

Durso, Joseph. Baseball and the American Dream. St. Louis, Missouri: The Sporting News
Publishing Co., 1986.

McMillan, Malcolm C. Yesterday's Birmingham. Miami, Florida: E.A. Seemann Publishing, Inc.,
1975.

Peterson, Robert. Only the Ball Was White. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

"Record Is Broken At Great Opening Of Rickwood Park." The Birmingham News. August 18, 1910.

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Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1981.

"Woodward, Jr. Sells His Club." The Birmingham News. September 22, 1912.

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Section number Photographs Rickwood Field Page #1

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Rickwood Field
1137 2nd Avenue West
Birmingham, AL
Jefferson County
Melanie Betz (AHC), Photographer
December, 1991
Negatives at the Alabama Historical Commission

- 1) Looking NE at gate with ticket booths and offices.
- 2) Looking SE at edge of gate and rear grandstand.
- 3) Looking W at end of gate and colonnade.
- 4) Interior of gate/office.
- 5) Looking SE at diamond and field.
- 6) Looking SW at left end of grandstand.
- 7) Looking NW toward home plate and press boxes.
- 8) Looking W at dugout and grandstand.
- 9) Looking N at dugout and grandstand.
- 10) Looking W at grandstand behind home plate.
- 11) Aerial view, June 25, 1992 (photographer unknown)